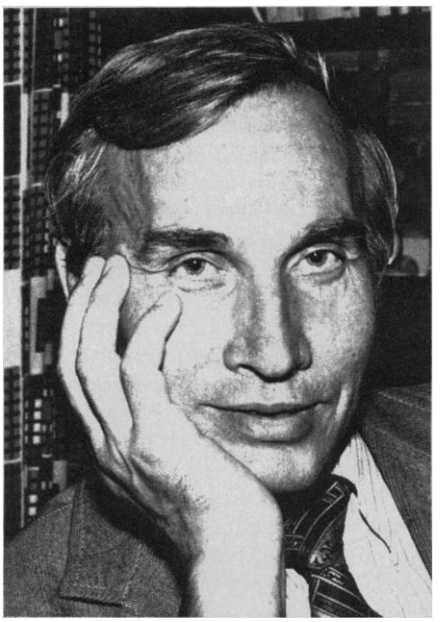
Emigrés Express Caution on Soviet Human Rights

The recent release of several prominent dissidents and refuseniks is a welcome sign, but the overall picture under Gorbachev is still murky



Anatoly Koryagin: *Dissident psychiatrist reportedly has been transferred to prison near his home in Kharkov, and has been promised freedom if he agrees to emigrate.*

THE highly visible handful of Soviet dissident and refusenik scientists who have been allowed to emigrate recently has supplied Americans with some firsthand, if fragmentary, information on Soviet practices with regard to human rights. Although the scientists are uncertain as to the significance of the recent moves, they have expressed the belief that Westerners—now as in the past—are reacting with premature and rather naïve optimism about the intentions of Soviet general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev.

The surprises continue, however. About 50 political prisoners have been freed since Andrei Sakharov was released from his Gorki exile in December, including Ukrainian nationalists, members of Christian sects, and labor organizers. Many were released following a government decree issued on 2 February, which reportedly contained 51 names of people imprisoned for "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda." Meanwhile, two imprisoned psychiatrists, Anatoly Koryagin, who in 1983 received the AAAS Scientific Freedom and Responsibility Award for exposing abuses by Soviet psychiatry, and Sergei Khodorovich, former custodian of a fund for dissidents' families, were told they would be released if they left the country. At the same time, refusenik mathematician Alexander Ioffe, who started a hunger strike in January on behalf of his son, received word that his son would be allowed to emigrate to Israel.

Among other unexpected developments have been the sudden appearance in New York of refusenik biologist David Goldfarb (spirited from Moscow in November on Armand Hammer's private jet), and the arrival in October of leading dissident physicist Yuri Orlov. Last year also saw the emigration to Israel of computer scientist Anatoly (Natan) Shcharansky, one of the founders, with Orlov, of the Helsinki Watch group.

But the larger picture is still murky. According to the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, half of those now in prison were arrested under the Gorbachev regime. Longtime refuseniks such as mathematicians Naum Meiman and Viktor Brailovsky and cyberneticist Alexander Lerner still languish, jobless, in Moscow. And while Sakharov was being freed, Anatoly Marchenko, another founder of Helsinki Watch, was allowed to die of a hunger strike in prison in December.

Orlov and Shcharansky were in Washington in late January for the hearing, a "commission of inquiry" on human rights in the Soviet Union sponsored by the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews. Their message was that the treatment of dissidents in prison has, if anything, gotten worse; that there is no lessening of official antisemitism (indeed, the Hebrew language is illegal, and a number of teachers have been imprisoned under Gorbachev); and that the emigration situation has gotten worse. The scientists are puzzled that the West does not press harder for Soviet compliance with the Helsinki Accords. They also find it strange that the U.S.–Soviet group, Physicians Against Nuclear War, was awarded a Nobel Prize last year. The group on the Soviet side is state-sanctioned and, said Orlov: "I don't know a single physician outside the camps who is speaking out for nuclear disarmament."

Orlov (who is not Jewish) said, speaking through a translator, that Gorbachev has a much more "sophisticated" approach than his predecessors, but "whatever little progress has been made so far has been made on the bones of the Soviet dissidents." He said the progress has mainly been a slight change in public opinion in the Soviet Union—"any optimism I have is connected more to the society than its leaders"—although most Soviets are still unconcerned about antisemitism and oppose free emigration.

The scientists felt that the West is too eager to make concessions to the Soviets based on very puny gestures. Shcharansky said, for example, that he talked with an editor who cautioned against doing anything to irritate Gorbachev now that he appeared to be moving in the right direction. Shcharansky's view, though, is that nothing at all gets done if one does not irritate officialdom.

He said that he talked in January with Sakharov and his wife Elena Bonner, who expressed consternation that interviews with them were being distorted in the Western press so they come out more complimentary to Gorbachev and critical of the West than was intended. Shcharansky attributed this to "the desire of the West to be deceived." He said people are so tired of living under the nuclear threat that they will jump at a few "sweet words" instead of analyzing things rationally.

In fact, he told the commission, headed by Senator William L. Armstrong (R–CO), the emigration situation is getting much worse. Last year about 900 Jews were allowed to emigrate—compared with more than 50,000 in 1979. In January, a new law came into effect that is touted as streamlining emigration procedures. But, said Shcharansky, it states that only those Jews with invitations from first-degree relatives may leave the country. This rules out all but 30,000 of the 382,000 who have received invitations and have applied for exit visas.

Orlov and Shcharansky generally counselled a tougher and more explicit American policy with regard to human rights in the Soviet Union. They decried a January decision by the Commerce Department to loosen restrictions—imposed in 1978 in protest to Soviet human rights violations—on the export of oil-drilling technology. They also emphatically opposed any loosening of restrictions under the Jackson-Vanik amendment of 1974, which denies favorable trade status to countries that restrict emigration, and urged Congress to notify the Russians

that specific measures to loosen trade restrictions would be made in response to specific annual emigration allowances. Orlov said that the lifting of trade sanctions imposed after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was "totally incorrect." He said Americans should not be intimidated by Soviet posturing because Gorbachev is a pragmatist and recognizes the necessity for cultural, scientific, and economic contacts with the West.

The two scientists related some details about their experiences as political prisoners, which they said put them at the bottom of the heap among prisoners. Conditions in the camps have not improved in the past decade, said Orlov, except that political prisoners now get 5 instead of 3 rubles a month spending money. This, he said, was spent on vegetable oil (prison diet had almost no fat), candy, and onions (for vitamins). Orlov, who was periodically put in solitary confinement for "noncooperation," said that when he was expelled from the Armenian Academy of Sciences—a development he learned of 2 years later—his notes were taken away from him and all scientific terms were deleted from his letters. He said his release came at a time when he had lost all hope and was totally unaware of the international concern about him.

The political prisoners survived only because of their "deep conviction and mutual assistance," said Orlov. "Those who lose their spirits very quickly die." Shcharansky offered some testimony which displayed his own remarkable resilience. After being warned that if he did not change his beliefs he would probably be sentenced to death, he said, "I had to find something within myself to resist this." First, he tried to rationalize that his captors were family men "just like me" who were probably looking for a pretext to spare him. But then he realized this was "very stupid" thinking; that in spite of "nice words" from Gorbachev "this is a system with a different morality, aims, and ideas." His resourcefulness comes through in a 1984 letter addressed to his mother, Ida

Sakharov Sends Message to Vienna

Andrei Sakharov and his wife Elena Bonner have been leading an active social life since their release from exile, including meetings with former secretaries of state Henry Kissinger and Cyrus Vance. Sakharov has resumed his outspoken ways with regard to human rights and in late January composed a statement (see below) to be released at the ongoing talks in Vienna on the Helsinki Accords.

Sakharov, who has been publicly releasing the names of newly freed prisoners, has been sounding more optimistic about human rights lately. He is quoted in the 9 February *New York Times* as saying he believes the recent moves are more than just "propaganda or window dressing . . . there are a number of people at the top" in addition to Gorbachev who recognize that increased liberalization is necessary for political and economic progress. "I myself have decided that the situation has changed."

Among his visitors has been a delegation of eight college presidents, accompanied by physicist Herman Feshbach of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Feshbach, who spent several hours with the Sakharovs, says both seem reasonably healthy, although Bonner, who has resumed smoking after her bypass surgery, has circulation problems in her legs. The conversation was translated by Bonner's son Alexei Semenov, who was allowed to visit from his home in Newton, Massachusetts.

Feshbach says he discussed particle physics with Sakharov, who has managed to stay fairly well abreast of the field. The Russian was also "obviously well informed" on the technology of the Strategic Defense Initiative, which he thinks will not work and should therefore be omitted altogether from arms control talks.

Sakharov said Gorbachev's new policy of *glasnost* (openness) came as a surprise to everyone, and although he does not know where it will lead, he apparently holds to the hope that there will be general amnesty for all "prisoners of conscience." He believes there are as many as 3000 such prisoners, including members of religious groups and minority ethnic groups.

The Russians have proposed that a special meeting on human rights be held in Moscow. Sakharov and others oppose this in absence of a variety of measures, including amnesty, to demonstrate Soviet good faith. Meanwhile, Moscow this month is hosting an "international forum of scientists on drastic reductions and final elimination of nuclear weapons," in which Sakharov has been invited to participate by Evgeny Velikhov, vice-president of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

Feshbach says he was in a hotel with Sakharov while the latter was drafting his human rights statement. At one point a maid entered, her eyes widened in recognition of the great man, and she scurried off, returning to ask for his autograph. Feshbach took this as evidence that many Soviets revere Sakharov and recognize his face despite the fact that he has been almost totally ignored in the official press.

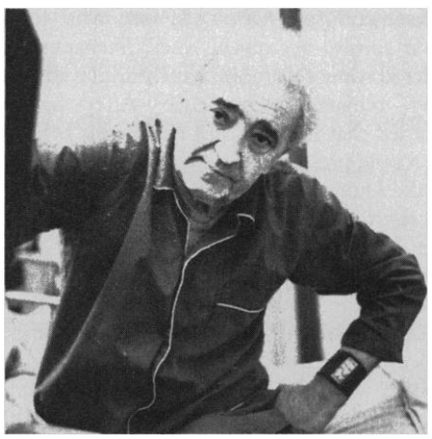
His statement for the Vienna talks reads as follows:

"I believe the most immediate goal is the release of prisoners of conscience in the U.S.S.R. and in the whole world. The release of prisoners of conscience in the U.S.S.R. would demonstrate that the process of liberalization of society is real, genuine. We know of about 700 prisoners of conscience by name and sentence; in reality there are somewhat more, possibly double or triple that number if one includes those that were put into psychiatric hospitals and sentenced under trumped-up criminal charges. It is necessary to strive for the release of all of them.

"The other important task is ensuring the right of free choice of one's country of residence, of emigration and of return, and of travel. The restriction of these rights to the cases of the reunification of families—which is an important problem in itself—contradicts international agreements, including the Helsinki Accords.

"I would like to mention a few names. These are the people who are suffering for the help they gave to others, for their striving for justice, for openness: the members of the Initiative Group for the Defense of Human Rights, editors and distributors of the magazine, *Chronicle of Current Events*, and the bulletin, *News from the USSR*, members of the Helsinki Groups and associated committees, [and] members of SMOT—Free-Interprofessional Association of Workers. They are in prisons, camps, psychiatric hospitals, in exile, deprived of family life and work in their profession. Here are the names of some of them: Altunyan, Velikanova, Kovalev, Khodorovich, Grigoriants, Smirnov, Shikhanovich, Koryagin, Podrabinek, Kostava, Bakhmin, Gershuni, Niklus, Nekipelov, Yakunin, Petkus, Bolonkin—and many, many others. [Some have since been released.] Our common responsibility is to care about their fate, to strive for their freedom.

"We must honor the memory of Anatoly Marchenko, who gave his life for the principle of justice." ■ **C.H.**



C. Holden

David Goldfarb: *Former refusenik microbiologist at New York's Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center.*

Milgrom: "The situation one finds oneself in here provides one with a wonderful opportunity to become the real master of one's destiny, and to feel these great privileges a man is granted by the feeling of inner freedom and independence from the chaos outside."

Even outside prison, once one becomes an outcast from Soviet society, it may be that only the toughest survive. Neurologist Lev Goldfarb, who emigrated last year and now works at the National Institutes of Health, reported at a seminar at AAAS that "the refuseniks are much more sick people than the Russian population on average," suffering high levels of mental and physical illnesses from the stress. Goldfarb, who acted as a physician for refusenik families during his 6-year wait for a visa, said that being stripped of their professional identities and subjected to a "life of grim isolation" is particularly hard for scientists, who "lose more and suffer more than any other refuseniks, being out of their labs." He himself found it "unbearable" to be falling behind in his field.

Microbiologist David Goldfarb (not related to Lev), who is now being treated at New York's Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital, believes that refuseniks "really suffer more as scientists than as Jews." Goldfarb, talking to *Science* with the aid of his son Alex, an assistant professor at Columbia University, said "the problem is not predominantly that they cannot leave the country. It's that they cannot work. They completely destroy the scientist." But he believes there is an attitude among some Americans that they do not merit special consideration of the scientific community because they are Jewish.

Goldfarb, 68, hopes to move to a New York apartment with his wife after being treated for lung cancer and complications from diabetes. He is careful to point out that he was not a dissident but an "ordinary refusenik" until the Daniloff affair sucked him into the limelight. (It was revealed after the release of kidnapped journalist Nicholas Daniloff that his friend Goldfarb had been prevented from emigrating in 1984 after refusing to set Daniloff up for arrest.)

Goldfarb, like the other emigrés, emphasizes that Western scientists can best help beleaguered Russian colleagues by being persistent and explicit in their demands. He says the moratorium on sending bacterial strains to Russian scientists that was imposed by Westerners to protest his treatment was very effective. In fact, he says that when KGB charges against him were lifted the KGB asked him to stop the boycott because it was having a damaging effect.

Goldfarb says that for outside pressure to be effective, it must entail constant harping on specific names and specific cases. He says it is "very important" to have field- and subject-oriented pressure. He and others say scientists should be firm in professional matters—such as insisting that replacements not be sent for scientists invited to meetings. Publicity is also very important, since the Soviets are sensitive about their image not only in the West but among their satellites and in Third World countries.

Goldfarb is moderately optimistic that the apparent liberalization going on under Gorbachev has some reality to it. The Soviet leader is "starting to call a spade a spade," he says. He is encouraged by the new openness about publicizing bad news, ranging from infant mortality figures to news about official corruption. But, like his fellow emigrés, Goldfarb is not particularly impressed with the recent flurry of released dissidents and refuseniks, pointing out that the Soviets are reaping a public relations bonanza at very small cost. ■ CONSTANCE HOLDEN

RAC Recommends Easing Some Recombinant DNA Guidelines

A series of changes to simplify regulations governing the conduct of laboratory research, field experiments, and industrial operations involving genetically engineered organisms has been adopted by the Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee (RAC) of the National Institutes of Health. The group's actions, which still must be approved by NIH director James B. Wyngaarden, primarily affect rules governing research funded by NIH. But they also may influence research regulations at other federal agencies.

The committee recommended that, in most cases, experiments and field tests that are approved by another federal agency need not be reviewed by RAC. For example, Steven Lindow's proposal to test a frost-inhibiting strain of *Pseudomonas syringae* on potatoes in California would require only Environmental Protection Agency approval. Both EPA and RAC reviewed Lindow's proposal, which involves bacteria that have a simple gene deletion.

The committee also reaffirmed a recommendation it made last September that most field tests of organisms derived from gene deletions be exempted entirely from regulation. Moreover, it recommended that rearrangements and amplifications within a single genome, and the transfer of extrachromosomal DNA from one organism to another, should also be exempt. NIH previously delayed a decision on adopting RAC's September proposal pending completion of an environmental assessment.

While it is not clear how other federal agencies will react to these proposals, Sue A. Tolin, the Department of Agriculture's nonvoting representative on RAC, says the committee's changes "are going to be very important." RAC is saying, Tolin notes, that researchers such as Lindow should be free to test organisms based on single base changes or gene deletions when there is no proven risk. This position runs counter to the claims of ecologists who argue that there often are insufficient data to predict the behavior of modified organisms.

The committee also endorsed part of a Food and Drug Administration motion to relax physical containment requirements for recombinant organisms deemed to pose little risk. Commissioner Frank E. Young had argued that the existing containment requirements for such organisms—*Escherichia coli*, *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, and *Bacillus subtilis*—are "expensive, unwieldly, and unnecessary" when taken beyond the fermentation tank.

Current regulations require that the organisms be deactivated before being removed from a fermentation tank. For large-scale fermentation research and commercial operations, this is cumbersome for downstream processing. And containment in downstream operations—even at the lowest laboratory levels that are currently required—is costly. RAC agreed that containment provisions "generally" need not be greater than those required for an unmodified host organism. Containment rules for