

Organochlorine Propaganda

SIR,—Some say that propaganda induces people to believe statements that are not rationally convincing. A. H. Macpherson (*Nature*, 237, 413; 1972) writes that "persistent pesticides are believed" to be responsible for the nearly complete disappearance of the peregrine falcon. This is the theme of much propaganda; certainly many people believe it, but others do not. For example, the Wilson Committee¹ regarded the evidence as not precise enough to establish the postulated causal relationship. The Neuberger Committee² adopted an agnostic attitude. The Mrak Committee³ doubted if the organochlorine insecticides occur

naturally at sufficient levels to produce effects on reproductive success and population numbers.

We have been urged to accept the belief that organochlorine insecticides are the cause of population declines in predatory birds partly because no other acceptable cause has been proposed. On the contrary, the drastic decline in numbers of almost all birds of prey in the 19th and early 20th centuries has been attributed to the increased efficiency of firearms and the spread of game preservation. According to Cramp⁴, reduced activity of gamekeepers accounted for an improvement in populations after that and until the 1950s. Barber⁵ suggested that there has, in the 1960s, been an increase in

gamekeeping and considered that attacks on predatory birds with trap, poison and gun are a feature of this period. We must not jump to conclusions about this, but clearly the pesticide hypothesis is not the only one.

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¹ *Advisory Committee on Pesticides and other Toxic Chemicals*, 148 (HMSO, 1969).

² *Third Report of the Research Committee on Toxic Chemicals*, 69 (Agricultural Research Council, 1970).

³ *Report of the Secretary's Commission on Pesticides and their Relationship to Environmental Health*, 677 (US Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1969).

⁴ Cramp, S., *British Birds*, 56, 124 (1963).

⁵ Barber, D., *New Scientist*, 54, 212 (1972).

Obituary

Dr W. R. Thompson

DR WILLIAM ROBIN THOMPSON, FRS, former Director of the Commonwealth Institute of Biological Control, died on January 30, 1972. With his death entomology in general and biological control in particular have suffered a severe loss.

W. R. Thompson was born in London, Ontario, on June 29, 1887, the son of the late William Thompson, editor of the *Canadian Agricultural Weekly*. Educated at the Universities of Toronto and Cornell, where he obtained his BSc and MSc respectively, Thompson went on to do research at Cambridge between 1914 and 1915, a DSc at Paris in 1921 and a PhD at the University of St Maximin in 1924. During this lengthy period of university education from 1909 to 1919, Thompson also worked for the United States Department of Agriculture as an entomologist for four years, and for the Royal Navy as a bacteriologist from 1915 to 1919. In 1919 he again returned to work for the USDA where he undertook extensive work on the natural enemies of the gypsy moth and the European corn-borer, basing his work on the principles of biological control.

In 1928 Thompson was appointed assistant director of the Imperial Institute of Entomology, and in 1947 he became director of the Imperial Parasite Service which subsequently became the Commonwealth Institute of Biological Control, a post which he held until his retirement in 1958.

Thompson's career in entomology and biological control was long and distinguished. He was one of the pioneers of the scientific study of the subject and

he also studied the mathematical theory of population growth in connexion with parasite-host relationships and its bearing on population control. He also did considerable research on the taxonomy and systematics of tachinids, work he continued after his retirement.

While assistant director of the Imperial Institute of Entomology and director of the CIBC, Thompson was responsible for the extensive development of the control work in the institutes. In the early years much of it was carried out in Europe for Canada, New Zealand and Australia, but later, with the establishment of research stations in the West Indies, India, Pakistan, Argentina and California, similar work was possible on a much broader basis.

Many honours were accorded Thompson during his working life. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1933 and of the Canadian Royal Society in 1949. From 1947 to 1958 he edited the *Canadian Entomologist* and in 1956 he was President of the 10th International Congress of Entomology. He was a honorary fellow of, among others, the Royal Irish Academy and the Royal Entomological Society. He won many awards and medals as tributes to his work and was a honorary DSc of the Universities of Bordeaux and Carleton.

As well as publishing numerous articles and papers and a book (*Science and Common Sense*, 1937), Thompson was also responsible for the *Catalogue of the Parasites and Predators of Insect Pests*, an invaluable reference work to the literature of biological control.

With his death entomology has lost a personality whose impact in the field of biological control will be of lasting academic and economic value.

Dr Vilmos Várterész



DR VILMOS VÁRTERÉSZ, director of the Frédéric Joliot-Curie National Research Institute for Radiobiology and Radiohygiene, Budapest, Hungary, died after a brief illness on May 24, 1972.

Dr. Vilmos Várterész was born on August 9, 1917. He took his doctor's degree at the Kossuth Lajos University for Medicine in Debrecen. In 1942, as a young physician he started working in the Lóránd Eötvös Radium and X-Ray Institute, Budapest. There, for more than eleven years, he was engaged in the various fields of tumour therapy, in particular studying the biological effects of ionizing radiations, a subject that became the focus of his life's work. In 1957, as an already acknowledged expert of the field, at the request of the Hungarian Ministry of Health, he founded the Institute for Radiobiology of which he became the direc-