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Paris, August 11, 1992

Dr. Abraham KARPAS
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Dear Abraham,

Thank you for sending me a copy of your letter of July 31st addressed to John Maddox.

The article published in Nature by Bernard Soytra (who formerly translated R.O. Gallo's book in French) contains some false statements.

I never asked Robin Weiss "help" for growing LAV in continuous lines. We had already, since November 1983, some continuous B-cell lines growing LAV (in fact strain LAI) to high titers without visible cytopathic effect.

X In fact, Robin Weiss sent his young collaborator, Mrs Chong Popov, at his request, to my laboratory in order to learn techniques of growing LAV and to bring back the virus to his laboratory in order to do some pseudotype experiments, similar to those he had done with ITLV-1.

I do not remember whether or not he mentioned specifically at that time the possibility of using cell lines.

It is correct that two months later in April 1984, Mr. Chong-Popov brought me back a CEM line infected with LAV, producing around 10,000 copies of RT activity. Within 2 weeks, in our culture conditions (including the addition of antibiotics active on mycoplasma), the titers reached up to 1000,000 cpm/ml.

I found the results very interesting and kept communicating with Robin Weiss about possible applications. Why a legal agreement was finally turned down is a question which has to be asked to the Directions of the Institutes involved.

There have been some misunderstandings in our talk in Sendai. I never believed or said that the CEM cell line was discovered by R. Weiss. Actually J-C. Cherman used it (a culture obtained from another laboratory of the Pasteur Institute) in 1982 to try to grow the original BRU isolate, but he failed).

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Since our own results were negative, I thought that Weiss' OEMs were a variant with some peculiar properties. I soon found that this was erroneous, since the LAV strain grown in B-cell lines (LAI) was also able to grow in the regular OEM cell line which had proved to be not susceptible a year before.

However we also found that this line as well as the OEM of Weiss was heavily contaminated with mycoplasmas and therefore improper for industrial use.

Then I asked the ATCC to send me a sample of the original OEM line. When these cells arrived, we - my collaborator the late Jacqueline Gruost and I, in collaboration with David Klatzman and Jean Claude Gluckman - began to enrich the cells for T4 expression and ended up, after cloning in soft agarose, with some good clones highly susceptible to LAV, and apparently not contaminated with mycoplasma (I am not so sure now using more sensitive techniques). These clones were transferred to Diagnostic Pasteur for mass production of the virus.

I always acknowledged R. Weiss' intellectual contribution in this matter. I particularly appreciated his fairness for keeping me informed of what he had done with our virus and not changing its name.

I trust that the CBL isolate he gave to Wellcome for industrial production was accidentally contaminated in his laboratory by our strain LAI as it happened elsewhere.

Sincerely,



Luc Montagnier

cc : Dr. J. Maddox - Editor of Nature
M. Schwartz - Director of Institut Pasteur
F. Barré-Sinoussi