

Letters

The New Refuseniks

Scientists who are politically persecuted must command our special attention. Not only does scientific knowledge know no barriers, but scientific cooperation and collaboration through the free interchange of ideas and the free movement of scientists is the substrate upon which knowledge grows. In the Soviet Union, the creation of a new class of scientists—Refuseniks—awakened interest in the West, and pressure from the West may have helped secure exit visas for some of the hundreds of scientists who lost their jobs and scientific livelihoods when they applied to emigrate.

The population of the new class has grown substantially in the past 4 years. Whereas earlier Refuseniks were usually physical scientists, there are now growing numbers of biomedical scientists who are denied visas. As it cannot usually be claimed that they possess classified knowledge, visas are usually denied with no reason given. These scientists and physicians are peculiarly vulnerable to the scientific atrophy that threatens a persecuted scientist. They lose their colleagues, their journals, their access to libraries; their right to publish, collaborate, and travel to meetings; and their livelihood. And they lose their laboratories and their patients. Medicine and biology are not practiced with notebooks, blackboards, and books, but with men and microbes.

Some of these new Refuseniks now do what their physicist counterparts have done for years—hold regular scientific seminars, but it is a meager substitute for their vocation.

The following letter from some of the members of the Biology and Medicine Seminar appeals for help from colleagues in the West, particularly those attending the Federation of European Biochemical Societies (FEBS) meeting this June in Moscow.

Dear colleagues,

For many years we are unsuccessfully trying to get permission to leave the USSR for reunification with our relatives in Israel. According to the Helsinki accord and Madrid

Conference protocol we have all legal rights to receive such a permission because nobody of us was ever acquainted with any classified information.

We are addressing you for your sympathy and help. We are sure that your appeal to Soviet Government, President and leadership of the USSR Academy of Sciences as well as to the President of the 16th FEBS Meeting to permit us to leave the country will be regarded with due attention and respect.

Writing you this letter we rely on your professional and human solidarity.

L. Goldfarb, M.D., Dr. Sci.

(Medical Virology)

I. Irlin, M.D., Dr. Sci.

(Experimental Oncology)

A. Khachatryan, Dr. Sci.

(Protein Crystallography and Phase Transformation)

M. Tarshis, M.D., Dr. Sci.

(Biochemistry)

I. Uspenskiy, Ph.D.

(Medical Entomology and Parasitology)

We urge that those able to help our beleaguered colleagues, at the time of the FEBS meeting in Moscow, through private appeals to Soviet colleagues and authorities, or through petition from scientific professional societies, get in touch with one of the organizations concerned with helping these scientists.

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Plutonium Policy

The unwillingness of the Department of Energy (DOE) to forego the use of plutonium that is currently in its civilian energy research program for weapons purposes illustrates the dimensions of the Reagan Administration's nuclear arms build-up. This is strongly underscored by DOE's reluctance to give up

even the option to divert to weapons use the approximately 4 tons of British-origin plutonium, for which peaceful assurances have been given for 20 years.

The commitment not to divert civilian nuclear technology and materials to military uses is at the very heart of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Our nation should be greatly concerned about the adverse effects any action by the United States could have on the 1985 NPT Review Conference and on the long-term prospects for renewal of the NPT itself in 1995. Apparently, DOE sees no connection between U.S. example and the viability of the NPT. Fortunately, however, a growing number of concerned individuals, including scientists and organizations that represent them, are very aware of the connection and have expressed support for my legislation to prohibit such civil-to-military diversions by DOE.

This is a complicated and often confusing issue, yet Colin Norman (News and Comment, 27 Apr., p. 365) was able to explain it with great clarity and accuracy. *Science* is to be commended for its timely reporting of this important issue.

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Field Access

Kenneth Prewitt, in his editorial of 9 March (p. 1019) raises for discussion the important subject of field access. Few would quarrel with his observation that "the use of a political-bureaucratic process to control access to field sites" is "troubling." Clearly, such restrictions are onerous and dangerous to the health and well-being of science, no less than to the scientist. However, Prewitt's argument appears to be premised on reaching a consensus before and independent of any evaluation of the source or nature of the conflict. As such, his four "modest" recommendations are in fact just about as risky as the problem he sets out to resolve.

It is indeed the case that it is "too late in the history of world politics to detach science from national sovereignty." However, it is also too early to surrender to the draconian restrictions sovereignty increasingly places on scientific endeavor. The broad implications of Prewitt's proposals are that we should work within a consensual model to achieve some sort