

CORRESPONDENCE

Medvedev's Complaint

SIR,—In his comments on the excerpt from Medvedev's book J. J. Bikerman evades mentioning the salient difference between Medvedev's case and his own (*Nature*, 228, 297; 1970). Whereas Bikerman's request was for funds (which seem to be scarce in all countries) Medvedev not only had to apply for permission to leave his country for a few days but had to do so in vain.

It is tempting to ask which of the two accounts deserves being classified as "subtle communist propaganda". However, such demagoguery against another political ideology should, in my opinion, not appear in a scientific journal like *Nature*.

On the other hand, I think that bureaucracy in *absurdum* should be attacked in all countries. Therefore I cannot agree with Bikerman's recommendation of acquiescence in all official decisions which are not in conflict with "the existing law". Stupidity is no crime, but that does not mean that stupid decisions are sacrosanct. Nor stupid comments.

Yours faithfully,

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LSD and Learning

SIR,—I find it puzzling that R. and E. Miller could draw the conclusion that "there is no evidence of significant long-term impairment of learning attributable to LSD" (*Nature*, 228, 1107; 1970). Their own data show that 5 weeks after discontinuing LSD injections the controls, with 2.2 mean errors, did almost twice as well as the LSD treated mice which had 4.0 mean errors.

Seventeen weeks earlier both groups of mice had 4.3 mean errors, which means to me that the untreated mice, when finally tested did 98% better, while the LSD mice had learned almost nothing.

I find it especially puzzling that the authors, as indicated by their address, are apparently members of a department of mathematics.

Yours faithfully,

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The Biologist's Dilemma

SIR,—In the report (*Nature*, 228, 900; 1970) on a recent meeting of the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science, Dr R. G. Edwards, discussing the circumstances justifying abortion, is quoted as arguing that "there is no clash between scientific and medical ethics if the rights of the patient and the foetus are safeguarded at all times" and further that "it should be up to the patient to decide whether or not the pregnancy should be terminated".

Perhaps it is arguable that the rights of a grossly defective foetus (though scarcely where there is no more than a statistical chance of abnormality) are best safeguarded by its destruction. But in all other cases the decision to abort requires a judgment of the rights of the foetus to its life against the rights of the mother to be rid of it. Granted that when there is a risk of serious harm to the mother her interests should be given precedence over those of the child, if the decision is to be left to the mother alone she will have to act as judge in her own cause against the interests of the child. That must surely be unacceptable, unless the child is to be allowed no rights to its life at all.

Furthermore, where the question of foetal abnormality arises, quite apart from her own emotional involvement, only very rarely will a mother have the expert knowledge needed for a proper assessment of the risks, or indeed to understand any medical or genetical advice that may be proffered. Whether or not to terminate in such cases is often a difficult medical decision, and it is not one which doctors should seek to evade by placing the responsibility on to the mother. She cannot be compelled against her will to submit to abortion, of course; but if she does ask for it, that is only one of several factors needing to be taken into consideration. After all, it is by no means unheard of for a woman in the sometimes psychologically difficult early months of pregnancy to become convinced, without any rational justification, that there will be something wrong with her baby. Is the decision then still "up to the mother", with no responsibility devolving upon the doctor asked to destroy the child?

Yours faithfully,

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Partial Hepatectomy

SIR,—A. Sakai performs a partial hepatectomy on one of a pair of rats connected by cross-circulation catheters, and observes an increased uptake of tritiated thymidine in the nuclei of liver cells from the second rat¹.

This result is explained most simply as a result of growth of the liver of the second rat, stimulated by the increased metabolic load presented to it after partial hepatectomy is performed on the partner. There is no need to postulate specific humoral factors.

Yours faithfully,

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¹ Sakai, A., *Nature*, 228, 1186 (1970).

Reprint Communication

SIR,—Whilst fully agreeing with the suggestions on reprint distribution made recently by Kruskal and Savage¹ may I simply add that such a scheme will be of especial benefit when an author makes it a point to send reprints of his paper, particularly to those workers (cited in the bibliography) who reside in foreign and non-English speaking countries. Apart from the courtesy involved, this will be of immense benefit in terms of increasing prompt scientific awareness, especially in view of (a) the normal postal transit and hence delay in the journals arriving in foreign countries, (b) the apparent lack of ready and easy availability or accessibility of foreign periodicals in several of the non-centralized libraries, and (c) the perhaps natural inertia in reading through a foreign periodical due to the language problem. All these problems may be overcome when the reprint arrives by post directly at the desk of an interested, though pleasantly surprised scientist.

Yours faithfully,

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¹ Kruskal, W., and Savage, I. R., *Nature*, 228, 888 (1970).