

correspondence

Soviet dissenters in need of help

SIR,—The case of Vladimir Bukovsky (February 6) highlights a disturbing aspect involving my own profession. Bukovsky was released from a labour camp in 1970 after several spells of 'treatment' for his dissenting views. He spent the next 14 months of liberty collecting evidence of psychiatric abuses for the suppression of political dissent in the Soviet Union at great risk to himself. His only hope of protection lay in the forthcoming Congress of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) in Mexico City in 1971. It was to psychiatrists in the West, and to the psychiatrists attending this congress in particular, that Bukovsky sent his covering letter in the form of an appeal when he sent the documents out to the West. Their authenticity has never been questioned. The Executive Committee of the World Psychiatric Association declined, however, to allow discussion of this problem despite the efforts of some psychiatrists. This shameful act of betrayal produced a savage reprisal in the form of a 12-year prison sentence and the terrible conditions under which Bukovsky has to exist. It is not a story that a psychiatrist can tell with pride.

We now have information that the Soviet authorities were extremely apprehensive about the Mexican Congress. At the time Mr Victor Fainberg, a dissenter, was in a Leningrad psychiatric prison hospital, from where he has now succeeded in emigrating to Israel. He tells me that he and his friend Borisov made certain demands for improving the conditions of the inmates of the hospital and for a re-examination of their own cases by the Court. Prior to the Mexico Congress conditions improved and the Soviet authorities agreed to have the cases re-examined. As soon as the decision of the Executive Committee of the World Psychiatric Association became known, conditions became worse than they had ever been and their request for re-examination by the Courts was dismissed with a contemptuous laugh. It can be assumed that in other special hospitals the same thing occurred. The failure of the WPA to rally to the defence of Bukovsky and the other 'lunatic' dissenters was an act of opportunism and devoid of all compassion.

I am writing to urge psychiatrists to do all they can to right a terrible wrong



Bukovsky: appealed to psychiatrists

that has been committed and to put all possible pressure, both individually and through their associations, on their Soviet colleagues and Soviet authorities to secure the release of a brave and generous man.

To move to the case of another dissident whose case has been mentioned in *Nature* recently, I can report that I have been asked by Mrs Plyushch to act as psychiatrist in an investigation into her husband's psychiatric state. This is in connection with legal action which she intends to bring against the Dnepropetrovsk special hospital for unlawful detention and criminal negligence in his treatment at that hospital.

Leonid Plyushch was sentenced to detention in a special hospital after examination by three psychiatric commissions, one of which pronounced him sane. The final one, presided over by Professor Snezhnevsky considered him as suffering from schizophrenia and stated that he had 'delusions of inventions', a reference presumably to Plyushch's interest in games theories, which he shares with his wife.

The case was heard *in camera* at Kiev and a large number of infringements of Soviet law appear to have been committed. Thus, defence counsel was not granted time for a proper interview and was told by the Judge to base his defence on evidence contained in the prosecutor's files.

A collection of Plyushch's letters has been published in Russian by the Herzen Press in Amsterdam. The first letter was written just after his arrest and the others after his incarceration in the Dnepropetrovsk special hospital, one of the most feared in the Soviet

Union. The letters show a lively, highly intelligent and understanding man for whom the experiences in the hospital were shattering. They show no indication whatsoever of mental illness.

According to information received only last week the 'treatment' received by Plyushch has reduced him to a state of complete nervous collapse so that proper psychiatric treatment under proper humane conditions might really be indicated at the present time.

I am prepared at any time to act as a psychiatrist representing the Plyushch family and would examine Mr Plyushch either at Dnepropetrovsk special hospital, or preferably for all concerned, in a hospital in the UK. Should Mrs Plyushch's application for emigration to the West for her husband, herself and two children be granted, I would be prepared to participate in any therapeutic measures that might be considered necessary to restore him to his previous good health.

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Hungarian visas

Sir,—On behalf of the Presidency of the Hungarian Biochemical Society and also in the name of those who made considerable efforts to ensure the successful organisation of the ninth FEBS Meeting in Budapest in 1974, allow me to express my profound disapproval of the letter entitled "Entry forbidden" (December 13, 1974) that was written and sent to me as a New Year's present by Ms Peller.

I firmly believe that you are well aware of the fact that the Ninth FEBS Meeting was a success, and it served well not only the exchange of scientific information, but also international scientific cooperation and collaboration. May I quote a part from the letter of Professor H. R. V. Arnstein, Secretary-General of FEBS, addressed to Academician T. Erdey-Gruz, President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences? "The organisation and scientific standard of the Budapest Meeting were excellent and I have heard many favourable comments. I am sure that the meeting will long be remembered with pleasure by all the biochemists who were fortunate enough to take part and it will have contributed significantly to scientific cooperation in Europe both now and in the future". Similar appre-