Science News of the Week

Moscow Science Seminars Meet in America . . .

Since 1972, many "refuseniks" scientists — Soviet Jews denied jobs or the permis-
sion 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 ab-
ruptly 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 a
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 "delegation of the Soviet state and public order." While his wife held
the next meeting as scheduled, Soviet se-
curity police have turned away would-be
participants for the past two weeks.

Police claim the Nov. 30 meeting was
canceled so that the Brailovsky's apart-
ment 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 in-
stead 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 at-
tempting to convene an international ses-
sion 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
Alekandr Voronel — founder of the Mos-
cow seminars — in Tel Aviv.

According to Robert S. Adelstein,
another of those present at the Washing-
ton meeting, Voronel expressed more
concern about Brailovsky's arrest as a
threat to scientific freedom than as a viola-
tion 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 dis-
semination among ostracized colleagues.
U.S. meetings may also serve as a platform
for carrying home to visiting Russian
scholars recognition that the plight of re-
fruseniks remains of concern here, Adels-
tein added. The next U.S. seminar is
scheduled for Dec. 20 at Cornell Univer-
sity. 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 em-
ployed as a punishment by totalitarian re-
gimes — is to make it difficult for the exile
to maintain contact with former associ-
ates and to stay involved in former ac-
tivities. (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: 2/22/80, 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 cam-
paign 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
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.

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