

correspondence

Chile: for . . .

SIR,—I have recently read your editorial of May 3, on academic freedom in Chile, and would like to make some comments on it.

This is the third occasion I have come to Chile to lecture, the previous visits being in 1970 (before Allende's election) and 1971 (under the UP government). I also lectured here in 1965 (shortly after Frei's election) but not with a contract. I cannot claim to know the state of all the branches (*sedes*) and faculties of the University of Chile or other universities, but I am tolerably well acquainted with what goes on here. I can assure you that as far as this department is concerned, your article is almost totally untrue.

I have seen no military in or near the Faculty in my two months here, although I do understand that they searched it for arms a couple of days after the coup, since when they have not returned. Not one member of staff of this department has been dismissed for political or any other reasons.

Actions 'such as not taking part in the anti-Allende demonstrations' are not 'now retrospectively considered illegal'. Hardly anyone in the department ever took part in such actions. On the contrary a considerable number of the staff and perhaps 50% of the students regularly took part in pro-Allende meetings or demonstrations. To all those UP sympathisers or militants (not to mention the apolitical) who stay unchanged in their academic posts, your suggestion that they 'remain at the universities in puppet roles' is insulting. You conclude the phrase by adding 'organising research according to the junta's decree, teaching what the junta thinks fit to be taught'. The courses here are submitted to no one, military or otherwise, for approval. My own course has not been reviewed even by the director of the department.

Your report must certainly be true for some academic institutions (because I cannot believe the entire international press is misinformed) but it is nowhere near the whole truth. Either you too easily believe the statements made in Europe by refugees, genuine or otherwise, without attempting to verify them, or you are not concerned with straight reporting and are motivated by political considerations. If the latter is true and *Nature* has ceased to be a scientific journal to become a political one, may I, as an Irishman,

suggest you focus your concern about military misbehaviour on your own army for which you are indirectly, and many British scientists directly responsible, rather than on the army of a country on the other side of the globe where you apparently have never set foot.

I am no apologist for the military junta; on the contrary I am a strong supporter of the ideals of social justice which Allende claimed to support. However honesty forces me to admit that the most charitable interpretation of the cause of his regime's collapse was its catastrophic incompetence. The chaos that reigned in 1973 would have provoked a coup in any other Latin American country, and most European ones too. That said, and recognising the impertinence of making comments on the internal affairs of a foreign country, I unreservedly condemn the brutalities, vengeful actions and plain stupidities attributed to the authorities at various levels since September 11. Perhaps, following the above, I can best demonstrate my conviction that academic freedom and 'intellectual life' in Chile is *not* 'dead' by signing myself openly

Yours faithfully,

W. F. L. PURSER

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. . . and against

SIR,—The Chilean replies to the letters published in *Nature*, criticising the regime, although insulting the intelligence of your readers, underline the spirit of a totalitarian regime, a trivial phenomenon these days. However, there is no necessity to refute arguments which only underline how ideological fanaticism can deform judgement.

It seems more important to stress the need for the scientific community, which is rightly reluctant to become involved in political controversy, to assert that it cannot remain indifferent when individual freedom is at stake under any politico-economical order, religious or social prejudice. It is a matter of dignity for scientists to know that the torturers' representatives be at least excluded from their community, if more drastic action cannot be taken.

As for those, whether nationals or 'multinationals', who support regimes of the Chilean or Czechoslovakian type, they would be well advised to have the decency to spare us the nausea of their

public apologetic justifications. They might also be advised to consider that Portugal and Greece are perhaps not just mere accidents.

Yours faithfully,

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Publish or perish

SIR,—How can we escape from the tyranny of the Science Citation Index (how many citations did your papers get last year?) and the general publish-or-perish rat-race?

I suggest a procedure by which a stable and well-established department might contract out. Let all papers from the department be published under the same fictitious name, as is done by the pioneer French school of mathematicians who are Nicholas Bourbaki — a general who, when defeated, tried to shoot himself but missed. What effects might follow?

We might build one substantial scientist out of several mediocre ones, whose success might encourage the others. As Blackett has pointed out: "a first-class laboratory is one in which mediocre people can do outstanding work".

The Matthew Principle (Matthew, 25: 29) of R. K. Merton, "to every one that hath shall be given . . ." will be turned to general advantage since $(A + B + C + \dots)^x > A^x + B^x + C^x \dots$ (if $x > 1$).

The general standard of papers might be increased and their numbers reduced by taking off some of the pressure on the individual to rush into print.

Multiple subscriptions to journals and societies could be reduced.

The promotion scheme based on published papers would be confounded, perhaps forcing the consideration of persons as persons.

There has been much talk of the commonwealth of science, but who will be the second to set up a scientific commune? I am sure that common scientific property will be as strongly opposed by the establishment as the commonality of the property of Christians was opposed by the Church of England (Article 38).

Yours faithfully,

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