

McBride criticizes inquiry

SIR—You have reported the findings of the committee of inquiry into the allegations of scientific fraud by me (*Nature* 336, 101; 1988). I believe this is the first inquiry of its kind in the world. I hope it will never be repeated.

Allegations of scientific fraud were first made by Norman Swan, a medical reporter for the Australian Broadcasting Commission, on a radio programme, "The Science Show", on 12 December 1987; they were based on statements by two of my former assistants and were repeated in the lay media.

The board of directors of Foundation 41, where I have served as medical director for 17 years, then set up an inquiry chaired by Sir Harry Gibbs, a retired chief justice of Australia, and including two scientists nominated by the Australian Academy of Science, Professors Robert Porter and Roger Short. Neither has published on birth defects, the mechanisms of their production or fetal pharmacology.

After I had agreed to assist this inquiry, I was informed that no party was to be allowed legal representation. My lawyers did present the committee with a written request on my behalf emphasizing that I, the accused, had my reputation to lose and should have the right of representation. I was advised by my legal advisers not to participate in the inquiry if this request was denied, but as I had already agreed to participate and as I maintain that I am innocent of the charge, I foolishly decided to attend.

The inquiry was set down for 25, 26 and 27 July 1988. As my accuser, Norman Swan, was about to travel overseas, a special sitting was held for him to give evidence on 7 July.

Not only was I denied legal representation, but I was not allowed to attend the inquiry and thus question my accusers. I had to put in a written submission before 30 June because of Swan's impending departure. As I had little time to prepare it and had to submit three copies, much work was involved. I was allowed to make later additions.

The inquiry was advertised in every major newspaper in Australia and the *Medical Journal of Australia*. Anyone could make a submission. As I was present only for approximately one and a half hours on 25 July and a short time for questioning on Wednesday 27 July, I still do not know who gave evidence or what evidence was given.

The experiment in question was entitled "Effects of scopolamine hydrobromide on the development of the chick and rabbit embryo," published in the *Australian Journal of Biological Science* (38, 173; 1988).

I gather that much of the evidence against me was supplied by Mr Fred Baker, a Washington lawyer who represents the Merrell Dow Company (this company does not manufacture scopolamine). This evidence from Mr Baker consisted of affidavits that would not be accepted as evidence by a court because the people who made them were not present for questioning.

Professor Short is a frequent speaker on the Science Show. On 29 October, he spoke on AIDS. After his segment, Mr Robyn Williams, the producer, said that Short had been a member of the committee investigating the charges of scientific fraud made by Swan against me on 12 December, and that the committee's findings would be handed down on 2 November. This was the first I had heard of the date of release of the findings. Williams went on to congratulate Swan on receiving the Walkley Award for journalism for exposing Dr McBride's fraud. This award had been announced on 27 October, six days before the committee's findings were released. Short's appearance and the announcement of the Walkley award before the Gibbs Committee report was handed down seems extraordinary. My criticisms of this procedure are as follows.

1. I was denied legal representation although I was the accused and I was refused the right to cross-examine my accusers.
2. I still do not know who gave evidence against me or the nature of the evidence.
3. I have requested but not had my original documents returned. These contain correspondence, some of which is eight years old, and a manuscript of the same time. I was not warned before I submitted this material that all three sets of the documents would be retained by the committee. Sir Harry Gibbs has ruled that this material is now the property of the committee.
4. Although the recorded transcript of the proceedings was paid for by Foundation 41, this has not been given to the board of directors.
5. I find it impossible to accept that scientists would dismiss eight malformed rabbit kittens, all with rare malformations of the brain or eye or both, as probably due to disease or age of the mother. It was suggested by Short on 25 July that rabbit food could have caused the deformities, because cat food can be toxic to cats. I did a computer literature search on 26 July and reported to the committee on 27 July

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that I could find no evidence of malformations produced by food. Even the Minamatta Bay disaster (mercury contamination of fish) did not produce physical malformations.

6. I feel the evidence collected by the committee may have been influenced by the partisan attitudes well described by the *Sydney Morning Herald* correspondent who, in a report of the inquiry, said of me that "he was a doctor, working in another professional area — medical science — where he was never quite accepted". Another example is the casual way in which the date of its finding was first announced, as an addendum to a popular broadcast.

As this inquiry sets a precedent, I hope that no one will be subjected to a similar procedure. Unfortunately, there is no way that I can appeal against the decision. I still maintain I am innocent of the charge of scientific fraud. Other workers have produced similar results with anticholinergic drugs in animal experiments since the early years of this century.

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Divine artefact

SIR—If God was smart enough to create The System, he was certainly smart enough to cover his tracks, that is he could have 'implanted' the geological astronomical record so that what many of us now see as a scientifically pre-Creation history is merely a divine artefact.

I say this as a non-creationist scientist who nevertheless cannot find a way around this argument. Can you? If not, then science would also appear to be a religion: we simply believe there was no relatively recent Creation but cannot prove it.

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OUP's list

SIR—I write to correct several errors in a recent news article (*Nature* 336, 102; 1988). OUP has been a significant publisher of scholarly journals for many years, and before our acquisition of IRL's list of 13 journals we had a list of about 100 journals in the sciences and humanities, such as *Brain* and *Mind*.

We also are successful textbook publishers. We rarely publish theses.

In your issue of 10 November, between pages 118 and 119, the publication of several textbooks is announced, but no theses.

KATHERINE JURY

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Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP, UK