

DEPARTMENT OF BIOCHEMISTRY AND MOLECULAR BIOLOGY
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



7 Divinity Avenue
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

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Dr. Bernard Lown
Lown Cardiovascular Unit
221 Longwood Avenue
Boston, MA 02115

Dear Bernard,

In response to your suggestion, here is a memorandum on steps that could be taken to resolve continuing concerns over the 1979 Sverdlovsk anthrax outbreak.

I certainly agree with you that there are many issues in international relations that deserve higher priority. But uncertainty regarding the Sverdlovsk outbreak continues to influence official and unofficial American attitudes towards arms-limitation agreements. The matter is sure to be brought up in Senate debate regarding the INF agreement. The Soviet government has shown impressive openness regarding several matters of similar concern, contributing to mutual confidence. These include underground nuclear testing, the Krasnayarsk radar, and the forthcoming international visit to the chemical weapons facility at Shikaney. It would be counterproductive not to deal with the Sverdlovsk outbreak in the same manner. Indeed, in recent months Soviet medical scientists and officials have provided much new information about the outbreak, in private and informal discussions. But the process of communication has gone only part way, so there has not yet been much real benefit.

There are several steps that could greatly improve the situation:

- 1) Publication of a detailed medical and epidemiological description of the outbreak, written by the appropriate Soviet medical scientists and appearing in a good English-language scientific journal. When I met with Dr. Burgasov and Nikiforov in Moscow in August, 1986, they expressed a desire to publish such a report. They worked late one night preparing a draft, of which they gave me a copy (enclosed). But, like most first drafts, it needs more information and more work before submission to a journal. I enclose an outline of topics that might be covered.

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2) Release of the official Ministry of Health report on the outbreak. US officials in Geneva were given to understand that such a report exists and they asked for a copy. They were disappointed to be given only a three-page document that I was also given earlier, in Moscow (enclosed). The question of a fuller report needs to be clarified.

3) Invitation to visit the facility of concern in Sverdlovsk. If more details are wanted, I could supply an exact specification of its location, together with some suggestions for how such a visit might best be conducted.

I am sure that there are several ways in which these steps could be facilitated, at the government level, through the US National Academy of Sciences, through the Pugwash organization, and in other ways. If there is any way that I can be of assistance, I would certainly try to do so.

Sincerely,

Matthew Meselson

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Enc.: 1) Draft article of 1986
2) Outline
3) Report of 1979