

# correspondence

## Biological fly killer

SIR,—K. M. S. Aziz (October 14, page 544) misquotes F. E. G. Cox (August 19, page 646) when referring to the use of insecticides for the eradication of tsetse flies (principally *Glossina morsitans*) from some 27,500 km<sup>2</sup> of riverine vegetation in Nigeria. This was achieved by ground spray techniques and not by aerial spraying.

This is a point of detail and Aziz could well reply that it does not affect his argument that aerial spraying (as practised against *Glossina* elsewhere in Nigeria and in other African countries) is an unsatisfactory method of controlling insect species. He gives as an example the resurgence of mosquitoes after an aerial spray operation over parts of Bangladesh. However, mosquitoes in Bangladesh present different problems to tsetse flies in Nigeria and it can be misleading to compare the two situations.

I suspect that the mosquitoes of Bangladesh re-appeared because the aerial spraying operations had no permanent effect on their habitats. Precisely the same would almost certainly have happened in time in the case of the tsetse flies of Nigeria had the habitat remained unaltered. However, Nigeria is a land-hungry country and the success of the anti-tsetse operations allowed a breathing space in which land cleared of *Glossina* was taken over by man and his cattle, altering the vegetation to such an extent that it no longer presented a suitable habitat for *Glossina*.

The moral of the Nigerian success story is that tsetse control operations should not be initiated unless there is a demand for the land occupied by the flies. Obviously, in order to prevent such evils as overstocking and soil erosion, exploitation of cleared areas must be strictly governed by well thought out development programmes.

Insecticides for tsetse control do have, and will continue to have for the foreseeable future, an important part to play in the development of rural Africa. By all means let us undertake research, as advocated by Aziz, on more specific biological methods of control; but Africa cannot afford to postpone action against *Glossina* until satisfactory alternatives to insecticides have been developed.

Your faithfully,

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## Nobel prizes

SIR,—I have found what I believe to be a significant correlation between Nobel prizes and Olympic games. Previously, the United States did not have the dominant position in science that it has achieved today. The Nobel prizes of physics, chemistry and medicine were never awarded to US scientists in the same year; now the situation has changed. In 1968 all three prizes were for the first time awarded to American scientists. The second favourable conjunction came in 1972 (seven titles out of eight, in the three domains). Now in 1976 there is again an American monopoly. The three remarkable events are significantly correlated in time with the Olympic Games.

Some friends of mine suggest that the

truly significant correlation is to be made with the presidential elections in the United States. Such a hypothesis is easily ruled out on the basis of the authoritative works of Einstein and Garfield. It is known that the presidential elections occur after, not before, the designation of the Nobel laureates. Einstein's theory of relativity (*Ann. d. Phys.*, 17, 891; 1905) excludes any time-reversed determinism. Then, the objectivity and political independence of Stockholm's academicians is attested by the fact that the Nobel prize correlates very well with the value of the distinguished scientific work, as measured in the Science Citation Index (Garfield, *Nature*, 242, 485; 1973).

Yours faithfully,

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## Stamps of scientific interest

On October 9 Sweden issued a colourful set of five stamps commemorating nineteenth century Swedish pioneers in various spheres of technology. Each of the stamps bears a portrait of the pioneer in question together with an example of the practical application of his contribution to technology.

These range from work on the use of solar energy (John Ericsson), a machine gun and hay-mower (Helge Palmcrantz), the first desk telephone (Lars Magnus Ericsson), a milk separator (Gustav de Laval) to the first spherical, self-regulating ball bearing (Sven Wingquist). It was this latter innovation which was later produced by the Swedish Ball Bearing Company (SKF), in Gothenburg, which was founded in 1907. L. M. Ericsson's first desk telephone of 1877 was the start of the L. M. Ericsson Telephone Company, now a world-wide enterprise.

Also issued by Sweden on October 9 were two stamps devoted to industrial safety. The first law on this subject in Sweden was passed in 1889, it also being then that the first inspectors were appointed. The present body both investigates hazards on the factory floor and carries out research on occupational health. The design of these two stamps consists

of two hands against a background of two cog wheels. The fingers and the cogs join to symbolize the interplay between man and machine.

Ian F. Finlay

