

letters

Policy on dissidents

The actions of the Soviet Union against dissidents, most recently the imprisonments of Orlov and Scharansky, have outraged all people who believe in human liberty. It is particularly appropriate for the scientific community to make efforts to liberate their imprisoned colleagues and to prevent further attacks on the freedoms of Soviet scientists.

These efforts are made much more difficult by the official policy of the Carter administration, which opposes human rights violations in the Soviet Union but supports them in countries like Iran and Korea. This policy is not a human-rights policy but an anti-Soviet policy, driven in part by right-wing pressure aimed at destroying a SALT II agreement and increasing the US military budget.

If the efforts of American scientists are to be effective, they must be completely and clearly dissociated from official American policy. Efforts that are limited to the rights of Soviet scientists, such as those of Scientists for Orlov and Scharansky, appear to the Soviets and to others as simple extensions of the official American policy. It is interesting that some of those who now refuse cooperation with the Soviet Union are eager to increase contacts with Communist China without any inquiry into or concern about the human-rights situations there.

For many years an organization called Amnesty International has worked to help persecuted individuals in any country throughout the world. Scientists interested in human rights might well consider joining and supporting this organization rather than forming new groups limited to human-rights problems in the Soviet Union.

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Journal complaint

The comparison of *JETP Letters* and *Physical Review Letters* by Mark Azbel (December, page 82) is indeed interesting. One important point not addressed in his letter is how conflicting referee reports are handled by the JETP editors. In the past, the PRL editors have shown a remarkable reluctance to make editorial

decisions in the face of conflicting referee reports. Although the editorial policy states "Calling on a third referee is now uncommon"¹ there is a substantial delay in such cases. I believe this is an area in which the PRL procedures could be improved. A possible step toward alleviating this delay might be an expansion of the board of associate editors.

A more serious problem is the delay imposed on papers not honoring the page charges in the *Physical Review*. The projected delays of nearly a year and a half for papers currently being accepted by *Physical Review* (B15) is clearly incompatible with the objective of the APS to facilitate the "advancement and diffusion of the knowledge of physics." The situation is particularly discouraging to younger physicists who do not yet have significant financial support. A possible solution might be to allow a certain (small) number of pages gratis per article (with due precautions to prevent a long article from being split up into several small ones!). In any case, I hope the physics community can find a way out of this unreasonable delay soon.

Reference

1. Bull. Am. Phys. Soc. 23, 664 (1978).

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COMMENTS BY PRL: The editors of *Physical Review Letters* are reluctant to make arbitrary editorial decisions on papers that receive conflicting referee reports. We do not find that reluctance remarkable. We have made some expansions in the number of associate editors (for instance, in nuclear physics) and other expansions are planned. We believe that such an increase in the number of associate editors will improve the selection of papers; we are less optimistic over the possibility that the handling of those papers that receive an unfavorable referee's report will be expedited.

Editors,
Physical Review Letters

Landscape symmetry

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