

Stix urges physicists to express concerns to Soviet counterparts

Thomas Stix, the new chairman of the Committee on the International Freedom of Scientists, appears almost uniquely well placed to act on his leading concern, the Soviet Union's poor record on human rights. Except for the three years he spent doing military service in World War II, Stix has worked his entire adult life as a plasma physicist, and since the late 1950s he has been acquainted with leading Soviet physicists in the field, including Evgeny P. Velikhov, Vice-President for Physics and Mathematics of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and Roald Z. Sagdeev, director of the Institute for Space Research of the Soviet Academy. Taking note of Velikhov's apparent access to the Soviet Union's top political leadership, Stix observes that it is "rather mind-boggling to be able to send a personal message to somebody who can touch the Soviet leader."

Stix feels it is imperative for American physicists to do everything in their power to convey to Russians how strongly US citizens feel about human rights. He says Velikhov once told Melvin Gottlieb of the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory that there is no public pressure in the USSR on human rights. Stix believes that people such as Velikhov need to be told at every opportunity that without substantial Soviet progress on human rights issues, the prospects for meaningful arms control will remain bleak.

As Stix sees it, Soviet violations of human rights provide the United States with "a moral basis for the arms race." His message to Soviet counterparts, accordingly, is that it would be a good idea for the Soviet government to do something dramatic to improve its human rights record, not as "a favor to us but as a necessity for them."

When Stix talks about human rights, he uses the term in a broad sense. He refers, among other things, to the Soviet Union's "oppression of Czechoslovakia, Afghani-



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stan, their invasion of Hungary, what they did to Solidarity. . . ." He does not, however, favor cutting contacts and exchanges as a means of exerting pressure on human rights. "Because of the nuclear danger," Stix says, "we have to use every means at our disposal to communicate with the Soviets."

Stix is aware that many Russians, including the dissident brothers Roy and Zhores Medvedev, argue that an inadequately controlled military-industrial complex in the United States is a prime cause of the arms race. What would Stix say if the Soviets were to complain that the profitability of American defense contracting gives them, the Russians, a moral basis for the arms race? They are "very sensitive to external threats, going back to the Mongols," Stix replies, "and then there's Hitler. They're paranoid about our weapons. But we're strongly concerned about their weapons, and we're paranoid about their totalitarian

regime and their suppression of individual freedom."

Stix has little patience with those who argue that intervention in the cause of human rights only makes adversaries angry and situations worse. But he appreciates that it is necessary to treat testimony about human rights abuses with some skepticism. In the case of Turkish physicists who have complained of their treatment at the hands of the current military regime, Stix was warned by a prominent Middle East expert at Princeton to proceed with care. The expert reminded Stix that Turkey's universities were a "literal battleground" before the military took over, that "automatic weapons fire was heard in the hall."

On the Cooperman case, Stix is inclined to agree with the general position adopted by his predecessor, Gerjuoy, but with one reservation. Stix considers the security of foreigners teaching or studying at US universities to be a legitimate concern for his committee. Individual Taiwanese, Vietnamese, Iranians and Libyans, among others, are believed to have been threatened or pressured by government security forces or terrorist groups in the United States.

Stix hedges on the question of whether CIFS would take action if asked to do so on Cooperman. He cites the committee's reluctance to get involved in situations "where we don't have solid evidence that human rights violations have occurred." In this case, he says, "the perpetrator is being punished, the physicist is dead, and allegations about a human rights violation concern the possibility of an assassination. We see this as substantially different from a situation in which a physicist clearly is being oppressed and and it is his own government that is oppressing him." While we "may think that the process of justice did not go far enough in this case," Stix says, "we have to ask what increment of influence CIFS can bring to bear." —WS

that the FBI knew a lot about Cooperman and his activities but was not of help in developing leads on the assassination theory. Apparently the FBI regarded the case as local, despite allegations that Vietnamese gangs in other states such as Hawaii might have been involved.

Immediately after Cooperman's death, Dresselhaus wrote to the president of California State University expressing distress over the death of Cooperman, whom she described as a "distinguished physicist and a highly regarded member of the American Physical Society." She offered the Society's "support and encouragement to you and your colleagues in your efforts to clarify the important aspects of this tragedy" and asked the president of California State to "let me know if we can assist you in any way."

Two days before Dresselhaus offered this help, a request from two APS

members for intervention in the Cooperman case was forwarded to Edward Gerjuoy, a University of Pittsburgh physicist who at that time was chairman of CIFS. The request was for CIFS to write a letter to the district attorney of Orange County, expressing the committee's strong interest in seeing that the case was thoroughly investigated. Gerjuoy turned it down on the ground that a letter could be interpreted as an attempt to interfere with an ongoing investigation, but he left open the possibility of intervening after the trial, if there were evidence that the investigation had been inadequate.

After the second trial ended, Cooperman's widow, Klaaske Cooperman, filed a civil suit against the Vietnamese refugee who killed her husband. Overseas, there are people who regard the Cooperman killing as comparable to other cases handled by CIFS. M. Laurent Schwartz, an eminent mathemati-

cian at France's Ecole Polytechnique, wrote a lengthy newspaper article about the "assassination" of Cooperman, which appeared in *Le Monde* on 22 February. Henri Van Regemorter, director of research at France's CNRS, wrote to Dresselhaus last November urging her to "ask all concerned authorities, in particular the House Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights, to conduct a complete and thorough investigation."

Before Cooperman's death, the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations launched an inquiry on Cooperman, and the Subcommittee currently has many of the documents from the physicist's office in its possession. The Subcommittee is interested primarily in whether Cooperman somehow managed to circumvent export regulations, and only secondarily in the suspicious circumstances of his death. —WS□