

## Natural or synthetic vitamins?

by Dee Fleming

Health food advocates claim that natural vitamin supplements have marvelous properties and functions their synthetic counterpart cannot provide. For this to be the case, both types would have to have different chemical compositions and properties. By "natural", the implication is that the compound used to form the vitamin is naturally found in nature, whereas for synthetic, it is not. But a specific vitamin can only have one biochemical structure. This means that, regardless of the source, the chemical structures are identical; and so too must be their activity.

Some health food writers acknowledge that the vitamin structures are the same. But they claim that a vitamin pill made from a natural source retains co-factors from the source which are not a part of the vitamin, but aid in its metabolic properties. There are no scientific experiments to back up these beliefs. The other properties the natural source is purported to possess would not be contained in the final vitamin pill because the methods used to extract the vitamin from the food remove or destroy them via the chemical process.

Even if these elements were present in the vitamin pill, they often have no relationship to the metabolism of the vitamin. For example, natural vitamin C supplements have been said to contain bioflavonoids which health food writers claim are synergists for vitamin C metabolism. First, these substances are not in the natural vitamin C pill; they are added. Although bioflavonoids may occur naturally in the food, they are removed during the vitamin C extraction process. Secondly, the effects of bioflavonoids on the bioavailability of vitamin C were studied by the Food Research Laboratories of the Health Protection Branch. They concluded that bioflavonoids decrease the body's abil-

ity to utilize vitamin C.

Too many claims are made by health food writers or speakers which are totally unfounded. One widely respected and read writer on health says in one of his books. "In (natural) supplements all nutritive factors are present in their natural, balanced conditions which is essential for better assimilation and maximum biological effect." This is a highly misleading statement. The words natural and balanced catch the eye and feel good to the psyche, but are meaningless. If, by natural, he means the vitamin is the same structure as the one found in food, then synthetically made vitamins possess the identical structure found in food. If, by balanced, he means that there are other nutrients within the tablet to help with assimilation, then his claim has no validity.

Unfortunately, it is not illegal for an individual to make false and unsubstantiated claims about the

### S. African speaker backs out

**OTTAWA (CUP)** — South African Ambassador Glen Babb decided March 4 to refuse the Carleton University Press Club's invitation to a debate this month. His decision came after he learned his opponent could be Donald Woods, former editor of the East London Daily Dispatch in South Africa.

"Mr. Woods was news to us," said Babb's Second Secretary Wesley Johanneson in a telephone interview. "We never knew Mr. Woods would participate."

Now living in England, Woods had to flee South Africa in 1977. "It's obvious his journalism is antagonistic to the government," said Robert McKenzie, vice president of the Press Club.

On Feb. 3, Babb accepted the club's invitation to debate "Freedom of Expression in South Africa". Johanneson said, at the time, Babb's

therapeutic value of a nutrient or food in person, or in a book, or to the mass media. There is no legal definition of the words "organic" and "natural". Organic actually means to contain carbon. As a result, both words have been widely abused. For example, vitamin packaging may seem to indicate that all contents are from a natural source. This is rarely true. Packaging on natural vitamin C tablets often gives rosehips as the only source. There is such a small amount of vitamin C in rosehips (2 per cent) that a vitamin C tablet made exclusively from this source would have to be as big as a golf ball. So you will pay \$5 to \$7 more per bottle for the privilege of having between 30 to 50 per cent of the tablet from rosehips. The remaining 50 to 70 per cent of the vitamin is made from the identical synthetic source, ascorbic acid. This principle is true for most vitamin sup-

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opponent was expected to be Peter Kent, a journalist with NBC TV in Miami.

But when McKenzie called the South African Embassy to set a date, he said Johanneson told him: "We won't debate Donald Woods."

The Press Club then decided to withdraw its invitation because Babb's objection to Woods was against the "spirit of our invitation", said McKenzie. Last month, the club frequently argued for "freedom of expression" when students objected to providing Babb a platform for racism.

McKenzie said this is not true. Journalists were sought only after the club received Babb's response, he said, therefore "it's impossible that we could have mentioned Peter Kent."

"We had to pursue several peo-

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