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DEPARTMENT OF BIOCHEMISTRY

PAUL BERG

Jack, Lulu and Sam Willson
Professor of Biochemistry

September 17, 1974

Dr. Sydney Brenner
Medical Research Council
Laboratory of Molecular Biology
Hills Road, Cambridge
England

Dear Sydney,

It was unfortunate that I missed you on my recent visit to Cambridge. I had hoped to discuss several matters with you but, hopefully, we'll have that chance shortly.

As you know I was in England to participate in a debate for the BBC on the matter of our recent letter to Science and Nature concerning synthetic recombinant DNA molecules. In my view there was not much of a debate (also shared by others who attended) but perhaps the public seeing the program will find a bit of the controversy that was there at the beginning.

I am writing now, specifically, to ask you to be a member of the "organizing" committee for the conference that is going to be held during February 24-27 at Asilomar, California. Presently the organizing committee consists of Dave Baltimore, Maxine Singer, Richard Roblin and me but we desperately want and need a few more particularly from Europe. If the Conference is to be international in its representation and impact, non-Americans must be involved in both organizing the meeting and, more importantly, in generating the recommendations that come from the Conference. Since the Conference program is pretty much set (if you join us I'll be glad to fill you in on the details as they have been agreed to) there won't be much work for you on that score; we will probably need some help from you to identify those Britains and Europeans that should attend. (The total attendance is being limited to about 135-150 people). But the major chore for you would be at the Conference. Each of the program

subcommittees is being asked to organize, besides relevant scientific presentations, a series of propositions about the hazards, or lack of hazards for specific kinds of experiments, and recommendations about how to proceed or not proceed on dealing with these hazards. Supposedly these propositions will be discussed by all in attendance. The organizing committee's responsibility is to try to find the unifying thread or concensus in each of these discussions and to present on the last morning of the Conference what will be a set of conclusions and recommendations consistent with the Conference's position. In addition we hope to draft a summary of the meeting and its recommendations for publication in a suitable journal. Both are not easy tasks and will probably take several drafting sessions during and following the meeting. Surely you can appreciate that if the organizing committee takes on that job it must have people who know what they are doing, that others will listen to and are as widely representative of this field of science as is possible to have.

Don Brown has told me that you have already agreed to work with his program subcommittee and I assume that means you were intending to come to Asilomar (John Kendrew had also told me of your tentative plans to come). Agreeing to join us then commits you only to a bit more effort, perhaps the most important effort though, at the meeting. I do hope you'll agree to join us and help out in what I know you agree is an important problem. I am also asking Niels Jerne to join this group as I know he has a stake in the outcome of the discussions and he is a central figure in EMBO. Please let me know your decision as soon as possible.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Paul".

PB:mjm