

Union idea: we mustn't repeat 'past mistakes'

Dear editor,

The letter from Shams Mir (July 20 issue) implies that he is satisfied with the responses that he has received regarding his idea for the formation of a veterinary union.

As I am not in practice, I am unable to appreciate the issues that he has raised. However, I do have a particular interest in the history of the veterinary profession. As Richard Weston noted in his article (July 6 issue), the union issue is not new. I hope, therefore, that Dr Mir has fully explored why the idea has failed before. There are always lessons to be learned from history.

Why did the Veterinarians' Union that was registered under the Trade Union Acts 1871-1964 on June 6, 1968 (register number 2,3071) not succeed? The first annual meeting was held on May 18, 1969. While enthusiastic progress was reported in various activities, I have been unable to find any indication of member numbers. The union published *Veterinary Digest*, a quarterly newspaper sent to all members of the profession, and *Veterinary Doctor*, a newsletter. After 1969, my files of the publications are empty.

Why did the Veterinarians' Union fail, as it obviously did? I think it is important for anyone who proposes a new union to examine this valuable case history carefully. The editorial content of the issues of *Veterinary Digest* I have indicate a dissatisfaction with both BVA and the RCVS. I have checked the printed names of those associated with this union and with its publications; some are still in the *RCVS Register of Members*, so I hope they have been consulted.

In 1967, the late Henry Carter (a past-president of the BSAVA and RCVS and always a blunt facer of facts) wrote in a letter about the Veterinarians' Union, published in *The Veterinary Record* (81:86): "Any organisation which is formed by malcontents is bound to have some initial appeal to the ignorant and misinformed...". He correctly predicted the union's demise. I do hope Dr Mir and his supporters have fully explored this part of our profession's recent history; we do have a habit of repeating our mistakes.

Yours faithfully,

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VT 39(33):39
24.8.09