

April 12, 1984

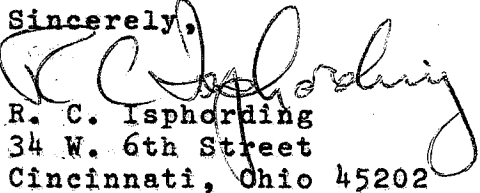
Dr. Matthew S. Meselson
Harvard University
Boston, Mass.

Dear Dr. Meselson:

I am completely astonished that the CINCINNATI ENQUIRER through an editorial by Mary McGrory - It says, "you feel that the 'yellow rain' used in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia is really not a chemical, but the excrement of honeybees."

I would appreciate it very much if you would send me a copy of your findings. I must admit I find it very difficult to believe that tens of thousands of honeybees in unison somehow communicate with one another and tell each other in unison to go to the bathroom. Your findings will be quite interesting.

Sincerely,


R. C. Isphording
34 W. 6th Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202



Reagan As A Dove On Chemical Warfare

WASHINGTON: What is it, a cloud, a UFO? No, it's a dove. It's Ronald Reagan making his maiden campaign flight as a peace candidate.

His "bold" initiative on restricting chemical weapons is vintage Reagan arms control. That is, it is a fishy proposition, to be sold by a suspect salesman and wrapped around a scheme to make more of the weapons that the treaty being sought is supposed to reduce.

Followers of the MX controversy are familiar with Mr. Reagan's "just one for the road" philosophy. He was palpitating to negotiate on nukes, he told the country boys in Congress. All he needed was the go-ahead on the most expensive and destabilizing weapon of all to go barreling to the bargaining table. The talks are, of course, now suspended.

THE APPOINTMENT of Vice President George Bush to present the issue to the disarmament conference in Geneva is also in the great Reagan tradition of picking a negotiator whose record suggests that he is only kidding as he opens his samples case.

Bush voted twice to put production of nerve gas over the top in the Senate. He cast the tie-breaking vote on July 13 last year and again on Nov. 8. Just on the face of it, he is not a fanatic in the cause of ending chemical warfare.

In Reagan terms, this absence of zeal in the matter at hand is a valuable credential. Our chief negotiator in Geneva on strategic weapons, Gen. Edward L. Rowley, is a testy half-liner who conveys the impression that the last thing in the world he wants is a deal with the Soviets.

IT COULD be, of course, that Bush shares his mother's repugnance for poison gas — she scolded her boy for his votes. But as an advocate he is so flawed as to cause worldwide skepticism about the President's intentions.

Usually when a person is about to make a fresh approach to an adversary, he checks his gun at the door. Mr. Reagan, characteristically, did not. By way of warming up the Russians, while not actually mentioning them by name, he referred to what he regards as the fact that they used chemical weapons in Afghanistan and in Southeast Asia.

THE CHARGES on Soviet use of "yellow rain" are in dispute. The foremost authority on chemical warfare, Dr. Matthew S. Meselson of Harvard University, says that the fatalities came from nature — the excrement of honeybees — not from Soviet planes.

But Mr. Reagan, as always, fears more than rejection by the Soviets: right-wing suspicion that he has gone soft.

The proposition, the manner of its presentation and the choice of its spokesmen seem to reflect the President's desire to get into the act more than a sudden craving for talks. The debating Democratic presidential candidates have lately grabbed the limelight with cries for peace and an end to the arms race. Sen. Gary Hart and Walter Mondale have striven mightily to detail their differences, but they are as one on disarmament, and the Rev. Jesse Jackson is in the "Amen" corner.

The present poison-gas "deterrent" is sufficient to wipe out every human being on earth in the most ghastly way imaginable. Mr. Reagan's contention that the Soviets have more and that he needs, as always, "a bargaining chip" may lack election-year appeal.

If Mr. Reagan follows the MX pattern, he will try to pick off an opponent of chemical warfare, turn him or her around, and hope for a bipartisan stampede.

IN THE case of Rep. Ed Bethune, R-Ark., who is running for the seat of Sen. David Pryor, who led the fight against nerve gas in the Senate, it will be a wasted effort. Although a loyalist on the MX and the B-1 bomber, Bethune cannot be shaken in his arguments against resuming production of weapons that our allies have said they will not accept.

Peace through poison gas may just not fly for the unaccustomed dove in the White House.

• *Mary McGrory is a Washington-based syndicated columnist.*

uff Greenfield