

# Letters

## Foundations: Robust and Thriving

In these uncertain times, when our great private foundations have come under vicious and unwarranted attack by the Congress, foundation officers should exercise restraint in rebutting claims and counterclaims about the size and character of these critically important institutions. The readiness to quibble about small points in print gives an uneasy picture of morale in the major foundations.

Jacquette and Kershaw (Letters, 29 May) seek to set aside the earlier statement by Irving L. Horowitz and Ruth L. Horowitz that "since 1950 the total wealth of foundations has grown faster than the rest of the economy" ("Tax exempt foundations: Their effects on national policy," 10 Apr., p. 220). Jacquette and Kershaw call upon a ratio of absolute quantities (foundation assets as a fraction of gross national product) to prove their point that during the 1960's foundation growth has actually lagged the growth in GNP. What the Horowitz statement says is simply that total foundation assets have grown from one point in time (1950) to another point in time (1968) by a greater amount than the comparable growth of GNP expressed as a percentage change in each quantity for the whole period of time.

Jacquette and Kershaw feel compelled to point out that foundation assets, though large and growing, are now actually declining as a percentage of GNP. . . . Their use of these data to draw the conclusion that the foundations' economic role in American life is undergoing a relative withering, which may intensify in years ahead, hardly seems justified. American foundations were never bigger, stronger, more numerous, or more influential in American life. To conclude otherwise on the basis of a declining ratio of foundation assets to the nation's output is to deny the enormous increase in effectiveness of the private foundations and to calculate their importance in narrow economic terms.

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## Defense of the Unpopular

Rizki and Hill's "Open letter to President Nixon" (10 Apr.) attributes the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers to "the volume of dying birds, dying fish, dying streams, and dying lakes." This seems to place all blame on commercial agriculture which includes the fruit industry. In recent years the greatest losses to growers of sweet cherries and grapes have been due to an increasing population of birds, rather than a decreasing population.

Before the use of chemical fertilizers, mature apple orchards were cultivated to liberate nitrates from soil organic matter. Yields of 150 bushels per acre were obtained with this system of culture which depended on the natural nitrogen supply. The modern mature apple orchard which produces 500 bushels per acre is maintained in sod and receives 15 to 30 pounds of chemical nitrogen per acre annually. The sod prevents erosion and replaces the organic matter previously destroyed by continuous cultivation.

Certainly streams and lakes contain more chemical elements today than in former years. Is commercial agriculture the main source of these elements or is it sewage disposal and industry waste from the cities where 90 percent of the population reside? The answer to this question is needed before pointing the finger at a specific group. Having zoologists and ecologists direct agricultural practices would appear to be the easiest way to reduce production of food and emphasize the hunger problem.

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Torrence concludes that "there is at least one unequivocal effect of DDT. It causes T. H. Jukes to write an inordinately large number of letters defending it . . ." (Letters, 1 May). Jukes's letters are not an "effect of DDT" but a response to the irresponsible slander of DDT that has been perpetuated by a few who either are unaware of the great benefits to human health and to agriculture that DDT has provided or who choose to ignore them and pre-

sent as a reason for banning DDT some isolated and loosely reasoned claims about brown pelicans, bald eagles, and so forth as arguments for going back to the pre-DDT days when a half to two-thirds of the world lived in malaria-infested areas. These "scientists" and supposedly responsible communicators of the major news media politicized this issue in order to scare the public and wage a campaign to have DDT banned.

DDT is the most beneficial chemical that science has discovered, a synthetic chemical which has saved millions of human lives—more than any chemical yet known, and which has not yet accidentally killed a single human being among the thousands who have ingested high levels of it. If such a beneficent chemical is banned, what chance is there for any other—aspirin, other insecticide, penicillin, or the Pill, to survive an attack such as has been organized against DDT?

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## Meetings Amid Amenities

Hoffman's letter (8 May) reminded me of the first International Oceanographic Congress sponsored by the AAAS and held at the United Nations in the late summer of 1959. The U.N. General Assembly building was obviously designed just for meetings, and I have always remembered how comfortable and pleasant it was to attend a meeting there. Rooms of various sizes abounded, each with comfortable seating and a good view of the speaker, plus excellent electronic acoustic facilities and the possibility of simultaneous translation. The restaurant and snack bar were convenient and comfortable. The corridors had niches at intervals furnished with a coffee table and armchairs, so that impromptu discussions with acquaintances in the hall were facilitated.

The contrast between the U.N. facilities and those at nearly all the other meetings I have attended is remarkable. Whoever designs Hoffman's center (which should probably be on one of the coasts, not in Missouri or Kansas) should first visit the U.N. and talk with its architect.

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