Brailovsky Arrested

In the latest of Soviet actions against civil rights activists, police in Moscow have arrested Victor Brailovsky on charges of "defaming the Soviet state and public order." Brailovsky, 45, formerly a cyberneticist at a Moscow research institute, was the organizer of a weekly seminar for scientists displaced from their jobs after they had applied for emigration.

Brailovsky's meetings, known as the Moscow Sunday Scientific Seminars, had attracted as speakers some prominent Western scientists, including David Baltimore of MIT, Walter Gilbert of Harvard, and Howard Temin of the University of Wisconsin, all Nobel laureates. Arno Penzias of Bell Labs, the 1978 Nobelist in physics, went directly from his acceptance speech in Stockholm to a gathering of 40 Soviet refusenik scientists in Brailovsky's apartment. "I've never seen a group less threatening to a powerful state," Penzias says. "Brailovsky is a sincere, very friendly man—naturally, he was a little nervous." Discussions at the seminar, frequently on aspects of theoretical physics, were necessarily abstract: As Brailovsky once remarked, "Our maximum facility is the pocket calculator." Since his arrest, Soviet police have prevented the meetings from taking place.

Like some other scientists, Brailovsky was recruited into dissident circles by the Soviets' refusal of his 1972 application for emigration to Israel. He and his wife, Irina, a mathematician at Moscow State University, were both denied on grounds of work relating to state secrets, a claim apparently denied by his supervisor and, in Irina's case, by the university's rector. Both were promptly fired from their jobs. Eventually, in a catch-22 of typical form, Brailovsky's exit visa was approved and his wife's was not; at first he demurred—not wanting to leave her behind; shortly after changing his mind, the visa was revoked on grounds that separation of families violated Soviet rules. Also, Brailovsky was denied permission to tutor, and then warned he could be imprisoned for failing to support himself. His latest arrest, reportedly in connection with his authorship of a journal on Jews in the U.S.S.R., occurred 2 days after the opening of the international conference to review the Helsinki Accords on human rights, held in Madrid. Brailovsky's arrest has been criticized there by the U.S. delegation, and at a recent press conference sponsored by the Greater New York Conference on Soviet Jewry. But the timing of the Soviet's action seems designed to show that such outcries will not be heeded.

Anne Penzias

A Moscow Sunday scientific seminar, with Brailovsky (far left).

Unfortunately, it fits into a pattern of renewed harsh actions against scientists. Tatyana Velikanova, a mathematician and computer scientist who once worked at the Soviet Academy of Science, was recently sentenced to 4 years in a labor camp and 5 years of internal exile for "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda." Her cause has been taken up by the Association for Women in Mathematics. In addition, the Soviets have recently sentenced Josif Dyadkin, a physicist who worked at the Geophysical Institute in Kalinin, to 3 years in a labor camp. Dyadkin was convicted of slander, apparently after preparing a demographic study of persons who perished under Stalin's rule. His cause and that of a dozen Soviet physicists denied the right to emigrate have been taken up by the American Physical Society.

It seems unlikely that there will be many Soviet concessions during the Madrid conference, which recesses in December and resumes in January.

—R. JEFFREY SMITH

the NSF statute was altered to permit it to support applied research. In the early 1970's the so-called RANN (Research Applied to National Needs) program was created under pressure from Congress, and the executive and a research applications directorate set up. RANN interdisciplinary research acquired a lowered profile in the foundation in the middle 1970's after some $50 million worth of energy research projects were transferred from NSF to the new energy research agency. A directorate for engineering and applied research (ESA) was formed in 1977. Some applied research has been lodged elsewhere in the agency, but responsibility for administering all applied research resided with ESA. Under the new reorganization, the five other directorates, which are organized on discipline or program lines, will also support applied research projects in addition to funding basic research.

Creating an engineering directorate with an undivided role is intended to give engineering greater visibility and leverage within the foundation. Jack Sanderson, NSF assistant director, who heads ESA says the new directorate will be "able to concentrate more effectively" on the problems facing engineering and "be more of a spokesman for engineering."

The decision against a major realignment of social and behavioral sciences came as no surprise. At the October NSB meeting, Langenberg indicated that the planners were moving away from a proposal for a social, behavioral, and neural sciences directorate. Word of a preliminary plan to separate research in neural and behavioral sciences from relevant research in the biological sciences had caused alarm, particularly among psychologists. There were also apprehensions on political grounds that a separate social sciences budget would be an inviting target for critics of federal support of social and behavioral science research. Slaughter says that for the time being, at least, the only change will be the transfer of some scattered social science programs into the existing directorate for biological, behavioral, and social sciences.

Now that the formal decision has been made to implement the proposals on applied research and engineering, NSF officials face the task of making the reorganization work. To keep things moving and monitor progress, a special oversight group will be established in the director's office. Certainly the process will also be under close scrutiny by those who think that too much or too little will be done.

—JOHN WALSH

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