

A CASE STUDY

Z Y L E R I U M B L I N D N E S S

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Human Factors in Design
Department of Mechanical Engineering
Stanford University

U.N. ASSEMBLY HEARS TERRIFYING IMPLICATIONS OF RARC DISCOVERIES
United Nations, N.Y. Sept. 17, 1966 Associated Press Release

Doctors Ivan Makelovitch of Moscow and Percival McGooch of Harvard shocked the world with their report to a special meeting of the General Assembly here today. Presenting the first official report of the Russian American Research Council, they stated that the newly discovered element, zylerium, is probably responsible for the rapid increase in the incidence of congenital blindness in the world's peoples.

"In a long series of controlled experiments, small quantities of zylerium were administered to animal subjects," the report stated. "Thirty-four per cent of the offspring of the injected animals were blind at birth. One hundred per cent of the second generation offspring of these injected animals were born blind. The experiment is by no means complete. We are relectant to generalize these findings to the human race at this time. Yet, we feel these data strongly suggest that even the minute traces of zylerium found free in our atmosphere may be responsible for the recent increase in congenital blindness. We shall proceed in our studies as rapidly as is humanly possible, and shall continue to make public our findings." The twenty-seven page report spelled out in statistical and medical detail the results of the much heralded zylerium-animal experiments.

The RARC Report struck an ominous note at the general assembly meeting. Many of the representatives were taken completely by surprise. Some few of the representatives admitted to this reporter afterward that they were expecting this news, after the announcement at the recent convention of the International Physical Society.

A proposal to expand the scope of the present research program, made by the Canadian delegation, was unanimously approved in the assembly. Starting tomorrow, the World Health Organization will hold a series of special meetings to decide what immediate measures can be taken to protect the world's peoples from this peril.

SOVIET EXPERIMENTS PROPHECY TOTAL BLINDNESS IN TWO GENERATIONS

Petrograd, USSR

Sept. 23, 1966

International News Release

Late last night came the announcement from the Petrograd Biophysical Laboratories that the destructive mechanism of the notorious element zylerium had at last been discovered. Dr. Igor Krlidszyk, eminent cytologist, who has been working feverishly with his small group of scientists to study the particular effects of zylerium on the visual senses, made the announcement.

His report was not optimistic. He stated that electron microscope studies had revealed that traces of the element zylerium have been absorbed by essentially all organic matter on earth. These traces, though extremely small, have caused irreversible mutations in the chromosome structure of every animal among certain higher order species, man included. The chromosome transmutations will cause blindness in a certain percentage of first generation offspring, he explained. He further claimed that no second generation offspring will be spared. Dr. Krlidszyk reported that the statistical conclusions of the animal studies of the Russian American Research Council had been corroborated by his work with the electron microscope.

"The very significant fact," he stated, "is that the animal and human tissues tested were not injected with zylerium. Yet, traces of this element sufficient to cause the critical transmutations were found within the tissues in every case. No experimental subject was spared the calamitous effects of the powerful element. This implies that zylerium has already been absorbed in critical quantity by practically every human on earth. Since the transmutation is irreversible, no corrective measures seem possible."

CRUCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ZYLERIUM REPORT NOW SEEN

William H. Flinger, Special Correspondent for the New York Times
September 24, 1966

Just seven months ago a group of British Scientists announced the discovery of a new element, zylerium. The announcement was made in a conventional scientific paper given at a conventional scientific meeting, the annual convention of the International Physical Society in Geneva. How ironical that this announcement, which led to the terrifying events of this month, should have been made in Geneva where continued but unsuccessful attempts have been made for peace.

The paper was conventional, but the nature of the discovery was not. A new element was uncovered. It was initially uncovered not as one would have guessed -- by atomic physicists. The discoverers were astronomers, using telescopes and spectrographs. By sheer coincidence, while peering into outer space, they noticed that a kind of radiation distortion was upsetting their measurements. Efforts to trace the cause of this distortion led them to re-examination of optical transmissivity properties of various layers of the world's atmosphere. It was at this point that the physicists were called in.

Further research led to this inescapable conclusion: Something new was holding forth in the upper atmosphere. Something was there which most certainly had not been there a few years before -- during the International Geophysical Year and for three years thereafter, when the nature and composition of the earth's atmosphere had been so carefully and completely inventoried.

After the physicists were called in, it was but two months before the cards were on the table. It was an entirely new substance -- a new element, in fact, which caused the atmospheric disturbance. This new element was resulting from a heretofore unknown nuclear reaction taking place in the ozone of the upper atmosphere. What had caused this reaction? The first hunch of the combined astronomer-physicist group proved to be correct. The nuclear explosions of the infamous Bering Strait Incident five years past had been of sufficient force to set off this much slower type of previously unknown and undreamt of reaction. Atomic theory had been pointing in this direction for several years. It took the Bering Strait Incident to prove the theory.

At present, scientists know no way of stopping this slow but deadly reaction, or of eliminating its byproduct. The discovery of zylerium may go down in the annals of history as the worst news science has ever released to the world. Or, it may be a great blessing. Perhaps this announcement, made at Geneva, the city of the struggle for peace, has at last brought to the world a new kind of peace.

THE BERING STRAIT INCIDENT MAY NEVER BE SETTLED -- BUT DOES IT MATTER?
Peter J. Balsopp, Syndicated Columnist
Sept. 25, 1966

It was July of 1961. There was a deadlock in the cold war such as the world had never known. The issues were the conventional ones. Who owns the atmosphere. (The weather balloon question, which caused so much trouble back in 1956 had been revived.) And, there was the other problem -- undersea mining rights. Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union had built up defenses, one in the Aleutians and the other across the Bering Strait, using these bases as jumping off spots for high altitude reconaissance, each over the other's country, and for practicing military operations in the Arctic. Both countries had been using their military engineering and transport equipment, stationed at these bases, to exploit the undersea uranium deposits recently discovered just north of the Arctic circle. Each side was charging the other with interfering with submarine transportation of "legitimately mined ores." Tension was at a peak, and each side, rationalizing in terms of bluff value, had pointed "concentrated blast" missiles toward the other's military base on the opposite side of the strait.

The result was almost inevitable. During an electrical storm on the evening of July 13th, the first missile was fired. The second followed within seconds. The explosions reaped total destruction on both bases. There were no survivors, except for the occupants of three Soviet aircraft doing reconaissance missions over the north pole and the crew members of an American submarine submerged for a research mission some forty miles from the American Base.

Each side claimed that the other fired first, that their own missile would have been fired only if the flight of another missile had been detected and was shown to be heading across the Bering Strait. Scientists have searched in vain to determine which missile was fired first. No evidence has been found at the site of the missile launcher nor anywhere around the bases themselves. There were some seismographic records, but since the explosions took place in adjacent areas, there is still considerable disagreement as to the interpretation of the seismographic recordings. There were seismographs at both bases, but these were destroyed. The closest ones to record the explosions were in Seattle, Washington, and Tokyo.

The radioactive fallout was fairly well localized, largely due to recent "improvements" in concentrated blast weapons. Some drifted over Alaska and caused an epidemic of radiation sickness. A great many caribou of the Alaskan and Northwest Canadian wilds were affected.

The incident caused an immediate furor in the United Nations and in diplomatic circles all over the world. In record time the U.S. and Soviet Union came to an agreement. The agreement was to abolish nuclear weapons of all types. Concurrent with this were important new steps toward total disarmament, with means to achieve an effective

inspection and control plan within the year.

Six months after the Bering Strait Incident a sharp increase in congenital blindness was noted in hospitals the world over. The blame was immediately placed on the nuclear explosion. There were international damage suits and legal wrangles. The rate of congenital blindness increased. From most scientific quarters the claim that blindness had resulted from the nuclear explosions was sharply denied. It was argued that even though these may have been the most powerful explosions from the standpoint of total energy released, the radioactive fallout was minimal and highly localized over the blast area. The radioactive fallout could not possibly have affected people the world over. Was a new, highly contagious virus in the air? "Impossible," said the medical researchers. "Peoples of certain isolated communities in the world have been affected in the same way as those in metropolitan areas." No proof could be found that the nuclear blasts were in any way connected with the alarming turn of events.

The truth is now before the world. The argument still rages over who lit the first match, and to many it seems important that the guilty party be brought to the international witness stand. But to some prophetic few, it is time to stop the argument and to consider only the matter of solving the problem at hand. The recent announcement of the RARC to the U.N. assembly, coupled with the report of the Petrograd Biophysical Laboratory, has brought the world face to face with the grim fact of increasing congenital blindness. This affliction is not limited by geographical area or by ideological loyalty. It is ironic that the prospect of universal darkness should be the path to peaceful cooperation.

In the light of scientific findings, it seems foolhardy to waste time, effort, and money on further legal proceedings. Let us unite our knowledge and resources to combat the approaching danger. Who fired the first shot in the Bering Strait Incident may always remain a mystery ... but does it matter?

U.N. OUTLINES FOUR POINT PROGRAM TO MEET BLINDNESS CRISIS
New York Herald Tribune, United Nations, New York, Sept. 27, 1966

The U.N. Security Council agreed today to a four point program to cope with the rapidly growing problem of blindness in our younger generation.

The bitter realization that the grandchildren of the present generation will live in a sightless world has stimulated the U.N. to complete a "five day session" in record time -- in this case, one and one-half days. The United Nations chambers have seen an unprecedented pace of activity. The exchange of economic and scientific information has been conducted with great dispatch, and security problems, even rules, have been ignored. Great and far reaching recommendations have been made. It remains only for the General Assembly to approve the recommendations at a special meeting tomorrow. Unanimous approval is anticipated.

Briefly, the recommended program is as follows:

1. A world educational council will be set up, wherein all countries pool information regarding techniques for educating the blind -- from nursery school age on. Problems concerning the survival of art and literature will be within the scope of the council.
2. Basic research pertinent to the zylarium blindness problem, especially with regard to possible prevention, will be undertaken on a large scale by every nation. A U.N. Research Coordination Council will be created.
3. Active development of machines and procedures will be sponsored by government contracts in the broad fields of transportation, communication, manufacturing, business procedures, building, etc. A U.N. Human Engineering Development Council will be created to coordinate these engineering developments. Local legislation will be encouraged to provide for partial modification of existing roads, buildings, and other public and private facilities, for installing and testing new equipment for anticipated conditions of total blindness.
4. National governments will take immediate steps to educate their citizens as to the nature of the forthcoming problems, to prevent panic and hysteria insofar as possible, and to enlist the cooperation of state and city governments in effecting a smooth evolution of community life.

The program spelled out in detail the means of achieving the desired ends under each of the four points. There seemed to be no disagreement among U.N. representatives. However, there are expected to be some amendments to the details of the program.

Shortly after the news of the Security Council proposals was received at the White House, the President made an unscheduled broadcast over the nation's radio and television channels. He wholeheartedly endorsed the proposed U.N. program and promised one hundred per cent cooperation from the United States. He announced that he was recommending an immediate reorganization of all Department of Defense facilities so as to provide construction and test personnel of all types for development projects. He also announced that recommendations for radical changes in the national budget would be made soon. He begged that engineers, scientists, and medical doctors cooperate with forthcoming organized planning programs and devote their attentions to the zylarium blindness research and development problems wherever and whenever possible. He assured them that their creative autonomy would be respected to the fullest, and that cooperation in the new research and development programs would in no way be compulsory.