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Docteur C. Escoffier-Lambiotte
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FRANCE

Dear Dr. Escoffier-Lambiotte:

I was surprised by parts of your reply to my letter and rather astonished to read the translated version of your interview with J. P. Levy, a very respected, fair minded, and gifted retro-virologist. I am now convinced that some of the things you wrote were biased, nationalistic, and based on concepts and information which were unidirectional, i.e. never once checked with me or my colleagues or anyone at NIH.

Your very reply to me admits how you reported on AIDS, never once with a direct interview, or contact, or telephone call to me. Yet, you have made statements about the relations, which involve me, our work, the name of the virus, and bits of scientific gossip or controversy. It is unfortunate that an investigative journalist writes without an attempt to know both sides of an issue. You say you went to meetings, you

"heard" about disputes, and then you report it. It should be apparent that you might have heard half the facts, part of the truth, a misinterpretation, a miscommunication. Your scientific sources are a bit one-sided and might not know all the facts. Your very interview with J. P. Levy is revealing. Jean Paul himself says HTLV-III is a reasonable term, yet your every question seems to be based on premises which seek to bias him. In fact, the interview, its title and subtitle reek with chauvinism and nationalistic sentiments. ("War", "defeat the Americans", "American blockade of French scientists etc.") My points on the interview are separately enclosed.

In response to a few specific points in your letter:

1. The first part of your letter deals with your reporting on "my excellent work with HTLV". This is fine, but it is all before the AIDS story. Yes, you dealt with Heckler's announcement, but I repeat you never once spoke with me.
2. You state that you reported my announcement to appear in conjunction with the Pasteur group the identity of LAV and HTLV-III etc. and that you still await this more than a year later. As seems consistent, you have part facts and part fancy. When Heckler decided to make this announcement it was because (a) I had enough data to say we believed we conclusively understood and proved a specific virus cause of AIDS, (b) we had a very reliable and mass produced available blood test for the virus.

In view of the desperate need for this and its importance, Heckler made that announcement. What you fail to understand and apparently failed from the start to understand, is that neither claim was made by the Pasteur group at that time, and the reason is simple. They had not achieved transmission of the virus to a permanently growing cell line to mass produce the virus to solve the technical production. Incidentally, this did not take a big team or industry. It took one intelligent technician, a few ideas (some mine, by the way) and one of my associates. Moreover, the Pasteur group had not conclusively (at that time) linked LAV to the cause of AIDS. We provided the first clear cut etiological link in those four Science papers and one Lancet paper in May 1984, publishing on 48 isolates (not one) and clear antibody epidemiology showing the link to the cause of AIDS.

At that moment I suspected that HTLV-III and LAV might be closely related or identical and I announced this at Heckler's press briefing to be fair. However, we did not know they were the same because specific reagents had not yet been developed against LAV and because, as I said above, LAV had not yet been successfully produced in a permanently growing cell line. Of course, once we had adequate reagents we could pursue this in a collaborative venture with the Pasteur group.

3. You then chastise me for not yet coming to the statement that they are the same. Once again, you operate and speak with little

information, or information which is misleading and/or manipulating you. First of all, we (Montagnier and myself) did announce that LAV, and HTLV-III were indeed very likely to be minor variants of the same virus (June 1984, Denver, Colorado meeting press conference). Second, we obtained sufficient immunological data and nucleic acid sequence data some time ago to solidify this, but Montagnier chose not to publish it, feeling that it was redundant, i.e., that everyone knew due to the nucleic acid sequence data being published from both our labs. I enclose for you copies of our correspondence (items labeled No. 1).

4. Next, you say I rarely mention the Pasteur group. My oh my I am now truly flabbergasted. This kind of hypersensitivity smacks of insecurity. I would say the opposite is true if anything, but I have no complaint, i.e., I don't expect, need, or want more referencing to my work. However, I enclose for you a letter written by the Director of the Chester Beatty Cancer Institute in London, Robin Weiss, who replies to similar nonsense stimulated probably by some back-room innuendoes (see item No. 2). As he states it, the referencing to key papers weighs more on us referencing Pasteur rather than vice versa despite the fact, as you rightly point out in your J.P. Levy interview, we publish far more than they do.

5. You then say I "always call the virus HTLV-III while a whole school of qualified virologists believe it does not belong to the HTLV family." I have several comments about this. Yes, I do always call the virus HTLV-III. I am consistent. In contrast, the Pasteur group used the term (1) "RUB, (2) "an HTLV", (3) LAV, (4) IDAV, and (5) back again to LAV. Regarding the accuracy of belonging or not to a family of HTLV: this is, of course, highly semantic. It is a human T lymphotropic retrovirus, i.e., an HTLV. It does share many features in common with HTLV-I and II, but you are certainly correct that since the nucleic acid sequence data has become known, it is clearly much more different than we or the Pasteur group knew or even suspected before.

Remember, the sequence data is very recent. I am not a mystic. I could not know this earlier, nor could anyone else. Moreover, I would bet you would be surprised to know that the only published claims that LAV or HTLV-III is closely related to HTLV-I or HTLV-II come from the Pasteur group and CDC (item No. 3 and No.4) which are quoted from their papers with CDC and above). Nonetheless, we all recognize now that they are distantly related to HTLV-I and II. However, naming these viruses in a numbered sequence never depended on any arbitrary degree of sequence homology. (Please see the international agreement made at Cold Spring Harbor in Nov. 1983 which is item No. 5. So that you fully understand the logic of our position, please see

item No. 6 which is a copy of a letter from me on this subject. Lastly, it is a bit ironic that you speak of "schools of virologists.. believe it does not belong to the HTLV family." yet the one person you name (i.e. you interview) and he happens to be France's number 1 retrovirologist, Jean-Paul Levy, believes HTLV-III is an appropriate name even though your questions were clearly leading and based on biased premises.

6. You then speak about research support, large U.S. laboratories etc. This is, of course, fair to discuss and your business, but as one French scientist said to me "be careful not to be a victim if the Viet Nam syndrome", i.e., "poor me, poor me, look at the big big Americans." Come on, Madam, let's be fair. The Pasteur group did not have extensive support because they did not have the same record as ours over the past 20 years. Clearly, since AIDS they have gained relatively much, much more than I. I have obtained one science administrator for AIDS. In any case, I admit I am supported more than most U.S. scientists. This was long before AIDS, and I assume there is a reason for it.

7. You say my statement "that you write as if you have a debt to the Pasteur Institute" was more ludicrous than injurious. For this I apologize. I was guilty of what you do, namely, I wrote an opinion based on one sided information, i.e., reading your writings, noting that you didn't ever check anything with me, and listening to opinions of several French friends inside

and outside of Paris. Again, I apologize for this, but at least when I make a one-sided written mistake based on limited information I don't get it published for the world to read and I am ready and able to admit a mistake and to apologize.

8. You say the Pasteur group does not have the means to make their research known that can compare with me! I am startled. Can you explain what you mean? They have published in Science (incidentally their original 1983 report in Science was with my help, see Item No. 7) Cell, Nature, Lancet. They organize meetings. They have a direct administrative line to their government. Mine is far less. I really do not know what you are talking about. Do you?

9. You speak about commercial aspects which I am aware of: Surely, I am aware, but as a government worker I am not involved. I think Pasteur Institute has relations with Pasteur Pharmaceutical, other French companies, and Genetics Systems in the U.S. I could care less. This is their problem, not mine. I am tied to no one.

10. Lastly, you say it is up to me to appease the dispute. You may find this hard to believe, but I have no interest and (never had) in any dispute. I am working on this problem and once in a while I am distracted by articles pushing disputes that are atrociously sensationalistic, and and harmful to science and the resolution of this problem. The only controversy is in the naming. It can be settled, and it is trivial.

Remember, my colleagues and I discovered T-cell growth factor, called it that, but today most people call it interleukin-2 (IL-2).. I lost but I don't cry nor care. We discovered HTLV-I and II. These names remain. The Pasteur group first identified in the literature LAV (HTLV-III); therefore they were the key people to first discover it. The contributions of my colleagues and I in this were: to first propose the idea that AIDS was caused by a retrovirus (one year before the Pasteur group began their work), provide the major techniques to grow the T-cells (the same as used for HTLV-I), provide the reagents to HTLV-I and II to everyone (including the Pasteur group) so that any new human retrovirus could be distinguished from HTLV-I and II, the first to grow LAV (HTLV-III) in a permanently growing cell line for its first mass production which in turn led to the first defined reagents against this virus, the first to unambiguously link this virus to the cause of AIDS, the first to molecularly clone the viral genes, the first to show the virus replicated in the brain, to discover the heterogeneity, the first to provide evidence for an African origin, the first to isolate virus in saliva, and simultaneously with two other groups first to discover neutralizing antibodies. In short, some of the above are part of a discovery which leads to the proof that a new virus is the cause of a human disease. If you combine this with our

previous opening of the whole field of human retrovirology and the logic of the nomenclature arguments in my letter to Varmus, perhaps you will agree that perhaps I have some points.

Sincerely yours,

Robert C. Gallo, M.D.

RCG:1b

