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Dear Matt,

I met Pierre Biquard this evening, together with Profs E. H. Bishop, Pat Wall, Steven Rose and Mr John Dutton, joint general secretary of the A.S.T.M.S. (the Union which amalgamated with the A.Sc.W.) to go further into the proposed "International Scientific Meeting on Chemical Warfare in Vietnam" about which I wrote to you on Oct 26th.

The position is as follows:- The World Federation of Scientific Workers undertook to hold a meeting with this title as a result of a strong request made by the N. Vietnamese delegate at their Council Meeting. The request was accepted, without prior notice or private discussion, because the N. Vietnamese stated that his country wished to present new scientific data and asked for the W.F.S.W. to call a meeting to accept and evaluate it. It was apparently not considered proper at the time to enquire what sort of data were involved, and the W.F.S.W. has gone ahead organizing a meeting by 1) getting a number of eminent sponsors 2) fixing a date

and arranging a place (either Villejuif or perhaps the Musée nationale de l'histoire naturelle), and 3) inviting a wide variety of scientists (mostly) who have been involved in CBW discussions through SIPRI, WHO, etc. to attend. The invitees are from most European countries and the U.S.A., and are largely persons who have already taken the position that CBW is to be deplored. Perhaps 60 persons have been invited, but it is not known how many will accept.

Biguier has had frequent contact with the N. Vietnamese ambassador and the N. Vietnamese delegation in Paris, and has tried for months to obtain a reasonably hard statement about what the evidence to be presented will be. He is only able to discover a) that the N. Vietnamese have been collecting data and photographs (including 30 min. film) during the past month and will send a doctor, an agronomist and one other to present it, together with 3 'witnesses' in the form of a mother who was exposed to defoliants and her grossly deformed child (or ? children), and b) that what they hope for is a "scientific evaluation" of the data, followed by a public meeting at which the scientists will make their opinions known to the Press, etc..

No one present (including Steven Rose, who has also been pressing his N. Vietnamese contacts) thinks it likely that the N. Vietnamese will produce any essentially new data - for example information about areas defoliated, crop yields and casualties must still presumably be considered a military secret, and there are no grounds for thinking that they will be in a position to demonstrate dioxin in recent sprays - though this could (optimistically) be wrong. It seems more likely that the Vietnamese idea of 'evidence' is confrontation with victims (even only one) and accounts of the effects of defoliants etc., which are essentially known already.

Equally, none of us saw any great virtue in putting such information before a number of scientists who do not particularly need convincing that they object to such methods of warfare.

However, the meeting cannot be undone - and indeed the persons listed in my previous letter have agreed to take part. (I was wrong about Coalston - he only said that he would come if he could fit it in with the meeting organized by Maurice Wilkins on Nov 27-28 in London on the Social Impact of Modern Biology.

Pfeiffer, however, is definite). The problem then becomes how to make the meeting worthwhile.

The present proposal is to change its emphasis so as 1) to enable persons with hard facts and experience - i.e. those Americans and French who have actually visited N. or S. Vietnam once or more times - to exchange information between themselves and the N. Vietnamese (minus the 'witnesses') at a small closed meeting, with some reasonably well informed persons - not necessarily all scientists - in attendance.

2) to follow this with a sort of teach-in (there will apparently be plenty of Paris students and other potentially interested persons around) which might make some impact on the European press.

I pointed out that the date (Dec. 11-12) is only a few days before you are due to present your report to the AAI - or so I believe - and that it might be embarrassing or impossible for you to jump the gun and reveal the contents of your report. However I also agreed to put it to you that you might come on one or more of the following grounds:-

That it would be worthwhile to exchange information with Khan, and the N. Vietnamese.

That you would have a forum - possibly a wide forum of the Press were to bite - for discussing your own findings (at least those in your preliminary report), and giving your own views. According to Biquard the French are not what he calls 'sensibilisés' on the subject of EBW.

I don't feel that I can press you very hard since I shall not be attending the meeting myself, and I think that it was conceived with insufficient thought. [It may even have originally been the intention of the N. Vietnamese to hope to influence the U.S. elections by it (though the timing is now wrong) more than anything else]. However I know that a lot of effort will be put into it, and I would prefer that the effort should be as worthwhile as possible - and it's a good cause.

When you have had time to get this letter I will phone you at the laboratory, and ask whether you can indicate definitely 'yes' or 'no'.

Yours ever  
John Humphrey