letters

Needed: help for oppressed scientists

A Soviet scientist is serving a five-year sentence in internal exile, stemming from his role as organizer and host of unofficial seminars designed to overcome the state-imposed ostracism of scientists wishing to emigrate. Another is in prison for writing a book. A third was sentenced to five years of Siberian exile for displaying a banner asking for permission to emigrate.

As he was walking home at noon, another applicant was jumped by three young men only 30 meters from a police station. He suffered a fractured skull, a concussion, and a broken nose. The police report that they have found no suspects. Several other applicants for exit visas have been demoted or fired from their jobs.

The function of a professional society such as The American Physical Society is to promote and facilitate the practice of the profession. The primary responsibility of any professional society is to see that competent practitioners can practice professionally. Otherwise the profession vanishes, and the society is superfluous.

We in APS recognize this obligation and have established a Committee on the International Freedom of Scientists, which has been very active. Unfortunately, the problem is so great in the world today that we need the participation of even more members in the society than we already have.

One activity of CIFS is to have Small Committees to correspond with individual oppressed physicists and try to help them. At present we have a list of 43 such individuals, and the list keeps growing. There are Small Committees for only 28 of these individuals. We need members of APS to form 15 more such committees.

Typical of the appeals from oppressed scientists are the following excerpts from a refusenik's letter, which was smuggled out of the Soviet Union. He says "... please regard this letter as an appeal for help." He then details a number of ways in which he and his family are being persecuted, and concludes "I hope that the scientific community of your country will not leave us alone in our adversity."

If any readers of PHYSICS TODAY are willing to help in this important work, please contact me at the Department of Chemistry, The Pennsylvania State University, 152 Davey Building, University Park, PA 16802. We need you to help maintain the integrity of worldwide physics. If not you, who? If not now, when?

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Ethnic oppression in USSR

I came upon, by chance, two letters by Vladislav Bevc (August 1982, page 15; February, page 99). I am not a physicist, I am a lawyer. Born in Moscow, I lived in the USSR for fifty-four years of my life. Most of Bevc's statements either contradict the factual circumstances he discusses, or are vague and require further elaboration.

First, Bevc claims that there is no evidence that treatment of refuseniks by Soviet authorities is based on ethnic animosity. I would suggest that Bevc put aside Pravda, whose articles on the subject surprisingly remind me of the style of his letter. I would suggest that he talk to ethnic German or Armenian emigrés from the USSR if he does not like Jews. He can also talk to Russians, not to those who are still frightened Soviet citizens, but to those who were able to leave the Soviet Union and have no hostages left there. Does Bevc know, for instance, of the directive not to promote those Soviet citizens associated by ethnic nationality with foreign states?—ethnic Germans and Jews, for example. Only a small portion of people of three ethnic nationalities have been able to enjoy the right to emigrate, although with much frustration. These are Germans, Jews and Armenians. These refuseniks are subjected not to double but to triple discrimination: (1) the discrimination suffered by all Soviet citizens under conditions of dictatorship; (2) the discrimination imposed as a punishment on those daring to claim their human right to leave the country; and (3) the

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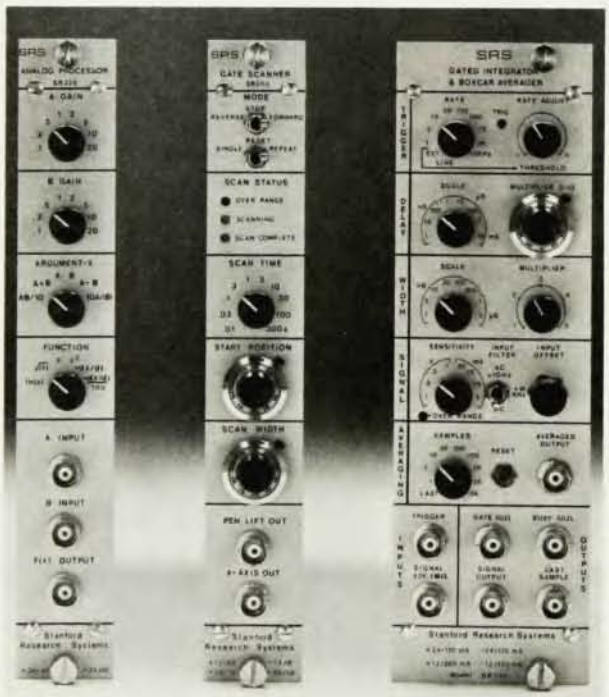

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discrimination and mockery reserved for those with ethnic identification. The ethnic animosity is instigated and provoked by the authorities as a means of supplementary pressure exerted on refuseniks, and as a way of deflecting the Soviet citizenry from criticizing the party-state apparatus (was this not what the Nazi rulers did, and did we not see the same arguments in their defense not so long ago?).

Second, Bevc's assertion that "every allegation of Soviet iniquity has a commensurate counterpart in the US" seems to me utter nonsense. I challenge him to try to refer the reader to any analogous article in the Soviet physics journals criticizing Soviet society to the extent Bevc criticized American society. Is Bevc jailed, exiled or dismissed after publication of his letters? Would he like sharing the fate of Brailovsky or Shcharansky?

Third, Bevc's explanation of how Soviet citizenship is renounced by the "own free will" of everyone applying for emigration seems a pure lie. The authorities approach it differently. There are some Russians in the West who live outside of the Soviet Union for decades and keep Soviet passports which they receive before leaving the USSR (I would not be surprised if Bevc is one of them). The others *are compelled* to sign special applications renouncing their citizenship. Unless they sign, their appliations for emigration are rejected without examination.

Fourth, his argument that allegations of Soviet antisemitism are not credible because many Jews, Trotsky, Kamenev and Litvinov for example, were "architects of the Soviet system" is a cheap trick. The discussion in PHYSICS TODAY concerns the problem as it exists today. Bevc chose to obscure it by references to events that happened sixty-six years ago. Trotsky, Kamenev and Litvinov paid for their involvement with their lives more than forty years ago. What does it prove or disprove?

Fifth, it is interesting that Bevc is at ease with the lack of freedoms in the USSR. He even found it proper to equate the situation in which Andrei Sakharov and his wife suffer exile, humiliation, assault and many other terrible things with the conflict in which Charles Schwartz was involved with the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory here in the US. One question to Bevc: Will Sakharov be able successfully to "sue before he gains access" (at least to his own apartment in Moscow) as Schwartz did? What a shameful position!

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Early computer history

This is a belated comment on a letter from John Brainerd in January (page 13). The correspondence concerns the early history of the ENIAC and EDVAC.

I suggest that a suitable reference on the subject is a pair of articles that appeared by Marshall Ledger in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*: "The Case of the ENIAC," in the October 1982 issue and "The ENIAC's Muddled History," in the November 1982 issue.

The second article quotes Nancy Stern in *From ENIAC to UNIVAC: An Appraisal of the Eckert-Mauchley Computers*, to wit: "It is necessary to keep in mind the unconscious or even conscious tendency of principal participants to reconstruct selectively the details of events in a manner that emphasizes their own contributions." It appears quite clear that both Ledger and Stern refer primarily to Brainerd in this matter.

This agrees with other observations. Mauchley has made no secret, either verbally or in writing, of his feelings that Brainerd was a principal impediment to the ENIAC. My father felt precisely the same way about Brainerd's contributions to both the ENIAC and the EDVAC. Brainerd has the advantage of having outlived them both, and so is relatively free to make statments without fear of contradiction by the other participants.

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Directed-energy weapons

At the 1981 APS Spring Meeting, we had a Symposium of the Forum on Physics and Society on directed-energy weapons that was filmed by the BBC for a documentary on the arms race. The first speaker, Douglas T. Tanimoto of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, showed a film of a propeller-driven dark red drone plane that was destroyed by an infrared laser that focused on it for a period of several seconds as it slowly circled at a relatively close distance. I asked Tanimoto if it was not cheating to use a close, slow-moving, dark red drone to simulate a large number of fast-moving, distant, polished metal targets, and he admitted that it was cheating "a little." The last speaker, Kosta Tsipis of MIT, presented conclusive evidence that the technology needed to develop effective ABM Directed Energy Weapons did not now, and probably never would exist!

At the 1982 Spring meeting, I attended the APS Council Meeting and learned that they intended to hold off on taking a stand on the nuclear freeze