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July 24, 1991

Dr. Simon Wain-Hobson
Laboratoire de Rétrovirologie
Moléculaire
Institut Pasteur
28 Rue Du Docteur Roux
75724 Paris, France

Dear Simon:

I am surprised and disturbed by the tone of your letter of June 24, 1991. Judging from the content of your letter and its tone, I believe that you are not completely informed on some aspects of this matter. In a sincere interest in improving the atmosphere on both sides of what should no longer be a controversy, and hopefully not to make a game of ping-pong, I would like to respond to the points you raised in your letter.

1. We, too, did believe M2T/B was derived from BRU. Since we had no remaining sample, and since we had written assurances of the provenance of the sample, our belief that M2T/B was the same as the other samples is understandable. That we were mistaken (as you say in your own letter in reference to the analysis of M2T/B showing otherwise), "such is life". Although you proudly proclaim that you brought your conclusion that LAV-1 was not from BRU to light within weeks of your having found it out, I should point out that for many years you must have had these materials available to you, during which time you maintained that LAV-1 most certainly derived from BRU. In view of the controversy which has surrounded this subject, I am surprised that these studies were never done until after our results were published. Given your interest in genetic drift over time, these samples should logically have been of great interest, since BRU lived until 1988. As to whether or not the similarity of LAV-1 and HTLV-III_B was such as to indicate a common source, I have previously, publicly, and repeatedly stated the possibility that this was the case and that III_B represented a contamination with LAV-1. Your recent results and ours convinced me of the overwhelming likelihood that this was the case, as well as provided an explanation of how and where it happened. I then decided, for the sake of international scientific amity (which has not been immediately forthcoming, I must say), to state this formally and immediately. That it took you so long to identify the contamination at the Pasteur would seem to warrant a less self-righteous tone.

2. You say that we had M2T/B derivatives available to us. I imagine this is your greatest misunderstanding. This is not the case. The only Ti7.4 LAV remnant that we have been able to locate is a Southern blot performed by Beatrice Hahn with four to six enzymes using DNA from a culture grown in the summer of 1984. This pattern looked like that of IIIB and LAV-1, but we had a number of other samples at the time, which looked like IIIB. These all occurred in one incubator, and fortunately did not harm our several other independent isolates like RF, MN, JS and SC, which were cultured and kept elsewhere in the lab. Our conclusion was that we had a serious contamination problem, and as a result, the validity of the blot with Ti7.4 was very much in question. We could not find any freezes of cultures of Ti7.4 despite a very extensive search through our freezers. It was apparently long ago thrown out by Mika.

3. You seem to imply that we did not make a serious effort to obtain M2T/B from the Pasteur, but this is not true. There were four attempts of which I am aware to obtain historical samples from the Institut Pasteur. First, I was told by Dr. Hadley that Dr. Raub had requested such samples, but was unable to get a positive response. Second, I personally asked Luc Montagnier at the Pasteur Vaccine meeting in October of 1990 for primary material from BRU and the M2T/B culture. He told me that none of this material was still in existence. Third, I attempted to get the historical samples from the French patent repository and was refused, even though I am listed as a co-inventor and thus should have had access to them. A second request was granted many months ago, but amazingly we have not yet obtained the materials. Fourth, I requested the early samples through Jean-Claude Chermann from Françoise Barre-Sinoussi, who told him that she could not send the samples to him or to me, at the request of Maxime Schwartz. I am enclosing copies of the relevant correspondence. A neutral observer would conclude that we in fact went to some effort to obtain the pertinent samples. Incidentally, I note in your letter that you state that the Institut Pasteur actually sent M2T/B, but not to whom. I was not aware of this. Where and when did they send it? Would it not be appropriate to tell me?

I sincerely hope that this letter convinces you that I have acted in better faith than you seem to believe. I do indeed regret if statements I have made in the past have shed more heat than light on the whole problem. I would like to add, however, that not all of the heat has come from this side of the Atlantic. In fact, I would venture to say that a casual examination of news accounts will show that the majority of such statements, and certainly some slanderous ones (such as your quote in the Italian magazine Panorama a few weeks ago) have come from Paris. I hope that this letter helps to calm the waters and dispels your apparent misapprehensions about the availability to us of Ti7.4 LAV and the serious effort we made to obtain the relevant historical samples.

I am sorry it has taken so long to do these analyses. In retrospect, they should have been done long ago by both sides in the controversy. A lot of frustration could have been avoided. I am not attempting to "one up" you. I do want to point out that things are not always simple, and I feel you might have a little more faith in and friendship for your colleagues. None of us, including Simon Wain-Hobson and Bob Gallo, are perfect.

Sincerely yours,



Robert C. Gallo, M.D.

P.S. You say that you do not understand why copies of my last letter to you were sent to other people. The reason is that you and Luc have used (or at least are quoted as using) slanderous comments about me in the media. I felt that I needed to communicate my views to at least a few of the people who are likely to have seen these comments in the media.

cc: Dr. Francoise Barre-Sinoussi
✓Dr. Samuel Broder
Dr. Jean-Claude Chermann
Dr. Suzanne Hadley
Dr. Francois Jacob
Dr. Luc Montagnier
Mr. Joseph Onek
Dr. Maxime Schwartz