Correspondence

Restrictions on Soviet Scientists

SIR,—The depressing story of the attempts by Dr Medvedev to accept an invitation to a conference in Sheffield (*Nature*, September 19) prompts me to raise the following issues. I have been to three conferences during the past month in various parts of Europe. At each conference papers by Soviet scientists were listed in the programme and abstracts were included; on each occasion none of the Russians turned up. One of these conferences was in Yugoslavia and on that occasion neither the Russian nor a Czech contributor was able to turn up, although both were due to give major addresses. At each of these conferences the organizers were caused embarrassment as well as regret by the inability of the speakers to come, and last-minute changes had to be made to the timetable in consequence. A further important consequence of these cancellations is that Western scientists are deprived of the benefit of meeting their Soviet opposite numbers.

At one of the conferences I attended, a letter was sent to the organizer by a Russian who was unable to come (such letters are not always sent, and sometimes the speakers simply do not turn up without notice or explanation). In the letter the scientist concerned expressed his regret at his inability to come and added that he was looking forward to seeing his contribution printed in the official proceedings of the conference. The question then arose whether his contribution should in fact be printed, and it was agreed that this should not be done. It is, of course, hard on a Soviet scientist, who would have liked to attend a conference but has been prevented by the failure of his authorities to grant permission, not to see his work printed. On the other hand, as I pointed out, if the work is printed then the Soviet authorities receive, as it were, indirect kudos without even having put up the resources to enable the speaker to deliver his paper in person; the Soviet authorities would have progressively less reason to permit their scientists to go abroad if their work is published as though they had been at the conference.

I submit therefore that it would be likely to be of long-term benefit to our Soviet colleagues and make it more probable that they would more often be allowed to come in future, if as a matter of principle conference organizers were to decline to print contributions from people who have not actually turned up in person at the conferences in question.

I should be interested to know the views of other readers concerning this suggestion.

Yours faithfully,

R. W. CAHN

University of Sussex,
Falmer, Brighton, Sussex.

Accelerating Somatic Cell Genetics

SIR,—In your leading article on October 24 (*Nature*, 228, 318; 1970), you attribute to Watkins and myself a discovery that we did not make. Watkins and I were the first to fuse together cells of human and murine origin, and we observed that in the fused cells DNA replication

was markedly inhibited in the human nuclei. However, the discovery that human chromosomes are preferentially lost from proliferating man-mouse hybrid cells was not made by Watkins and myself, but by Mary C. Weiss and Howard Green (*Proc. US Nat. Acad. Sci.*, 58, 1104; 1967).

Yours faithfully,

HENRY HARRIS

Sir William Dunn School of Pathology,
University of Oxford.

Population in Nigeria

SIR,—I wish to make some comments on your leading article of September 12 relating to the discussion at the meeting of the British Association (*Nature*, 227, 1073; 1970). You are, of course, correct in your reporting, but there is a possible danger of misunderstanding from the comment which you attributed to me which states that I doubt whether Africa has a population problem. I would not like to leave an impression which would be wrong. What I did say was that we are sceptical of the great efforts being made on population control in Africa by some advanced countries. We are sceptical because our main problem is not that of high birth rate which would likely be followed by a great increase in population, but rather the problem of a high infant mortality rate.

To be more specific, may I explain in this way: the population of Nigeria is calculated at about 60 million. A large majority of these 60 million are young people of not more than 15 years of age and most of these young people will never live beyond the age of 15—this is a medical fact. The result is that the effective population of Nigeria as regards her manpower is certainly not 60 million but may be between 20 and 30 million. It is obvious therefore that our concern should not be, as was suggested in the question directed to me, that we should control birth rate by limiting the number of children in each family (which is the current practice in population control) but that of preventing the high infant mortality rate.

Yours faithfully,

T. ADESANYA IGE GRILLO

Department of Anatomy,
University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Evolution of Rifting in Africa

SIR,—In his interesting comments (*Nature*, 227, 699; 1970) on our paper¹, it seems that McConnell thinks we consider the phenomenon of sea floor spreading to be taking place in the rift zone of East Africa. This is not so. The purpose of our communication was to bring together evidence from seismicity, age of faulting, age of volcanoes and interpretations of gravity anomalies and to suggest that they together indicate that rifting in East Africa is probably associated with attenuation of the lithospheric plate. This process, we envisage to precede spreading. The rift in East Africa cannot be a site of spreading for

it is likely from geophysical and geological data that sialic Pre-Cambrian material underlies the rift floor. We stated that the positive gravity anomaly indicates the presence of an intrusive body which could be within 1 km of the rift floor... this suggests that extreme crustal thinning has taken place, but as yet there is no crustal separation as in the Red Sea. Unlike McConnell who uses the term "spreading" twelve times, we were careful to use it only once and then in parenthesis with the word analogous.

We agree with the comments on the age of volcanoes and McConnell's doubts are expressed by the long error bars in our Fig. 4. We plotted all the age data available at the time of writing and it remains to be seen whether the

trend is born out by future data. We were careful not to use these data alone but to bring together five sets of data to support the suggestion of plate attenuation.

Yours faithfully

R. W. GIRDLER
J. D. FAIRHEAD
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W. T. C. SOWERBUTTS

School of Physics,
The University,
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU.

¹ Girdler, R. W., Fairhead, J. D., Searle, R. C., and Sowerbutts, W. T. C., *Nature*, **224**, 1178 (1969).

Obituary

Professor A. E. Alexander

ALBERT ERNEST ALEXANDER, professor of physical chemistry at the University of Sydney, died on May 23 1970. In Britain and Australia, he made important contributions to colloid and surface chemistry.

Alex, as he was always known, was born in Ringwood, Hampshire. He began his university career at Reading in 1932, continuing at King's College, Cambridge, in 1935. After obtaining a first in chemistry in Part II of the Natural Science Tripos, he joined the Department of Colloid Science in Cambridge under E. K. (now Sir Eric) Rideal, a step which largely determined the direction of his future research; his fellowship thesis at King's College in 1939 was entitled "Molecular Orientation and Reactions in Monolayers". During the war, although much of his time was taken up by war research, he continued to produce papers on surface chemistry and allied topics such as liquid interfaces, interfacial tension and ageing effects, built-up films, the structure of films, the role of hydrogen bonding, and the application of the Gibbs adsorption equation. On the biological side he was interested in the penetration of membranes and surfaces and in the properties of protein films.

In 1944 he was appointed an assistant director of research in the Department of Colloid Science at Cambridge. At this time, he was very successful in fostering

friendly relations with the chemical industry. The summer school on colloid science, which he organized in collaboration with the Royal Institute of Chemistry in 1945, is still spoken of warmly.

It was a great loss to Cambridge science when he accepted the Foundation chair of applied chemistry in the New South Wales University of Technology at Sydney, becoming the first head of the Chemistry School there and dean of the Faculty of Science. In 1956, having built up a flourishing department, he moved to the chair of physical chemistry at the University of Sydney, where he remained until his death. In Australia, as in England, Alexander was enthusiastically concerned with surface chemistry and its application to such things as water evaporation, the efficiency of cattle dipping preparations and the effectiveness of drugs. He was author or co-author of more than 130 papers on these subjects.

Alex married happily twice but had much more than his fair share of personal tragedy. Cathie, his first wife, died in 1965 after a long illness and in 1967 he married Giesela, the widow of a university colleague. Shortly afterwards, his daughter Naomi was killed in a car crash. With his hidden resources he was soon back in action, but tragedy struck again late in 1969, when he himself became fatally ill. He leaves Neil, the son of his first marriage, Giesela and her two children.

Announcements

University News

Professor G. C. McVittie, professor of astronomy at the University of Illinois, will be a visiting professor at the University of Kent during 1971.

Miscellaneous

Professor Ralph W. Chaney, University of California, Berkeley, has been awarded the **Paleontological Society Medal**.

Mr Ray Creasey, director of Advanced Systems and Technology, British Aircraft Corporation Preston Division, has been elected a fellow of the **American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics**.

Lord Penney of East Hendred, rector of the Imperial College of Science and Technology, University of London, has been awarded the **James Alfred Ewing medal** for his services to engineering. The **1970 S. G. Brown award and medal** has been won by **Dr D. C. Simpson** for his work on the development of externally powered artificial limbs.

The report of six new species of seaweed found in South Africa (*Division of Sea Fisheries Investigational Report No. 86*, Cape Town, 1970), which was mentioned in *Nature* (**227**, 779; 1970), unfortunately contained several errors and is to be reissued at a later date.

An **American Red Cross National Fractionation Center** has been established under the joint sponsorship of the American Red Cross and the National Heart and Lung Institute. The centre will provide facilities and staff for the large scale isolation from blood and other tissues of specialized proteins, plasma and cellular enzymes, membrane fractions and so on, which are not available from commercial sources. Further information can be obtained from Dr G. A. Jamieson, American Red Cross Blood Research Laboratory, 9312 Old Georgetown Road, Bethesda, Maryland 20014, USA.

Entries are invited for the £50 prize of the **Plastics and Polymer Group of the Society of Chemical Industry**, awarded annually for the best paper submitted on any aspect of pure or applied polymer science. The paper must be in English, and may be a description of original