

Release of Soviet Dissidents Continues

At least 150 dissidents have been released from Soviet prisons since the end of January. The cases of a like number are said to be under review. The latest to be freed (as of 20 February) is Hebrew teacher Josef Begun, whose case prompted public demonstrations in Moscow earlier this month. Also released was psychiatrist Anatoly Koryagin who reportedly returned to his home in Kharkov on 19 February. Koryagin's release was apparently delayed because of his refusal to sign a statement promising not to engage in any more illegal activities. The death of dissident mathematician Anatoly Marchenko in Chistopol prison in December, which has been heavily publicized, is widely believed to have been influential in prompting the wave of pardons.

The recent changes in the Soviet Union have moved Scientists for Sakharov, Orlov, and Shcharansky (SOS) to call on its members to resume scientific cooperation with Soviets. SOS, formed after the 1978 arrests of Orlov and Shcharansky and the 1980 exile of Sakharov, has 8000 members in 44 countries who had pledged to refrain from scientific cooperation while retaining individual contacts with their Soviet counterparts.

On the emigré front, former refusenik geneticist David Goldfarb has been released from Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York, where he has been under treatment since his arrival in October. ■

CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Academy to Drop Issues Quarterlyly

The National Academy of Sciences plans to end publication of its quarterly journal, *Issues in Science and Technology*, with the summer number scheduled to be published in June. Efforts are still being made to find a way to continue the journal, but chances of success are apparently regarded as slim.

Since last year, it has been known that the sponsoring organizations, the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, and Institute of Medicine, were concerned about the costs of continuing the journal. Officials of the organizations declined to discuss the decision to stop publication, conveying through the academy's public affairs office the valedictory comment that they had been increasingly

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pleased with the content of *Issues* but could not meet the cost of continuing it.

No financial details have been disclosed except that no public money was involved in the project, which was financed through institutional funds.

The journal was launched in the fall of 1984 and a dozen issues will have appeared after the spring and summer issues. Billed as a journal of analysis and opinion, *Issues* represented a bid to create a vehicle for the discussion of a broad range of public policy issues involving science and technology.

What seems to have been *Issues'* best chance for survival came in negotiations last year with Sigma Xi, the scientific honorary organization, on a proposal to provide the journal to Sigma Xi members. The idea was approved by the delegates from the organization's local chapters at its annual meeting last fall, but was rejected by Sigma Xi's board of directors.

After that near miss, the councils of the journal's sponsoring organizations agreed it would be necessary to cease publication unless outside means of support were found. In late January, when such efforts did not produce results, the decision to end publication in June was made.

Issues apparently suffered low renewal rates. With the benefit of initial promotion, circulation peaked at about 20,000 in the quarterly's first year, but dwindled to the current level of about 10,000. Red ink last year led to efforts at cost-cutting including the departure at the end of the year of founding editor Allen L. Hammond and managing editor Philip S. Cook. ■

JOHN WALSH

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DOD to Reassess Bioweapons' Risks

The Department of Defense (DOD) must prepare an environmental impact statement covering research activities on biological warfare being conducted at 127 government, university, foundation, and corporate laboratories in the United States. DOD agreed to conduct the study as part of a court-supervised settlement of litigation brought by social activist Jeremy Rifkin.

Rifkin filed a lawsuit with the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia on 2 September charging that DOD was violating the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). At issue was the department's failure to assess the potential environmental and human health effects of an accidental or deliberate release of pathogenic organisms that are the subject of research conducted at DOD facilities or by DOD contractors. Charles W. Findlay, a Justice Department attorney, says there was no admission by in the settlement that NEPA was violated.

DOD is applying recombinant DNA techniques in research and the production of a range of pathogens and toxins including botulism, anthrax, and yellow fever. This research effort has increased dramatically in the past 5 years, says Rifkin, but DOD has failed to show that they have examined the health effects of these activities in the manner required by NEPA. As part of the court agreement, DOD is expected to evaluate evacuation, quarantine, and medical treatment capacity of local jurisdictions where there is ongoing defense research on biological warfare.

The settlement appears to have limited implications for research using genetic engineering techniques, according to Jeffrey Gibbs, associate general counsel for the Association of Biotechnology Companies. The legal precedent that has been set does not extend to other federal research programs involving recombinant DNA, Gibbs notes. But, it does mean that future research undertaken by the Pentagon will be subject to evaluation under NEPA if it is of a large scale or could have broad environmental effects. Whether activists will attempt to apply this ruling to chemical and nuclear warfare research programs is uncertain.

The settlement calls for a draft environmental impact statement to be published in 15 months, with the final document completed in the fall of 1988. In the interim, DOD can proceed with its research work. Department researchers, however, are bound by the agreement to adhere to research rules established by the National Institutes of Health covering recombinant DNA molecules. ■ MARK CRAWFORD