

U.S. Scientists Protest Punishment of Sakharov

The Soviets' decision to impose "internal exile" on one of their best scientists—Andrei D. Sakharov—has brought forth a shower of protests from Western leaders and even from the Socialist parties of France, Italy, and Spain. America's scientific community issued a rebuke as well, raising the specific threat, which must concern Soviet leaders, that scientific exchanges may be broken off.

None of this is terribly new for Sakharov, who must be accustomed to being at the center of things. One of the Soviet Union's ablest fusion physicists, he is credited with inventing (along with Igor Tamm and others) the Soviet hydrogen bomb. In 1953 he was admitted to the Soviet Academy of Sciences at age 32, one of the youngest ever to receive this distinction. Three times he was given high awards by the state. In 1975 he won the Nobel Peace Prize, but was not allowed to leave the country to collect it. His political views and increasingly visible role as a defender of personal rights in the last 14 years have made him a thorn in the side of the Communist Party bureaucracy.

After losing his security clearance in 1968 over the publication of his essay, *Thoughts on Progress, Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom*, Sakharov found himself locked out of government laboratories and cut off from his work. Now he has been stripped of his honors and sent from Moscow to live in the closed city of Gorki, which foreigners may not visit. More humiliation may await him, for *Izvestia* has charged him with traitorous behavior and accused him of blurring out "slandorous anti-Soviet statements."

Philip Handler, president of the National Academy of Sciences, released a statement in Washington, D.C., renewing a warning given to the Soviet Academy in 1973 when Sakharov was being threatened with prosecution: "Harassment or detention of Sakharov will have severe effects on the relationships between the scientific communities of the U.S. and the USSR." Handler continued, "This blatantly punitive act against Academician Sakharov can only be regarded as . . . an act of deliberate ill will. What

the consequences may be, I cannot foresee, but I find it difficult to imagine scientific exchange continuing in the spirit we had created heretofore."

Kenneth Boulding and Frederick Mosteller, chairman of the board and president of the AAAS, respectively, sent a telegram to the Soviet ambassador in Washington, warning that Sakharov's exile "will further divide our nations at a time when every effort should be made to preserve a strategy of peaceful coexistence." They called Sakharov "a brilliant voice in support of mutual understanding and the defense of human freedom."

Jeremy Stone, director of the Federation of American Scientists, a group that includes many physicists and strong supporters of arms control, published what may have been the gloomiest note of all. In a personal statement, Stone said that the Soviet leadership is "battening down the hatches against any internal dissent by making an example of the most senior internal dissenter." Although Stone calls himself a dove on military matters, he issued a most un-dovely cry: "Prudence requires that the West view the Soviet action silencing Sakharov as an indication that they could be planning further aggression subsequent to Afghanistan and that the West must look to its defenses."

This may mark the beginning of a new era of stiff censorship of the scientific community. The signs are ominous. At the same time Sakharov was sent to Gorki, Vladimir Kirillin, the chief science official of the Party and chairman of the State Committee for Science and Technology, resigned his post. A member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Kirillin had not been an activist, but reportedly argued within Party councils for lenient treatment of scientist dissidents. Speculation has it that he was forced out, possibly because he did not wish to cooperate in the punishment of Sakharov. An alternative explanation is that he was asked to step aside because he is considered partially responsible for the poor record of technological progress in the Soviet Union over the last few years. The most troubling sign, according to Stone, is the decision to label Sakharov a traitor. Stone fears that the government may be planning a show trial or a propaganda campaign to drive Sakharov out of the Academy of Sciences.

No "Humane" Executions, Boston Doctors Say

"It's a bad precedent; it's like Nazi medicine to have a physician killing someone who's not physically ill on the order of the state," says Ward Casscells, a clinical fellow in medicine at Boston's Beth Israel Hospital. Casscells is upset by a recent trend among state legislatures to require that the death sentence be carried out with the tools of modern medicine. Oklahoma, Texas, Idaho, and New Mexico already have acted, and Florida is about to become the fifth state opting for what is thought to be a humane form of execution in which the victim receives an injection of drugs. (The prescription is a potent combination of barbiturates, potassium chloride, and curare or muscle relaxants.)

Casscells, along with Harvard professor of legal medicine William Curran, challenges physicians to resist and effectively nullify these laws by refusing to cooperate. In an article they coauthored in the 24 January issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, they write that physicians "should not escape moral responsibility by ordering a subordinate to do what he or she may not properly do directly. . . . For physicians to monitor the condemned prisoner's condition during the drug administration . . . would be so intimately a part of the whole action of killing as to deny any consideration as a separate medical service." There are now 140 prisoners in Florida and 119 in Texas on death row. The authors say that medical professionals should strictly avoid participating in any way in their execution, for to do so would violate the Hippocratic Oath. It reads, in part: "Neither will I administer a poison to anyone when asked to do so, nor will I suggest such a course."

Casscells flatly rejects the notion that drugging is more humane than electrocution. There is no less suffering, he says, and possibly greater humiliation in some prisoners' way of thinking.

The American Medical Association has never considered this issue, but a spokesman said he wouldn't be surprised if it came up at the next meeting.

Eliot Marshall