

JUN 27 1977



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE  
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE  
NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH  
BETHESDA, MARYLAND 20014

JUN 21 1977

Dr. Joshua Lederberg  
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Dear Josh:

This is in reply to your letter of 14 June.

I want first to address some inferences that I have drawn from your remarks on how the Ehrlich experiments briefly became an abortive cause celebre.

Ehrlich's paper and a companion piece on *B. subtilis* infection in a seriously compromised host were sent to me by Larry Horowitz during the week of May 25. As he alleged, other members of the Kennedy subcommittee staff viewed this study as evidence of a serious "loophole" in the DNA guidelines.

I was invited to meet with the staff on May 27 to explain the crucial differences between natural recombination and the "novel recombinant events" which are the properly narrow subject of the guidelines. It was a chilling experience. The prevailing attitude favored restrictions upon laboratories to reduce the occurrence of phenomena proceeding naturally with a frequency unlikely to be affected by any human law. The importance of continued examination of natural recombination, even for the parochial purpose of permitting some rational regulation under the present guidelines, had to be carefully and patiently defended again. The meeting seem to have been successful; at least, the June 14 print of the Senate Bill contains no catastrophic extension of coverage.

A statement in the press subsequent to the May 27 encounter and to the effect that NIH had established a committee to examine the Ehrlich experiments is false. It refers to the Krause Committee created months ago to evaluate safety practices in research programs involving mutagenesis and other forms of genetic recombination, with particular attention to better classification of hosts and vectors.

*over*

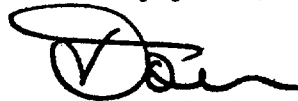
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I hope I do not need to defend the quality of our perceptions here of which are the true and which are the false lines being drawn between scientific inquiry and protection of the environment or the public interest. Comments on tactical errors are always welcome, however; and I will admit to over-optimism in the past about containment of damage likely to be afflicted upon science--and in the long run, the public interest--by the hurricane of political action that now envelopes us.

I am cheered by your letter to Senator Cranston. Both the substance and the form are to be applauded. I only urge you not to consider this effort enough. What Voltaire called "ingenious reason" is preparing to flee in this Age of Disenchantment. You must continue to be one of the strongest and steadiest voices urging that spirit to remain.

With kindest regards,

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Fredrickson', with a large, stylized initial 'D'.

Donald S. Fredrickson, M.D.  
Director