

A Pledge to Help Sakharov

An appeal to scientists to help exiled academician and human rights leader Andrei Sakharov has been issued by the Federation of American Scientists.

The FAS suggests that scientists should consider refusing to engage in any official scientific exchange with the Soviet Union until Sakharov's political and civil rights are restored to him.

The declaration proposed by the FAS is as follows:

I assert my intention of refusing to participate in official bilateral scientific exchange with the Soviet government, and its scientific representatives, either here or in the Soviet Union, until such time as Andrei Sakharov is released from internal exile.

Nine Nobel prizewinners have already signed the pledge. The FAS has invited professional scientific societies to relay the message to their members and to tally themselves, or direct to the FAS, whatever responses their members make. The FAS will maintain a depository of declarations in support of Sakharov and relay the results to the Soviet authorities.

The declaration does not apply to personal scientific contacts or to the Pugwash conferences.

Sakharov is the preeminent figure in the human rights movement in the Soviet Union, a position he started toward after doubts about the hydrogen bomb, which he had helped create. The Nobel Peace Prize committee, calling him "the spokesman for the conscience of mankind," gave him their award in 1975 for his courage and eloquence and for his thesis that no country could consider its own national security assured unless individual liberties were assured in all.

The FAS, founded in 1945 by American atomic scientists, has adopted Sakharov as a colleague in need of defense because it sees him as a counterpart. "Our own founders reached many of the same conclusions as did Academician Sakharov, and in the same way—through experience with nuclear weapons and a sense of guilt about participation in their creation," the Federation states.

FAS director Jeremy Stone considers that Sakharov is likely to face further reprisals. The Soviet authorities presumably intended to silence Sak-

harov by banishing him to Gorki but the effect may be the opposite of the intention. Foreign correspondents in Moscow did not use to report all of Sakharov's many declarations on behalf of those whose rights were violated; they are more likely to publish every word that Sakharov manages to get out of Gorki. "The Soviet Union may be forced soon to take some further action, by imprisoning him or expelling him. But a giant voice of conscience like Sakharov's cannot be silenced by placing him in Gorki or even in prison," Stone observes.

The pledge of nonparticipation proposed by the FAS is among the first specific steps so far undertaken by scientists in the United States on Sakharov's behalf. Another is the decision by the National Academy of Sciences to defer bilateral seminars with its Soviet counterpart.

Interferon Victory Claimed and Disclaimed

The European-based company Biogen seemed to have beaten its several competitors when it announced on 17 January that its scientists had developed clones of interferon-producing bacteria. The claim was widely reported and led to a gratifying boost in the share prices of Biogen's major corporate stockholders.

Less widely noticed was an identical claim made by Hoffmann-La Roche at a press conference held on 14 January by the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association. Hoffmann-La Roche vice president Sidney Udenfriend, director of the Roche Institute of Molecular Biology, mentioned casually that Roche had cloned interferon, but retreated behind a cloud of verbiage when asked for further details.

Did Udenfriend misspeak himself, or has Roche obtained interferon clones but decided not to announce the fact yet? Udenfriend now says that the company is "very, very close to selecting out specific clones that will be capable of synthesizing interferon." Another Roche official remarks that "there is a semantic difference of opinion as to whether we have cloned interferon; in my opinion you can't say you've cloned something until you have definite proof."

Control of Commercial Gene Splicing

A bill requiring companies to notify the government of their gene splicing activities was introduced last month by Senator Adlai Stevenson.

Congress's failure to pass legislation on recombinant DNA research has left commercial gene splicers under no formal obligation to abide by the National Institutes of Health's safety rules, although probably all companies are at present doing so. The NIH has tried to cover this lacuna by persuading companies to register their projects with the NIH recombinant DNA committee on a voluntary basis; committee members swear to protect the trade secrets revealed to them.

"I remain convinced," Stevenson said in proposing his bill, "that the voluntary registration scheme . . . serves neither the public's nor industry's interest." If only a few companies fail to register, the whole system could be discredited, Stevenson observes. The fact that a company can withdraw information from the NIH if there is disagreement over its proprietary nature could in the senator's view put the government in the false position of "condoning certain activities and assuring the public of their safety on the basis of incomplete data."

At present companies can submit data to the NIH and withdraw it if the Freedom of Information officer decides it is not proprietary. The Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association is happy with the NIH's voluntary registration system and opposes Stevenson's bill.

The bill has been referred to Senator Kennedy's health subcommittee, which alone has the power to do anything with it, but Stevenson plans to have his science and space subcommittee hold oversight hearings on the matter.

All gene splicing experiments with *E. coli* K12 may now be conducted in minimal (P1) containment. The NIH committee's proposal to this effect (*Science*, 21 September 1979) has been accepted; the new guidelines are published in the *Federal Register* of 29 January, marking a further stage in their vexed but preplanned evolution.

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