Taylor

April 7, 1986

Dr. A. Taylor
National Research Council
Atlantic Research Laboratory
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dear Dr. Taylor,

It was a pleasure to meet you in Ottawa last week. I wish there had been more time to talk. I was intrigued by your references to the isolation of trichothecene-producing fungi isolated from Southeast Asia. Could you supply me with references suitable for published citations? I have seen the forthcoming Canadian report that describes finding T2 on the inside and outside surfaces of a plastic bag collected in a Thai village near the Cambodian frontier in 1982. Most unfortunately, the results are given only in parts-per-million and not in terms of the amount present. From what I learned in Ottawa I suspect the actual amount on the bag might be of the order of a tenth of a nanogram or less per square cm of surface. Could the surface of a plastic bag accumulate enough spores or other fungal material to have a few tens or hundreds of picograms per square cm?

The yellow spots found on roofs and other surfaces, thought by some to be a possible chemical warfare agent, were found to contain copious amounts of pollen. There were yellow spots and brown dust inside the bag but these are said not to contain pollen. From this, two things seem quite clear. First, the yellow spots noticed and collected by the villagers and others could not have come from the plastic bag. Second, whatever was in the bag appears not to have been dispersed over the village, since the yellow materials collected from the village <u>did</u> contain pollen.

It takes a remarkable imagination to see in this episode anything more than the normal activities of bees and the understandable psychosomatic complaints of the villagers after they have been warned on the radio by their minister of health and by health officials sent into the village that they might have been exposed to chemical warfare. Another lesson of how science can be exploited politically.

If you have any thoughts on all this I would value hearing them.

Sincerely yours,

Matthew Meselson
Professor of Biochemistry
and Molecular Biology

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Enclosures