

COMMENTARY

Freedom and Responsibility: The International Ornithological Congress¹

HELMUT C. MUELLER²

In the months preceding the unfortunate decision to hold the XVIII International Ornithological Congress in Moscow, the government of the Soviet Union began to intensify its oppression of "dissident" scientists. This change has continued unabated until it is now questionable that there remains a scientist in the Soviet Union who has publicly disagreed with Soviet policy without suffering persecution for his views. The Soviet campaign culminated, during 1980, with Andrei Sakharov being stripped of his membership in the USSR Academy of Sciences, removed from his laboratory, and sent to internal exile. Sakharov is known as the inventor of the Soviet hydrogen bomb and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his writings on the dangers of nuclear war, the need for coexistence, and the need for intellectual and scientific freedom. Sakharov thus joined the many Soviet scientists who have been imprisoned, sent to labor camps, committed to psychiatric hospitals, or exiled. Their crime is to insist on the right to speak freely. Indeed, more than a few have been persecuted for merely protesting the imprisonment of other scientists.

Many individual western scientists and more than a few organizations have responded to this tyrannical campaign of the Soviet government by boycotting scientific meetings and other formal interchanges with the Soviet Union. As of late October 1980, more than 6,000 U.S. scientists, including 32 Nobel Laureates, had signed a pledge to boycott meetings, etc., in the Soviet Union. An additional 1,800 scientists from 43 nations have also agreed not to cooperate with the Soviets until the dissident Soviet scientists are released from prison. The U.S. National Academy of Sciences has suspended previously formally arranged joint meetings of groups sponsored by the two academies.

You have the freedom to attend the Congress in Moscow. I ask you to examine your responsibility to the imprisoned Soviet scientists and to the Soviet ornithologists who will not have the freedom to attend. As I see it, you have three options: (1) Ignore the plight of the Soviet scientists and agree with the Soviet government that this is an internal matter. (2) Boycott the Congress. (3) Attend the Congress, but state your objection to the persecution of Soviet scientists. If you chose alternative (2), you should notify the Soviets indicating why you are not attending. If you chose alternative (3), you should make your objections known *before* going to Moscow. Once there, you will have little access to officials and your efforts to talk with Soviet ornithologists about the matter will, at best, lead to embarrassment. As noted above, those Soviet scientists who disagree with Soviet policy are persecuted: Do you wish to endanger your Soviet colleagues?

Your objections should be sent to: Prof. Valery Ilyichev, Secretary of the XVIII International Ornithological Congress, Ringing Centre, Fersman Street 13, Moscow 117312, USSR *and* (because he is a member of USSR Academy of Sciences and head of the Soviet Organizing Committee of the Congress): Academician Vladimir Sokolov, Director, Institute of Evolutionary Animal Morphology, Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 33 Leninskii Prospect, 117071 Moscow V-71 (letters of protest to the Soviet Union should be sent by *registered* mail or it is likely they will not be delivered).

¹ This Commentary addresses an issue that I have heard discussed among colleagues but that has not been openly aired in the pages of ornithological journals. Upon receiving Professor Mueller's submitted Commentary, I felt it appropriate that contrasting views also be represented. Accordingly, I invited Professor Farner to respond to Mueller's viewpoint; his Commentary follows. It should be noted that the Council of the A.O.U. has not discussed this issue and has taken no official stance on the matter; publication of these essays should not be interpreted as establishing an A.O.U. policy on this issue.—J.A.W.

² Department of Zoology and Curriculum in Ecology, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514 USA.