Academy v. Federation of Scientists: Handler Accuses Stone of "Ugly Act"

Philip Handler, president of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), late last month accused Jeremy J. Stone, director of the Federation of American Scientists (FAS), of an "ugly act" in seeking "deliberately . . . to turn our friends and members against the academy." Handler's complaint, set forth in a hotly worded nine-page letter to Philip Morrison, the federation's chairman, has to do with some of Stone's admittedly acerbic commentary on the NAS. While the FAS executive committee has rejected Handler's demand for an apology and is standing by Stone, it has sought to conciliate Handler and the controversy now seems to have cooled.

Central to Handler's grievance has been a brief article appearing in the December issue of the FAS newsletter. The article carries criticisms of the academy by some Soviet "refuseniks," or scientists who have been refused emigration visas and often been made to suffer loss of jobs or other recriminations. The refuseniks complained that Handler and other NAS officials have failed to demonstrate publicly support of their cause by visiting them in Moscow. Handler said the article is "extraordinarily misleading" because it ignores the numerous representations made by the NAS behind the scenes on behalf of Benjamin Levich—a Jewish chemist and refusenik specifically mentioned in the article—and other refusenik and dissident scientists.

Jeremy Stone

Aside from whatever this heated episode may reveal about Handler, Stone, and relations between the NAS and the FAS, it points up two very different attitudes about how best to intercede on behalf of scientists suffering a denial of their rights under the Soviet system. Although not claiming to have had much success in influencing Soviet actions, Handler believes that it is best for NAS officials to use the various channels and communications established between the NAS and the Soviet Academy of Sciences—and, usually, to work at this privately, without engaging in symbolic public acts which the Soviets might regard as unacceptably provocative. But Stone believes that Handler and the NAS, in their concern to "husband our political capital" (Handler's phrase), are excessively cautious. He thinks that, inasmuch as there is only one National Academy of Sciences, the Soviets have no choice but to deal with it if they are serious about détente and the scientific exchanges that are one of its hallmarks. In Stone's view, NAS officials should go to Moscow prepared to behave like politicians, and, on occasion, to send the Kremlin a message by highly visible symbolic gestures, such as openly visiting or meeting with dissident scientists. Such symbolic acts, he feels, may not be as easy to ignore as representations made privately through official channels.

The NAS and the FAS are of course very different both as to makeup and function. The NAS, with about 1130 members chosen for their scientific eminence, is a highly prestigious organization chartered by Congress to advise the government on scientific and technical problems through a large and elaborate program of contract studies. Rarely does it challenge established government policies. The FAS, on the other hand, is an activist group of about 7000 members which lobbies to promote arms control and other aims agreed on by its executive committee and council.

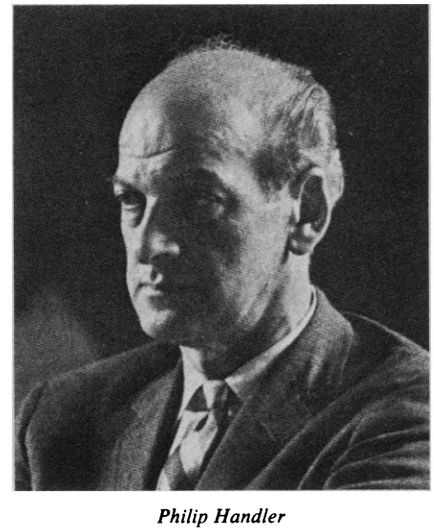
Stone, who, together with a secretarial assistant, makes up the total FAS staff, has brought about a fivefold increase in the FAS membership since he became the federation's full-time director in 1970. A scientist himself (with a Ph.D. in mathematics from Stanford), Stone enjoys the confidence of the federation's elected leadership and, although major policy positions and statements are cleared through either the FAS council or executive committee, he is allowed a high degree of freedom and initiative. It's too much to say that the FAS is "Jeremy Stone and a few telephone calls," as one jaundiced observer at the NAS remarked the other day, but there is a degree of truth in it.

Furthermore, Stone's style is deliberately provocative, and he seldom bothers to soften his commentary with blandness. "The voice of conscience always seems a nagging, hectoring voice," he says.

In fact, it appears that Handler's resentment of Stone first began to develop last October after Stone prepared and, with his executive committee's approval, circulated a statement commenting scathingly on an NAS report on the long-term global effects of a major nuclear war (*Science*, 17 October 1975) and on the cover letter by Handler. Noting that both the report and the Handler letter had indicated that mankind would probably survive such an exchange, Stone observed, "Evidently, with its customary alacrity, the National Academy of Sciences has gone about answering, after 18 years, Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*."

On this score, Handler, in his letter to Morrison, accused Stone of trying to generate an "empty, one-sided controversy" and deflecting attention from the substance of the report. Handler omitted any mention of the fact that, a few days after the nuclear war report was made public, he had personally called *Science* to express an anguished regret that the report and his accompanying letter had not warned, on the basis of data contained in the report itself, that the aftereffects of a nuclear holocaust would leave "no hiding place" for anyone.

Handler was still smarting from the FAS criticism of the nuclear war report when the federation's December newsletter appeared. It contained a detailed account



Philip Handler

of a trip which Stone, traveling on an ordinary tourist visa, made to Moscow in November to investigate for the FAS the problem facing Soviet scientists with respect to the denial of human rights and freedoms supposedly recognized by the Soviet Union as a signatory of the Helsinki agreement. Most of his time there was devoted to calling on political dissidents such as Andrei Sakharov and on refuseniks such as Benjamin Levich, who has not been allowed to emigrate to Israel and has been given the silent treatment by nearly all of his colleagues in the Soviet Academy of Sciences. As a corresponding member of the Soviet Academy, Levich is the highest ranking of the refuseniks, and his case has become something of a *cause célèbre* among those in the West most concerned about the right of scientists to travel freely, to emigrate, and to practice their profession.

The newsletter's one mention of Handler and the NAS was set off separately in boldface type and had to do with complaints "from a variety of sources" about the academy's "posture with regard to refuseniks." One such complaint was that, during the observance of the 250th anniversary of the Soviet Academy in October, no one from the NAS—indeed, no scientist from any of the western delegations—had visited the seminars which the refuseniks hold regularly in a courageous effort to keep themselves alive professionally. George Hammond attended the anniversary observance as the NAS foreign secretary. He was reported to have mentioned the problem of Levich and other refuseniks in a conversation with his opposite, G. K. Skryabin, acting chief scientific secretary of the Soviet Academy, but without pressing the matter further after Skryabin said, "It is not up to us."

Another complaint had to do with Handler's visit to Moscow in June of 1973. Stone, referring simply to a story being "quoted in Moscow," wrote as follows: "Levich had been told to expect a call from Handler and not receiving one, had called Handler directly. Handler had 'hemmed and hawed' and said he did not feel that he could meet with Levich since he was an official representative. Later his [Handler's] wife called to smooth over the situation but without effect." (Handler says that his wife made no such call, although once in his absence, she answered a call from Mrs. Levich.)

A footnote to this newsletter item indicated that Hammond had confirmed having brought up Levich's problem during a long discussion of exchange problems with Skryabin but was not at liberty to disclose the substance of what was said. But Stone never called Handler directly to get his side of the story, and this has become a very sore point.

In his letter to Morrison, Handler said, "The reader is surely led by Mr. Stone's rhetoric to wonder about my motives in avoiding a meeting with Levich at his apartment as he requested. My decision rested entirely on my concern that I not compromise my ability to be of assistance to Dr. Levich. Publication of that story, in the form in which it appeared, could damage me personally and damage my ability to provide [leadership]. In the position that he holds, I would think that Mr. Stone—son of a famous journalist [I. F. Stone]—

No New Year's Gift for Science

The once-bright prospect that the Administration would start off the new year with a brand new White House science adviser has grown distinctly dimmer thanks to crossfire between the Administration and a handful of Senate Democratic staffers over the legislation authorizing the appointment. Ever since 6 November 1975, when the House of Representatives passed an Administration-backed bill reestablishing the White House science adviser's job which former President Richard M. Nixon abolished in 1973, swift passage of a comparable Senate measure had been expected by many people who had been following the legislation. Some Administration officials had even hoped the President could sign a final bill by Christmas.

Now, however, no final action is expected before February at the earliest. Drafts of the Senate bill have aroused Administration opposition and alarmed the usually docile Republicans who sit on the relevant Senate committees. A number of prominent scientists have also reportedly gotten into the fracas, and have been telephoning the White House, then the Senate, then the White House, trying to figure out what is holding things up, and even, on occasion, carrying messages between the two sides.

The irony behind the dispute is that all parties, including Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D–Mass.), who has the chief responsibility for getting a Senate bill passed, have stated that they are anxious that a new White House science adviser be appointed speedily. Both the President and the Vice President, in the meetings with congressmen and with scientists, have stated that they want this, too.

The controversy is over a series of draft Senate bills drawn up by Ellis Mottur, Kennedy's principal staffer for science matters. The drafts give the science adviser the power to make yearly recommendations on R & D priorities in the federal budget. If the President does not follow this advice, he must explain why, to Congress, in writing. They also give the science adviser other powers; for example he sits on the National Security Council and thus has an explicit role in military and strategic affairs. The Administration objects that these provisions make the science adviser so powerful that the President would be answerable to him, rather than the other way around.

In addition the drafts contain elements left over from a Christmas tree science bill passed by the Senate in 1974 largely at Kennedy's initiative. These include provisions for retraining scientists and engineers, appointing science advisers to state governments, and creating new programs in the National Science Foundation. Few people, in the Administration or the House, took the 1974 bill seriously, and the bill died.

But the new draft bill in the Senate has the Administration alarmed. An informal White House memorandum complains that the draft, "The Mottur Bill," contains "undesirable and unacceptable" features and treats "Science and Technology ... as ends in themselves rather than means, which, along with others, are to achieve agency and national goals."

Although Senate staffers plan to negotiate away some of the bill's less desirable features in conference with the House, this plan does not allay the Administration's concern. "I still think we must take as the will of the Senate anything that passes the Senate, no matter what staffers promise," says one source.

The House bill, drawn up by Olin Teague (D–Texas) last summer in close consultation with the Administration, provides for only a White House science office and leaves most details of the new arrangement up to the President. The Administration clearly wishes the Senate would pass something equally limited in scope. Anything else, it argues, would mean more delay.

—DEBORAH SHAPLEY

should appreciate the burden upon him to have attempted, before publication, to verify his story by a direct approach to the subject thereof. He did not."

What happened was that Stone had called Howard J. Lewis, the NAS director of information, to say he had picked up complaints about Handler and the academy in Moscow. But Lewis, who had not been with Handler in Moscow, did not want to hear or to respond to them, and suggested that Stone call Handler directly. Stone countered with the suggestion that Handler, whom Lewis soon told of this conversation, could call him if he wished. This is where the matter was left—neither principal called the other. Most reporters would probably agree that Stone fell short of a good faith effort to elicit Handler's reaction to the complaints made about him and that the academy made no real effort to provide Stone with Handler's reaction.

In his letter, Handler sets forth what the academy had done to try to help Levich prior to the NAS delegation's 1973 trip to Moscow and what it was attempting to do at the time of that trip. "Levich was the only individual Soviet scientist whose personal circumstances were protested by the Council of the National Academy of Sciences when, at my invitation, [M. V.] Keldysh [then president of the Soviet Academy of Sciences] and his party visited the NAS in the fall of 1972," Handler wrote. "When knowledge of the nature of that discussion appeared next day in the Washington Post, the episode very nearly terminated all relationships between the NAS and the [Soviet] Academy of Sciences."

In Handler's view, the circumstances of his 1973 trip to Moscow were such that for him to pay a personal call on any of the Soviet dissidents or refuseniks was out of the question. The U.S. ambassador had returned to Washington to be there for the then ongoing visit of Secretary Brezhnev to the United States, and Keldysh, Handler's host, was introducing him to President Podgorny and others as the highest ranking American official then in Moscow. Also, he was to be addressing a special session of the Soviet Academy, engaging in extensive discussions with the academy's Presidium, and attending several formal receptions as the guest of honor.

Yet it was in these circumstances that, shortly after his arrival in Moscow, he received, much to his surprise, the call from Levich. Assuming that his telephone was being monitored, Handler was concerned lest the mere fact that he was talking with Levich lead to the loss of whatever leverage he might have to help him. And this was essentially what Handler and his wife conveyed to the Leviches.

According to his letter, Handler, while in Moscow, discussed "the tragedy of Levich" with the Presidium of the Soviet Academy and got in a brief word about the "the plight of Soviet scientists generally" with Podgorny. Moreover, he tried, albeit without success, to deliver to Keldysh personally a letter from the Electrochemical Society inviting Levich to attend the society's fall meeting and receive its Palladium Medal.

"I would have been pleased to share all of these details, and more, with Mr. Stone, had he but phoned," Handler said. "Instead, he chose to use your [newsletter] for the promulgation of extraordinarily damaging calumnies."

Handler's sense of outrage was heightened by the fact that Stone sent a copy of the newsletter to each member of the NAS and included along with it a letter calling attention to the refuseniks' criticisms of the academy. This letter urged the academicians to let the FAS know whether it could rely from time to time on "your voice and your signature" in defense of Soviet scientists. (Stone says that, one week after the first deliveries of this mailing, 58 academicians had responded, all sympathetically. Judging from this early indication and the past pattern of response to FAS mailings, Stone now expects to hear from about a fourth of the entire NAS membership.)

It was this appeal to NAS members that Handler has termed an "ugly" and "unforgivable" act on Stone's part. Handler observed that: ". . . the freedom of American society permits simultaneous employment of alternative strategies by diverse organizations according to their own natures, styles, and opportunities, e.g., the State Department, NAS, FAS, Amnesty International, church groups, business organizations, etc. Each such organization should be free to work in its own style and thereby complement the work of the others. To demand that other organizations work in the style of the FAS would surely be to diminish the total effect of these efforts." Handler said that a half dozen or so of the Soviet scientists whom Stone had visited in Moscow had, at various times, been the subject of special representations by the NAS.

As FAS chairman, Philip Morrison, who is an Institute professor of astrophysics at MIT and a member of the NAS, replied to Handler on behalf of himself and at least six of the other seven members of the federation's executive committee. He said that there were no grounds for apology, either with respect to the criticism of the nuclear war report or the article reporting the complaints about the NAS heard in Moscow.

Morrison told Handler that it was "unfortunate" that Stone's "effort to reach you" in regard to the complaints was unsuccessful. And he called it "doubly unfortunate that you saw the publication of this anecdote as a personal attack." He proposed that the situation be redressed by publishing in the FAS newsletter that part of Handler's letter describing his efforts to help Levich and the dilemma in which Levich's call placed him.

The FAS chairman informed Handler that, from time to time, the federation may criticize the academy further but that this would represent no more than the results of that "pluralism to which you referred" and would represent "only our traditional policy of independent analysis and commentary." "Finally," he said, ". . . we cannot accept certain complaints made about our director, to whom we are indebted for the rejuvenation of our organization and in whose integrity we have full and tested confidence."

Morrison's letter reached Handler shortly before *Science* was going to press, and, when this reporter asked him for his comment, he said that he had not had much time to think about it. It was clear, however, that his anger had cooled and that he, too, was now of a mind to restore peace between the NAS and the FAS. "I've never wanted this thing blown out of all proportion," he said. "Offhand, I would say that Phil Morrison has made a reasonable effort to be conciliatory."

—LUTHER J. CARTER

APPOINTMENTS

William Schumer, professor of surgery, University of Illinois College of Medicine, Abraham Lincoln School of Medicine, to chairman, surgery department, University of Health Sciences/The Chicago Medical School. . . . **Shaun J. Ruddy,** associate professor of medicine, Harvard University, to chairman, immunology and connective tissue diseases department, Medical College of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University. . . . **Mitchell D. Ferrill,** chairman, natural resources department, University of Connecticut, to chairman, forestry department, University of Nebraska-Lincoln. . . . **Paul G. Shewman,** director, materials research division, National Science Foundation, to chairman, metallurgical engineering department, Ohio State University.

Erratum: In "Locus of short-term visual storage" by B. Sakitt (26 Dec., p. 1318), the sentence on lines 10–13 of paragraph 1 should have read "In the partial report condition, an auditory tone was presented with some delay after the letter presentation."