

SCIENCE NEWS OF THE WEEK

Moscow Science Seminars Meet in America . . .

Since 1972, many "refusenik" scientists — Soviet Jews denied jobs or the permission to emigrate (SN: 1/7/78, p. 7) — have counted on informal Sunday seminars to keep abreast of recent developments in science. The most famous, an ongoing weekly series, was held in Moscow. No longer. The Moscow meetings ended abruptly last month following the arrest of their host, Victor Brailovsky. But in a show of solidarity, sympathetic scientists have resumed the Moscow seminars. There's been a change of venue, however; starting with last Sunday's gathering, they're now held in the United States.

For the past two and a half years, Brailovsky and his wife, Irina — both mathematicians specializing in computer science — have hosted Moscow's Sunday seminars in their Vernadsky Prospekt apartment. But on Nov. 13, Brailovsky was arrested for "defamation of the Soviet state and public order." While his wife held the next meeting as scheduled, Soviet security police have turned away would-be participants for the past two weeks.

Police claim the Nov. 30 meeting was canceled so that the Brailovskys' apartment building could be disinfected. ("Bedbugs" was an explanation offered by one officer, according to an account in *The New York Times*.) But that's just not so, Irina Brailovsky charges, claiming that instead the police are illegally prohibiting lawful private gatherings.

This is not the first time the Brailovskys have encountered trouble by the police over the Sunday seminars. In 1974, Victor Brailovsky was jailed for 15 days after attempting to convene an international session of the seminar. He was interrogated for 12 hours at Lefortovo Prison in May 1977 in connection with the celebrated case by the Soviet government against Sunday seminar press attache Anatoly Shcharansky. And on Dec. 21, 1978, the KGB conducted an eight-hour search of the Brailovsky home. Before the secret police left, scientific papers related to the Sunday seminars were confiscated.

The main impetus behind launching a North American spinoff of the Moscow Sunday seminars was to boost morale among Muscovites closed out of the weekly science talks. "And the response that we got from Moscow is that [scientists there] very much welcome these [U.S.] meetings," Max Gottesman told *SCIENCE NEWS*. Gottesman, a cochairman of the Committee of Concerned Scientists (CCS), was present at the first U.S. seminar held Nov. 30 in the Washington, D.C., home of National Cancer Institute biologist Maxine Singer. In addition to Singer's technical talk on simian virus 40, seminar attendees discussed implications of Brailovsky's ar-

rest among themselves and by phone with Aleksandr Voronel — founder of the Moscow seminars — in Tel Aviv.

According to Robert S. Adelstein, another of those present at the Washington meeting, Voronel expressed more concern about Brailovsky's arrest as a threat to scientific freedom than as a violation of human rights. And that, Adelstein says, brings up another major value of the U.S. seminars: dissemination of scientific

research. Minutes from each meeting will be mailed to Moscow contacts for dissemination among ostracized colleagues. U.S. meetings may also serve as a platform for carrying home to visiting Russian scholars recognition that the plight of refuseniks remains of concern here, Adelstein added. The next U.S. seminar is scheduled for Dec. 20 at Cornell University. Later ones will be held elsewhere; CCS is handling the schedule. □

and Sakharov writes to Israel

One of the purposes of internal exile or forced residence — a tactic so often employed as a punishment by totalitarian regimes — is to make it difficult for the exile to maintain contact with former associates and to stay involved in former activities. (With Calvinistic thoroughness the Afrikaners of South Africa make this point explicit by forbidding the victim to receive visitors or to attend any meetings whatever.) Thus, friends of Andrei D. Sakharov, the famous Russian physicist, have feared that he would be unable to keep up with the international community of theoretical physics, restricted as he is to the limits of Gorky, a "closed" city, one that foreigners are not allowed to visit.

Sakharov was forcibly moved to Gorky early this year (SN: 2/2/80, p. 67). Since then he has been subject to various police harassments. The Soviet press has added to the uneasiness of his friends by a campaign of vilification, which suggested at first that Sakharov's political interests had so superseded his scientific interests that he was no longer competent to do physics. Then the insults claimed that, in spite of his relative youth, he was becoming senile.

In his own hand, Sakharov now goes a long way to allay the apprehensions of his



Sakharov: Exile in Gorky is bitter.

friends and refute the contentions of his enemies. Recently, Harry J. Lipkin of the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, Israel, received a postcard from Sakharov, in which Sakharov expresses his gratitude for a copy of a paper of Lipkin's and makes a comment on it. The card was reproduced in the *Washington Post* on Nov. 25 and is also reproduced below.

