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Author(s): Herman Feshbach

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## A Meeting with Sakharov

Herman Feshbach

*At the Tuesday Fellows' Luncheon on February 3, 1987, Herman Feshbach, Institute Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Academy President, 1982-1986, spoke about his recent trip to Moscow to meet with Soviet physicist Andrei Sakharov, recipient of the 1975 Nobel Peace Prize and a Foreign Honorary Member of the Academy since 1969. A similar version of this report appeared in the April issue of Physics Today.*

It was, to put it mildly, a memorable visit. Although Andrei Sakharov and I have been in contact in one way or another over the past dozen years, I had never actually seen him face to face. I had met Elena Bonner, his wife, several times and am friendly with her children and son-in-law, Efrem and Tanya Yankelevich and Alexi Semenov, who live in the Boston area. So when I was asked by Robert Arsenault, another family friend, if I would join a group of college presidents\* led by Edmond Volpe of the College of Staten Island (CUNY), in a meeting with Academician Sakharov, I accepted the invitation immediately.

I met the group in Moscow on the evening of January 24 and proceeded with them to the Sakharov apartment for dinner. It was then that I at last met Sakharov. It was quite an emotional event for me as I was greeted warmly by him and by Elena. In spite of the many indignities he suffered in Gorky, which he had left a month earlier, Sakharov looks well. He is vigorously pursuing human rights issues as well as recent developments in particle physics and cosmology. (While in Gorky he published six scientific reports.)

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\*The group also included Alice Chandler, State University of New York at New Paltz, David W. Fraser, Swarthmore College, Sheila Kaplan, University of Wisconsin at Parkside, Alice Ilchman, Sarah Lawrence College, Larry A. Jackson, Lander College, and Olin C. Robison, Middlebury College.

The next morning our group visited Alexander Yaffe, a refusenik then on the eighteenth day of a hunger strike in support of the emigration of his son Dimitri. That afternoon we returned to Sakharov's apartment, where he spent nearly three hours responding to our questions. In the evening I had dinner with the Sakharovs, Robert Arsenault, and Alexi Semenov, who had at the last moment been allowed to accompany our group. After dinner, Sakharov and I talked physics, mostly about string theory and Kaluza-Klein models. Sakharov was completely aware of the difficulties of these theories and was looking forward to a set of seminars at the Academy on these topics. Alexi acted as translator. The next day, Sakharov composed a statement on human rights, which I read at a press conference held January 27 in Vienna as part of the meeting on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the Helsinki Accords).

The following is a summary of Sakharov's comments made to our group on the afternoon of January 26. It is based upon my notes, which I believe are quite accurate.

Sakharov strongly urges the release of prisoners of conscience, including not only the dissidents but also the Crimean Tatars, the Germans, the Jews, and the Pentecostals. He knows the names and sentences of about 700 individuals and estimates the total to be about 2000.

He believes one should press for freedom of thought, conscience, religion, distribution of information, travel, and the right to choose one's country of residence.

The change with respect to openness in Soviet society has surprised everyone. Sakharov hopes for a general amnesty. How real the change is he cannot say. But, obviously, the case of Marchenko (who died during a recent hunger strike) and the new Soviet emigration regulations, which are in violation of the Helsinki Accords, are cause for concern.

What do the Soviet leaders hope to gain from this openness? Liberalization of Soviet

society is essential for scientific and technical progress. A closed society is dangerously unstable. However, Sakharov notes, not all Soviet citizens want democratization.

In November, during the first set of meetings on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Soviets proposed a meeting on human rights to be held in Moscow. Before this meeting is scheduled, Sakharov believes the Soviet government should release the prisoners of conscience, especially those imprisoned for monitoring the Helsinki Accords.

Exchanges, especially scientific exchanges, are important and should be increased in every way possible. However, the issues of the prisoners of conscience and of freedom should be raised at every opportunity. Invitations to Soviet participants should be made on the basis of merit and not dictated by the Soviet bureaucracy.

Sakharov stressed that there is a strong connection between arms control and openness. It is difficult to develop the necessary trust when a society is closed or when the Helsinki Accords are violated.

The important issues in arms control are not technical; nontechnical political issues dominate.

Sakharov is against "packaging" in arms control, in particular, the Soviet coupling of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) with other features of the Reykjavik proposals. SDI will not work with sufficient reliability. There are many technical unknowns. Moreover, cruise missiles and submarines are completely independent of the space-based SDI. It would be better to obtain agreement in other areas, particularly in liquidating offensive weapons and thus expediting agreement on defense.

Upon being asked by the group about education with regard to human rights, Sakharov replied that he doesn't know the American educational system. However, he believes in general that such education should be based on the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. Principles should be discussed in conjunction with analyses of concrete situations in different parts of the world.

Recent announcements in the press and private information indicate that the process of liberalization of Soviet society is continuing. Very much remains to be done. But, hopefully, the freedoms for which Elena Bonner and Andrei Sakharov have fought so heroically will become a part of the Soviet way of life in the not too distant future.

*Postscript:* Dimitri Yaffe has been granted an exit visa. Sakharov was an active participant at the International Forum for a Nuclear-Free World, held in Moscow on February 14-16. A number of those on Sakharov's list of prisoners of conscience have been released.