



FEDERATION OF EUROPEAN BIOCHEMICAL SOCIETIES
*A Federation of Biochemical Societies in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria,
Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, GDR, GFR, Great Britain,
Hungary, Israel, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland,
Portugal, Rumania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, USSR, Yugoslavia*

From the Secretary-General of the Federation of European Biochemical Societies:
Professor H. R. V. Arnstein
Department of Biochemistry, King's College
Strand, London WC2, England
TELEPHONE 01-836 5454

20 November 1969

Dr F.H.C. Crick,
MRC Laboratory of Molecular
Biology,
University Postgraduate Medical
School,
Hills Road,
CAMBRIDGE. CB2 2QH.

Dear Francis,

Many thanks for your letter about our contribution in Nature to the discussion concerning international conferences which you started early in October. As you know, FEBS now has constituent societies in every European country and therefore covers a part of the world where political differences are very marked. Although personally I disapprove of both extremes of the political spectrum, I still think it is desirable that FEBS meetings should be organised by different constituent societies in their own countries provided that biochemists can attend the meetings without interference by the government of the host country and can express scientific opinions freely. In other words FEBS as an organisation is inclined to see this problem from a pragmatic and practical point of view. This is the reason why, when it comes to our first point, we have deliberately not included the requirement that citizens of the host country should also be able to enter and leave the country freely. I, personally, would of course like to see a world where all scientists, and indeed everyone else, could travel freely, but I think to make this a condition for holding a meeting in a particular country is at present unrealistic. For example, there was a time when the United States refused quite frequently to issue passports to many people, including some eminent scientists. Would you consider that during that period it would have been wrong to organise an international meeting in the United States? I feel that there are other and better ways of applying pressure and that by holding meetings under such conditions one can at least retain scientific contact. I should draw the line, of course, if scientists of the host country were prevented from attending the meetings, since in such circumstances meaningful scientific contact would clearly no longer be possible.

Your remarks about financial support and the attitude of younger scientists may well be true and in fact I am not at all surprised about the attitude of the students at Spetsai. In my experience, however, younger people are often extremely ignorant about the financial cost of most things, including the organisation of meetings. It is in fact their good fortune that they don't have to consider such matters, but a little bit of education in this respect is usually well worth while and, I find, often appreciated. My personal view would be that one should draw a distinction when considering financial support by



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governments between support for strictly scientific aspects, e.g. the cost of inviting foreign scientists who are giving lectures, and social functions. I can see very little wrong in accepting money to enable a symposium to be held, but I think it is quite unnecessary to depend on the support of an oppressive regime for social functions. At the same time, these two aspects are often difficult to disentangle and in the case of FEBS, where meetings are organised by the host society, this would be doubly difficult.

These are just my first reactions to the points you have raised. I am taking the liberty of sending a copy of your letter and this reply to Datta and I am wondering whether you think it would be useful sometime to have an exchange of views by personal discussion rather than correspondence to see if we can reach some sort of agreed position. I should certainly be quite willing to come up to Cambridge some time in the near future if you thought this would be useful.

Best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Henry', written in dark ink.

H.R.V. Arnstein