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Dr. Matthew Meselson
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Dear Dr. Meselson:

Thank you for replying to my letter to Scientific American about your article on bee droppings. I had read your letter of defense and also the accompanying one in the Wall Street Journal.

I really find it hilarious that distinguished scientists, such as yourselves, seriously propose that reports of chemical/biological "yellow rain" attacks are really bee droppings. How surprising that natives mistake a natural rain of bee dropping to be airplane attacks on them.

I personally was in Thailand a few years ago and talked with nurses working in the refugee camps. They said they had no doubts that some of the people in the camps had been subjected to chemical/biological attacks. These and other reports must be factored into any objective view.

I hope that as scientists, you seek objectivity. Well, a realistic, objective view of the world today suggests the possibility -- or even more likely, the probability that the Soviet Union would test chemical/biological agents in a place like Southeast Asia. The record shows the Soviet Union seeking military superiority in every way possible. Their leaders do not appear to have the Judeo-Christian ethics which would place chemical/biological warfare off limits.

As experienced scientists, you must know that absolute proof is hard to come by and often requires a long period of work. Early results are often ambiguous and conflicting. Field collection of data under difficult and changing circumstances compound the problem. To demand absolute, immediate proof is simply unreasonable from a scientific viewpoint. That's a politician's way of trying to get his way.

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Also, there are many things we know before we can prove them absolutely. Some years ago a biochemist told me no one yet knew the mechanics by which morphine worked. But still, we knew the effects and utilized the drug. No doubt each of you have more and better examples and hold many conclusions that you are convinced of, but for which you could not offer absolute proof. Lack of absolute proof does not say to a scientist that the conclusion is wrong.

And, of course, your article has many scientific flaws. I'll just mention one major one...

Your tests show that the samples of yellow material are quite likely to be bee droppings. But, no where is this material shown to be actually related to the reports of "yellow rain" attacks. "Yellow rain" could be gas or liquid droplets or solids with a short life, or many other things which would make it difficult to collect proper samples. In fact, your article says, regarding the samples you tested, "...there is strong evidence that aircraft had nothing to do with the appearance of the yellow deposits...". Your own report suggests that the samples and possible attacks were not related.

Your work is interesting (and apparently sound within the limitation of the study). However, it does not warrant the conclusion, "an alleged chemical-warfare agent is honeybee feces." The only scientific conclusion warranted by your work is something like, "Samples of material which might be connected to yellow rain reports were examined and found to be bee feces."

Thank you for the enclosures, which I read. I send one from the University Bookman, which I think is pertinent.

Sincerely yours,



C. A. Haverly

Enc.