

LETTERS

Degrees Revoked in Soviet Union

A fundamental principle of academic freedom accepted throughout the world is the sanctity of academic degrees. Once earned and granted in recognition of the scholarly achievement of individuals, they are irrevocable. That principle is now being grossly violated as the Soviet Union accelerates its persecution of emigration and human rights activists by revoking their advanced degrees. According to the *Los Angeles Times* (1), 65 scientists "have lost or are in the process of losing their academic degrees since this practice began occurring systematically about a year ago. . . ."

The Soviet Higher Attestation Commission's (VAK) letter of 3 December to Dr. Leonid D. Stonov, in one brief paragraph, negates his years of study and research:

To: L. D. Stonov

The VAK of the USSR informs you that following the request of the Scientific-Technical Council at the All-Union Research Institute on Chemical Means of Plant Protection addressed to the VAK of the USSR on the 28th of January 1981 (Protocol No. 6-1), it deprives you of the academic degree of Candidate of Agricultural Sciences and the academic title of senior scientific worker. The diploma of the Candidate of Agricultural Sciences No. MSKh 003289 and the certificate of senior scientific worker No. MSN 027299 are declared to be invalid and should be returned to the offices of the VAK of the USSR at the following address: Moscow, No. 12, Griboyedova St.

Deputy Chief Academic Secretary,
(Signed) V. V. Davydov

It is no coincidence that all those who received similar letters are either Jewish and/or have applied to emigrate. And it is frightening to recall that the revocation of all degrees earned by Jews in Nazi Germany foreshadowed more intense persecutions. We believe that, if unchecked, the Soviet revocation of advanced degrees will become an increasingly popular weapon against any scholars who are considered politically unreliable.

We abhor this practice as a gross violation of human rights and academic integrity. Moreover, we are distressed over the human toll it exacts: scientists stripped of degrees are subject to cuts in salary, demotion, humiliation, and ostracism by academic peers; denial of access to scientific libraries and laboratories; and even dismissal from professional employment.

We call upon all scientists and academics to voice their opposition to this reprehensible practice which, although

reported last August (2), has yet to be widely denounced by the international scientific community. Given their commitment to scientific progress and academic integrity, professional societies should be in the forefront condemning the use of academics as a tool of persecution. As conferrers of degrees, universities should respond by declaring that they will recognize degrees unjustly and immorally revoked.

If these earned degrees are not returned to the individuals concerned, and if the practice of revocation continues, we believe the U.S.S.R. will have placed itself outside the pale of civilized countries and will deserve to be treated as such.

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References

1. R. Gillette, *Los Angeles Times*, 24 February 1982, p. 10.
2. D. Hirsch, *Nature (London)* **292**, 578 (1981); V. Rich, *ibid.*, p. 789.

Society for Scientific Exploration

There are a number of topics about which the public turns to scientists for information, only to find that the scientists have little information or interest. Some of these phenomena are outside the mainstream of science because their purported properties appear to run counter to established scientific knowledge. For instance, "precognition" violates the principle of causality, and "UFO reports" sometimes describe phenomena that apparently violate laws of motion. Since the relevant evidence is "soft" (typically narrative), there is good reason for scientists to be skeptical of the reality of these phenomena.

A number of other topics potentially investigable by scientific methods do not belong to any recognized subdiscipline of science, and for this or other reasons tend not to be fully discussed in the scientific literature. Examples include suspected but implausible cross-disciplinary relationships, rare catastrophes, and topics (such as "SETI") which may involve unknown intelligence.

The established disciplines and opera-

tions of science and other forms of scholarship do not always offer a ready procedure by which concerned scientists and scholars may investigate anomalous phenomena in response to the public (or their own) interest. Exchange through refereed articles in established journals is essential for scientific and scholarly work, but such journals are often reluctant to give space to these topics.

We see little prospect of arriving at an assessment of such phenomena (beginning with their reality) until they are subject to the normal processes of open publication, debate, and criticism. This conviction has led to the formation of the Society for Scientific Exploration, Formed for the Study of Anomalous Phenomena, which I currently serve as president. The society will provide a forum by which research on these and related topics may be presented to other members of the society and to the scientific and scholarly community in general.

The society has no intention of endorsing the reality or significance of any particular topic. On the other hand, no subject will be prohibited from discussion or publication simply because it is not now an accepted part of scientific or scholarly knowledge. We anticipate that most members will take the point of view that any purported anomalous phenomenon is unlikely to be real, but honest evidence concerning any of them deserves open investigation without prejudice.

Membership in the society is open to interested persons who have an established ability in science as demonstrated by the award of a Ph.D., the publication of scholarly or scientific articles, or equivalent evidence. The society's first meeting, open to members and their registered guests, is to be held from 2 to 4 June 1982 at the Center of Adult Education, University of Maryland. Further information concerning the society may be obtained from Laurence W. Fredrick (Secretary), Department of Astronomy, University of Virginia, Post Office Box 3818, Charlottesville 22903.

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Diesel Emissions and Health

The rapid price increase in hydrocarbon fuel has resulted in a significant shift to the use of more fuel-efficient vehicles, including those equipped with diesel engines. Current projections indicate that