

Scientists for Sakharov, Orlov and Shcharansky:

Professional Networks, Human Rights and Dissent in the Late Cold War

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Abstract

This article explores the challenge presented to governments and the scientific establishment by physicists who campaigned internationally on behalf of their Soviet scientific colleagues in the early 1980s. Cold War science operated in a highly charged environment: while the work of scientists on both sides of the Cold War divide was sponsored and closely guarded by government and military agencies, scientists were also at the forefront of activist challenges to human rights infringements suffered by their colleagues. The article explores the motivations for and limitations of a moratorium on participation in scientific exchange with the Soviet Union launched by the California-based group “Scientists for Sakharov, Orlov and Shcharansky” (SOS). It considers the ways that both professional identity and Cold War dynamics shaped this solidarity campaign. SOS sought to build their activism on a transnational basis and worked closely with scientific colleagues in Europe to do so. They pitched a campaign that appealed beyond the university and national scientific laboratories to a broad range of people who identified as scientists. Unlike many contemporary scientific organizations, the SOS leadership embraced the political nature of such activism. As a whole, this article shows how scientists navigated different political and scientific contexts when organizing support for their Soviet colleagues.

Keywords: science, human rights, dissent, Sakharov, Orlov, Shcharansky

This article focuses on the work of a group of scientists in California in the late 1970s and early 1980s who set up the organization “Scientists for Sakharov, Orlov and Shcharansky” (SOS). SOS campaigned internationally on behalf of dissident scientists in the Soviet Union—most notably, but not only, the three “principals” mentioned in its name. SOS’s most prominent campaign was the organization of a moratorium on participation in scientific exchanges with the Soviet Union, for which it secured the allegiance of nearly 8,000 scientists worldwide. Scientific committees dedicated to campaigning on human rights issues proliferated in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the wake of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, but SOS was also part of a longer trajectory of political involvement by scientists that was fueled by an awareness of both the destructive and constructive applications of scientific research (Kuznik 1987: 1–3). The role of science in wartime military development, and in particular the development of nuclear capability, led individual scientists in both the Soviet Union and the United States to reevaluate their relationship with both their respective governments and society. Recent scholarly work has highlighted the ways scientists engaged with the national level legislative process and with mass politics in the immediate postwar period (Wang, 1999), worked for peaceful applications of nuclear technology (Josephson 1999), and promoted increased East-West dialogue as a path to peace and a reduction in armaments through the Pugwash conferences (Evangelista 1999; Kraft and Sachse 2020).

In the Soviet Union, scientists were figures with considerable authority, forming part of a technocratic elite working within a sizeable research apparatus. By the 1980s, one-fifth of the world’s physicists worked in the Soviet Union. Many were party members, had comfortable careers, and benefited from the relative openness and security of the Thaw years (Josephson 1999: 4; Josephson 1991: 1). But scientists, like writers, were also prominent in the Soviet “dissident” movement that emerged from the mid-1960s onward. In 1970, the nuclear physicist Andrei Sakharov cooperated with several fellow scientists, including Vladimir Turchin and

Valery Chalidze, when he founded the Moscow-based Committee on Human Rights, a group that dedicated itself to “advising” the government and educating the public on miscarriages of justice (Chalidze 1984). In 1976, the physicist Yuri Orlov and the computer scientist Anatoly Shcharansky were founding members of the Moscow-based Helsinki monitoring group. Many Jewish Soviet scientists—including Shcharansky—who requested the right to emigrate to Israel were deemed a security risk, lost their jobs, and faced arrest and imprisonment. In 1974, Alexander Voronel, Viktor Brailovsky, and other colleagues began to organize a series of “Sunday Seminars” to which international scholars in Moscow were invited. These seminars were intended to serve as a venue for these individuals to continue their scientific collaboration, but they were often as much a forum for discussions about repression and dissent. The plight of Jewish “refuseniks,” including scientists, attracted considerable international attention in the late 1960s and 1970s. Scientific research and development in the Soviet Union had always been closely controlled by the Soviet authorities. In the United States, wartime developments highlighted the government’s and the military’s awareness of the need for a much closer relationship with the scientific world. The result was substantial funding directed primarily—but not exclusively—toward physics, skewing the development of particular scientific subfields and inaugurating a closer entanglement of university science with the state (Forman 1987). Of course, scientists received some benefits from this substantial investment in their research, and some courted it (Barany 2020). The Lawrence Berkely Lab where SOS originated was located on a university campus, but it depended on funding from the US government’s Atomic Energy Commission and later the Department of Energy for its work in accelerator physics. As SOS’s Philip Siegelman put it, while their organization chose to avoid government contacts as far as they could, “the plain fact was that virtually every participating scientist worked for a government sponsored organization” (Siegelman 2017). State or military sponsorship of scientific projects did not preclude criticism of government policy or

engagement in activism, however. Culture and science were major battlefields in the Cold War, and in the United States particularly, the idea that scientists operated in a climate of freedom and independence was central to the vision of the nation that successive governments wanted to project. Allowing US scientists to feel that they were exercising this freedom was a necessary corollary of that vision (Wolfe 2018: 2).

The international exchanges initiated in the Khrushchev era and intensified during the period of *détente* from the late 1960s were always thorny to navigate for the scientific world. They were valued in principle by both scientists and governments on both sides: besides furthering scientific cooperation and advancement, they played an important role in information gathering and helped governments understand the state of the scientific field on the other side of the Iron Curtain. They also enabled scientists to build professional contacts, friendships, and knowledge of both the scientific and political situation in competitor countries. These closer contacts meant that scientists were readily aware of restrictions that their Soviet colleagues faced and the ways politics influenced the operation of the exchange programmes themselves. As an organization whose principal strategy was a moratorium on scientific exchange, SOS confronted the question of who benefited and who suffered as a result of the withdrawal of international cooperation in all their discussions with their interlocutors in the scientific community.

The signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 gave a new impetus to activism on behalf of Soviet scientists and also provided a new language through which to express it. The Act, which was signed by thirty-five countries, guaranteed territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders (a key objective of the Soviet government since the mid-1950s), but it also included provisions on trade, scientific cooperation, and human rights, including freedom of emigration and freedom of the press. Follow-up meetings to monitor the implementation of the Act would take place in Belgrade in 1977–78, Madrid in 1980–83, and Vienna in 1986–89. Alongside the

formal diplomatic processes, non-governmental Helsinki monitoring groups were established in the Soviet Union, Europe, and the United States. Following the Belgrade meetings particularly, as the US delegation took an assertive stance on human rights and the Soviet authorities cracked down harder on Soviet dissidents in response, Western non-governmental organizations involved in monitoring human rights abuses proliferated (Snyder 2011: 81–113). In the Soviet Union, Helsinki Watch groups were set up to monitor human rights abuses not in other countries but at home: there were active groups in Moscow, Kiev, Vilnius, Tbilisi, and Yerevan (Nathans 2015b: 35). The members of the Moscow group were all seasoned figures from the broader Soviet dissident movement, and the adoption of human rights rhetoric was a development rather than a radical new turn for a movement that had been campaigning for civilrights as enshrined in the Soviet constitution for more than a decade—an “expansion of the dissident repertoire” in which the same individuals participated in different organizations and targeted different audiences (Nathans 2015b: 39; Nathans 2011). Nevertheless, the terms of the Helsinki agreement spoke directly to the concerns of the Soviet dissident movement, particularly the demands of Soviet Jews for the right to emigrate—to Israel—and the rights to freedom of speech and assembly.

In the Western scientific world, professional organizations set up their own sub-committees committed to defending the human rights of scientists, and independent organizations were also established for that purpose; some of these operated on a broad basis. The Committee of Concerned Scientists, whose executive directors included Ruth Levine, Lilli Chertoff, and Dorothy Hirsch, was established in 1972 and reached a membership of 4,000 by 1974. Throughout the period of the Helsinki monitoring meetings, the Committee worked to highlight violations of the human rights dimensions of the Helsinki Final Act (Vezzosi 2018). Some were discipline-specific organizations: the very active Comité des Physiciens Français, for example, and the Comité des Mathématiciens, which regularly reported on conditions in

Soviet mathematics and what Western mathematicians could do to help (Schwartz 2001: 457–490). Other groups, such as the CERN Orlov Committee, were specific to a particular lab. In science as elsewhere, these organizations testified to the broad engagement with human rights rhetoric that scholars like Samuel Moyn and Jan Eckel have identified as characteristic of the 1970s (Moyn 2010; Eckel and Moyn 2015; Eckel 2019). Studies of scientific human rights organizations have demonstrated that their members understood human rights to be closely connected to scientific freedoms (Wolfe 2018; Vezzosi 2018; Rhéaume 2008). But just as Soviet scientific dissidents were constituents in a broader movement dedicated to calling out their government, members of Western networks were also part of a wider international activism, not solely articulated in the language of human rights, on behalf of Soviet dissidents, be they scientists, authors (from Solzenitsyn to Alexander Ginzburg), or others.

International engagement with Soviet dissent predated the 1970s. In 1966, Western coverage of the trial of Yuli Daniel and Andrei Sinyavsky, who were charged with publishing “anti-Soviet” literature abroad, sparked interest in Western Europe and North America. The response to the trial also tied in with a growing number of solidarity committees and publications supportive of oppositional figures in the Soviet Union and other countries under communist rule (Walker 2008: 913–914). There were both tensions and opportunities in this kind of international campaigning. On the one hand, activists valued the international connections they forged and believed that international public opinion could bring pressure to bear, if only in limited ways, on the Soviet authorities. On the other hand, while their concerns were amplified in an international context, they could also be distorted, faced with a “Western readership eager to extract familiar Cold War lessons” from what they read (Nathans 2015a: 580–581). SOS’s action took place in a period of heightening Cold War tensions, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and Ronald Reagan’s accession to the US presidency, and an awareness of the potential to exacerbate these tensions is evident in their campaign too.

Through a case study of SOS, this article asks how dissent was understood and represented through scientific networks, and how important both professional identity and an understanding of Cold War dynamics were in building this solidarity network. It looks at the context for and significance of the moratorium pledge and the debates it engendered within the scientific community about whether cutting off contact with Soviet scientists was an effective or appropriate strategy. It highlights the problems that the moratorium created for SOS and some of the other creative campaigning strategies the organization tried out in order to achieve its objectives. It also explores the ways in which SOS worked with other cognate organizations campaigning on human rights issues, how members understood their organizational mission, and how they sought to position their organization in relation to US government policy and in East-West relations. While SOS was a US-based initiative, members sought to build its activism on a transnational basis and worked closely with scientific colleagues in Europe to do so. SOS pitched a campaign that appealed beyond academic circles to a broader community of people who identified as scientists. And unlike many contemporary groups, SOS embraced the political dimensions of its activism rather than presenting its human rights activities as apolitical. This case study of SOS gives us a broader picture of who the scientists who participated in such campaigns were and provides insight into the ways scientists navigated different political and scientific contexts when organizing support for their Soviet colleagues.

SOS and the Moratorium Pledge

In June 1978, Morris Pripstein and Denis Keefe, two physicists from the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory at the University of California, established “Scientists for Orlov and Shcharansky.” Among a group of others involved at Berkeley were Nobel laureate Owen Chamberlain and Andrew Sessler, the director of the lab. Philip Siegelman, a later recruit to SOS and a political scientist at San Francisco State University, observed that SOS testified to a “typically

‘Berkeleyian’ sensitivity to matters of social conscience” (Rhéaume 2008). There were personal connections between the founders of SOS and the scientists for whom they campaigned. Orlov was an accelerator physicist, and both Andrew Sessler and Denis Keefe knew him and his work. Orlov was sent into exile in a labor camp in Siberia in 1977 as a result of his work with the Moscow Helsinki Watch group (Orlov 1991). Shcharansky (later an eminent Israeli politician) was a computer scientist and was denied a visa to emigrate to Israel on the grounds that during his career, he had access to sensitive information relating to Soviet national security. In 1978, Shcharansky was sentenced to thirteen years of forced labor. Shcharansky’s wife Avital, who campaigned for his release both in Israel and the United States, was invited by Pripstein to visit the Berkeley Lab to discuss his case (“Background Information,” SOS 9:2; Gilbert 1986). SOS added Sakharov’s name in early 1980, when he was exiled to the closed city of Gorky following his protests against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Sakharov had an extraordinarily high profile as a nuclear physicist who had worked on the development of Soviet atomic weapons but later campaigned against their proliferation. He became a prominent dissident in Moscow, writing to the authorities on behalf of political prisoners, meeting with Western journalists, and founding the internationally affiliated Committee on Human Rights in the USSR in Moscow in 1970 (Lowrie 2002; Sakharov 1990). In 1975, he received the Nobel Peace Prize. SOS communicated with Sakharov through his daughter and son-in-law, Tatiana and Efrem Yankelevich, who acted as Sakharov’s representatives in the United States, and through Ed Kline, a former department store owner and self-educated expert on the Soviet dissident movement who financed Valery Chalidze’s Khronika Press in New York (SOS 19:2; SOS 16:33).

Sakharov, Orlov, and Shcharansky were persecuted for their human rights activism, not their scientific activity. Strikingly, while SOS’s materials focused on the repression of the three men’s freedoms, they made little mention of Moscow Helsinki Watch or the issues on which it

was campaigning. Neither did they use the word “dissident”, a term that was disliked by Sakharov and most of his peers in the human rights movement, even though it was widely applied in Western discourse (and by the Soviet authorities as a pejorative). SOS’s campaign was organized on behalf of scientific colleagues and their right to freely pursue their careers as researchers and scholars.

In the United States, formal scientific exchanges with the Soviet Union were coordinated by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). By the mid-1960s, somewhere between twenty and forty scientists were travelling in each direction. In the early 1970s, these exchange programs increased substantially in scale, with the signing of a series of bilateral agreements for cooperation in specific fields of science, from soil science to computing (Wolfe 2018: 182). Against the backdrop of *détente*, these programs aimed at the freer exchange of scientific knowledge, although governments on both sides recognized their value for information gathering too. However, the signing of the Helsinki Accords and the heightened awareness of the plight of Soviet scientists made individual US and European scientists more circumspect about their involvement in these exchanges. A group of prominent French scientists had expressed concern about the Soviet press campaign against Sakharov in 1973 (Rhéaume 2008: 5–6). Sakharov was an elected foreign member of the NAS, and Philip Handler, the NAS President, was also obliged to defend him. In an open letter to the President of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Handler implicitly raised the threat of a boycott. “Were Sakharov to be deprived his opportunity to serve the Soviet people and humanity,” Handler wrote, “it would be extremely difficult to imagine successful fulfilment of American pledges of binational scientific cooperation, the implementation of which is entirely dependent upon the voluntary effort and goodwill of our individual scientists and scientific institutions” (Handler 1973: 7). Nevertheless, Handler’s tone was cautious. He and the NAS had invested significant energy in building up the exchange program and did not want to threaten it. His

letter went on to say that the NAS “warmly supported” the growing détente. Drawing on the rhetoric of scientific internationalism, he pointed out the common ethics and values of the scientific community and celebrated the fact that shared heroes of science (like Sakharov) could be recognized by both the national academies. An NAS report in 1975, following the signing of the Helsinki accords, concluded that while individual American scientists were free to express their views, it would be inappropriate for a body like the NAS to criticize the Soviet government (Wolfe 2018: 186).

There were also genuine problems with the scientific exchange programs as experienced by those involved, and while many scientists embraced international exchange, they also found them problematic. They questioned their purpose: propaganda, intelligence, or mutual scientific advancement? Securing the attendance of top scientists could be difficult because the Soviet career structure used overseas visits as rewards for those who were politically loyal. Often those invited would withdraw at the last minute and be replaced by someone with negligible expertise in the area under discussion. There was also the question of the flow of science and technology from West to East: both governments were reluctant to send their best people or exchange their best science. Writing to Philip Siegelman, Roger Kaplan described “the rotten exchange situation . . . whereby they send over a computer specialist with a camera in his lighter and we send over a guy interested in the Novgorod legend” (a reference both to the possibilities for intelligence gathering and the interest of arts and humanities scholars in the Soviet Union) (Kaplan 24 March 1982, SOS 17:28). Following the arrests of both Orlov and Shcharansky in the spring of 1977 and their trial and conviction the following year, the impetus for action became stronger. Valentin Turchin, a founder member of the Moscow branch of Amnesty International now living in New York, argued for a boycott of scientific exchanges in *Nature* in the spring of 1978 (Turchin 1978: 256–257). In Paris, the Committee of French Physicists for the Defence of Yuri Orlov called for a boycott in June

1978, just after Orlov's trial, and five hundred French scientists signed a statement agreeing to take part (Caroli 9 November 1978; SOS 18:4).

SOS's first major initiative was to issue two separate petitions: the first was a statement of conscience, inviting signatories to "withhold all personal cooperation with the Soviet Union" until Orlov and Shcharansky were released; the second was a milder four-point "declaration of principle," according to which signatories pledged they would not attend international conferences in the Soviet Union, and that they would minimize their collaboration with and attendance at lectures by Soviet colleagues, oppose the expansion of scientific and technical exchange programs, and campaign against the transfer of Western technology to the Soviet Union. They would continue with this until "the Soviet government provides tangible proof that it has curtailed its persecution and harassment of our Soviet colleagues" ("SOS Petitions," SOS 8:2). On March 1, 1979, SOS held a press conference in Washington DC, announcing that 2,400 US scientists had signed one or another of the pledges. Their protest garnered coverage in a range of local and national papers, from the *Berkeley Gazette* and the *San Francisco Examiner* to the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal* (SOS 1:7).

In March 1980, the SOS committee launched its campaign internationally, calling on "our scientific colleagues, in the tens of thousands, from all countries the world over, to join us in a moratorium on professional cooperation with the Soviet scientific community, for a period beginning May 1980, the anniversary of the founding of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group, and ending at the November 1980 Madrid Conference to monitor the Helsinki Accords." They sent out a printed coupon that they asked colleagues to sign in support of the moratorium and send back. They also asked for contributions if possible. The Moratorium Pledge ran as a full-page paid advertisement in *Science*, *Physics Today*, *Nature*, and *Chemical and Engineering News*, a first because of the perceived political nature of the advertisement (SOS 19:9; 1:7). A grant from the Smith Richardson Foundation financed a direct mailing to

10,000 scientists internationally and a further 30,000 in the United States. Pripstein was hoping for more than 10,000 signatories, but in the end, almost 8,000 scientists signed the moratorium pledge. About half of these were based in the United States, but there were also signatories from forty-three other countries (Pripstein 19 March 1980; Pripstein 20 June 1980; SOS 17:28).

Sakharov, Orlov, and Shcharansky (and other Soviet and East European scientists) were aware of Western support networks like SOS and used them quite consciously. Even before they added his name, the committee had received a message of support from Sakharov praising their work (Maiman and Sakharov 10 March 1979; SOS 8: 2). In 1981, Sakharov sent SOS a telegram explaining his decision to go on a hunger strike, which began “I am aware of the interest you are taking in my plight and am deeply grateful for it” (Sakharov 9 October 1981; SOS 13:73). In June 1982, *Nature* published Sakharov’s “Letter to Soviet Scientists,” which used the latest SOS appeal in defense of Sergei Kovalev as a launching point for a critique of Soviet scientists’ lack of action (Sakharov 1982, 355). In 1986, when Elena Bonner was allowed to leave the Soviet Union for medical treatment, she not only spoke at Berkeley (arranged by SOS) and addressed the Committee of Concerned Scientists in New York but also proposed new solidarity projects they might launch (SOS 20:4). When Shcharansky was allowed to leave the Soviet Union, SOS arranged an interview with him. Many of SOS’s questions to Shcharansky dealt with the strategies Western scientists could use to help Soviet dissidents—for instance, whether their moratorium was effective, and whether they speak up about abuses of human rights while visiting the USSR. The interview was to be shown at an SOS event in Berkeley and was timed to coincide with a major international physics conference—so there was a publicity element, but the dialogue back and forth about strategy was evidently valuable too. Pripstein also planned to travel to CERN for research and take the tape to share with scientists in West Germany, Italy, France, England, and Switzerland

(Pripstein 17 June 1986 SOS 19:2; Pripstein 10 August 1986 SOS 17:26; Pripstein 11 June 1986 SOS 20:4).

The moratorium clearly built on strategies that had already been aired and acted on individually in the scientific community. How did these strategies work in practice? In April 1980, Paul Kessler of the Atomic Physics Laboratory of the College de France wrote to SOS with an account of how the boycott operated at a workshop in Amiens. The organizers displayed material about Orlov and others on a table during the workshop. They sent “anti-invitations” to the Soviet Academy of Sciences and to directors of the principal relevant institutes in the Soviet Union, “uninviting” them. At the beginning of the conference, before beginning a “short review of the history and the problems of photon-photon collisions,” Kessler made a statement explaining the decision not to invite colleagues from the Soviet Union. “We know that the question of boycott of the Soviet Union in science is a highly controversial one at present, and that some scientists in the West would prefer to assume a milder attitude on this problem. We respect all attitudes, of course. But this is the decision the Organising Committee has taken, in order to show our solidarity with Yuri Orlov in his prison camp and with all the others” (Kessler 22 April 1980, SOS 19:17).

Signatories of the Moratorium Pledge

SOS publicity often focused on the higher profile signatories of their moratorium pledge. In one published list, they divided the signatories into categories including “Nobel laureates,” “present or former chairmen of university science departments,” and “present or former directors of major professional societies” (SOS 4:15). It was widely felt that recruiting prominent names in the field was the most effective means of gaining both publicity and influence: Rolf Hagedorn of CERN argued that having the names of a few prominent people was likely to be more effective than having a lot of unknowns (Hagedorn n.d., SOS 15:53). On

the other hand, Paul Flory—Professor in Chemistry at Stanford University, an active member of SOS, and himself a Nobel laureate—made the case for a broader-based campaign. According to him, the inclusion of “technologists, applied scientists and engineers” would boost numbers, and he also believed that the Soviet authorities “attach greater importance to them than us” (Flory, 6 August 1979, 13 September 1979, SOS 17:33).

The range of signatories reflected the entanglement of university science with the national security state, with the largest collections of signatures coming from the major national laboratories and university science departments. There were 134 signatories from the Argonne National Laboratory, and eighty-one from the Los Alamos Scientific Lab (both central to the development of American nuclear capability during the Second World War). There were over one hundred signatures from the Lawrence Berkeley Lab, where the campaign had originated, and 331 from the various campuses of the University of California. At Johns Hopkins University, there were 140 signatories, though it is unclear how many of these came from the associated Office of Naval Research. The range of signatories also reflected a broad disciplinary definition of science: for example, Siegelman, a political scientist, certainly counted, and anthropologist Clifford Geertz at Princeton signed the pledge. Further, the definition of who counted as a “scientist” went beyond the university and the national security state. For instance, signatories came from private laboratories and companies, hospitals, and community colleges. The Bell Telephone Lab collected forty signatures, and there were lots of individual signatories too: E. B. Silberstein of Cincinnati General Hospital; Clifford Rinehart, a math teacher at Drake High School in San Anselmo, California; Nikolay Williams of Hackley School in New York; Gordon Newkirk of the High Altitude Observatory in Boulder, Colorado; Lawrence Doe of Mack Trucks Ltd. in Pennsylvania; William Engelhard and H. W. Mueller of Temperature Processing (a metallurgical enterprise) in Colorado (SOS 4:15; SOS 5:1-2).

Signature patterns were dictated to some extent by the SOS committee members' own networks (for example in California) but also by subscriptions to the journals they advertised in, which gave them a broader reach. In some places, enthusiasts for the initiative collected signatures for them. Igor Mel'čuk of the University of Montreal wrote to tell SOS that he had personally collected signatures from all the professors in his department and was circulating as many copies of the signature slip as he could (Mel'čuk 3 April 1980, SOS 18:4). Internationally, there was very broad reach but less depth, with signatories from Nigeria, Guatemala, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as Latin America and the major European countries. There were signatories from seventy different institutions in West Germany and sixteen institutions in Israel. In some cases, however, the existence of a strong local movement could hinder the progress of SOS's campaign. In France, where SOS had very strong connections with likeminded scientists, the reach of the moratorium pledge was relatively small, at least in part because (as previously mentioned) many scientists had already committed to a full boycott: the moratorium seemed a lesser step. There were signatories from fifty-five French institutions, but the numbers at each were small. Equally, there were only twenty-four signatures from CERN, where there was a dedicated Orlov committee already. In Britain, signatures came from individuals based at forty-four different institutions, the largest number of signatories being thirty-five from the Rank Hovis McDougal research facility at High Wycombe (dwarfing the thirteen from Cambridge, eleven from Oxford, six from Manchester, and one from Newcastle). At the University of London, Karl Popper signed the pledge.

The process of collecting signatures for the moratorium generated a lot of correspondence that sheds light on attitudes to the idea of academic boycott and to the engagement of scientists in human rights campaigns and/or political activism. Some scientists expressed their disagreement with the moratorium strategy. Professor Massimo Simonetta of

the University of Milan wrote to say that he appreciated SOS's efforts but did not think a moratorium was likely to be effective. "In my opinion what we should do to help would be to increase our visits to the Soviet Union and the number of invitations to Soviet scientists. For this reason I cannot sign the pledge" (Simonetta 3 July 1980, SOS 17:56). One scientist from the University of Rochester sent SOS \$25 toward its efforts but nevertheless declined to sign the pledge as he felt that cutting off relations was inappropriate (SOS 18:32). These refusals represented a broader current of opinion in the scientific press, and *Physics Today* particularly, in favor of continued dialogue. An article by Tim Toohig in February 1984—arguing that the harsher the regime in the USSR, the more reason there was to cooperate with it—prompted Valentin Turchin (who declared that the article "enraged me beyond all limits") to describe Toohig's stance as reminiscent of the days of Fellow Travelers (Turchin 5 February 1984, Siegelman 25 July 1984, SOS 20:2). In March the same year, an editorial by Harold L. Davies argued that physicists who sought to restore ties with the Soviet Union would be performing a service "to both their discipline and their country" (Davies 1984). In 1985, when the exchange agreement between the US and Soviet academies of science was being renewed, Joel Lebowitz wrote to Pripstein that "having an exchange agreement or not having one is a matter of tactics rather than of principle as far as human rights are concerned." There were circumstances in which either course of action might help or hinder dissidents (Lebowitz 28 May 1985, CCS 98).

Debating the moratorium also often led to discussions about the extent to which science and human rights were related concerns and the responsibility of scientists to ensure that freedom of thought and independent investigation were possible. The Federation of American Scientists went so far as to poll its members on this question in a "Sakharov poll." Members could choose from six options, ranging from "The internal exiling of Andrei Sakharov is basically a political matter, not a scientific one, and American scientists should not become

involved,” through to a refusal to participate in any bilateral exchange with the Soviet Union. Members were also invited to give other comments and suggestions. For Philip Siegelman, part of the point of establishing SOS was that, unlike the committees set up by professional bodies within their field, this organization could be overtly political. He railed against attempts to “equate human rights and science in such a way that politics is excluded from our function as a human rights organization.” Professional organizations were set up to carry forward the work of science. SOS was set up explicitly as a campaigning venture: “The cause of human rights, though congruent in some sense with science as an activity, cannot be carried forward as a scientifically depoliticized activity.” SOS was “a group of activist scientists who are prepared to engage in politics” (Siegelman 25 June 1981 SOS 19:7).

In some respects, the moratorium could be regarded as a startling success—the scale of its appeal, the profiles and international nature of signatories, and the amount of media attention it generated. SOS held a simultaneous press conference in in Washington, London, Paris, and Geneva on October 16, 1980, which was covered on the ABC and CBS television networks and NBC and CBS radio news in the United States, on a range of European TV and radio stations, as well as (for example) in the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *International Herald Tribune*, and *The Economist* (“Scientists Suspend Ties with Soviets” 1980; “Scientists’ Group Breaks Its Soviet Ties in Protest” 1980; “7,900 Scientists, Engineers Pledge Boycott” 1980; “We’d Rather Not Talk to You” 1980). The moratorium campaign inspired admiration outside the world of science; the film and television producer Bud Yorkin wrote to SOS that, “I intend to try to mobilize the show business industry in a fashion similar to what you have done with the scientific industry” (Yorkin 23 May 1979, SOS 19:5).

SOS’s activities also elicited a response from the Central Committee of the CPSU. Following the pledge signed only by US scientists in 1979, the Soviet Ambassador to the United States was commissioned to report on who the signatories were. The information he

provided fed into a Central Committee statement to the effect that the signatories were not leading American scientists and were not actively involved in international cooperation with the Soviet Union. Subsequently, articles appeared in *Pravda* (on the lines of the CPSU statement, emphasizing the peripheral status of the scientists involved) and *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, alluding to human rights violations in the West that were not covered in Western scientific publications) (Pripstein 2 November 1992, Trapeznikov 22 March 1979, SOS 20:5; Ovchinnokov et al 1979). The SOS committee consulted with Sovietologists at Berkeley and in Washington, and the consensus was that the committee should construct a reply but that the principal focus should be on making the reply interesting to a Western audience: they should use their response as a chance to set out their position (Pripstein 24 June 1979 SOS 20:5).

Pripstein and Ralston estimated that the number of academics participating in academic exchange with the Soviet Union declined by more than 75 percent between 1979 and 1982. Following Sakharov's exile, the NAS eventually suspended bilateral exchanges with the Soviet Union, and there were protests also from the Royal Society and the French Academy of Scientists. The SOS committee felt its vanguard action had measurable outcomes. Émigré Soviet scientists suggested that the moratorium had been "useful and effective, and that cessation would markedly worsen the circumstances of refusednik [sic] and dissident scientists" (Pripstein and Ralston 1982: 7). What the moratorium campaign patently did not do, however, was make any immediate difference to the fate of Sakharov, Orlov, or Shcharansky.

The moratorium, therefore, presented considerable difficulties when it came to ongoing campaign strategy. The SOS leadership had been reasonably circumspect, using the term "moratorium" rather than "boycott" and setting very definite start and end dates, and as we have seen, this meant that they took a softer position than their colleagues in France. There were two virtues to the fixed-term moratorium: it was thought that it would make people more

likely to sign up, but it also avoided the difficult situation of having to decide when and whether it should end.

Post-moratorium Strategies

As early as April 1980, while the moratorium was still active, Philip Siegelman wrote to Morris Pripstein that SOS needed to think about “what is to be done with the moratorium? Is it an end in itself? What can be done while it is on to prepare for the next step?” (Siegelman 1 April 1980 SOS 19:17). Although November 1980 had been given as a notional end date, the moratorium continued precisely because there was no plan for lifting it and, so far, no concrete outcome. In a paper on whether or not the moratorium should continue, Anthony Ralston emphasized the need to be steadfast. A moratorium on scientific cooperation was so much against the instincts and principles of scientists, he argued, that it could only be justified in the first place by the strongest arguments of a non-scientific nature. Consequently, its supporters needed to be in it for the long haul and to demonstrate that they were committed to the principles on which they were campaigning. He stated, “Few, I think, of those 7900 scientists who signed the original SOS pledge believed—or had much hope—that the moratorium would directly help Sakharov, Orlov or Shcharansky. Most believed it was necessary to send a message that business as usual was not an option until they treated our colleagues with more decency” (Ralston, n.d., SOS 19:17). Its eventual success, he suggested, might be in preventing the persecution of future Sakharovs. Supporters, Ralston argued, should write to Soviet colleagues to let them know why they were taking part in the moratorium. But they should not be willing to reengage in scientific exchange unless there was some change in the treatment of the scientists on whose behalf they were campaigning.

This position became more problematic from 1983 onward, as there were indications that official scientific exchange agreements between the National Academy of Sciences and

the Soviet Academy of Sciences would be renewed and low-key visits of SAS and NAS personnel began to take place between Moscow and Washington. The SOS leadership was aware that it needed to “see to it that we aren’t left out in the cold by their current efforts” (SOS Meeting Minutes 1 March 1984, SOS 20:2). They had been at the forefront of the initial boycott efforts, and they needed to take control of any resumption of exchange to make sure their agenda was heard:

What we need is a bold new initiative which doesn’t suggest we’ve capitulated but which simultaneously tries to extract some kind of quid pro quo from this growing desire for détente and restoration of exchanges. If exchanges are to be restored, SOS should be in the forefront of demanding that a price be exacted for them. (we should also militate against going back to exchanges in their old form by insisting on reciprocity, symmetry, and recognition of the human rights of Soviet scientists). If we just hold on to our present position, are we likely to be overrun by the widespread renewal of exchanges? (SOS Meeting Minutes 1 March 1984, SOS 20:2)

At a meeting of the National Academy of Sciences in Washington in 1985, members of the NAS were overwhelmingly in favor of a resumption of exchanges on the grounds that “human rights must not be allowed to hold scientific relations and disarmament relations hostage.” Siegelman found it “especially disappointing that numbers of SOS members have also embraced this position” (Siegelman 3 May 1985, SOS 20:3).

Beyond the boycott, then, questions emerged about what other strategies could be employed to achieve SOS’s human rights aims. In the early 1980s, SOS experimented with a range of different initiatives. Some were familiar campaigning strategies, while others were more creative. The committee cabled members of the Soviet leadership and the President of the Soviet Academy of Sciences—for example on the anniversaries of Sakharov’s exile—and encouraged others to do so. It protested and picketed the visits of senior Soviet scientists to the

United States (Sessler 30 June 1986, CCS 98; “Scientists Protest Plan to Honor Soviet Physicist” 1986). These strategies focused on making clear that international audiences were monitoring developments in the cases of the scientists for whom they campaigned. SOS made efforts to provide direct help to Soviet dissidents: one of the most practical of these was a 1984 scheme to induce a Western scientific institution to offer Orlov a grant for his research in order to exempt him from manual labor in Irkutsk. SOS members raised their own “Orlov fund” but also initiated lengthy discussions with CERN, an organization to which the Soviet authorities were expected to be more responsive, and with the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, which in 1985 agreed to pay Orlov a monthly grant of 400 rubles, a portion of which was paid by SOS (SOS 20:2, 20:3).

These genuine aid efforts were counterbalanced by initiatives designed primarily to generate public interest. In 1984, SOS invited scientists to sign up to act as “good faith witnesses” who would travel to the Soviet Union as “hostages” in order for Sakharov’s wife, Elena Bonner, to go abroad for medical treatment. Fifty-four scientists signed up, including six Nobel laureates, but this scheme was controversial. John Cornforth of the University of Sussex (a winner of the Nobel Prize for Chemistry) wrote that “this scheme is too obviously a publicity ploy to be worth pursuing. Exactly what are these guarantors supposed to guarantee? They could obviously not qualify as hostages. I don’t wish to be associated with this venture, although I remain ready to join in more straightforward methods of persuasion” (Cornforth 17 July 1984, SOS 18:35; SOS 5:10).

Just as the original moratorium pledge had been tied to the 1980 Madrid meeting to monitor the implementation of the Helsinki accords, in 1982 the SOS executive focused on how it might “establish a temporary presence” in Madrid for the CSCE meeting when it reconvened in November. SOS’s leadership considered the Madrid meetings to be “the single most important area where human rights questions are discussed both with reference to their

intrinsic merits and as an aspect of East-West relations” (Siegelman 22 August 1982, SOS 20:19). They had two schemes in mind: one for a press conference at which internationally eminent scientists from the US and Europe would make their assessment of the results of the Madrid discussions so far, restate their position on the scientific moratorium, and “argue in a premonitory way that improvements in scientific relations between East and West depended heavily on a successful conclusion to the Madrid meeting.” The plan was both to “give good visibility to our cause but also to contribute to the creation of a Final Document in a positive way.” The second, more elaborate scheme was for an evening of science and human rights; eminent scientists and statesmen would be invited as speakers, and invitations would be sent to members of the CSCE delegations, Spanish intellectuals, scientists, and the international press, who would already be in Madrid for the opening of the meeting on November 9th. In its final form, this “scientific forum of concern” resembled the simpler rather than the more elaborate plan, but it nevertheless involved substantial fundraising from the SOS membership (\$7,500 US dollars) and coordination with scientific human rights groups in Europe. The event was co-sponsored by the Comité Scientifique Français and the CERN Orlov Committee. SOS was keen for this to be a joint initiative because having US and European scientists speaking together would counter the idea that human rights were “a peculiar American obsession” (Siegelman 22 August 1982, SOS 29:19). John Charap (UK), George Charpak (France and CERN), Paul Flory (USA), Jean-Paul Mathieu (France), Sergei Polkanov (USSR, “now stateless”), and Alvaro de Rujula (Spain and CERN) all took part in the event, urging delegates at Madrid to stand firm on securing a binding agreement (Draft Press Release, SOS 8:2). Siegelman believed this was the first such international representation of scientists concerned with human rights at Madrid.

This formulation of publicity before the fact was quite adept strategically. There were still questions, however, as to whether publicizing human rights violations was the way to bring

about improvements in the circumstances of the dissidents for whom they campaigned. In 1982, SOS and German journalist Richard Löwenthal discussed a plan to negotiate behind the scenes for Sakharov release to the West for medical treatment. SOS was to take the lead in locating a clinic in West Germany or Switzerland that specialized in Sakharov's heart condition and arrange for eminent doctors to send Sakharov letters indicating their judgement that he should be treated there. Löwenthal would ask the West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt to intervene with the Soviet leadership on behalf of Sakharov, making the argument that they could be responsive in a symbolic way and create a positive climate for the forthcoming meeting in Madrid. Löwenthal apparently could "see Schmidt at any time, confers with him often, and has a strong intuition that such a scenario would appeal to him very much." According to SOS, "The trick is to get the timing right, to avoid pushing them [the Soviet leaders] against the wall when their prestige is at stake, to give them reason to believe they will generate a concrete advantage for themselves" (SOS Meeting Minutes 24 July 1982, SOS 19:29).

SOS returned to this scheme several times over the next couple of years, and there were parallel initiatives in Europe too. These negotiations raise an interesting point about SOS's main and alternate strategies: international publicity and "shaming" the Soviet Union on its human rights record were not always, or necessarily, the best ways to produce results. Löwenthal advised SOS that "As far as public campaigning can go I think you have had a considerable impact, and I should not advise to add a new public action in the present German context. Very often in the past, releases of important victims have been achieved by quiet personal pleadings at the top level" (Löwenthal 1 November 1981, SOS 19:20).

The several changes of regime in the early 1980s seemed to offer new possibilities. After Brezhnev's death, SOS discussed opportunities to "think creatively about possibilities if Andropov wants to do some nice things for the West to assure a non-adversarial beginning for

his reign.” Siegelman felt that “We should not hesitate to explore possible scenarios that might produce outcomes we want. Certainly we should try to be bold and imaginative about reshuffling the existing cards” (Siegelman 24 July 1982, SOS 19:20). Similar thinking was at play in the case of personnel changes or influence in the Soviet Academy of Sciences. In 1982, SOS explored the possibility of asking Rockefeller to pay for an SOS mission to Moscow so they might meet with either the President (Anatoly Alexandrov) or the Chief Scientific Secretary (Georgii Skriabin) of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Rockefeller “probably wouldn’t give us a cent for the continuation of our moratorium,” Siegelbaum thought, “but they are very passionate for the idea of improving exchanges” (Siegelman 26 November 1982, SOS 19:29).

Cognate Organizations and the Wider Landscape

Throughout its lifetime, SOS worked with the many cognate organizations that operated at the intersection of science and human rights. Among their strongest relationships were those with the CERN Orlov Committee; the Comité des Physiciens Français, which was also “spontaneous, grass-rooted, and not related to any organization” and one that SOS reciprocally helped organize signatures and publicity; and the Comité des Mathématiciens (Caroli 9 November 1978, SOS 18:4). The American Mathematical Society had a Committee on Human Rights of Mathematicians that actively supported Viktor Brailovsky and other mathematicians (Alexander Lunts; Alexander Lerner) who had been denied the right to emigrate. American and French mathematicians attending the International Congress of Mathematicians in Warsaw in 1983 introduced their talks with dedications to Brailovsky, Orlov, and other “human rights cases” (Aizenman 26 August 1983, CCS 93). SOS was also in touch with members of the Association of American Geographers, which was campaigning on behalf Yuri and Olga Medvedkov, two Soviet colleagues at the Institute of Geography in Moscow active in the peace

movement (Adams 15 January 1983, SOS 20:1). There were many organizations devoted specifically to refuseniks, including an “International Federation of Scientists for Soviet Refuseniks” based in London but with branches in Belgium, Canada, France, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States. There was a Swedish Committee for the Freedom of Science. There were also other broader human rights committees or campaigns that set up subcommittees composed of and dedicated to scientists: the Israel Public Council for Soviet Jewry had a “Scientists Committee”; so too did the Conseil national Français pour la protection des droits des juifs d’URSS. SOS also interacted with international NGOs and more official organizations: in February and March 1984, SOS members met with both Amnesty International’s Soviet Research Expert and Spencer Oliver, the executive head of the US Helsinki Commission (Pripstein 30 January 1984, 9 March 1984, SOS 20:2).

The crowded nature of the field generated both benefits and complications. It meant it was necessary to keep common objectives in sight: when Morris Pripstein complained about the Sakharov Institute’s Edward Lozansky, grumbling that “his idea of collaboration was to ask us to do something for him,” Siegelman pointed out to Pripstein that if the person in question was doing something for Sakharov, then helping them would also be doing something for Sakharov—they should judge each proposal on its merits (Siegelman 16 February 1985, SOS 20:2). There were often several parallel initiatives underway at the same time: while SOS organized the grant for Orlov, Helsinki Watch was pursuing similar plans (SOS 15:58; HRW 59). There were also some failed initiatives. In June 1984, SOS attempted to get twelve Nobel Laureates to endorse a text supporting Sakharov’s hunger strike. Of the twelve persons contacted, only one, Betty Williams, agreed. Siegelman assumed that these people were approached so often by diverse groups that “they have decided to take the rudest alternative by simply not answering requests for the use of their names” (Siegelman 30 June 1984, SOS 20:2).

SOS's relationship with the Committee for Concerned Scientists—also an independent, cross-disciplinary organization devoted to helping Soviet scientists—was vexed. The two groups had similar objectives and some members wondered why they did not merge (Kolthoff, 9 July 1979, SOS 18:28). But they were at odds about the boycott policy, which CCS felt was “basically incorrect for a number of reasons,” and stepped on each other's toes in other respects as well. CCS's founders felt that SOS tried to “claim credit for everything and get involved in everything,” and despite relying on their (CCS's) assistance with contacts, “did not want to be affiliated with us in any way or have our name used in any way” (“SOS—Scientists for Orlov and Shcharansky,” n.d., CCS 98). Members of SOS regarded CCS as insufficiently militant in their strategies, and this was one of the chief barriers to closer cooperation (Flory 6 August 1979, SOS 17:33).

Concern for the human rights of scientists was not confined to scientists in the Soviet Union. There were also committees that defended the human rights of scientists in other geographic areas, particularly Latin America, and SOS worked with some of these organizations too. The International Campaign Massera, which campaigned for the release of Uruguayan mathematician Jose Luis Massera, switched their focus after Massera's release and launched the International Campaign Orlov and Shcharansky. SOS contributed several hundred dollars to their campaign (Halperin March 1984, Pripstein 26 March 1984, SOS 20:2). The French Committee of Physicists that had initially been established to defend Yuri Orlov rapidly expanded its scope to campaign against human rights violations in other global regions (Caroli 2022). Following the success of the moratorium, SOS also had internal discussions about a potential broadening of the campaign's mission. Bruce Kiernan, who briefly acted as executive director of SOS, believed that “to ensure credibility” in the Cold War context, SOS needed to express its concern for human rights on a “North/South as well as East/West basis. One cannot

be indifferent to the human rights abuses in such countries as Argentina, South Africa, Chile, Brazil, Indonesia, and China” (Kiernan, n.d., Siegelman 25 June 1981, SOS 19:7).

On the one hand, this potential broadening of the aims of SOS met with vehement opposition both from members of the executive and the wider membership. Siegelman asked who would find them more credible—their membership? Soviet scientists they were trying to help? The Soviet authorities? One member, Bob Adair, asked to be disassociated from SOS in 1981 (though he was persuaded to remain in the organization) because of concerns about a “considerable broadening of the SOS mission.” He did not consider SOS “well constituted in terms of investigative capacity” to deal with the complex situation in Uruguay and Argentina. “An advantage of organizations with precise and limited objectives is found in the breadth and variety of support that can be martialed. My respect for the integrity [of SOS] does not mean that I can be expected to follow you in any direction . . . but I believe we can agree on the narrow objectives of SOS” (Adair 13 April 1981 SOS 19:1).

On the other hand, the SOS executive definitely thought their responsibilities went beyond their three named principals: campaigning on behalf prominent and symbolic people was in part intended to use their prominence to derive benefits for others as well (Adair 4 June 1981, SOS 19:1). Even between the three principals there were sometimes feelings of inequity. At one point in 1981, Siegelman railed that SOS was not doing as much for Orlov as for Sakharov. He argued that the committee should remove Orlov from its name if it was not prepared to do more (Siegelman 22 December 1981, SOS 19:7). In 1982, Siegelman wondered how to find out from those in touch with the Polish situation “what a group like ours with virtually no resources but with considerable symbolic weight should be doing . . . In the case of Soviet human rights activists, we are generally reasonably well informed about what they would like to see us do on their behalf. Is the present Polish situation sufficiently similar to allow us to proceed without further inquiry into such matters?” (Siegelman 8 March 1982, SOS

19:20). The committee also considered whether its work should really be restricted just to scientists. Their press release at Madrid said that their “insistence on scientists is not because of a lack of concern for the general issue of human rights. It is simply because we know certain cases directly through personal contacts” (Draft Press Release, SOS 8:2). Likewise, Laurent Schwartz of the Comité des Mathématiciens remembered that “some people reproached us for defending only mathematicians.” But it seemed to Schwartz that while they were of course interested in all cases of injustice, “coming to the aid of our colleagues was in the nature of a primordial duty” (Schwartz 2001: 461).

Conclusion

SOS was one among many organizations established in the late 1970s and early 1980s that campaigned on behalf of Soviet dissidents, be they scientists, writers, or refuseniks. While SOS worked with many of their counterparts in the scientific world, they established themselves as an independent entity precisely so they could engage politically and in order to adopt creative campaigning strategies that went beyond what Paul Flory described as the futile “conscience-salving practice of writing letters and other handwringing activities” (Flory 13 September 1979, SOS 17:33). Like scientists in the immediate postwar period, SOS engaged with governments, publics, and the scientific establishment in ways that were “simultaneously savvy, improvised and chaotic” (Wang 1999: 6). SOS’s organizers sought to operate on an international scale both in order to maximize the impact of their efforts and to maintain credibility in a Cold War atmosphere in which US scientists concerned about human rights might easily be portrayed as stooges of the US government. Because the position of scientists in the United States was so highly charged, their European counterparts viewed their US colleagues’ participation in this kind of activism as essential. Christiane Caroli of the Committee of French Physicists wrote to Morris Pripstein that Russian sources told her committee that the French boycott was

considered by scientists in the USSR to be “a rather annoying thing, but not too serious as long as the Americans do not take any such step!” (Caroli 9 September 1978, SOS 18:4).

The scientific community saw human rights as aligned to scientific freedoms. For this reason, many contemporaries saw human rights campaigns as apolitical in a sense (Wolfe 2018, 197). This was clearly not how SOS saw its work. Such campaigns also brought together individuals with a broad range of political positions. As Audra Wolfe writes, “On the left, the human rights movement drew support from those who opposed the US government’s relationships with Latin American dictators; on the right, it attracted anti-Communists who opposed *détente*” (Wolfe 2018: 186). SOS’s signatories evidently embraced the moratorium for a range of reasons, both political and professional. But the SOS committee worked carefully to position itself vis-à-vis its own government’s policy. While the committee often (somewhat disingenuously) referred to the signatories of the moratorium pledge as SOS’s 8,000-strong “membership,” it continually made clear that this was activism on the part of individual scientists, and as such, it was not associated in any way with government policy (SOS Press Releases, CCS 98; Pripstein 12 November 1985, 15 February 1986, SOS 17:55). In the spring of 1980, when it appeared that the US government was exerting pressure on scientific associations to withdraw conference invitations issued to Soviet bloc colleagues, Kurt Gottfried wrote to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to stress that SOS did not, as he (Vance) might suppose, support the Carter administration’s steps to restrict communication between the US and Soviet scientific communities. Pressure for the withdrawal of invitations, the cancellation of visas, and the imposition of secrecy pledges were all steps that “display a willingness to adopt techniques that should be left to the schemings of a totalitarian state” (Pripstein 20 March 1980 SOS 17:54). Likewise, SOS did not pressure the NAS to suspend exchanges—the point of their campaign was that individual scientists could take action in spite of government-sponsored opportunities for collaboration (Flory n.d. SOS 17:33). The government and the

academy had to “arrange scientific contacts with other countries taking into account a host of conflicting needs, including military, political and cultural factors. Scientists individually can express themselves in support of human rights as their consciences dictate” (‘SOS Policy Position’, SOS 8:5). SOS also emphasized that scientists withdrew from exchange programs reluctantly because many had interacted extensively with Soviet colleagues in the past. But “when scientific exchange begins to feel like endorsement of repressive measures by the Soviet government, then we find ourselves with no choice but to refuse our cooperation and risk the losses to science that ensue on both sides” (‘SOS Policy Position’, SOS 8:5).

The SOS executive was also—like other scientists active in this arena—concerned that its actions should not directly contribute to worsening Cold War relations. The period between 1979 and 1985 was a time of escalating Cold War tensions, including growing fears of nuclear warfare, and SOS had to navigate these concerns. They were conscious that “any action taken by scientist in the political arena—or any refusal to take action—must not increase the likelihood of nuclear war, and if possible, should decrease that likelihood” (Ralston, n.d., SOS 19:7). SOS firmly opposed “turning the deeply felt sympathy for Soviet dissidents into support for yet another acceleration of the thermonuclear arms race” and believed that “virtually all scientists agree on that, whether they are exiled to Gorki’i, do hard labor in the Urals, or freely exercise their civil and human rights before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee” (“On the Position of SOS,” SOS 19:18). This was a further reason for keeping SOS’s activism as far as possible away from any government action and emphasizing its individual nature. As Audra Wolfe has demonstrated, campaigning for scientific freedom and speaking out against human rights abuses were hardly anti-government positions given the role that the idea of scientific freedom played in US projections of national culture in the Cold War context. But certainly, SOS was aware of the complex nature of their engagement with governments on both sides of the Cold War divide. As Philip Siegelman put it, “Substantial numbers of scientists (especially

physicists) were reluctant to support the Cold War. Often such people were simultaneously appalled by the persecution of their scientific counterparts by the Soviet state” (Siegelman 2017).

At the same time, there was a sense in which SOS and likeminded scientists clearly felt that they understood the context and dynamics of dissent in the Soviet Union—as evidenced by the reluctance to get involved in human rights campaigns dealing with other parts of the world. This stemmed in part from previous interactions with Soviet science and particularly with the scientists for whom the committee campaigned, but it also reflected the widespread penetration of Cold War commentary on the Soviet Union’s government and society in the United States at that time. The genuine concern of US and European scientists for their Soviet colleagues operated alongside a search for useable dissident figures on the part of the US government and media, and this, along with the broad purchase of human rights as an ideal, helped SOS bring together a broad community of scientists in support of the moratorium campaign. The Soviet scientists that SOS campaigned for recognized both the benefits and limitations of such campaigning: they engaged with international support groups and, in some cases, contributed to strategy too.

SOS was aware also of the limits of the moratorium and the risks of being defined by the boycott as a strategy. Paul Flory was adamant that “SOS should not perceive its role in terms of boycotts and pledges. Much more needs to be done to develop a broad consensus among scientists. Some may wish to boycott and others to sign pledges. Others may choose to do neither but to restrict their cooperation by examining each instance on its merits” (Flory 13 September 1979, SOS 17:33). Publicity was a key element in SOS’s strategic repertoire, but its protagonists were also very much interested in action that would produce results, and this drove their efforts to be more creative. Philip Siegelman, who along with Morris Pripstein was certainly one of the most active members of the SOS committee, railed against those members

of the executive who seemed only partially committed to their cause. “None of these people would be satisfied with being amateur/week-end scientists; why should we be satisfied with their use of SOS as a sort of titillating activity to salve their (rather confused) political conscience?” (Siegelman 22 December 1981, SOS 19:17). Although they operated through professional networks and understood their activism to be their responsibility as scientists in some sense, they nevertheless saw this action as fundamentally political and organized on that basis. In their efforts to publicize and negotiate for Sakharov, Orlov, Shcharansky, and other Soviet scientists, SOS demonstrated both the broad reach of such human rights campaigns within the scientific community and the possibilities (and limitations) of international activism in the late Cold War.

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