

## Restoring US-Soviet communications in science

The alarming deterioration in US-Soviet diplomatic relations prompts us to call on the US physics community to join ranks and work together at restoring communications with our Soviet colleagues. For the past decade, US physicists have been split over how to respond to the Soviet government's unconscionable treatment of dissidents. Some physicists, while deploring the Soviet actions, have tried to maintain their contacts in the USSR; others have chosen to boycott all opportunities for contact with Soviet physicists. Four years ago, the National Academy of Sciences lent its weight to the latter approach when it cancelled all bilateral scientific meetings with the Soviet Academy of Science. Two years later, the US government, in reaction to the situation in Poland, did not renew the bilateral agreement on cooperation in science and technology.

It is still a matter for debate whether the boycotts by scientists have succeeded in their goal of ameliorating the Soviet government's policy towards dissidents. However, there can be no disagreement that the boycotts together with the hard-line positions of both governments have choked off scientific communications between physicists in the two countries to an historically low level. In January (page 9) Timothy Toohig reported that the last joint high-energy physics program using a Soviet accelerator has come to an end. Whether because of personal choice or lack of opportunity, many prominent US physicists, who previously were frequent visitors to the USSR, have not been there for several years. Certainly, as a result, physics has suffered on both sides of the world.

Now is the time to give priority to revitalizing our channels of communication with Soviet physicists in the interests both of scientific progress and of maintaining contact with the more reasonable elements of Soviet society. Given the current deeply troubled Soviet-American relationship, the US physics community can no longer have a realistic hope of exerting any influence on the Soviet government. In 1980 Herman Feshbach wrote on this page (in arguing against boycotts) that their effect would be a minor

perturbation to the actions of the two governments. No one can doubt that this is the situation today.

The first Soviet physicists to visit the postwar US attended the 1956 Rochester Conference at the invitation of Robert Marshak. During the 1960s Marshak headed the National Academy exchange program with Eastern Europe but later, with the advent of the dissident problem, was himself deeply conflicted about maintaining communications. As this page went to press, Marshak gave us the following comment:

During the 1970s I shared the view of other scientists that boycotting meetings in the Soviet Union would help to moderate its harsh treatment of dissidents and refuseniks, and, in some instances, it paid off. However, in the present dangerous political climate, boycotts will be ineffectual and will deepen suspicion and recrimination. I believe that American scientists can now make a positive contribution to the reduction of tension and to human rights by seeking vigorous dialog with Soviet colleagues at all levels.

We urge physicists to follow Marshak's lead and work at finding ways to enhance communications as individuals through correspondence and visits or by encouraging institutions to revive formal exchanges. The road may not be easy, as Norman Zabusky can attest (he was recently expelled from the USSR for agreeing to lecture at a "Saturday Evening Seminar"; see January, page 75). The policies of both governments (such as the US regulations on information export) will present obstacles. But both Toohig and Zabusky agree that Soviet physicists as individuals are warmly receptive to renewed contacts. Physicists in the East and West who succeed in this endeavor will have performed a service to both their discipline and their country.

*Harold L. Davis*