CORRESPONDENCE

A letter to Soviet scientists

The following document reached *Nature* on 21 May 1981, the 61st birthday of Academician Andrei Sakharov.

I have learned from foreign broadcasts that the "Scientists for Sakharov, Orlov and Shcharanskii" (SOS) Committee in the United States has issued an appeal to Soviet scientists to come to the defence of the family of Sergei Kovalev — that is, Sergei himself, his daughter-in-law Tat'yana Osipova, and his son Ivan. I feel sure that many of you also heard this appeal. I beg you to treat it with all seriousness and to undertake those actions to which each of you feels prompted by his feeling of responsibility as a citizen and by his conscience, both in this particular case, and in others where your intervention would be of special importance.

For many years now, I have observed an almost total lack of action on the part of my Soviet scientific colleagues in matters relating to the defence of human rights. It is shameful that foreign scientists (and deepest thanks to them!) show a greater concern for our affairs than we do ourselves. In this letter, I am speaking first and foremost to those scientists occupying a fairly high and independent position — more specifically to Members and Corresponding Members of the Academies. I know that some of you have negative or sceptical feelings regarding my statements on general questions. But this is not a general question (on these, I have always expressed my views in the form of a discussion, and have never thrust my opinions on to anyone). This is a matter of the fate of real people, including the fate of your colleague in science. Every one of you who has shown even the least interest will form his or her own independent opinions on these cases, of the total degree of injustice and the harshness of repression.

You cannot consider that these cases do not touch you; the historical experience of our country, professional solidarity, simple human sympathy for the fate of others, and often personal contact with the victims of repression (many of you were personally acquainted with Orlov, Kovalev and others), make such an attitude impossible. You must not invoke the interests of your job, the need to keep your professional post in the interests of science. In fact, most of you are in a fairly secure position. And the interests of science must include the defence of members of the scientific community from injustice; they include the responsibility of the citizen. This is not the Stalin era; practically speaking none of you *now* are under any kind of threat. But can you rule out completely a return to a new era of mass repression? For if this should come to pass, your lack of action *now* will be one of the causes. And conversely, could not the activity as citizens and the independence of even a few of the country's top scientists have a profound and beneficial effect on the whole situation?

And which of you can lay his hand on his heart and proclaim that this is not a vital necessity? It is precisely this which more than anything would promote international scientific relations, and, on a far far wider scale, trust and peace throughout the world.

Such is the measure of the individual personal responsibility of every one of you.

In conclusion, I should like to cite several examples of scientists and scholars who are victims of repression — prisoners of conscience. For each of these cases there is information which is accessible to you.

(1) The case of Kovalev and his family, with which I began this letter. Kovalev has served a term of seven years imprisonment under the harshest conditions, and he is now in exile, under shocking conditions in the Magadan region. Tanya Osipova and Ivan Kovalev are in prison, and it is necessary to obtain for them, at the very least, the opportunity of meeting. After the arrest of his wife, and before his own arrest, Ivan had only one 30-minute meeting with her in 15 months. (2) The case of Yuri Orlov. His fate, and the cruel torments he is suffering are widely known.

(3) The case of Anatolii Shcharanskii — also very well known.

(4) The case of the mathematician and cyberneticist, Dr Aleksandr Bolonkin. After imprisonment and exile which robbed him of nine years of his life, beatings-up, confinement in the punishment cells and provocations, he is back in prison again on a trumped-up criminal charge.

(5) The case of the philologist and poet, Vasyl Stus'. After many years in prison and exile, he was condemned to a further 15 years labour-camp and exile, simply for supporting the Ukrainian Helsinki Watch Group.

(6) The case of Anatoliy Marchenko. He is not a scholar; he is a worker and writer, the author of some remarkable books on present-day labour camps and prisons. But he has been sentenced again — his fifth sentence — to the monstrous term of 15 years imprisonment and five years exile; the central point of the charge being his open and noble-hearted letter on the "Sakharov case" to academician P. L. Kapitsa, who is one of those to whom I address this letter.

(7) The cases of Aleksandr Lavut and Tat'yana Velikanova (mathematicians), Mart Niklus (ornithologist), Leonard Ternovskii (radiologist), Viktor Nekipelov (a pharmacist and talented poet), Pyatkus (philologist), Meilanov (mathematician), Luk'yanenko (jurist), Airikyan, Altunyan and many others. None of them has had recourse to violence nor would do so. All of them have suffered cruelly for loyalty to their noble convictions, the principles of free expression and justice. Help them — this is our common duty.

Andrei Sakharov, Gor'kii, 30 March 1982.

POSTSCRIPT — In defence of Ivan Kovalev.

Ivan Kovalev has been sentenced. This is yet another blow to the champions of human rights in the Soviet Union, to free expression, and to the Helsinki Watch Group; a blow against the principles expressed in the Helsinki Final Act. And this is a new act of inconceivable cruelty towards the famous Kovalev family, the third of its victims. In December 1974, Sergei Kovalev, Ivan's father, was arrested. In May, 1980, Tat'yana Osipova, Ivan's wife was arrested. Both of them, like Ivan Kovalev himself, have received

cruel sentences for their nonviolent defence of human rights, for their fidelity to noble convictions. In a letter which he wrote shortly before his arrest, Ivan Kovalev wrote about himself and his situation. And in his article "My Tanya", he told us about his wife, her fate and her struggle. There is little one can add to those documents — and having known Ivan for many years I am convinced of the justice of his case.

I call upon everyone who believes in justice, who can feel for the tragedy of this young family, to speak out in defence of Ivan Kovalev, his wife and, of course, his father. The possibility of a meeting between Tat'yana and Ivan must be obtained — this is their inalienable human right. And it is very important too to obtain their freedom, and the freedom of all prisoners of conscience.

Andrei Sakharov, Gor'kii, 2 April 1982.

ESA clarification

SIR — May I refer to your article "Antarctic research hit by crisis" published in *Nature* of 15 April (p.593) and in particular to the part of the article:

"Although Argentina's own research efforts have been extremely limited, it is at present collaborating with the French in glaciological work, and plans exist to site a ground station for the first European Space Agency remote sensing satellite to be put into polar orbit, at the Argentinian base of Marambio".

There is no Argentinian connection with the European Space Agency/ERS-1 programme. There will certainly be some ERS-1 overseas ground-stations outside Europe, but no negotiations have been made with Argentina or indeed with any other South American state. If such plans were ever envisaged, they would require approval of ESA Council.

You will appreciate ESA's desire to have this point clarified.

W. BRADO
(Head of ESA Director
General's Cabinet)

ESA, Paris, France

Editor in false garb

SIR — If both of your bizarre and intemperate recent leading articles ("Doves in false garb", 18 February, p.542; and "Professional propaganda", 1 April, p.380) had been published on 1 April, one might more easily have understood them. They are so full of rancid sarcasm, repetition to the point of perseveration, wild claims devoid of any supportive evidence, multiple errors in basic logic, frank contradictions and odd grammar, that they imply a writer almost incoherent with anger. They are also probably the most disgraceful abuses of editorial privilege I have ever seen in print.

You have used, however ineffectually, the anonymity of the editorial and the prestige of a hitherto distinguished scientific journal, to lend spurious respectability and authority to your personal and highly idiosyncratic views. You have jeered at a very large number of sincere, ethical, distinguished and honourable professionals throughout the world, impugning their honesty, without raising a

single justified or logical argument. You misrepresent the views and claims of those you disagree with, so as to more easily oppose them.

You criticize the professions (with biased inaccuracy) for ignoring public issues, and belittle them when they speak out on them. You graciously grant us the responsibility to contribute our special knowledge to the solution of such problems, but criticize us for failing to exceed the limits of such special knowledge. You insist that it's laudable for us to express ourselves singly, but dreadful to do so collectively. You sneer at the "catchy acronymic titles" of the groups concerned, though few of them are catchy, and none are acronyms. You complain that the groups "claim professional support" in a deceitful way. While the degree of professional support they have is significant and growing, their titles very specifically and accurately state their membership as limited to those members of each respective profession who are opposed to nuclear arms or war: how much more accurately could they describe themselves?

Take your own advice, Mr Editor. Put aside your pique about the professions you don't belong to; put aside your anonymity and the authority that belongs to *Nature* and not to you — take your courage in your hands as you exhort us to do (and as we have done) and join us on the hustings. If you can express your views coherently and support them with data, we will listen with interest and respect.

Amongst your hectic hubris, you graciously concede that "it would . . . be shocking if physicians were silent about the probable consequences of smoking". May we not also warn about the dangers of being smoked?

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Ab what?

SIR — In the preamble to the first editorial in the edition of *Nature* dated 22 April (p.693), the word "abreact" is used. So far as I can discover the word is a term from psychoanalysis referring to the liberation of the individual from neurosis by the expression of repressed emotion. Is this what the leader article intends?

I feel it would be a pity if *Nature* were to start falling into the trap of employing jargon terms made meaningless by fashionable use.

It might cause some adverse reaction among the readers.

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Data protection

SIR — I read with great interest the article "Big Brother's law" (*Nature* 1 April, p.694) about personal data protection. I would like to add a few comments.

In the summer of 1981, the European Commission addressed a formal recommendation to European Community member states to sign and ratify the convention of the Council of Europe by the end of 1982. Up to now, only five member states have signed it.

In this recommendation, the Commission

stated that it would draft a Community directive if the member states failed to sign the convention.

The socialist group in the European parliament has long pressed for a European Community directive. Indeed, in March 1982 the European parliament adopted a report of its legal committee (the report was given by Herr Sieglerschmidt, SPD) asking among other things for a Community directive for personal data control.

We believe, however, that the most important point is the control of the transnational data transfer of private companies, although you are right in the statement that the transfer of information between governmental departments is very important.

Finally, I would like to say how important it is to lobby the British members of the European parliament. The international companies are very familiar with effective lobbying of MEPs. The electorate should do the same, but in the interest of maximum protection of data on individuals.

FRITZ GAUTIER, MEP

Braunschweig, FRG

Patent sense

SIR — The report in *Nature* of 29 April (p.792) of the 21 April Colloquium at the Association of the Bar of the City of New York is inaccurate in stating that a European visitor may, under European laws, derive an invention from a seminar or talk in America and appropriately apply for a patent in Europe.

European and other patent laws do not permit patents to those who derive. Typically, they require that the subject of a patent be the original work of the applicant or its predecessor in interest.

The issue of whether or not an invention is original work is different from the issue of whether or not the inventor's (original) work preceded the work of another.

DAVID W. PLANT

Fish & Neave,
New York, USA

Ageing controversy

SIR — I am writing to vehemently protest about the recent *News and Views* article from your ageing correspondent in the 1 April issue of *Nature* (296, 392-393; 1982). The work of Dr Obispo and his colleagues on "longevin", the lifespan-extending protein from carp gut is described in excruciating detail, but no mention at all is made of Dr A. Huxley's pioneering work.

It was in the obscurity of his Oxford college rooms that the re-discovery of the rejuvenating effect of raw fish viscera was made (*Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B* 240, 153-215, 1969). Furthermore, he has gone a long way in the characterization of the same protein. I am truly surprised that this work of a British scientist (who in addition comes from a very distinguished family indeed) should be overlooked in the pages of *Nature*. I think the reason for this is not only that the Obispo and Maunciple group has essentially unlimited funding from the Stoyte Foundation for Aging Research, but also that nowadays anything having to do with gene cloning receives

immediate attention, while people like your correspondent tend to overlook standard protein chemistry work. It is sad that Dr Huxley's work has been ignored for so many years, but it is even more sad that the California group should be allowed to patent the longevin B-chain clone. The extension of human lifespan is of utmost ethical importance and should not be treated lightly; least of all in a patent office.

AN AGEING PROFESSOR

Basle, Switzerland

SIR — I read the *News and Views* article on longevin (*Nature* 296, 392-393; 1982) with keen interest but think, if I may say so, that this may prove to be the swan song of geriatric biochemistry.

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SIR — Huxley in his seminal work *After Many a Summer* (Chatto and Windus, 1937) was the first to draw wider attention to the research of Obispo. It is regrettable that your correspondent's otherwise excellent report on anti-senescence factors (*Nature* 296, 392-393; 1982) did not refer to Obispo's pioneering studies, even though these were conducted on whole carp *flambé* (*J. Carp Sci.* 1, 69; 1936). Hauberk's results on raw carp viscera were not rediscovered until the regular visits of a member of the present shadow cabinet to Tashkent led to the realization that the famous mad ape in the local zoo was none other than the now fully evolved Lenin. Obispo himself, his procreative and creative powers equally unimpaired, will reach the age of 100 in 1984, by which time, we can be confident, gerontology will have experienced a timely death.

RICHARD GLENDALE

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Nuclear options

SIR — David Fishlock should keep his journalistic innuendos (*Nature* 22 April, p.700) for *Financial Times*. He implies that my letter in *Nature* of 18 March (p.192) on "Electricity costs" is equivalent to flat-Earth theory, ostensibly because it cites a paper of mine¹ as "in the press". He calls this "unpublished", but in fact Energy Policy No. 2, containing the paper, was published on 5 May, and the *Financial Times* was sent a copy of the page proofs before publication. In any case the scientific editor of the *Financial Times* was surely not unaware of the report of Sir Kelvin Spencer's committee², which was given wide publicity after a press conference in the House of Commons on 2 February, and which quoted or paraphrased the main results of the "unpublished" paper.

I can only assume that any conclusion which does not wholeheartedly support the nuclear case is necessarily flat-Earth theory to David Fishlock, and need not be looked at any further.

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1. *The Real Cost of Nuclear Electricity in the U.K.*, Energy Policy, Vol. 10, No. 2, 76-100 (1982).
2. *Nuclear Energy: The Real Costs: A Special Report by the Committee for the Study of the Economics of Nuclear Electricity*. (Worthyvale Manor, Camelford, Cornwall).