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### The "Sunday Seminar"

We are a group of Americans who attended a symposium on nucleic acids sponsored jointly by the Soviet and American academies of science. The symposium was held in Moscow from 29 September through 4 October 1975. While in Moscow we visited the "Sunday Seminar," a weekly meeting of a group of scientists, most of whom have applied for emigration visas and as a result have lost their jobs. These people are not permitted to function as working scientists: they do not have access to laboratories, classrooms, scientific meetings, or even scientific libraries. The current head of the Sunday Seminar is Mark Azbel, in whose apartment the group meets. He is a theoretical solid state physicist of international reputation, who lost his positions at Moscow State University and at the Landau Institute of Theoretical Physics 3 years ago. He is now being threatened with arrest if these scientific seminars continue. Most of the scientists present the day we

visited were physicists and mathematicians. The biologists included Edward Trifonov and his wife Helene Lebedeva; before losing their jobs, they worked, respectively, in the Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy and at the Institute of Genetics and Selection of Industrial Microorganisms. Both were involved in research on basic problems in biology of interest to our group and now face an uncertain future. During our visit to the Seminar, which lasted several hours, some of us presented summaries of our work as Trifonov translated. Even though most of the Soviet scientists were from different fields, they were grateful for this direct professional contact.

We urge all scientists who visit the Soviet Union to make an effort to contact these dispossessed colleagues and to visit the Seminar, if it still exists (1). External contact is of vital importance to these scientists, whose intellectual life has been severely curtailed by their government and who are permitted neither to work productively within their society, nor to leave it. This destructive treatment of individuals, whatever the pretext, is clearly in violation of the spirit of the Helsinki Accords and can only serve to impede future cooperation between American and Soviet scientists.

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#### Notes

1. The following was reported in the *Washington Post* (5 Jan. 1976, p. A7): "Soviet police told a weekly seminar of Jewish scientists today that the meetings must stop because of complaints from neighbors...."

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