

On the small side East and West

Stephen Oliver

Journal of Industrial Microbiology. Editor-in-chief G.E. Pierce. Elsevier. 6/yr. Dfl. 435 plus carriage charge.

Molecular Genetics, Microbiology and Virology. Soviet editor P.N. Burgasov. Allerton, New York. 12/yr. \$425 (North America), \$470 (elsewhere).

Soviet Biotechnology. Soviet editor V.A. Bykov. Allerton, New York. 6/yr. \$385 (North America), \$420 (elsewhere).

THESE three journals — one, *Journal of Industrial Microbiology* (JIM) published for the US-based Society for Industrial Microbiology, and the other two cover-to-cover translations of Soviet journals — present the reader with some obvious contrasts. JIM is produced to the usual glossy Elsevier standards and has a panel of editors drawn almost exclusively from the United States, many of them from well-known companies. The Russian translations are produced as camera-ready typescript; although this in itself is quite acceptable, the half-tone photographs have been photocopied from the original journal and are of such poor quality as to be totally indecipherable. The standard of the English used is generally good, but the prose can be turgid at times and it is impossible to say whether this is the fault of the translator or the original authors.

JIM covers an area of science which, although currently very active, is well served by existing journals (some of them, for example *Applied Microbiology and Biotechnology* and *FEMS Microbiology Letters* being the products of the same publishing house). Most of the papers are fairly short and some barely qualify as microbiology, for instance that dealing with the effects of aflatoxins on mice.

The subject matter of the papers covers a very broad range, but there are some dominant themes. Contributions on environmental microbiology and waste treatment make up the largest single class and may reflect the fact that this area is less fiercely competitive than some others in the commercial arena. On the other hand, biochemical conversions of antibiotics is another popular topic and can hardly be said to lack immediate commercial relevance. All the work presented relates to the bacteria and fungi, with no papers at all on viruses, algae or protozoa. JIM appears bimonthly, and although publication times began at about two months from final acceptance they soon fell to four months; the journal is thus unlikely to gain a place as a vehicle for rapid publication.

Altogether, I feel that JIM will have to

develop some distinctive role if it is going to survive against the competition. The intention is to publish short reviews, but the one example in the issues I read (on heterologous gene expression in *E. coli*) was disappointing. The editors will need to commission such reviews from acknowledged experts, rather than rely on voluntary submission, if an adequate standard is to be maintained.

The journal's real role, I think, will be to encourage microbiologists working in industry to publish their work. Attitudes to publication within companies have undergone a great change since the arrival of the genetic engineers, and it would be good to see industrial scientists unlock some of their collective wisdom in the areas of microbial biochemistry and physiology.

An obvious problem with the other two journals reviewed here is that all the papers come from the Soviet Union. It is simply not possible for any single country to produce a journal of international standard from its own resources, given the choice of publications open to authors these days — even the US-based JIM draws 30 per cent of its papers from foreign sources. The parochialism of *Molecular Genetics, Microbiology and Virology* (MGMV) and *Soviet Biotechnology* (SB) even extends to the bibliographies of the papers themselves, with a number of authors quoting only Soviet material.

In the issues I read, bacterial genetics was the dominant subject to MGMV, together with virology as related to

vaccine production. There were a number of useful short reviews, such as one on microcins and another on bacterial mutagenesis (the latter being the sole contribution from a Western author). But on the whole, MGMV contains little to excite.

I found SB far more interesting. The journal covers the whole range of biotechnology, from molecular genetics to chemical engineering, and the papers are short (3–5 pages). The obvious analogue among existing journals is *Biotechnology Letters*, but although SB has something of that publication's liveliness some of the papers present work which is not novel and which would not have been accepted in a Western journal.

Of great interest to watchers of Soviet science are the lengthy reports of speeches by ministers, telling how biotechnology fits into the next five-year plan. We learn, for instance, that the single-cell protein programme is forging ahead but that one hapless institute has failed to produce a single new drug in 12 years, in spite of the expenditure of some 50 million roubles. We also learn that biotechnology will produce "profound qualitative changes in the substance and character of labour and in all the material and spiritual conditions of life". Biotechnologists in the West will hope that such sentiments are also close to the hearts of their own political bosses. □

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Place for overall immunity

Fred S. Rosen

International Reviews of Immunology. Editors Heinz Kohler and Constantine Bona. Harwood. 6 issues per volume (see below). £52, \$64.

IMMUNOLOGY is an unabatedly vigorous field of research, and some of the most important findings are published in non-speciality journals — *Nature*, *Science*, *Cell*, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* and so on. This leaves a need for publications which pull together the flood of new facts and findings. Most review journals have an unfortunate lag

Harwood Academic Publishers and Gordon and Breach Science Publishers produce journals under the 'flow system'. Once sufficient papers are accepted to complete an issue, that issue is closed and quickly published. According to the publishers, this avoids the usual delays created by rigid schedules, but means that the number of issues per year cannot be accurately predicted.

period from submission to publication. Perhaps this problem can in part be solved by the appearance of *International Reviews of Immunology*.

The journal is edited by Heinz Kohler and Constantin Bona, and a personal subscription represents good value. Each issue is devoted to a subject of current interest such as idiotypic vaccines, T-cell clones, isotype regulation and so forth. Some issues are assembled by authoritative guest editors. A prestigious international editorial board has been recruited for this effort and its members should assure the future appearance of broad and comprehensive surveys of various immunological topics.

So far the scientific quality of the contents has been good. The format is of a convenient size, and the figures and illustrations (including some in colour) are well done. Altogether this publication is a useful addition to the small cohort of immunology review journals and annual reviews. □

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