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4 December, 1991

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Professor Mathew Meselson,
Dept. of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology,
7 Divinity Avenue,
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Dear Mathew,

Thank you for your letter of November 21 inviting me to write something for the Chemical Weapons Convention Bulletin on where we are and decision criteria for the Sverdlovsk incident. I have spoken with David Huxsoll and he is willing to co-author.

What I want to do is to first go through all the published literature and freely available notes on Sverdlovsk and then to write an objective referenced script of what is agreed to have happened, when, where, and to whom during the epidemic. That is, to set out an epidemiologic database that we can all agree upon, and if not agree at least document the differences. [My personal objective here is that it will form the majority of the chapter that I had already planned for my ever-procrastinated book on anthrax. Thus I can achieve a "two-fer".] It should also have an appendix of scientific criteria for "pneumonic", "enteric", dermal anthrax, and suspect states, whether based on clinical observations or on autopsy and pathology. It will escew journalist and emigre angst.

With such a script/database, David and I can then define the gaps and using predefined criteria submit various hypothesises to test. This latter excercise should result in your evidentiary article and outstanding questions.

Please let me have your comments. If my plan meets with your approval, might I have a list of people whom you believe I should contact for factual material. I will also ask David's help. Is it possible to get copies of reliable maps and/or satellite imagery of Sverdlovsk in 1979? Ditto meteorological information for that region and time?

It occurs to me that this data collection phase might, in a circular fashion, encourage the provision of 'lost' reports and such. It will also necessitate an embarrassing assessment of various individuals' scientific competence, especially among the Soviet experts.

Thanks for the copies of Gumbel's articles. The more I work with

Russians (I have no experience of Ukrainians, Georgians, etc) the more convinced I am that it is virtually impossible to know when they are telling the truth or lying unless one knows them personally and one has background information. And even then I am not always sure. In addition, their truth is sometimes different from ours even when based on identical facts. Gumbel seems to have accepted much at face value.

His articles reminded me of Oscar Wildes' comment that truth is seldom simple or pure.

Best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'M. H. Jones', written in a cursive style.

Martin Hugh-Jones

cc: David Huxsoll