

July 12, 1951.

Dr. Leonard Karel,
Chief, Extramural Programs,
National Microbiological Institute.

Reference: E 72(C3)

Dear Dr. Karel:

Thank you for your letter of July 10, and for the statement of research grant award which accompanied it.

As you know, this award was made for an amount considerably less than that requested. We have been, and shall continue to be deeply indebted to the Research Grants Programs of the National Institutes of Health for the very generous support they have provided for our work on bacterial genetics, and it is not difficult to envisage the circumstances which necessitated retrenchments such as this. I would value your counsel, however, on the probabilities of the future course of these programs as they may relate to our own project, in order that we may lay plans for the uninterrupted execution of our research.

This project, initially RG-1445 (M&I) was initiated on a very modest basis, and I was in fact advised by various people who I expected to be acquainted with the facts that a more ambitious request should have been proposed. I felt, however, that in the initial, exploratory, and rather unpredictable phase of this particular problem that no more funds should be committed than were absolutely essential to keep it going until such time as we could have some prospect of a worthwhile return on the investment. Frankly, until a few months ago, I would have admitted that such a return was doubtful, except for information of a purely negative character. At about the time that the project for E 72 (C3) was written up, on the genetics of bacteria, with special emphasis on Salmonella, the picture changed completely, and the likelihood of significant results became, in my own mind, very great. The request for increased support was commensurate with this conviction.

The administration of the grants program, and my dealings with its agents have been so gratifying, that I would hold it very important to retain its confidence if that were reasonably possible. The recent action with respect to this budget raises certain questions either as to that

confidence, or (I hope more likely) as to its resources. Either way, this places me in a quandary: shall we proceed on a limited basis for the time being, in hopes of more favorable action at a later date, or shall we look for other sources of support, with the possibility of a deflection of our course in other, or more applied directions.

I hope that this letter does not unfairly demand an unanswerable question. I am certainly not asking for any commitments of any binding character. However, it might remain appropriate to ask whether the extramural programs intend to encourage or discourage applications for augmented support, and whether the prospects of necessary resources are favorable or not, all assuming that the study committees find the same interest in this project as they showed in 1948-50. If the difficulty is at this last level, I should of course be indebted for any criticism of the scientific validity or value of our work in progress.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg,
Associate Professor of Genetics.