

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Several news articles have recently appeared in the Czech, English and Danish media concerning the alleged involvement of Dr. Jiri Bartek in espionage during the 1980s. Due to the serious nature of the allegations it is important to detail the facts in order to determine whether there is any validity in these claims. Jiri Bartek is rightly a world-renowned cancer research scientist. He presently works at the Danish Cancer Society's research Institute in Copenhagen from where he has made numerous groundbreaking scientific discoveries. It would be extremely unfortunate if the media publishes groundless allegations about one of Danish and Czech science's most distinguished scientists.

Some of the signatories of this letter work for Cancer Research UK, in the cancer research institute where Bartek worked as a junior scientist in the 80s. We all know Jiri Bartek personally and several of us were at the institute at the time when the incidents described in the news bulletins took place. We are greatly upset by the sensationalistic reporting of allegations relating to criminal activities when the truth is that Jiri Bartek only did what numerous other Western scientists did already – and that was to help less fortunate scientists in Eastern Europe. Even though Czechoslovakia was at the time behind the 'iron curtain', there has always been – also during the cold war - an exchange of ideas and materials in the scientific community. Cancer is not restricted by borders or iron curtains, and the global war on it has always required collaboration between scientists from all over the world. Cancer research is not, and never was, an element of espionage, even during the cold war. What Bartek did was thus in no way unusual, and it had absolutely no detrimental effect on England or other countries in the West.

We can provide the following specific information, which will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of what happened:

It has been reported that Bartek sent 'tissues and equipment' to Czechoslovakia. The facts are that Bartek sent only freely available experimental cell lines, which can be grown in culture in the laboratory, to biologists in his home country. This was not unusual. Many research laboratories generate cell lines, which are also useful for other scientists around the world. In 'The Daily Telegraph' the cell lines were described as 'living tissues from a cancer clinic'. This is a very inaccurate description. Although it has always been common practice to share research reagents such as cell lines, it was in those years very difficult to share such reagents with scientists working behind the iron curtain. Bartek only sent materials that his colleagues and coworkers were aware of being sent. Moreover, the scientific equipment he sent to the East was without exception obsolete equipment that would otherwise have been discarded, as it was no longer of use to his host laboratory in the West. It can appropriately be compared to the shipping of old computers to areas of the world where such equipment, though antiquated, can still be useful. This was hardly a criminal act, or espionage, but rather an act of kindness; something which many Western scientists were doing themselves.

It has also been reported that he sent 'secret documents'. In reality, Bartek only photocopied exciting new scientific articles that were published in Western scientific journals. This can hardly be described as espionage; there wasn't access to these journals in Czechoslovakia, so Bartek helped his friends and colleagues follow the latest scientific developments by providing them with a copy.

In some news bulletins, much is also made of the fact that Bartek (between the lines, as 'a dangerous spy') sent material via personal, diplomatic couriers. The truth is

that for cell lines to survive the journey to Czechoslovakia, this would have been the only viable option to get the cells delivered.

We have come to realize that it is rarely interesting for newspapers and other news outlets to hear that stories, such as those about Jiri Bartek, are not as scandalous or as interesting as first suggested. However, it must surely be in the public interest to know the truth of what happened. We sincerely hope that this letter will prove helpful in this regard.

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