

Is the fear of Chemistry, Chemophobia, important? Or is it merely a fashionable attitude, which can be disproved like the Flat Earth Hypothesis? Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* started international environmental concern in 1962 and in consequence it enhanced chemophobia. The major argument has been that the chemical industry placed profits before environmental concern, but this is no longer so cogent as it was in the past. Chemical companies have now realised that their sales performance is reflected in their public image and small efforts have begun to counteract chemophobia.

Certain blame for chemophobia must also fall on the media which have seen in the negative aspects of chemistry the source of sensationalised reports, based on misleading facts and gross exaggerations. As I was the Science Correspondent of the London *Daily Telegraph* for 10 years, I am fully aware of the difficulties of reporting chemistry in a daily newspaper to a readership, unaware of the difference between a chloride, [harmless as common salt] and chlorine [the first poison gas ever used].

The real harm of chemophobia resides in the totally negative attitude injected in young children and students, avoiding the choice of chemistry as a career. Eloquent proof resided in 151 'chemistry drawings' produced by children from Basel, the city where Switzerland's chemical industry is concentrated [See ISR 21/2]. The great majority of children felt threatened by chemistry, symbolised in their drawings of skulls, skeletons, TNT and other explosives, and above all by the thick black smoke emanating from factory chimneys. Such attitudes are accurately reflected in the declining number of chemistry students at Universities, a fact which did not escape the attention of chemical companies in the West, afraid of losing able chemists for their own future industrial employment. As it stands, chemical industry in the East is strongly competing for young qualified chemists, as there chemistry is still considered one of the best careers for talented male and female students.

The answer to chemophobia appears simple. When gifted and enthusiastic teachers of chemistry, themselves inspired by the galaxy of the great chemists of the past, can transmit to their students the attraction of chemistry, then the best of the next generation will choose chemistry again as their career. I did. [See Title 4]

Teachers are notoriously underpaid, and chemistry teachers are no exception. The 'Fonds of Chemical Industry' started in 1950 by Otto Bayer in Germany is the example to be followed. Collecting 50 Pfennig for each employee in the Industry, it raised DM 160 million in 30 years, and thus could implement the income of the best university students and university teachers. It is time to start a similar Fonds for school teachers of chemistry, and thus Stop Chemophobia.