

# CORRESPONDENCE

## Exposure to Asbestos

SIR,—Your article "Exposure to Asbestos" (*Nature*, 234, 383; 1971) quoting work in a USA shipyard gives the impression that the present standards for maximum permitted levels of asbestos dust emission are too high.

Until 1968 the maximum permitted level for asbestos dust concentration in work areas in the USA was expressed in accordance with the standards of the American Conference of Government and Industrial Hygienists in millions of particles per cubic foot. The standard during the time at which the ship repair workers that you have reported were exposed was therefore the pre-1968 standard of 5 million particles per cubic foot.

Since asbestosis was not diagnosed in persons with less than 10 years of cumulative exposure, the only relevant dust counts are those for the pre-1961 period. The average level of dust concentration aboard ship where 98% of the man hours were spent, given in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, by the test method appropriate to the standard, was 7.2 m.p.p.c.f., in 1965. For the only previous year quoted, 1945, the measurement, while taken by a different method, indicates levels nearly twice as high.

In 1968 the American standard was reduced from 5 m.p.p.c.f. to 2 m.p.p.c.f. or to 12 fibres/millilitre, since they regarded these as roughly equivalent.

The current threshold limit value in the USA is a time weighted average of 5 fibres/millilitre over an 8 h period with a peak not exceeding 10 fibres/millilitre in a 15 min period. In the UK the Factory Inspectorate in interpreting the Asbestos Regulations 1969 has adopted a TLV of 2 fibres/millilitre and for concentrations between 2

and 12 fibres/millilitre over a 4 h period takes into consideration the level of concentration and duration of exposure.

Thus the levels at which the full provisions of the regulations are applied are in both countries well below the levels of shipboard exposure for pipe coverers on which you have reported.

Yours faithfully,

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## Heads in Bags

SIR,—After *Nature's* excellent commentary on the Compton Report it was sad to find a scientist—Harald Trefall (*Nature*, 235, 347; 1972)—dealing so unscientifically with a more human problem. I would like to remind Mr Trefall of the point of the enquiry. If our civilized standards of justice are to mean anything, they must be defended against corruption by the sort of violence that they are supposed to be fighting. I am proud that my countrymen will go to considerable, though unhappily inadequate, lengths to maintain the standards of British justice. I am saddened that our forces of "law and order" act as though they are above the law; it is even sadder that Mr Trefall does not see the paramount importance of this.

Mr Trefall should also realize that if political arguments are to be settled by exchanging atrocity stories, much time can be saved by picking sides according to nationality—Irish or English, Israeli or Arab, and so on. If Mr Trefall were to study the recent history of Ireland, he would discover that the forces of "law and order" have seldom acted

according to the standards of civilized justice, which gives some point to the resistance of many Irishmen to the forcible imposition of that same law and order. The concept of the justice of overthrowing tyranny by force is old and honourable—see the American Constitution. The blind worship of authority which Mr Trefall apparently advocates is even older, but much less honourable.

Yours faithfully,

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## Semmelweiss in Translation

SIR,—In a review by E. Gaskell of *A History of Medicine* (edited by Lester S. King; Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1971; 60p) which appeared in *Nature* of February 4, 1972, page 290, is a statement which implies that the works of Semmelweiss have never been translated. This is not true, for I have read a translation, by F. P. Murphy, of *Die Aetiologie, der Begriff und die Prophylaxis des Kindbettfiebers* (Vienna: Hartleben, 1861) which appeared in *Medical Classics*, 5, 350-773 (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1941).

Yours faithfully,

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## Obituary

### Professor Emmanuel Fauré-Fremiet

PROFESSOR EMMANUEL FAURÉ-FREMIET, cytologist, developmental biologist, and protozoologist, died on November 6, 1971, in Paris.

Born on December 29, 1883, as the

older son of the composer and organist Gabriel Fauré, Emmanuel spent much of his youth with his maternal grandfather, sculptor Emmanuel Fremiet, whose name both he and his brother adopted in the compound Fauré-Fremiet.

For 60 years Fauré-Fremiet was

associated with the Laboratoire d'Embryogénie Comparée, which became in 1955 the Laboratoire d'Embryologie Expérimentale, of the Collège de France. He took the chair there in 1928, succeeding his father-in-law, and stayed there until his retirement in 1955. As "Professeur