

guest comment

Questions for Soviet visitors

I would like once again to attract your attention to the human rights problem, particularly in the Soviet Union. We have heard so many stories about violation of basic human rights in this country that they aren't news any more. We have heard these news reports for years and what have we done about them? There is some activity in the Western scientific community to help those oppressed, but this activity from my point of view often goes on without clear ideas, methods and goals. For example, people are still arguing whether boycotts are a good or bad approach. The Committee on Human Rights at the National Academy of Sciences is reluctant to adopt too many cases from the Soviet Union because they do not want to be accused of being too Anti-Soviet. Sometimes, leading Western scientists, being sympathetic to the victim, are still reluctant to write a letter of protest to the Soviets because they feel that the validity of their letters will be questioned if too many are received from the same person. And sometimes, Western scientists do not write protest letters because they think it is absolutely useless.

As a former Soviet scientist who has been lucky to get out and now is in the free world, I feel the responsibility for many of my fellow scientists who have been caught in the Soviet trap and, therefore, I would like to make some suggestions.

Presently, in our labs we very often have visitors from the USSR. They are usually good scientists; they smile and joke; and the law of hospitality prevents us from asking them some non-scientific questions. We usually think in this way: This Soviet guy looks very nice; he gave an interesting talk; of course his country is an awful place, but this is not his fault—it is the Soviet government's. So, why should we give him a hard time asking inconvenient questions; this is not fair. And Soviet visitors go away breathing with relief. They buy blue jeans, tape recorders, albums and lingerie for their wives; and they are very happy that nobody asked them those embarrassing questions about Orlov or Scharansky—about thousands of refuseniks trapped in the USSR without work and permission to emigrate—about separated families for years trying to be reunited—about normal people



Soviet emigrant Edward Lozansky and wife Tanya and daughter, who are seeking permission to join him in US. Near Kiev in 1976.

detained in the mental hospitals only because they said openly that something is wrong in the Soviet society despite the fact that according to the local newspapers Soviet people are the happiest in the world and every day they sing songs and read poetry for the glory of the Communist Party. And everybody who is not happy is insane and his place is in a mental hospital or prison.

I think that by being so nice and so quiet, we are losing a great chance to help people through delivering messages directly to the Kremlin. Western scientists should realize that the majority of Soviet visitors to the West are active members of the Communist Party, and therefore they have to share responsibility for the Soviet domestic policy. Only those who have an excellent record from the point of view of the party and the KGB can travel to the West. It is enough sometimes to say one careless word and a black mark "nev-yezdnoy" (which means "no travel abroad") will appear in your file. I know one leading Soviet scientist who was preparing to go to Yugoslavia back in 1968 and during the instruction course in KGB (all Soviet citizens before departure abroad must go through special instruction in the KGB) was asked by the officer:

"What will you say if they ask your opinion about events in Czechoslovakia?" The scientist, being a very honest man, answered: "I would say that I am not quite sure that the invasion has been necessary." Immediately, his trip was cancelled and I doubt that he will ever be able to go abroad even to East Europe. The point is that those smiling and pleasant Soviet visitors are (with very rare exclusions) the right hand of the Party; it is they who *inculcate* Party policy in the scientific institutes and universities. It is they who fire refuseniks and conduct racial and anti-Semitic policy in science—which is why we should ask them a few questions after a scientific seminar: Ask them how can they explain that a world-known physicist, member-correspondent of the Academy of Sciences, Yuri Orlov, has been sentenced to seven years in jail only because he wanted to help the Soviet government transform the Helsinki Accord into a Soviet reality. Ask them to explain why computer-scientist Anatoly Scharansky has been sentenced to thirteen years in jail only because he wanted to emigrate to Israel and, when being refused, became an activist of the emigration movement. (He was helping people obtain papers needed for application, to fill out forms, helping support people morally. It happened that I knew both of these men and I feel they can be considered saints. They have sacrificed their future, families, and their lives to save people.) Ask them to explain why my wife, Tanya Lozanskaya, 26, a chemist at the Institute of Organic Chemistry Academy of Sciences, USSR, for more than two years has been trying to get out of Moscow with our daughter who is seven years old—to be reunited with me in the US; ask why the director of this Institute, N. Kochetkov, also a very frequent and smiling visitor to the West, threatens to fire my wife Tanya, and has ordered that her mail be opened and confiscated. My wife has never worked in any secret area of research and, therefore, the Soviets have no legal reason to detain her in Moscow.

Such leading American and British scientists as Linus Pauling, Francis Crick, Max Perutz, Hans Bethe, Howard Temin, Aaron Klug, Charles Yanofsky, James

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guest comment

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Darnell, Ronald Brown, Ira Pastan and many, many others have written to the Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev and Academician A. Aleksandrov, who is currently the President of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, asking to let Tanya go, but to date, these letters have been largely ignored.

I think it is our duty to ask Soviet visitors to explain these and many other known facts, and demand a logical answer. And when they give you a smile and, looking around, whisper that there is nothing they can do—that this is not their fault—you can make a very reasonable statement: that they are Party members and therefore have to share responsibility and that you expect from them clear and logical answers. Then when this Soviet gentleman returns to Moscow, he will file a report on his trip (everybody who has been abroad files a report), and he will certainly mention the hard time given him by his Western colleagues. If this happens to a majority of Soviet visitors to the West, or when Western scientists ask the same questions when they visit the USSR, perhaps this will effectively force the Communist Party to think twice and do something positive instead of continuing its current policy of blatant violation of basic human rights.

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