

correspondence

Visa problems

SIR.—In your issue of December 13, Miss Peller gave an account of her experiences in trying to attend the Ninth FEBS Meeting in Budapest last August. As Chairman and Secretary-General, respectively, of the Federation of European Biochemical Societies at that time, we naturally regret that Miss Peller was unable to obtain a Hungarian visa in time, although we have been assured by the organisers of the meeting that a visa was in fact available, unknown to her, in Vienna three days before the meeting started.

Because there are no diplomatic relations between Hungary and Israel it was anticipated that it would be difficult for biochemists in Israel to apply for Hungarian visas. This problem was discussed during a visit to Budapest in February 1974 by the then Secretary-General of FEBS and Professor S. G. Van den Bergh, the FEBS meetings adviser. In consultation with the organisers of the FEBS meeting (the Hungarian Biochemical Society and the Hungarian National Academy of Sciences) a special procedure was worked out which enabled Israeli biochemists to send their passports some months before the meeting by diplomatic mail to London, where the FEBS Secretary-General obtained Hungarian visas on their behalf within 24 hours and then returned the passports and visas to the applicants in Israel, again by diplomatic mail. Though somewhat elaborate, these arrangements worked satisfactorily in the case of applications received in good time through the Israeli Biochemical Society. They did not, however, cater for biochemists like Miss Peller, who were not resident in Israel at the time and therefore applied directly to Hungarian consulates.

In Miss Peller's case there is at present a fundamental discrepancy between the information she received at the Hungarian consulate in Vienna where she was told she was on a "black list" and would not be admitted into Hungary and telegrams she received by one of us (H. R. V. A.) from the meeting organisers some days before the meeting started stating that her visa had been granted. Although we have not yet been able to resolve these apparent contradictions, we believe that a genuine effort was made both by the organisers of the FEBS meeting and the authorities in Hungary to establish a satisfactory procedure for dealing with

all visa applications and there is no evidence to suggest discrimination in the issue of visas.

Nevertheless, we think that there are several important lessons to be learnt by the organisers of future international conferences, as well as by intending participants. Principally, there is a need to ascertain at an early stage of planning a meeting the precise official regulations of the host country concerning visa applications, to include this information in the circulars sent to all intending participants, to make and publicise special arrangements for citizens of countries which do not have normal diplomatic relations with the host country, and to urge participants to apply early for visas. Finally, we believe it would be useful, particularly in the case of large conferences, to appoint a member of the organising committee to be responsible for dealing with urgent visa problems and to announce his name, address and telephone number well in advance of the meeting so that contact can be made quickly if and when participants have special difficulties.

Yours faithfully,

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SIR.—In continuation and support of S. Peller's letter (December 13) I would like to point out that I was, obviously on the same grounds, subjected to an identical procedure by the diplomatic authorities of the host land of the Extraordinary General Assembly of the International Astronomical Union at Torun in September 1973—in spite of possessing an official invitation.

Although I was far from active politically or in any other way that could interfere with the interests of the host country, and despite rigorous adherence to the instructions printed on the invitation, I was refused an entry visa and thus prevented from attending the assembly. I wish to thank all colleagues who tried—in vain—to change the decision at the very last moment.

Yours faithfully,

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IQ Statistics

SIR.—A recent editorial (September 27) has drawn attention to the unfortunate social consequences of the recent con-

troversy about the possibility of genetic contributions to the observed differences between the average IQs of different races. It does not seem to have been noticed that many of the contributors to the debate, on whatever side, have quite misunderstood the logic of the relevant statistical methods.

If, as a first approximation, we assume that the observed IQ of an individual is the sum of a genetic component, G , and an environmental component E , so that $I = G + E$, it has become customary to define a 'coefficient of heritability', h^2 , as the ratio of the variance of G to that of I . In doing this the tacit assumption is made that G and E are uncorrelated in the population so that the variance of I is the sum of the variances of G and E . This is usually the case for quantitative characters in animals and plants. For human IQ, however, there is no doubt whatever that G and E are correlated, environment (both physical and psychological) being strongly associated with intelligence. Thus there is no point in attempting to estimate h^2 since it cannot be defined, let alone estimated, and attempts to estimate it are a misapplication of the analysis of variance.

It is of course, true that it might be possible in theory (but very difficult in practice) to divide the variance of I into three terms, the variances of G and E , and their covariance, and even to go further and split the variance of G into linear, dominance and epistatic components.

Even if this could be done, however it is clear that such components of variance within a population throw hardly any light on the differences between populations. This is easy to illustrate on animal and plant populations where h^2 within populations, when it can be defined, has no relationship to population differences.

At present there exist no methods of estimating differences in mean levels of G , and there is no evidence of any kind which suggests that negro intelligence is, on the average, less than, equal to or greater than that of white people. These three hypotheses are not intrinsically unpalatable but those who think they can be tested empirically have been inadequately instructed in the analysis of variance by their statistical colleagues.

Yours faithfully,

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