correspondence

Entry forbidden

SIR,—This year I had planned to attend the Ninth International Meeting of FEBS (the Federation of European Biochemical Societies) in Hungary. I am a scientist, I paid my registration fees and I even had flights and accommodation arranged; but I was barred on grounds of nationality. I am Israeli!

I suppose the word international has a different meaning in Hungary.

A PhD student at King's College, London, and a member of the British Biochemical Society, I acted in accordance with the instructions in the booklet issued by the Hungarian organisers, " . . . Participants from countries that do not have diplomatic relations with Hungary should apply for a visa to a General Consulate of Hungary in a European country they find most convenient", and applied for a visa from London.

Even though they had four weeks to issue the visa and in spite of a special request from Professor H. R. V. Arnstein, Secretary of FEBS, they kept me waiting until the very last moment. It was intimated that I could pick up the visa when I stopped in Vienna on my way to the conference. But when I arrived at the Embassy in Vienna, three days before the conference, I received a rude and cold reception. After keeping me waiting for half a morning, they told me I was on a "black list" and forbidden entry to Hungary.

This left me in Vienna, holding worthless train and hotel reservations, wondering about the purpose of international conferences.

I would say to all organisers that if their conferences are to be truly international, they should choose countries which foster this spirit, not, for example, Hungary.

Yours faithfully,

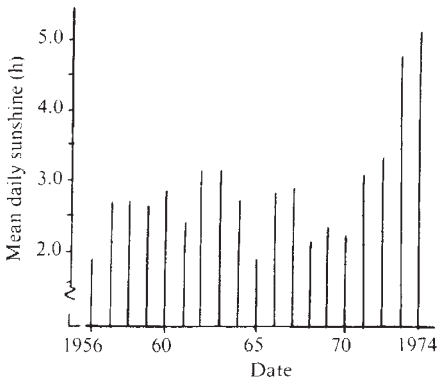
S. PELLER

King's College,
London WC2, UK

Cameroon climate

SIR,—The catastrophic effects on humanity of the major climatological fluctuation which has caused so much concern in the Sahel zone of Africa may have overshadowed other smaller changes in the meteorological records recently obtained in adjacent areas.

Sunshine records obtained during the past 19 years in Yaounde and published by the National Meteorological Bureau of the Cameroon indicate, perhaps, a considerable shift in the distribution, and thus the total amount, of daily insolation during some agriculturally important months of the year. For example, the mean daily number of sunshine hours for July in the years 1959–74 is illustrated in the accompanying graph. The difference in the years



1973 and 1974 by comparison with the previous distribution of approximately 2 to 3 hours a day could, if confirmed by subsequent records, possibly affect the agricultural productivity of the region, which relies heavily on cocoa, a crop noted for the complex relationships between growth/yield and the shade factor.

The way in which the production of dry matter depends on energy provided by insolation is well known and if the radiation available for agricultural production has altered over a wide area, the aid programmes planned by donor agencies may need revision.

J. DANCER

Ecole Nationale Supérieure Agronomique,
BP 138, Yaounde, Cameroon

Asbestos and health

SIR,—In Peter J. Smith's article (October 18) the point is well made that scientists should be more concerned with the practicalities of occupational health. We think it a pity, however, that he should have selected asbestos as an example of a health problem which scientists have ignored, since more scientific effort has in fact been expended on this problem than on most other similar problems in recent years, as the literature testifies.

It is not true that "asbestosis is taking an increasing toll" in this country. The number of new cases diagnosed may be on a higher plateau now than it was in the 1950s, reflecting factory conditions long ago and the increased usage of asbestos in an uncontrolled way in, for example, insulation, but since reaching a peak of 168 in 1967 there has been no further increase. The average since then has been 139 per year. We have every confidence that stringent controls associated with the Asbestos Regulations 1969, which apply to all asbestos work, will in coming years reduce these numbers to a very low level indeed. Indeed they are intended to eliminate them altogether.

The standards associated with the controls have a scientific base for which scientists working for government departments, the Medical Research Council, the British Occupational Hygiene Society and the industry-sponsored Asbestosis Research Council deserve full credit.

Yours faithfully,

W. P. HOWARD

The Asbestos Information Committee, London W1, UK

Academic consultancy

SIR,—Your editorial "Academics in the Boardroom" (November 22) implies that consultancy by university staff is something to be encouraged, whereas in fact it is something to be deplored.

Professors and lecturers at universities are in receipt of a full salary for a full-time job of teaching and research, and none of them has any right to use any part of that time in consultancy to anyone, whether industrial firm or individual, or even government department or agency, for the benefit of his client or himself.

In addition no member of university staff has the right to use apparatus and facilities provided at public expense for the purposes of teaching and research, for the benefit of any organisation or for his own benefit.

It is time that the Department of Education and Science clamped down on such use of public funds to subsidise such consultancy, which has forced so many independent consultants out of business. How can any independent consultant possibly compete with the university member who does not have to pay for his equipment and facilities or premises, and may even use students as unpaid staff?

Yours faithfully,

H. A. COOK

14 St Alban's St,
London SW1, UK