

Prof. Johansson loses lab: IARC loses credibility
**Karolinska Institute teaches science world
a lesson in politics - shut up or get out**

By John Weigel

Stockholm's Karolinska Institute, one of the world's premier educational institutions under the rectorship of Harriet Wallberg-Henriksson, has been plunged into an international scandal amid accusations of undue corporate influence of staff and stifling academic research not to the liking of big business.

In the same week one member of staff, Anders Albom, Professor of Epidemiology since 1987, was sidelined at the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research in Cancer (IARC), accused of influencing policy relating to the safety of microwave communications and holding a directorship in his brother's public relations firm in Brussels.

Then on Friday, Dr. Olle Johansson, of the Karolinska's Department of Neuroscience, issued a statement announcing, "Due to unforeseen circumstances I am now being evicted from my premises." In recent year Johansson has gained an international following due to his assertion that microwave radiation used by the communications industry is dangerous to human health. This winter Spanish protesters wore luminous waistcoats bearing his photograph.

The timing of Johansson's silencing smacks of revenge because on the same day the Standing Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), called on European governments to "take all reasonable measures" to reduce exposure to electromagnetic fields, especially to radio frequencies from mobile phones, "and particularly the exposure to children and young people who seem to be most at risk from head tumours".¹

The apparent attempt to silence Johansson has been on-going. First he was told his offices and lab were required for experiments on ferrets. Then he was informed he was to be moved in favour of an imaging centre by his department head, Staffan Cullheim, a Professor of Anatomy.

In April 2010, Johansson and two other eminent researchers, Epidemiologist Dr. Annie Sasco, University of Bordeaux, and Biophysicist Dr. Dimitris Panagopoulos, University of Athens, participated in a conference before Canada's House of Commons Standing Committee on Health (HESA) outlining the dangers of low level electromagnetic radiation from cell phones, masts and wi-fi with reproductive decreases from mobile phone radiation.

Retribution was swift. First Panagopoulos was reassigned a windowless workspace the size of a toilet cubicle. When he found a research post elsewhere, the University of Athens, under the supervision of Lukas H. Margaritas, refused to allow him to take up the new position. Panagopoulos' offense is to have scientifically proven DNA damage from

¹ http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/Search/PACEWebItemLast_E.asp

microwave radiation. He also discovered a mechanism by which weak electromagnetic fields can affect cells non-thermally.

Margaritis has failed to respond to questions about his role in the controversy. As with other so-called experts, Margaritis speaks about the dangers of cell phones and masts and then failed to stop the erection of the equipment on the university campus.

This year on International Women's Day, Sasco's offices were taken from her by the administration at Bordeaux. Her medical degree (with honours) was followed by two masters degrees from Harvard where she also acquired a doctorate in Public Health in the field of Epidemiology. Ten years later in 1996 she received the highest university research degree in France researching the epidemiology for cancer prevention.

The third victim of the simultaneous symbolic "demotion" is the venerable Johansson, a scientist of international renown. Johansson's first salvo against the digital industry occurred in the early 1980's when he pointed out that radiation from computer screens endangered both pregnant women and their unborn children. The computer industry beefed up the safety standards of computer monitors but did not forget.

In a letter to Nikolaos Matsis, Greek ambassador to Canada, Daryl Vernon, conference co-ordinator, explained the circumstances of the three scientists. "Shortly after those meetings in April, three international witnesses before the HESA urging revision of microwave standards based on their scholarly work, Dr. Panagopoulos, as well as Dr. Olle Johansson of the Karolinska Institute in Sweden, and Dr. Annie Sasco of Bordeaux University in France; all three have had their offices removed from them! The fourth international witness, Dr. Andrew Goldsworthy of Imperial College London, England, could not have his office removed, being recently retired, but he has attested to having suffered similarly prior to retirement."

Of the three beleaguered scientists, only Sasco seems to have survived. An associate of Devra Davis, epidemiologist and author of *Disconnect: The Truth About Cell Phone Radiation, What the Industry Has Done to Hide It, and How to Protect Your Family* published last year, Sasco this week reported that she had been contacted by the French foreign office and in spite of having her team of researchers taken from her, found her new premises satisfactory. Davis' book is a largely anecdotal collection of experiences as she gathered information. The importance of her book is found in the history of the development of microwave technology and the revelation that standards are based - not on children, the most vulnerable to exposure - but on a large adult male with an eleven-pound head, unlike children who experience a penetration into their brains of up to seventy-five percent. "I do think I'm looking at an (cancer) epidemic in slow motion," she said.

Predicting that "a hard rain is gonna fall" following issuance of the Dublin Declaration demanding their re-instatement, Panagopoulos has remained excluded and silent, leaving Johansson to face the human resources technique called "mobbing" where the targeted individual is isolated from his associates unofficially through rumour and innuendo and professionally through financial audits and personal confrontations with management. With his accounts in order, no anonymous accusations supported by fact, research unassailable, and his meagre salary found to be below that of his colleagues, Johansson was called to a management meeting where he was told that he should abandon his offices in favour of smaller premises for reasons of "personal development" and "because he is a poor scientist".

Under European law, universities have the legal right to control their premises which appears to be the stance being taken by the three respective educational facilities against the three professors.

When asked to clarify the situations surrounding the two Karolinska professors, Ahlbom and Johansson, Press Officer Katarina Sternudd replied, "Anders Ahlbom is Professor and Head of the Institute of Environmental Medicine at Karolinska Institutet. Olle Johansson is Associate Professor at the Department of Neuroscience, Karolinska Institutet." Administrators at the other two universities have not responded to requests for clarification of their simultaneous actions against Sasco, and Panagopoulos. Questions to Harriet Walberg-Henriksson, president of the Karolinska Institute, Manuel Tunon de Lara, Président de l'Université at Bordeaux, Prof. Theodoros Pelegrinis, the University of Athens, and Prof. Bernd Huber, chairman of the League of European Research Universities have gone unanswered.

With the main casualties silenced and others like Dr. Magda Havas, of Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada; Dr. Lennart Hardell, professor in oncology and cancer epidemiology at the University Hospital in Orebro, Sweden; and Henry Lai, Research Professor, Department of Bioengineering, University of Washington continuing their work in the face of opposition, the scene switched to the international stage of regional government and ultimately to the machinery of global health at the World Health Organization.

On May 27, the day that Professor Johansson lost his premises, the Parliamentary Assembly of The Council of Europe's Standing Committee issued a report on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs. Titled *The potential dangers of electromagnetic fields and their effect on the environment, Resolution 1815 (2011)*, the committee's report and recommendation go far beyond the guidelines recommended by the independent International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP).

ICNIRP has a long history of charges of setting standards which favour the communications industry, collusion both as an organisation and personal vilification of Michael Repacholi, chairman emeritus and former coordinator of the WHO Radiation and Environmental Health Unit in Geneva. Microwave News accuses Repacholi of being an industry insider. Another ICNIRP expert is Prof. Anders Ahlbom, who, like Johansson, is based at the Karolinska Institute as head of the Division of Epidemiology and deputy director of the Institute of Environmental Medicine.

The importance of the Council of Europe's report is that it recommends changes to nearly all of ICNIRP's recommendations and recognizes for the first time biological effects of electromagnetic frequencies on living plants, animals and human beings. In eight points, the statement notes:

1. drafting an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights concerning the right to a healthy environment. The recommendation includes implementation of the Aarhus Convention giving European citizens greater direct access to the legal system. (Ireland, for example, is a signatory but has failed to pass the enabling legislation.)
2. electromagnetic fields of all frequencies represent one of the most common and fastest growing environmental influences

3. As the number of base stations and local wireless networks increases, so does the radio frequency exposure of the population.
4. non-ionising frequencies, be they sourced from extremely low frequencies, power lines or certain high frequency waves used in the fields of radar, telecommunications and mobile telephony, appear to have more or less potentially harmful, non-thermal, biological effects on plants, insects and animals as well as the human body even when exposed to levels that are below the official threshold values.
5. the Assembly recommends that the ALARA or “as low as reasonably achievable” principle is applied, covering both the so-called thermal effects and the athermic or biological effects of electromagnetic emissions or radiation.
6. there is still a lack of reaction to known or emerging environmental and health risks and virtually systematic delays in adopting and implementing effective preventive measures.
7. the issue of independence and credibility of scientific expertise is crucial to accomplish a transparent and balanced assessment of potential negative impacts on the environment and human health.

The eighth point is a list of recommendations, the most contentious of which is a direct challenge to ICNIRP. The Council of Europe calls to “reconsider the scientific basis for the present electromagnetic fields exposure standards set by the International Commission on Non-ionising Radiation Protection, which have serious limitations and apply “as low as reasonably achievable” (ALARA) principles, covering both thermal effects and the athermic or biological effects of electromagnetic emissions or radiation.” Taking the issue further still, the Council proposes a pro-active stance where citizens are to be warned of the potential hazards of the microwave / ELF / EMR technology - from cell phones to DECT phones - labeling as well as local zoning in the interest of safety.

Meanwhile the International Agency for Research in Cancer met for a week long session in Lyon, France. The IARC’s Monographs are widely considered the ultimate standard for determining which chemical and physical agents can or may lead to cancer. The IARC decision on RF/MW radiation will likely govern official perceptions of the cancer risk from mobile phones for the foreseeable future. Founded in 1965, the agency quickly became the ultimate authority on cancer-causing agents under the aegis of the World Health Organisation. The general principles of issuing monographs preamble states: “The IARC Governing Council adopted a resolution concerning the role of IARC in providing government authorities with expert, independent, scientific opinion on environmental carcinogenesis. As one means to that end, the Governing Council recommended that IARC should prepare monographs on the evaluation of carcinogenic risk of chemicals to man, which became the initial title of the series.”

It is membership of this group and their ties to industry that is under scrutiny. While it is reasonable to expect members of outstanding ability to work within the industrial sector, the lines of objectivity have, over time, become blurred, especially in the area of the wealthy communications sector. It is therefore of great significance that few of the members are independent scientists or outspoken critics of the microwave-based cell phone / masts / digital technology and the testing and usage of frequencies on an unsuspecting population.

The interface between excluded independent voices like Johansson, Sasco and Panagopoulos was highlighted by the work of Swedish investigative journalist Mona Nilsson who revealed a serious conflict of interest by Dr. Anders Ahlbom. As head of the Division of Epidemiology and deputy director of the Institute of Environmental Medicine at the Karolinska Institute, Ahlbom was chairman of the ICNIRP Standing Committee on Epidemiology until 2008 and has been an ICNIRP member from 1995 until 2008.

While the three genuine voices of concern were being demoted and discredited, controversial Repacholi, former head of the WHO EMF project now in business as an industry consultant, and Ahlbom were members of the expert group which authored "Health Effects of Electromagnetic Fields" for the Irish Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources in 2007. Their verdict: "So far no short or long term health effects have been found". Their report includes references to psychological perceptions. Referring to other studies, the report states, "They concluded that EHS was unrelated to the presence of EMF." The result is that electromagnetic levels in Ireland are as much as 1,000 times the previously accepted levels and the Royal College of Physicians in Ireland is predicting that half the Irish population will have "some form of cancer" by the year 2025.

Ireland is the site of communications giant Ericsson's only research facility outside of Sweden in Athlone, County Westmeath.

Nilsson's heavily footnoted investigation is particularly damning. The author of two books on mobile phones and health, she unearthed Ahlbom's connection to his brother's lobbying company in Brussels. "Professor Ahlbom created the lobby firm in 2010 together with his brother and sister in law who live in Brussels. The brother, Gunnar Ahlbom, is a telecoms lobbyist in Brussels since the early 90's, and was already active in this field in 1998 when Professor Ahlbom participated in the setting of the controversial ICNIRP standards on radiation from different sources of non-ionizing radiation like wireless devices and cell towers.

The company's mission statement is to "do consulting business in the areas of EU affairs, particularly regulations and specifically telecommunications, IT, environment- and energy regulations as well as medical techniques, support public affairs and corporate communications and trade with stocks."

"Anders Ahlbom's link to the telecom Industry through his brother and their common company is a straight-forward explanation of his systematic denial of health risks," says Nilsson.

She was about to post a press release on what she learned when Ahlbom announced he would not be going to the IARC meeting held in Lyon, France 24 -31 May. Nilsson says that this is good news. "Ahlbom absolutely should not be on the IARC expert group," she said.

As a result of Nilsson's disclosures, Ahlbom was asked to attend last week's IARC meeting but not to chair it. He was invited to attend instead as an expert without voting rights and refused.

Others with ties to industry include:

René de Seze of the Fondation Santé et Radiofréquences which is half state funded and half supported by industry.

Luc Verschaeve received a small research grant from the GSM Operators Forum on environmental effects of mobile phone base stations.

Niels Kuster is President of the Board and shareholder of Near-Field Technology AG, a holding controlling the two companies SPEAG and ZMT that are active in development of near-field measurement instruments, simulation software and medical test equipment.

Joe Elder is self-employed as a RF Bioeffects Consultant. He was employed by Motorola (until 2009) and his wife holds stocks from Motorola.

Jack Rowley is employed by the GSM Association whose member companies use RF to deliver communication services.

Mays Swicord worked as a consultant for Motorola. His participation as an observer in this IARC Monographs meeting is sponsored by the CTIA – The Wireless Association.

Prof A. Lerchl, the highest ranking German in the mobile radiation protection officer, adviser to the federal government and the representative of the German state in international bodies, was denied participation in the Monograph meeting due to his alleged close links to the industry.

The importance of the meeting is that after a seven year delay, the IARC was expected to interpret previously unreleased material in the form of another monograph which would finally establish the link between electromagnetic frequencies and cancer, particularly acoustic neuromas and parotid gland tumours. Activists with the EMF Alliance, with board members in Holland, France, the U.K. and Norway, called for an extension in the release of a document called “Non-Ionizing Radiation, Part II Radiofrequency Electromagnetic Field (includes mobile telephones)” on the basis that all the relevant data had not been released. To date, only the pooled 13 country data for glioma and meningioma (malignant brain tumours) has been released.

“The full data set of IARC’s own Interphone Study has been available since 2004. To hold a meeting without the overall analysis of all the data from this study would be a travesty for science and public health,” claimed the Alliance.

Meanwhile Prof. Olle Johansson appears to be another casualty of Rektor Harriet Wallberg-Henriksson’s authoritarianism at the Karolinska. Last year the bicentenary of the venerable medical university which selects the winners of the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, was soured by an acrimonious row. Twelve professors published an open letter claiming the prestigious institution was being threatened from within by Wallberg-Henriksson herself following the summary dismissal of molecular pathologist Karl Tryggvason from his position of research dean without notice or consultation, after an internal investigation concluded that he had tried to unduly influence a grant committee's selection process. The committee was responsible for distributing a fund established by Tryggvason to support prominent Karolinska professors.

The President of the Karolinska Institute is not without ties to private enterprise. She joined the Scientific and Medical Advisory Board of Cellastra, a San Francisco, California Stem Cell and Regenerative Medicine Company in 2008.

But who could blame a lady with a penchant for high-profile displays of power and prestige? Where would the Karolinska Institute be, how could it justify the festivities surrounding the Nobel Prize without the sponsorship of Sony-Ericsson?

Against this backdrop, Tuesday 31 May 2011 the IARC released the conclusion of its much anticipated meeting. In contrast to the recommendations the Council of Europe, experts, activists and victims, as well as the request to delay publishing a Monograph by the International EMF Alliance, the IARC accepted that there may be some risk and “less than sufficient evidence of carcinogenicity in experimental animals”. The panel accepted that there may be an increased risk for glioma, a malignant type of brain cancer, associated with wireless communications and assigned a 2B classification, admitting the possibility of a link between cell phones and cancer risk.

The request to delay publication of the monograph went unheeded. A summary report will be published in The Lancet Oncology in July.

Given the potential consequences for public health of this classification and findings,” said IARC Director Christopher Wild, “it is important that additional research be conducted into the long-term, heavy use of mobile phones. Pending the availability of such information, it is important to take pragmatic measures to reduce exposure such as hand-free devices.”

Just who will conduct the additional research when critical voices are being silenced remains to be seen. On Monday, the day the IARC meeting ended, Prof. Johansson was led to his new “cell” by a university security guard.

John Weigel is a member of the Alliance for Irish Radiation Protection

Word Count: 3,200

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