

letters

Boycott Helsinki meeting

Next 18-29 February an international meeting will take place in Hamburg—the "Scientific Forum" agreed upon in the Final Act of the Helsinki Accord of 1975. A preparatory meeting of experts was held in June 1978, where the aims of the Hamburg Forum were stated in the following words:

"The Scientific Forum will be held in conformity with the relevant provisions of the Final Act, in the form of a meeting of leading personalities in science from the participating states to broaden and improve co-operation and exchanges in the field of science and thus to continue the multilateral process initiated by the Conference on the Security and Cooperation in Europe."

What is this multilateral process?

The idea of the Helsinki Accord, as seen from the West, was to promote security and co-operation in Europe by formally recognizing the post-war borders in exchange for a formal Soviet pledge to observe basic human rights and to remove obstacles impeding the free flow of information and ideas. It is because of this supposed give and take that the Helsinki Accord was regarded universally not as just one more retreat by the West but, hopefully, as a way to make the Soviets behave in a more civilized, if not humane, manner.

However, the Soviet side, having signed the Accord and celebrated it as a great victory, safely ignored its part of the bargain. Moreover, the Soviet authorities sharply stepped up repression in connection with the Helsinki Accord itself. More than 20 members of the "Helsinki Watch" groups in the USSR were arrested and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. The leader of the Moscow Helsinki group, Yuri Orlov, 55, was sentenced to 12 years of deprivation of freedom, beginning with 7 years in strict-regimen prison camp. (On the Orlov trial see PHYSICS TODAY editorial, September 1978, page 104.)

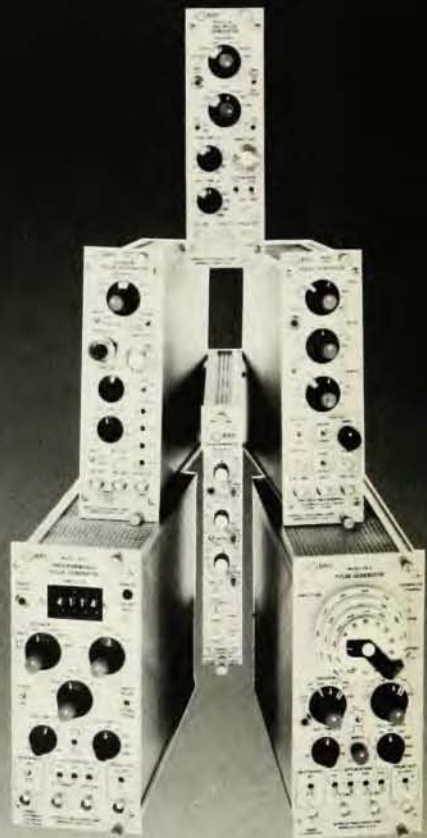
It is true that nobody in the USSR takes the regime's word at its face value. Orlov and his friends understood that they could be arrested. And still many believed that the arrests of Helsinki monitors would be impractical for the Kremlin, because of the implications for the important Helsinki Accord. To put

Helsinki monitors into prison would be such an obvious and defiant violation of the Helsinki Accord that it would endanger its very existence.

But the KGB strategists reasoned better. They reckoned that they would get away with it, and they did. Some Western officials protested, but the Soviets experienced no real trouble. The West never came close even to mentioning the possibility of rescinding the Helsinki Accord. The result: Instead of becoming the first working example of a direct formal link between human rights and political relations, the Helsinki Accord became just one more in the long row of examples that teach the difference between what politicians say and what they mean. It became an invitation to consider human rights a sort of dressing on international agreements, which is useful to produce a good impression at home and abroad, but should not be taken seriously. The Helsinki Accord downgraded the concept of human rights, instead of upgrading it.

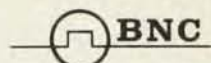
Such is the background of the Scientific Forum. While a minority of scientists are concerned about human rights in the world and try to induce the Soviet regime to release the imprisoned scientists, the representatives of the institutionalized majority (the American delegation, for example, is to be led by Philip Handler, President of the National Academy of Sciences) will go to Hamburg to continue the "multilateral process" that led physicist Yuri Orlov, computer scientist Anatoly Shcharansky, and other Helsinki monitors into Soviet prisons. With all the best intentions the Western scientists gathering in Hamburg may have, their main achievement will be the endorsement of the *status quo*. Because the Scientific Forum is a political event *par excellence*. It is not to coordinate scientific research between America, Belgium, France, and so on that the Forum will convene, nor even to coordinate research between the Western and Soviet-bloc countries. All those things could be done, if necessary, in technical meetings, without bearing any relation to the Helsinki Accord. Its goal is to approve "the multilateral process" as it is, and to tie to it some specific agreements and technical arrangements in the field of science. The

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letters

reputation of the prominent scientists who take part in the Forum will be given to this cause.

Human rights are not mentioned in the agenda of the Scientific Forum. But the agenda does provide a possibility to discuss obstacles to East-West cooperation. Suppose for a moment that some of the participants use it to raise the issue of human rights and, specifically, the imprisonment of Orlov and others. Unfortunately, there is no reason to be optimistic about the results. One can predict what will happen from the experience of other international scientific conferences. Those scientists who are prepared to take a strong action in protest over the imprisonment of a scientist, or official refusal to permit the journey of an invited scientist, and, so on, invariably find themselves in the minority, so that only a very mild resolution can be passed, if any. Of course, even a mild resolution is welcome and makes the overall human rights balance positive when it is an addition to a quintessentially non-political event: a scientific conference. But the Scientific Forum is essentially a political event. The more than probable failure of potential human-rights activists to secure an adequate response to the repressions in the USSR will only stress the overall victory of the Soviets. "Although a miserable handful of spiteful enemies of détente," Soviet papers will say, "tried to hamper the work of the Scientific Forum, the scientific community showed that it wholeheartedly supports the growth of East-West cooperation and the principle of non-intervention into the internal affairs proclaimed by the Final Act of the Helsinki Accord."

Yuri Orlov's health is rapidly deteriorating in the awful conditions of a Soviet prison camp (see *PHYSICS TODAY*, December, page 88). No better is the condition of Shcharansky, biologist S. Kovalev (arrested in 1974) and others. I urge that there should be no Scientific Forum so long as Orlov and the other Helsinki monitors are imprisoned. By taking part in the Forum, scientists would signal their acceptance, if not approval, of the way the Soviets comply with the Helsinki Final Act.

VALENTIN F. TURCHIN
Forest Hills, N.Y.

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Valentin F. Turchin is a former Soviet dissident, chairman of the Amnesty International group in Moscow. He emigrated to the USA in 1978 and is now a professor of computer science at the City College, the City University of New York.

COMMENT BY LEADER OF US DELEGATION: No one could sympathize more deeply than I do with the motives and concerns that Valentin Turchin so clearly

expresses. Indeed, the Academy has not been remiss in communicating those very concerns to appropriate officials of the Soviet Union. But he and I are led to opposite conclusions concerning the Scientific Forum.

To be sure, there is the risk that, regardless of what actually transpires at Hamburg, internal Soviet news media may hail the very fact of the Forum as vindication, indeed as approbation of Soviet policy. But those Soviet scientists present will surely know otherwise. The American delegation, if no other, will go to Hamburg determined to bring forcibly to the attention of the delegates from all of Eastern Europe those concerns that, understandably and rightly, trouble Turchin.

The boycott he advocates is equivalent to the boycott of *all* exchanges that has been advocated by others. I welcome the fact that some Americans are so moved and publicly so indicate. They arm those of us in position to communicate their concerns, face to face, to those scientists who represent the Soviet bloc in these arrangements. Only so can the force and legitimacy of our moral position be made clear—and reported back to those governments. The struggle for human rights, like the struggle for a stable peace, requires that we continue to discuss these difficult matters. If we stop talking, we will have given up.

Finally, it should be recognized that Turchin would introduce to the varied and complex Soviet-American agenda the single-issue tactic that has proved so destructive of our national political life. In the end, both at home and abroad, that tactic must be self-defeating.

PHILIP HANDLER
President
National Academy of Sciences

Dating with accelerators

The account of "Radioisotope Dating with Accelerators" by Richard A. Muller in February (page 23) contains a section called the "History of direct detection." That section treats the use of the cyclotron and tandem accelerator simply as two alternative methods of generating high-energy ions, thereby obscuring both the different physical principles involved and the different historical developments of the two approaches to radioisotope dating by direct detection. The confusion in the author's mind seems to have arisen because the large tandem accelerators and the cyclotrons used for the early C^{14} studies generate similar particle energies. In contrast to the cyclotron work, however, the tandem accelerator work^{1,2} has been followed rapidly by the design and funding of quite small tandem accelerators used basically as molecular disintegrators within almost conventional mass-spectrometer systems. The quite different motivation for the work on the

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