

Press

DEPARTMENT OF BIOCHEMISTRY AND MOLECULAR BIOLOGY
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



7 Divinity Avenue
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

1 February

~~14 December, 1984~~

Dr. Frank Press, President
National Academy of Sciences
2101 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20418

Dear Frank:

In connection with a recent trip to England, I was invited to visit the Chemical Defense Establishment at Porton Down November 27 and 28. I gave a lecture on "Yellow Rain" and spent a day consulting with people working on the problem there. You may wish to be appraised of the main findings and conclusions of which I was told.

1. Porton noted pollen in Yellow Rain samples in January, 1982. I think they were the first to do so. They have subsequently examined numerous samples of alleged chemical warfare agent said to have been gathered at sites of chemical attack in Southeast Asia. All such samples were found to be predominantly pollen. The people at Porton believe that the samples are honeybee feces.
2. Porton has developed an excellent analytical capability for trichothecenes, using capillary gas chromatography - medium resolution mass spectrometry. They find that great precautions must be taken to rule out false positives. For example, glassware blanks are run before and after each analysis and any apparently positive results are checked with a different chromatograph matrix material. Porton has been unable to confirm American reports of trichothecene mycotoxins in environmental and biomedical samples from alleged attacks. They think it unlikely that such toxins have been used. They consider that analytical reports suggesting otherwise may have resulted from contamination. As additional support for their view they cite their demonstration of the short lifetime of T2 toxin after addition to freshly drawn blood and their calculations that unreasonably large quantities of toxin would be required for military effectiveness.

3. People at Porton do not rule out the possibility that some sort of chemical warfare has occurred, not involving trichothecenes. Neither do they rule out the possibility that there has been no chemical warfare of any kind, not even riot control agent.

4. Apparently all this is included in a report that has gone to the MOD Science Advisor, Richard Norman and to higher levels of their government.

Sincerely,

Mat

Matthew Meselson

MM/jbf

cc: Walter Rosenblith