

Concern for Russian scientists

The American Physical Society has a tradition of concern for the hardships endured by the Russian physicists who have been penalized for their desire to leave the USSR and who have been ostracized by their government. Presidents Philip Morse and Joseph Mayer each addressed a letter on the subject to M. V. Keldysh, chairman of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Moscow. President Chien-Shiung Wu wrote a letter to Chairman Vladimir Kirillin of the State Committee on Science and Technology, the Kremlin.

In response to a Forum resolution that "The American Physical Society supports the right of Soviet scientists, and scientists and people everywhere, to live and work in the country of their choice", on 9 September 1972 Morse informed the Soviet Academy of Sciences that the APS had "learned with dismay the serious penalties imposed on scientists who desired to emigrate from the Soviet Union." He stated that the APS opposes the imposition of exit fees on Soviet scientists and other intellectuals, and joined with the National Academy of Sciences in urging Keldysh to transmit this concern to the members of the Soviet Academy and to the government (*APS Bulletin*, February 1973).

Mayer's letter of 23 January 1974 (*APS Bulletin*, June 1974) spoke about the plight of some Russian physicists who had lost their positions after expressing a desire to emigrate from the Soviet Union. "May I beg of you on behalf of The American Physical Society," the letter concluded, "to use your influence to avoid actions in the USSR which cannot help but increase the disinclination of individual Americans to cooperate fully and wholeheartedly in exchanges between our two countries."

Wu's message to Kirillin on 12 September 1975 underlined APS's support of increased scientific exchanges between the US and the USSR and expressed pleasure at the expansion of scientific exchange programs. At the same time, however, she warned that these exchanges are dependent upon "the voluntary participation of individual scientists, and the good will required for this purpose . . . (is) being weakened by recent actions which are contrary to the spirit of scientific exchange. We have learned that some



Soviet scientists who have applied to emigrate have subsequently lost their scientific positions and have been denied permission to leave Russia on the grounds of being privy to national secrets, although all of their scientific research has been devoted to basic science and published in open journals."

These scientists who have been cut off from the more conventional avenues of scientific research have attempted to maintain their scientific competency by organizing various seminars by themselves. Calling the position of these ostracized scientists "insupportable and, in the twentieth century, incredible," Wu cited the example of Mark Azbel, in whose apartment one of these seminars had been meeting. Azbel "has been told by the KGB to stop foreign scientists from participating in the seminar or to suffer the consequences."

Wu urges support for basic research

American Physical Society president Chien-Shiung Wu, the officers of APS, and members of the Executive/Budget Committee had continuing discussion on the serious problem of support for basic research by the Federal government during the late Summer and Fall. As a result of these discussions, Wu sent the following letter to Gerald Ford,

President of the United States, on 31 October:

"Dear Mr. President:

"I am writing to you as President of The American Physical Society, the largest scientific society of physicists in the world, to express my concern about the continuity of federal support for basic science and its importance to the nation's future. In these times of economic difficulty, it is easy to forget that our world leadership in technology, and much of our past prosperity, had its roots in the continuous advances in basic scientific research in the earlier decades of this century. Atomic energy, the transistor, the laser and a host of other benefits all had their origins in advances in basic research. Much of our military strength is also derived from this work. Basic research continues to be a vital long-range asset to our society.

"The two most essential conditions to maintaining the strength and vitality of basic research are the requirements of a long lead-time and of a steady and uninterrupted environment in which to develop. The long lead-time often requires a decade or more. Many of the vital problems facing us, such as energy, have similar timetables. The ultimate solutions to these problems will depend on the basic research now being done. The requirement of a steady and uninterrupted environment is to prevent any erosion in the fundamental health of basic research, which is a fragile enterprise. The most capable of our people must be trained and their work in advancing the frontiers of knowledge supported adequately and with continuity over the long periods of time necessary to achieve progress. Fluctuations and discontinuities in support which might little affect other national enterprises may have disastrous effects on basic research and scientific progress for many years.

"I am thus writing to ask your help in insuring that the nation's commitment to the support of basic science not falter in the difficult time we now face. The potential budgetary savings this year are extremely small compared to the long-term benefits to the nation. Although these are my own personal opinions, I am certain that my concern is shared by the physics community and the scientific community generally." □