

OLD WORLD

Dr Zhores Medvedev Replies to Professor John Ziman

DEAR PROFESSOR ZIMAN,

I have read your "Second Letter to an Imaginary Soviet Scientist" with great interest (*Nature*, 243, 489; 1973). I doubt whether you have received many replies from the USSR. As you probably remember, your first letter (*Nature*, 217, 123; 1968) did not induce many replies either. My own reply sent to you in April 1968 started our correspondence and friendship, and I explained to you then that in the photocopied version of *Nature* which was available in the USSR your letter was not reproduced at all so that only a few scientists in the USSR have known of your appeal. I can add now that even though the USSR has signed the Universal Copyright Convention, which does not permit the distribution of photocopies of *Nature*, your second letter has also only been seen by few people in the USSR because this page was simply cut out from the copies of *Nature* in Soviet libraries.

As you know I was officially invited to Britain in January, but a few weeks ago the Soviet authorities unexpectedly deprived me of my citizenship, a decision made partly on the basis that according to them the invitation was private. But I assure you that I had thought of answering your letter before this unhappy development—at a time when I was legally one of those to whom you addressed your letter.

In your second letter you asked us to say whether the boycott of conferences and symposia in the USSR would help those Soviet scientists whose human rights are being violated. You are right to say that there is no simple answer and that, in general, the boycott of scientific meetings is not a good way to help those who are in trouble. I am sure that the isolation of the Soviet scientific community does not help Soviet scientists. During recent years, in spite of many troubles at home, I was usually very glad to meet foreign colleagues in the USSR. These meetings gave me great moral support and they had a significant influence on my research work. But when you arrive in the USSR there are several approaches you can take. You can, for example, ignore the official ceremony and have private meetings with friends or colleagues whom you like and want to support. But, of course, if you find that such friendly contacts with individuals are impossible because of interference from bureaucrats or the police, then you certainly have to make a protest or return home.

But the situation which faces foreign scientists could be more complex than that. I give you one such example.

The World Psychiatric Association will hold an international symposium on "Aspects of Schizophrenia" in the USSR next October. The Soviet hosts have selected two very attractive Caucasus cities. Two days of meetings will take place in Yerevan and two others in Tbilisi. The ministers of health of both republics, Armenia and Georgia, will give opening addresses. Armenians and Georgians are very nice and traditionally open and hospitable people. I am sure that British, French and other foreign participants at this symposium will have a very good time.

But there are other problems which cannot be ignored. Among the speakers are A. V. Snezhnevsky, G. Morosov and R. A. Nadzharov who were responsible for many decisions which sent some political "dissidents" into psychiatric prison-hospitals. Two scientists, Dr Leonid Plyshch and Yury Shikhanovitch, have been their most recent victims. You probably remember that the same three psychiatrists examined me in 1970 and the methods of their "work" have been described in the book *Question of Madness* written by my brother and I. There have been several other protests about abuses of psychiatry in the USSR and the forthcoming symposium with

these three "heroes" of many well-known psychiatric-political cases present is a unique chance for western scientists to investigate these accusations at first hand.

I do not suggest that western scientists try and obtain first hand knowledge of some political "patients", for they will not be allowed to do so. I am sure that A. Snezhnevsky and G. Morosov will always be able to produce for foreign observation some clear mental syndromes even in local Caucasus clinics. But there is a more general aspect of the problem which honest scientists cannot ignore.

On August 8, 1973, Professor R. Nadzharov distributed through Tass a statement which said that suggestions about the use of psychiatry to punish "different-minded people . . . are a part of an anti-Soviet propaganda campaign launched by hired professional anti-Sovietists". Professor Nadzharov explained that ". . . the Soviet laws in this field are in principle similar to the laws operating in most other countries and that the Soviet laws specifically provide legal punishment for the persons guilty of unjustified placing of the patient in a mental hospital". Nadzharov noted that all slanders about abuses of psychiatry in the USSR had been rejected by the World Association of Psychiatry. That the world association has in the past

Conference On Aspects of Schizophrenia

ACCORDING to the preliminary announcement of the International Conference on Aspects of Schizophrenia to be held in Yerevan and Tbilisi in the Soviet Union from October 8 to October 12, 1973 the following are to be present:

H. P. Rome (USA), A. V. Snezhnevsky (USSR), S. Follin (France), A. Megrabyan (USSR), H. Rennert (East Germany), G. Morosov (USSR), J. J. López Ibor (Spain), R. A. Nadzharov (USSR), L. Eisenberg (USA), C. Koupernik (France), M. Vrono (USSR), V. Bashina (USSR), R. de la Fuente (Mexico), E. Strömberg (Denmark), J. K. Wing (Britain), H. Collomb (Senegal), Z. Serebryakova (USSR), G. Hunter (FRG), Z. Zharikov (USSR), K. Heinrich (West Germany), R. F. Prien (USA), M. H.

Lader (Britain), P. C. Baastrup (Denmark), A. Smulevitch (USSR), R. Gardner (Britain), Yu. Saarma (USSR), W. Linford Rees (Britain), A. Zurabashvili (USSR), A. J. Coppen (Britain), I. Yamashita (Japan), A. J. Mandell (USA), J. M. Davis (USA), A. Freedman (USA), C. E. Frohman (USA), R. Lideman (USSR), D. Lozovsky (USSR), B. Grbeša (Yugoslavia), S. Semyonov (USSR), G. Kolyaskina (USSR), K. Seidel (East Germany), T. Asuni (Nigeria), L. Erlenmeyer-Kimling (USA), E. Inouye (Japan), V. Gindilis (USSR), J. Nielsen (Denmark), A. Falek (USA), D. Leigh (Britain), J. Angst (Switzerland), G. Winokur (USA), I. Shakhmatova (USSR), T. Imura (Japan), F. Kontridze (USSR), M. Mestiashevili (USSR) and S. Zulidze (USSR).