LETTERS

NAS Exchange Agreement

C. B. Anfinsen, P. J. Flory, and A. A. Penzias (Letters, 3 May, p. 530) raise fundamental questions concerning the role of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) in relation to violations of human rights in the Soviet Union. There is no dispute over the basic facts. In 1980 the National Academy did indeed suspend most of its exchange agreements with the Soviet Academy as a protest against violations of human rights of scientists in the U.S.S.R., culminating in the exile of Andrei Sakharov to Gorky. The recent draft protocol between the academies, accepted by the NAS Council, calls for a resumption of the exchanges, subject to certain new conditions. Yet Sakharov and his wife are still virtually prisoners in Gorky, and the situation regarding human rights in the Soviet Union is probably worse than it was in 1980.

In view of these grim facts, is the NAS justified in signing the protocol? As one with strong concern over the maintenance of human rights, I believe that the answer is "yes." To have suspended the exchanges in 1980, and to resume them now, is indeed to acknowledge that the aims underlying the suspension—namely to give help to victims of oppression in the U.S.S.R.—have not been achieved. There seems no reason to believe that a prolongation of the suspension would result in anything better. Should the relations between the two academies, therefore, continue to be as limited, and as frosty, as they have been since 1980?

On the contrary, I believe that there are compelling reasons for an increase of mutual communication, when we consider the course of relations between the United States and the U.S.S.R. over the last 5 years. Both countries have been involved in enormous programs of rearmament; in our own case, it is by far the largest rearmament program in our peacetime history. In both cases a large part of the program involves production of thousands of new nuclear weapons, including (on both sides) weapons such as the MX missile, which are at once powerful, highly accurate, and vulnerable and hence calculated to make each side fear a possible first strike by the other. Each side is deeply alarmed by the preparations of the other, since such weapons in the hands of another great power rightly inspire fear that cannot be much alleviated by the knowledge that we have such weapons also. The sense of alarm has been increased by pronouncements at the highest level concerning an "evil empire," and proposals about preparing, in certain circumstances, to fight a "protracted nuclear war," in which our side is to "prevail," although it is acknowledged that nobody can win.

These developments had, by 1983, produced the highest level of mistrust between the two superpowers since the Cuban missile crisis. The shooting down, by the Soviets, of the Korean airliner in September 1983 appallingly exemplified this mistrust and served also to enhance it. I well remember my own intense anger and outrage on first hearing the news of that event; on further reflection I realized the urgency of establishing better communications between the United States and the U.S.S.R. in order to minimize the danger that similar events might recur with still more terrible potential consequences. The risk of nuclear war, even after such alarming events, may be very small in any given year, but the magnitude of the catastrophe, if it occurred, would be so overwhelming that even a small risk is intolerably great. In spite of deep mistrust, both countries have a common interest in reducing that risk to a minimum. The NAS, among many other organizations, has a part to play in that process, and it cannot play it adequately simply by continuing studies on arms control through joint meetings of committees of experts in the two academies. Those meetings are all to the good, but they are not enough. It is essential for citizens of both countries, including scientists, to meet together and work together in a variety of ways to develop mutual understanding and common interests. Such developments have occurred most notably among Soviet and American physicians, who have organized to form International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, including also physicians from more than 30 other countries. The views of the American physicians, in joint discussions with their Soviet counterparts, have been broadcast in the U.S.S.R. and heard by millions of listeners.

We cannot divorce the issue of preventing nuclear war from that of human rights. Nuclear war, if it were ever to occur, would be the supreme violation of human rights for uncountable millions of innocent human beings, including millions living outside the warring countries, if they were destroyed by a subsequent nuclear winter. Those who champion human rights must also recognize the supreme priority of this issue.

The treatment of dissidents and refuseniks in the U.S.S.R. is indeed calcu-

lated to arouse grief and outrage among those who care about human rights; but, in the present era of unparalleled danger for the human future, the need to take every possible step for the prevention of nuclear war is overriding. Moreover, I believe that the chance of ameliorating the lot of the oppressed in the Soviet Union is more likely to be increased (although perhaps very slowly) by closer and more cooperative personal relations than by maintaining a refusal to undertake further exchanges.

We should, of course, continue, as individuals and in groups, to plead the cause of those whose human rights have been violated, under every regime that has been guilty of oppression. Among these, the Soviet Union is one of many. Certainly we should continue our work in petitioning for the rights of those who are persecuted. However, the relation of the United States and the U.S.S.R. is unique today. Each has the power to destroy the other; we hold the fate of the world in our hands. We are trustees for the future of humanity; the development of nuclear energy and nuclear weapons has thrust that awesome responsibility upon us, and for me that must remain the primary consideration.

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Arms Negotiations

R. Jeffrey Smith's article "Allegations of cheating endanger arms talks" (News and Comment, 8 Mar., p. 1180) is a misleading portrayal of the President's General Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament (GAC) and its report *A Quarter Century of Soviet Compliance Practices Under Arms Control Commitments: 1958–1983*.

The GAC report resulted from a year-long analysis of all available data, through the highest levels of classification, concerning post–World War II Soviet actions pertinent to Soviet arms control commitments, including 26 documentary arms control agreements and numerous Soviet unilateral commitments.

Looking across the spectrum of Soviet arms control practices provided new insight into Soviet approaches to arms control. For example, the GAC found the complete body of available evidence persuasive in establishing that the Soviets had *planned* to violate certain arms control agreements even as they were in