LETTERS

Soviet Arrests Continue

The Soviet physicist Andrei Tverdokhlebov has been arrested. In 1970, he, together with A. Sakharov and V. Chalidze, founded the Moscow Human Rights Committee. More recently he became the secretary of the Soviet group of Amnesty International. The biologist S. Kovalev, another member of this group, was arrested last December.

Sakharov and Shasarevich (a distinguished Moscow mathematician) applied for the release of these men. In an "Appeal to American scientists" Chalidze wrote:

> . . . these repressions involve serious scientists who, despite their public activity and pressure from the regime, have continued scientific work . . . persecuted Soviet scientists have no defense other than to hope for the support of the international scientific community.

We initiate the creation of a Scientists' Committee for Tverdokhlebov. Interested colleagues are asked to write to one of us.

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Graduate Astronomy Programs

The recent recommendation by the National Academy of Sciences' Astronomy Manpower Committee to discourage graduate education in astronomy was reported in the 18 April issue of *Science* (Research News, p. 246). It is clear from reading the full report (*1*) that the intentions of the committee were good. Nevertheless I feel that, as chairman of a department that carries the name of astronomy, I must register my disagreement with that recommendation.

First, the recommendation may backfire. If the graduate program is reduced, so is need for faculty to maintain that program. With the present strong financial pressures on colleges and universities, the total faculty pool may well be cut. Thus the recommendation threatens to set off a vicious cycle that will exacerbate, not abate, the shrinking job market.

Second, a problem exists only if astronomy programs are set up to produce narrow specialists who are unfit, at least psychologically, for any other work. In that case the problem lies in those programs and not in the trivially obvious fact that one cannot have zero population growth in a population that attempts to replicate itself once every year or two. The solution we have adopted is to create a broader interdisciplinary approach so that a degree in astronomy does not restrict its recipient to work only as an astronomer. A few of the best and the luckiest remain in astronomy. The others are able, and feel that they are able, to use their ability and training in problem-solving in the physical sciences to work productively in government or industry. Our graduates are all finding good, useful jobs in which they are successful. They are not overly concerned that these jobs often do not involve a simple extension of their thesis research. There are undoubtedly other approaches to the problem, but the interdisciplinary one has worked well at Rice University.

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References

1. Astronomy Manpower Committee, Committee on Science and Public Policy, *Employment Problems in Astronomy* (National Academy of Sciences, Washington, D.C., 1975).

Far-Out Diets

The Point of View "Stamp out food faddism" (News and Comment, 16 May, p. 714) is a curious mixture of emotion and inaccuracy. It says that "[o]ur far-out diet—almost 20 percent refined sugar and 45 percent fat—is new to human experience." New indeed, as anyone who has ever mixed or analyzed a laboratory diet could tell the anonymous author. American diets commonly supply about 42 percent of food energy as fat (*1*). Fat has a caloric content 2.25 times that of carbohydrate or protein, so this is equivalent to 25 percent, not 45 percent, of the diet, not counting roughage and minerals, which bring the fat content down to 20 percent or less.

The author implies that our great-grandparents ate diets of raw broccoli, wheat germ, and yogurt, but does not mention