

International Science Seminar Honor Soviet Refusnik Scientists

Nobel Prize laureates and experts in physics, mathematics and the life sciences will meet at Tel Aviv University for the 1984 International Science Seminar, in honor of Soviet refusnik scientists -- Jewish scholars who have been forbidden to work in their professions because they applied for permission to emigrate.

Some 100 scientists, including Nobel Prize winners Prof. Emilio Segre of the United States and Prof. George Klein of Sweden, are expected at the two-day seminar, sponsored by TAU and the Fabian Kolker Foundation. Refusnik scientists unable to leave the Soviet Union will participate in absentia. Their papers will be read by experts in their respective fields, and published along with other presentations at the Seminar. Most of the participating Israeli scientists are former Soviet refusniks.

The Seminar will take place on the tenth anniversary of an international scientific conference, scheduled to be held in Moscow in July, 1974. It was one of a series of seminars organized by Soviet refusnik scientists who had been prevented by the authorities from continuing their research. During the weekly meetings, initiated in 1972, refusniks met with participating professionals to exchange scientific ideas.

In 1974, members of the group organized an international conference which was eventually cancelled owing to the denial of entrance visas to Western scientists and the harassment of Soviet participants. In 1981, Soviet authorities officially banned the seminars. Prof. Victor Breilovsky, the leader of the group, was immediately imprisoned and sentenced to two and a half years of internal exile. Doctors Alexander Paritcky, Vladimir Kislick and Isay Goldstein were also arrested. They are still unable to leave the Soviet Union and are harassed continually by Soviet authorities.

TAU Physics Professor Alexander Voronel, the organizer of the forthcoming seminar, left Russia at the end of 1974. One of those imprisoned and denied the right to continue working as a scientist, he struggled for four years before being granted an exit permit.

"The Russians were afraid of our knowledge,

afraid of the physicist's ability to create atomic warfare," he said. "After about 20 of us applied for permission to emigrate, we were all denied exit and banned from continuing research. It was as if we had been forbidden to follow a normal way of life. To meet with one another and discuss science, to maintain our intellectual ability, was a question of survival."

The refusniks became social outcasts. A Russian law forbidding individuals to work below their qualifications made job hunting all the more difficult. "Eventually, some of us took secretarial jobs requiring scientific knowledge. Myself and Prof. Marc Azbel, now a physics and astronomy lecturer at TAU, prepared material for a scientific abstract but were even rooted out of that job by the KGB."

Finally, in order to maintain links with the scientific world, the refusniks established a weekly science seminar which they held in private homes. "After a while, we began inviting Western visitors to our meetings, which put the authorities in a difficult position. On the one hand, they were involved in an ideological war with the Western world. On the other hand, they were very interested in scientific contacts. Eventually, in order to put a stop to the meetings, they began accusing us of spying and sending secret material to outside intelligence sources. We were all threatened with treason."

After the official banning of the seminars, most of the participants finally received permission to emigrate to Israel. Prof. Victor Breilovsky is still in Moscow, unable to leave. According to recent reports, there are as many as 40,000 Jewish Soviet scientists in a similar position.

The 1984 seminar will include presentations of scientific papers, informal workshops and round-table discussions on current issues in the life sciences, exact sciences, mathematics and engineering. Minister of Science and Development Yuvan Ne'eman as well as other senior government officials will attend the gathering. It will end with a human rights program devoted to restrictions on scientific freedom and civil liberties in the Soviet Union.

For further information please contact Carol Cook or Michelle Amdur at 03-420249 or 03-414653.

Las Vegas Study In Israel



Mary Gottlieb and Alex Gottlieb, of Las Vegas, who are on a Hadassah Study Mission of Israel, visit the therapeutic pool in the Rehabilitation Center of the Hadassah University Hospital on Mount Scopus, Jerusalem. The Mission took place while the 9th International Congress on Rehabilitation, dealing with revolutionary new approaches to the problems of victims of war, road accidents, stroke and heart disease being held in Jerusalem.

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