

PUGWASH CONFERENCES ON SCIENCE AND WORLD AFFAIRS

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30 June 1980

Ambassador V. L. Issraelyan
Head of the Delegation of the USSR to the
Committee on Disarmament
4, chemin du Champ de Blé
1292 Chambésy
Geneva

Dear Ambassador Issraelyan,

Further to our discussion on the BW problem, I should like to advance the following proposals for a meeting of scientists to discuss the matter.

Such a meeting could be held under Pugwash auspices in or near Geneva. It would be informal, completely private with no publicity whatsoever, and would not imply official government endorsement. The purpose of the meeting would be to clarify questions that have arisen concerning the nature of the anthrax outbreak in Sverdlovsk in 1979 which was referred to in the final plenary session of the BW Review Convention in March 1980. The meeting would serve as a confidence-building measure to improve the negative atmosphere now prevailing in Washington, and which not only concerns the question of BW but also negotiations for arms control and disarmament in general. For this reason, Pugwash would be glad to do whatever it could to alleviate the situation.

I have read the articles on the incident which appeared in the USSR publication "Microbiology, Epidemiology and Immunobiology" of May 1980, and in Izvestia of June 15. They are general accounts and lack certain precise details which would clarify matters. As a microbiologist and epidemiologist I believe the following questions, amongst others, would be of major interest.

1. The number of affected people, the dates they got sick, and how many died.
2. The clinical history and symptoms, and results of laboratory examinations (bacteriological, immunological, and post-mortem findings).
3. If possible, the parts of the city where they lived and where they worked.
4. Information on the food they ate during the period of exposure.
5. The vaccine(s) used to immunize the human and animal populations, and the therapeutic agents used.

The suggested participants are:

Professor J. Lederberg, microbiologist, President of Rockefeller University, New York, and Nobel laureate in Medicine

Dr. Philip Brachman, anthrax specialist, Center for Disease Control, United States Public Health Service, Atlanta, Georgia

Professor Paul Doty, biochemist, Director, Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

Professor Matthew Meselson, Professor of Biology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

Professor C. E. Gordon-Smith, microbiologist and epidemiologist, Dean, London School of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, UK

Professor Gören Hedén, microbiologist, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden

Four or five Soviet scientists who are expert in microbiology, clinical medicine and epidemiology, and who are completely knowledgeable about the Sverdlovsk incident. Preferably, they should have dealt with the matter in Sverdlovsk itself.

The meeting would be chaired by myself.

I know personally all of the above listed people, except the Soviet scientists, and most of them have been participants in Pugwash meetings. I shall not, of course, contact them until I hear from you, but I believe I could persuade most of them to attend if the meeting were held.

Since time is important, I would suggest that the meeting be held for two days during either the first or second week in August. Failing this, the meeting would have to be postponed until September as I must leave Geneva on 15 August and will be away until the end of that month in connection with our annual conference in the Netherlands. If the meeting were to be held in August it would be necessary for me to know this by July 14 at the latest as I may have to travel abroad during the last two weeks in July.

I would appreciate hearing from you about the above at your earliest convenience and would welcome any comments.

Yours sincerely,



M. M. Kaplan
Director-General