

# Russian Physicist Falls Foul of Bureaucracy

*Hostage plan led to exile instead of return*

What does it take to make a man willing to jeopardize his career, security, and privileged place in society? In the case of Sergei Polikanov, a leading Russian nuclear physicist, it was a quite minor incident that led him to object to being pushed around by the system. But that one small step of defiance against an uncompromising bureaucracy set him on the inexorable path that led to outright dissent and eventually to exile.

Polikanov, accompanied by his daughter Katya, was in Washington, D.C. last month to accept the Bonner prize for nu-

tem was one of the system's making. Polikanov had devised a theory about the nature of spontaneous nuclear fission as well as an idea of how to test it. Equipment for conducting the experiment was built at Dubna under his direction and shipped to CERN, the European nuclear research center at Geneva. Polikanov was told that there was no problem in his going to Geneva for a year to run the experiment. But his wife and daughter would have to remain at Dubna. No reason was given.

The Geneva experiment represented a

After his 17 November 1977 press conference in Moscow protesting the government's refusal to let him spend a year in Geneva with his family, Polikanov became an official nonperson in his own institute. Although some individuals privately supported his stand against the travel curbs, no one at the institute would cooperate with him publicly and his research came to a halt.

"I lived like in a vacuum. Finally I started to feel that I had to go to more general problems and help people who were in trouble," Polikanov says. In February 1978, with two others, he signed a letter in defense of Yuri Orlov, a leading member of the Moscow Helsinki group formed to monitor their country's compliance with the Helsinki agreements on human rights. The following month he was expelled from the Communist Party after a local meeting at which his accusers said he should have remained loyal in view of his privileged position and the higher education and other benefits he had received from the state.

In August, Polikanov was summoned to the visa department of the KGB and told he could leave the country. A few weeks later he and his family were on a plane for Copenhagen, where he now works at the Nils Bohr Institute. The decision to leave was painful, but it was clear to Polikanov that he would not be able to do any more science as long as he stayed in the Soviet Union. Observers suggest he was exiled lest, by his eminence, he should become another focus of dissent like Sakharov.

The motive for the original travel curb on his wife and daughter may have been petty punishment or perhaps an attempt to ensure Polikanov's return by holding his family hostage. Because Polikanov refused to be pushed around, and the bureaucracy refused to yield, a distinguished citizen was turned into a dissident and then an exile.

"It is a big shame that Soviet scientists are silent," Polikanov says: "I know that high ranking Soviet scientists, particularly members of the Academy of Sciences, are quite close to the politicians, and they have the opportunity to influence the situation of Orlov and other scientists in the labor camps, and this would help improve the atmosphere." He supports the policy of noncoop-

## Soviets Release Five Prisoners

Five political prisoners were released from Soviet jails and flown to New York on April 27 in exchange for two Soviet officials convicted of espionage in the United States.

The unusual exchange is presumably a gesture to improve the climate of relations between the countries, perhaps with an eye to helping the Senate's ratification of the yet to be announced SALT treaty.

The five released prisoners represent a variety of different dissident movements in the USSR. Aleksandr Ginzburg, a poet, sentenced to his third prison term in 1978, is a prominent member of the civil rights movement. Valentin Moroz is a historian and leading member of the Ukrainian nationalist movement. Georgi P. Vins belongs to the Initiators, a group of reform Baptists who reject the authority of the Soviet State. Eduard S. Kuznetsov and Mark Dymshits were members of a group accused of trying to hijack an Aeroflot airliner and escape to Israel. Apart from Ginzburg, the released prisoners had already served most of their sentences.

The exchange did not include prominent civil rights activists such as Yuri Orlov, Anatoly Shcharansky, or Sergei Kovalev.—N.W.

clear physics. The American Physical Society awarded him the prize in 1978 but Polikanov was refused permission to come and accept it.

Before his dissidence, Polikanov belonged to the Soviet elite. He was a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, a corresponding member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and in 1967 won a Lenin Prize, one of the state's highest honors. He has worked for 20 years at the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research at Dubna, served as its deputy director for 4 years and as head of its nuclear studies laboratory since 1967. His prize from the American Physical Society cited his significant contribution "to the discovery and elucidation of isomeric fission."

The episode that derailed Polikanov's distinguished career with the Soviet sys-

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He wrote appeals to Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and to Party theoretician Mikhail Suslov. Nothing happened. "Finally it was clear to me that I would never go to the West, not even for 1 day," he says. He decided on a move of great personal courage: to take his complaint over the heads of the bureaucracy to the Western correspondents in Moscow.

Before then Polikanov's only defiance of the system had been his refusal to sign a letter condemning Sakharov in 1973.

eration with the Soviet Union by individual American scientists as a means of helping their Russian counterparts: "As soon as people in the USSR, especially in the Academy of Sciences, start to feel what it means, perhaps it will help them to understand that it is impossible to be silent."

Scientists as such have played a prominent role in the human rights movement in the Soviet Union. The reason, Polikanov suggests, is that "People working in science are used to analyzing the facts as they are and trying to be objective. Now they are doing the same for problems of human relations." He believes that as in-

ternal freedom grows, people "are not worried about the official point of view." On the other hand he notes that although his colleagues were well aware of the human rights movement, they were afraid to discuss it with him: "After the Orlov trial, nobody asked me how it was."

Will the Soviet authorities manage to squash the human rights movement? "The dissident movements will not disappear until the authorities stop violating human rights," Polikanov says. "It is difficult to start a Big Terror again"—"Great Terror," his daughter gently corrects him—"Young people don't worry nowadays about losing their careers—it

is only the people in high positions who are worried."

Polikanov has been fortunate in being able to resume his scientific career in the West. But that outcome was anything but certain when he first decided to make his stand against bureaucratic harassment. Like all other members of the human rights movement, he faced the probability that his activities would end in arrest, trial, and years of hard labor. But the privileges which his fellow party members thought should have bought his loyalty to the system were not enough to buy his acquiescence in its abuses.

—NICHOLAS WADE

## Changes in Ethics Act Benefit Scientists

*Post employment conflict of interest provision is toned down but detailed financial disclosure remains a possible problem*

For the past several months, top-level federal scientists have been frantic about a provision in the new Ethics in Government Act that could have forced them out of their jobs before the first of July, when the act takes effect.

Intended to slow the "revolving door" through which many federal officials pass on their way to influential and lucrative jobs in industry and law, the act's stringent provisions regarding "post employment conflict of interest" could have been strictly interpreted to preclude large numbers of scientists from taking a university post for a full 2 years after leaving government (*Science*, 9 March). Just what they could do during the 2-year cooling off period was not quite clear and, as a result, several prominent scientists, including National Science Foundation (NSF) director Richard C. Atkinson and Donald S. Fredrickson, director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), threatened to resign. Furthermore, there was concern that the new policy would make it doubly hard to recruit scientists to government.

Although the financial disclosure provisions are likely to cause some persons significant discomfort, researchers' worst case analysis of how the law might be construed has not come to pass. As Mark Twain said of Wagner's music, it isn't as bad as it sounds. On the contrary, the Office of Government Ethics has drafted a detailed set of regulations governing implementation of the law that was written with a view to alleviating the

scientists' fears about future employment. Bernhardt Wruble, an attorney who is director of the ethics office, told *Science* that the regulations are based on "common sense" and added that "Nobody in his right mind wants an ethics law that makes it impossible for scientists to serve the government."

In addition, the Senate has passed three amendments clarifying the language of the act, and the House is expected to follow suit within a couple of weeks. In early April, Representative George E. Danielson (D-Calif.) held hearings on the subject (*Science*, 30 March). The amendments were firmly endorsed by the Administration, which sent the secretaries of Health, Education, and Welfare, and the Department of Defense to testify.

The Ethics in Government Act, a product of post-Watergate morality, was passed by Congress last fall. Speaking before the Senate last month when the new amendments came up, Senator Abraham A. Ribicoff (D-Conn.) had this to say about passage of the act:

This act was carefully considered in the last session of Congress. It was pending in Congress for more than 15 months. It was considered by four House committees—Post Office and Civil Service, Judiciary, Armed Services, and Ethics. On 2 separate days, it was debated on the floor of the House, where a number of amendments were adopted to [retard] the "revolving door" [from government to the private sector]. The House-Senate conference lasted 2 days.

But still, Ribicoff had to admit, the law

plainly said things Congress had not intended, had consequences it did not foresee.

As originally written, the offending provision, which carried stiff criminal penalties for violation, said that if a top-level official left government, he or she would have to observe a 2-year ban on having anything to do with his or her former agency. It said that one could not be an "agent or attorney" for someone in a dealing involving the former agency. Nor could one "otherwise represent" any subsequent employer "in any formal or informal appearance," or offer aid, advice, counsel, or assistance to anyone in any matter that could be considered part of one's "official responsibility."

It could be read any number of ways. What about having lunch with one's new colleagues and telling them things about the people who make decisions about grants at one's former agency? Does that constitute illegal, indeed criminal, advice and counsel? Common sense said "no," but the literal language of the law said "yes," and even if the Department of Justice never acted on a complaint, the possibility for harassment seemed clear. What about that term "official responsibility"? Broadly interpreted, it would mean that a person in Atkinson's or Fredrickson's position who might become a university president could have nothing to do with his university's dealings with NSF or NIH for 2 years. No sensible university would hire a president under such constraints. Hence, the