THE NEW PROVISIONAL COMMITTEE
ON NOMENCLATURE OF VIRUSES

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The necessity for order and for international agreement in the field of microbial nomenclature has long been recognized. Fungi and protozoa posed few problems as they may be categorized according to the rules of the botanical and the zoological code respectively. Originally the bacteria were also classified according to the Botanical Code. But there were many difficulties and as a result of the efforts of the International Committee on Bacteriological Nomenclature and the generosity of the botanists in relinquishing claim to the Protista, the Code of Bacterial Nomenclature was born.

And the viruses? Nobody today would dare to decide that viruses are animals, plants, protozoa, fungi, bacteria, or even organisms. It is generally admitted that viruses represent a specific category of entities and the problem naturally arises: should the code of Bacterial Nomenclature, or, more generally speaking, binominal nomenclature be applied to viruses? The International Committee on Bacteriological Nomenclature and the Plenary Session of the 4th International Congress at Copenhagen in 1947 have approved the following statement: "The bacteriological code applies to bacteria, related organisms and the viruses." This statement was again approved at Rome in 1953 by the Plenary Session of the Congress, and the name of the code specified as the Code of Nomenclature of Bacteria and Viruses.

A few binominal systems of viruses have been proposed. One of them bashfully appeared in the 6th edition of the Bergey's Manual but was not included in the 7th. It was obviously inapplicable. As a matter of fact, the problem of viral nomenclature has been much in discussion. The International Committee on Bacteriological Nomenclature created a subcommittee whose task was to classify and name the viral world. But its members were not always in agreement. Although a few thought that binominal nomenclature and the code should be applied to viruses, the majority were against the procedure. As a matter of fact the code was

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not applied to viruses and the impression dominates that individual viruses, as well as groups, have been often christened without much attention being paid to the "law."

Moreover, all recommendations and proposals relating to nomenclature of a taxonomic group studied by a subcommittee are reviewed by the Judicial Commission. But because of lack of agreement very few problems of nomenclature or recommendations from the Subcommittee on Viruses were referred to the Judicial Commission. Thus, most actions taken by the Subcommittee on Viruses are devoid of legal value and can be considered as tentative proposals only. Nevertheless, this Subcommittee has performed extremely useful work, and I would like to pay tribute to its Chairman, Sir Christopher Andrewes, and to its members.

The essential points of nomenclature are: a) to aim at fixity of names, b) to avoid or to reject the use of names which may cause error or throw science into confusion. Something should obviously be done in order to achieve for the viral kingdom as great a degree of international agreement as for bacteria. A binominal nomenclature would be useful if it could be codified according to the specific needs of virology. Virologists should not be left in an illegitimate taxonomic vacuum. Viruses should be named according to rules which apply to individual viruses as well as to groups. Enough knowledge has now been gained in the field of virology to transform the empirical, unformulated rules into a coherent body of recommendations.

Moreover, as one of the problems of viral nomenclature is the naming of groups, it is clear that an agreement has to be reached concerning systematics. How could the problem be solved? Dr. Andrewes considered the problem, consulted his Subcommittee and recommended to Dr. S. T. Cowan, Chairman of the International Committee on Bacteriological Nomenclature, that the Subcommittee on Viruses be dissolved and a new committee appointed which would be responsible to the Executive Committee of IAMS (ECIAMS). Dr. Cowan transmitted this recommendation to the President of IAMS (see Intl. Bull. Bact. Nomen. Tax. 13(3):171-173, 1963).

Faced with this situation and in view of its responsibility, ECIAMS, after consulting the Chairman of the International Committee on Bacteriological Nomenclature, the Chairman

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of its Subcommittee on Viruses, and the Chairman of the Advisory Council of IAMS and finding unanimous agreement, took the following action at the ECIAMS Meeting in Paris (July 1963).

ECIAMS:

- 1) took notice of the willingness of most of the members of the Subcommittee on Viruses to dissolve this Subcommittee.
- 2) decided that a new international committee, the International Committee on Nomenclature of Viruses (I.C.N.V.) be created, the counterpart of the International Committee on Bacteriological Nomenclature (I.C.B.N.)
- 3) decided that the members of the I.C.N.V. (like those of the I.C.B.N.) would be nominated by the national societies. The first official meeting would be held during the IX Congress in 1966 in Moscow.

It was felt, however, that some preparatory work was necessary and it was decided that a provisional committee should be created. Its task would be to study the problems of viral nomenclature and systematics and to propose rules or recommendations for the naming of individual viruses and of groups, i.e., recommendations concerning systematics. These proposals would serve as a base for the work of the future I.C.N.V. in Moscow.

The Executive Committee decided to ask the following scientists if they would agree to work on the new committee:

Christopher Andrewes*	M. Kaplan
P.D. Cooper*	A. Lwoff*
S. Fazekas de Saint Groth*	K. Maramorosch
H.S. Ginsberg*	A.B. Sabin*
D. Goldfarb	K. Smith
L. Hirth*	P. Tournier*
G. Ivanovics*	V.M. Zhdanov*

Needless to say, the Committee would be free to coopt others.

* Have already accepted.

It is hoped that finances will be found for a meeting and that, in any case, the Provisional Committee on Nomenclature of Viruses (P.C.N.V.) will be able to elect a chairman, a secretary and to appoint a small working group to draft recommendations.

The P.C.N.V. will report to the Executive Committee of IAMS and its proposals will be communicated to the national societies and published in periodicals of its choice. The P.C.N.V. will be automatically dissolved as soon as the I.C.N.V. has been constituted.