

Visit to CDE Porton, 15 Dec 81

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At Rex Watson's invitation, prompted by my correspondence. Arrived 1230, left 1645. Straight into lunch, via bar, in the new cafeteria, substituting for the now-closed Mess. Met briefly Alan Bebbington en route to somewhere else. Lunch with Watson, Tom Iach and Mr G B Carter, the four of us subsequently repairing to Watson's office.

- 1) Carter transferred from MRE to the ca 40-man BW element at CDE. Couldn't make out whether he was a technical man or in some sort of intelligence group: he spoke as though he spent a lot of his time scouring the Soviet literature.
- 2) Much of the time was spent talking about Yellow Rain and, for my part, how further work by UN Group might best be structured. On this they weren't especially helpful, probably because they feel the truth of the affair is now well enough established. Seemed to have no doubts that the samples were proper ones. The controls eliminated, in their mind, the possibility of natural occurrence. They didn't seem to know whether or not zearalenone or HT2 had or had not been sought, only that they hadn't been found. What impressed them was the quality of the Americans they had met who were working on the affair. Agreed that State had been extremely hamhanded in their publicity--almost as though State wanted to discredit the evidence in order to save the CW disarmament negs.
- 3) They are now starting aerosol studies of trichothecenes (I failed to ask which ones, or whether they were making the trichoths themselves; at one point in the convs they indicated familiarity with commercial sources of T2). Problem is to decide which animals to work with. Animals that are habitually exposed to potentially-fusarial food may not be such a good idea as human models: carnivores perhaps better.
- 4) Carter was very impressed by his discoveries in the Soviet literature about the extent to which the Soviets used industrial fermentation products and their capacity for producing fungal metabolites on a large scale: if the Soviets wanted to arm themselves with such toxins, they certainly had a powerful industrial infrastructure with which to do it. Pointed particularly to the gigantic Soviet production capacity for Single Cell Protein: one plant, of which Watson had a slide in his office, would dwarf a steel-making factory. *And to fibroblast, from Fusarium cultures.*
- 5) Carter had been working on the CoDepositaries paper for the BWGRC: had met Mikulak (and Meselson) in States while doing so.
- 6) They had heard of autopsy data on Yellow Rain, but seemed not to have seen it. I mentioned the Swedes as having been given some.
- 7) Spent quite a bit of time on Pugwash, impressions of Lohs, Purkyne etc. They would clearly like to attend future Workshops. Suggested I should reopen the matter through CSA, by a way which didn't involve a Minister surrounded by a lot of officials (as Watson put it) taking the decision.
- 8) Carter wanted to know what Pannax/Harris source had been on Heydrich botulin (which he implicitly confirmed). Promised to look it up for him.
- 9) Watson was interested in seeing a copy of the list of secrets to be withheld from the French.

- 10) In sharp contrast to last visit but one, they all seemed to take it for granted that the West must build up its retaliatory cap. How else to get the Russians to negotiate seriously. Watson got quite heated when attacking my arg that CW was not much good for the Russians on an offensive in Europe: repeatedly referred to offensive value of MRL/HCN systems.
- 11) Also moving away from their former position that the nerve gases were what really mattered. Toxicity not everything—e.g. utility of HCN and of trichothecenes. Toxins now had to be taken seriously. Hitherto their skin effects had been neglected—merely a laboratory nuisance (in the case of SBE), not something seen as a potential weapon effect. Watson noted the inbuilt bias of a place like CDE to suppose the nerve-gases are the be-all and end-all: everyone there has been working on them for the last 30 years and have got set in their ways.
- 12) Watson asked what the West should now do in the negs on CW disarmament: should it stick to its guns in demanding intrusive inspection, or should it take a risk on something less, justifying the risk in terms of the protection available against Soviet infraction? This risk would now seem a lot larger than a year or two ago, before Sverdlovsk (which Carter seemed to think was a clear BWC violation), before Yellow Rain. The new appreciation of toxins has laid the verification field wide open again: none of this talk of reliance on PAS & Co would do.
- 13) Carter asked me why I didn't ask my FCO contacts to set up an Intelligence briefing for me?
- 14) They clearly felt CW arms control was a dead-letter anyway. Any more would be dangerous because it would give their masters an excuse to cut back antigas protective programmes still further. Witness the BW defence programme having been reduced from 400 personnel to 40. Politicians had swallowed the idea of BW being senseless militarily: did they but know (Carter said)—implying that the earlier MRE work suggested the contrary.
- 15) Carter had heard that someone thought they had spotted an elephant in the animal farm at the Sverdlovsk facility; but he tended to ridicule this, saying it showed how flimsy was the hard data intelligence people had to work from.
- 16) Which reminded someone that Porton had once had an armadillo (but this was to do with someone's side-work on leprosy).
- 17) Col Whittaker (I was told after asking Inch in the bog) was about to move on to what would probably be his last posting. He was hoping for a military attachment in Kuala Lumpur.
- 18) High spray is perfectly practicable given appropriate thickeners.
- 19) Watson explained that what he had meant in his letter about the higher the classification of an intelligence appraisal, the better it was, was to do with especially good/valuable sources being given a high classification to safeguard them from compromise.
- 20) I asked about the diazinon sheep effects. Watson called Beswick on the phone and was told that the current theory was that the sheep kill was nothing to do with the dip. The farmer had not used a bactericide in his dip, which subsequently spread a staphylococcal infection throughout the flock.

21) Watson had some detailed comments on my ICDSI paper, which, in general, he found too philosophical for his taste: it did tell the likes of him what they should do about CW. Points:

(a) Was there really a resurgent interest in chemical weapons? For the West's part, what was resurgent, thank heavens, was concern for antichemical defence: at last the Americans were doing something other than push for binaries, though that too. As for the Russians, did we have sufficient baseline intelligence to say whether YR &c was actually a resurgence rather than a continuation of the same?

(b) Disputed my suggestion that there was similarity between use of herbicides/irritants and toxic CW.

(c) Surprised by my suggestion that military staffs had not opposed the 1925 Protocol at the time. Could I document this?

(d) My statement that CBR communities were adept at securing increased resources during times of rearmament was either too obvious to be worth mentioning in the sense that all agencies were adept at this, or, if I was suggesting that CBR communities were better at it than other technical services, untrue.

(e) Does one really expect governmental policy statements on weapons to detail how they are to be used?

22) Quite often the conversation reverted to the way my writings are read in MOD, GDE &c. Common impression was that I was only out to attack the West—but on this Watson said he understood my predicament about having only Western sources to work from. By attacking binaries I risked destroying the only lever the West had for getting the Russians to move in the negotiations. Carter needled me a couple of times by suggesting I didn't pay as much attention as I could to Soviet activities; and in a perhaps over-cross retort I told him how the fullest open source on Pact CW capab (that Army FS&T thing) had, as about half of its literature citations, my own writings.

23) Spence is retiring. But Watson called up his successor and asked him to lend me copies of the GDE Collected Papers for 1978 onwards (the 1980 one had just come in).