CORRESPONDENCE

SERC and South Africa

SIR — The replies to the questionnaire sent out by a working group of the Science and Engineering Research Council (SERC) on the South African Astronomical Observatory (SAAO) should not be taken as representing the balance of opinion among astronomers on whether the United Kingdom should continue to subsidize the SAAO (see *Nature* 23 September, p.291). The questionnaire was not sent to all UK astronomers and was in fact sent mainly to groups who have already used the SAAO. Many of those who refuse to use SAAO on principle did not receive it. The questions asked were all concerned with what facilities should be used, what programmes pursued and what instrumentation required. As there was no question on whether the subsidy to SAAO should continue, I and many others did not reply to the questionnaire, regarding it as an irrelevance to the central issue.

The central issue is a moral one, whether astronomy is so important that it should come before one's duty to the oppressed black majority in South Africa, whose leaders (those who have not been murdered or imprisoned) have repeatedly called for the severing of all international ties with South Africa. This call has been supported by the United Nations, UNESCO and many other international bodies. The agreement maintained by SERC with the South African government on behalf of UK astronomers is probably the last official cultural link between the two countries and is a disgrace to UK science.

Note that I am not trying to prevent individuals with strong stomachs from using telescopes in South Africa or for that matter Chile. The issue is whether a substantial chunk of the UK astronomy budget should go to maintain an official subsidy of SAAO by the United Kingdom.

I ask all concerned scientists, and UK astronomers particularly, to write to the Chairman of the Astronomy, Space and Radio Board, c/o SERC, North Star Avenue, Swindon, calling for an end to this shameful treaty.

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How to help Poland

SIR — As a recent and relatively frequent visitor to Poland, I have the unhappy task of reporting to the Western scientific community the particularly unfortunate situation that Polish scientists now find themselves in.

Specifically, they are caught in a pincer between the scientific policies of the Polish and US governments. On the Polish side, in this time of economic crisis during which the average Polish standard of living has already decreased by 25 per cent, it is a fact that the relative decrease in salaries for scientists is far greater than for most other economic groups. For example, under the new system coal miners' earnings are about four times that of professors and more importantly, coal miners have access to stores that have something for

sale other than the most basic foods while professors do not.

The reasons for this especially poor treatment of scientists by the politically captive Polish government are: (1) universities and institutes have generally been organizational centres for Solidarity; (2) the scientific community is generally Western-oriented in its values and has been particularly tainted by extensive contacts and visits to the West; (3) this Western orientation precludes its usefulness to the Eastern bloc defence establishment; (4) the Soviet Union has little intrinsic interest in the cultural value of Polish science.

Salaries, prices and availability of goods have been restructured to the great detriment of scientists. Polish scientists, thanks to money saved during visits to the West, have lived relatively well in the sense of better apartments, clothes and cars. Their Polish salary has only paid for subsistence at a moderate level. The reduced salaries now barely cover monthly expenses in normal markets, where little is available, and are certainly very inadequate on the black market where such luxuries as decent soap, toothpaste and shirts are to be purchased. Clearly the future is economically even more downhill for Polish scientists than it is for the general worker. The second arm of the pincer is the American policy of cutting support for joint US-Polish projects. This money was very important in that it financed travel to Western scientific conferences. The Polish government rarely releases its foreign exchange for such purposes. The US policy is based on the idea that actions which punish Polish science and culture will cause Polish scientific and cultural

groups to apply pressure on the Polish government, thereby affecting its policies.

Sensible as this may seem in countries whose governments serve their people, as we see from the above discussion the policy cannot be effective in Poland. In fact the policy is damaging to Western interests in that it helps destroy one of the most Western-oriented communities in Poland.

Can we in the West do anything to help our Polish colleagues? The answer is yes. This correspondent has already communicated the contents of this letter to the US government at the highest levels. On the economic and intellectual side, invitations to established, as well as young, Polish scientists to come to the West, even for the more easily arranged short visits, can be a great help. It will keep the Poles abreast of Western scientific work. It will also be amazingly effective in helping them survive economically. To appreciate this one must realize that \$100 saved when converted to zloty on the ever present and unofficially tolerated black market (the government wants the dollars) is roughly equal to four to five months salary for a scientist at the beginning of his scientific career. Importantly, it has been my experience that Polish visitors return excellent value for their salaries. They truly value their chance to work in the luxury of Western scientific facilities and because of the limited time they have, they work very hard.

Finally, invitations to visit the West help elevate the spirit of our Polish colleagues who truly live these days under the heavy foot of external oppression.

Name and address
supplied but withheld

No rising trend for IQ in Japan

SIR — R. Lynn¹ reported evidence of IQ levels in Japan and drew some far reaching implications for American and European economies. In his letter, T.B.L. Kirkwood (*Nature* 2 September)² suggested, rather cautiously I thought, that the evidence presented does not entirely support a "rising trend".

Taking the data presented for the mean IQs of the 23 Japanese cohorts, I plotted the cumulative sum chart³ shown in the figure. Without making any statistical test it is clear that there are two "populations" and no

obvious outliers. There is certainly no evidence for a "rising trend" in any part of this data.

As to likely explanations, in the absence of further information regarding the way that the data were gathered, I suggest that the following hypotheses can be advanced:

- (1) There was step change in the ability of the Japanese to do intelligence tests starting with those born after 1946.
- (2) There was a step change in the test applied to those born after 1946.

Before getting too involved in the implications of hypothesis (1) it seems prudent to investigate hypothesis (2) more thoroughly, for while it remains open, doubt must be cast on IQ comparisons such as those made by Lynn in his paper, and indeed on the levels themselves.

Whether the Japanese are more intelligent than other nations or whether IQ measures anything that can be related to "economic success", are no doubt fascinating questions. What the Japanese have done is to allow and encourage a broad mass of people to use their intelligence in their ordinary jobs, and in particular by many national training programmes since 1950, to deal with data effectively by means of simple charts and statistical treatments.

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1. Lynn R., *Nature* 297, 222-223 (1982).
2. Kirkwood, T. B.L. *Nature* 299, 8 (1982).
3. *Cumulative Sum Techniques* (ICI Monograph No. 3, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1964).