Bonner challenges premises of Yalta at Sakharov memorial conference

by Laurence and Marjorie Hecht

Andrei Sakharov, the leading physicist and courageous opponent of the Soviet dictatorship, who lived just long enough to see the toppling of Bolshevik rule in Russia, was honored by family and friends of long standing, at a May 19 event sponsored by the Human Rights Committee of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and the International Andrei Sakharov Foundation. These included Elena Bonner, Sakharov's renowned widow, an astute and morally guided analyst of world affairs in her own right; Askar Akayev, the new President of Kyrgyzstan, the Turkic-Muslim former Soviet republic which borders on western China; Lane Kirkland, president of the AFL-CIO labor federation in the United States; and Boris Bolotovsky, fellow physicist and former campaign representative for Sakharov.

The all-day affair at the lecture hall of the neo-classical building which houses the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C. turned out to be a microcosm of the revolutionary changes that are sweeping aside many of the institutions of the post-Yalta world, while the threat of a new global war looms before us. The content of the speeches reflected this.

- Elena Bonner denounced the cynicism of the United Nations and leading western governments continuing to operate in the geopolitical realm of the Yalta accord, that is the post-World War II division of the world into two major spheres of influence. Either these fundamental premises are changed, she said, or the world will be led to further violence and wars.
- AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland, a prominent figure in the one-worldist Trilateral Commission, broke with the British-French appeasement policy in the Balkans and called on the United States to arm the Bosnians and support them with air strikes "to defend their hearth and homes."
- Kyrgyzstan President Askar Akayev, a physicist and former member of the Congress of People's Deputies who had defended Sakharov against a Gorbachov-orchestrated attack in 1989, called on scientists to act like Sakaharov. "Truth and justice must be the scientist's responsibility," he said.

Among the major speakers, only Lawrence Klein, the Wharton School economist, who as a Nobel Prize winner had lent his name to a call for Sakharov's freedom, seemed to have learnt nothing from recent events. Professor Klein, whose economic consulting firm does business with the People's Republic of China, proposed that since the shock therapy approach had failed, Russia should adopt the "Chinese model," also pointing to Chile and Mexico as other, possible variants.

Amid much shaking of heads and muttering under the breath, especially from the many Russians in attendance, physicist Yuri Orlov rose to politely puncture the economist's fantasy. Orlov, who served a six-year sentence in a Russian labor camp and is now at Cornell University, explained that such a path is out of the question, that the democratic movement in Russia would not tolerate or even give serious thought to the Chinese model.

The postwar world and threat of new war

In her speech, "Self-Determination," Dr. Bonner sharply denounced the United Nations and the powers in the West for failing to give up the assumptions that have guided policy since the end of World War II, and in particular for the failure to recognize a nation's right to independence, or self-determination, as a fundamental human right. Referring to Andrei Sakharov (1921-89) as a man who was ahead of his time, she pointed out that her husband had already recognized the importance of this principle in a 1968 essay on peaceful coexistence, intellectual freedom, and progress.

Bonner also sharply criticized the western slowness to recognize the independence of Baltic and Balkan states, in their desire to avoid offending Gorbachov, and in general criticized the dominance of geopolitical thinking over morality.

She pointed out that the United Nations was founded at the end of World War II with the major participation of the Soviet Union. "As a result, we have the principle of the inviolability of borders and *status quo* of the existing situation of the political map shaped after 1945. As a consequence, the same doctrine of inviolability—or impossibility to reshape the borders—became the basis of the Helsinki agreement of 1975," she said.

"Moreover, this doctrine in some ways justified or legitimized the existing situation, the division of the world into two parts: one being peoples that have the right to determine their own fate, and the other part peoples who are denied this right," she continued.

"Today, almost on the anniversary, almost two decades since the Helsinki Accords were signed in the summer of 1975, we can say that this was an act of ultimate cynicism," Bonner said. "The longer we live by the doctrine guiding the United Nations at the Helsinki Accords, the more tragedy, violence, and suffering we will witness in the years to come.

"It is very difficult to try to change the concepts that guide organizations such as the United Nations," Bonner said. "But I think this is the only opportunity to preserve these very organizations as coordinating institutions. Otherwise these very institutions will be swept away by very great changes, in the very same way that the League of Nations was swept away by the events of the Second World War—maybe not swept by the Third World War, but by hundreds of small regional wars and conflicts that are being bred by the absence of respect for the right of self-determination," Bonner said.

"Lithuania proclaimed its independence in May 1990. But the United States recognized it only after August 1991. A year after that, Slovenia and Croatia proclaimed independence. And the chorus of European states, the United States, the CSCE [Council on Security and Cooperation in Europe], and the United Nations all said, neither Croatia nor Slovenia have the right to independence. Could it have been that it was this decision that forced the Army to decide the situation there by use of force?"

Origins of 'ethnic cleansing'

Referring then to the tragedy in Karabakh, she first criticized the Gorbachov government for refusing to recognize the decision of the Karabakh Supreme Soviet to become part of Armenia (80% of the population of Karabakh was then Armenian). Gorbachov's personal pro-Azerbaijani stance led to gross violations of human rights, pogroms, and violence, she said.

But the failure of world opinion to condemn these pogroms which took place in Sumgait, Baku, and Kerevaban in 1989-90 led to the acceptance of the situation we have now in Bosnia, Bonner said. "If the events of spring 1991, the despicable violation of human rights that was demonstrated in the forcible deportation of the Armenians from Karabakh by the Azerbaijani and Soviet armed forces, were condemned, we would not have had ethnic cleansing today," she said.

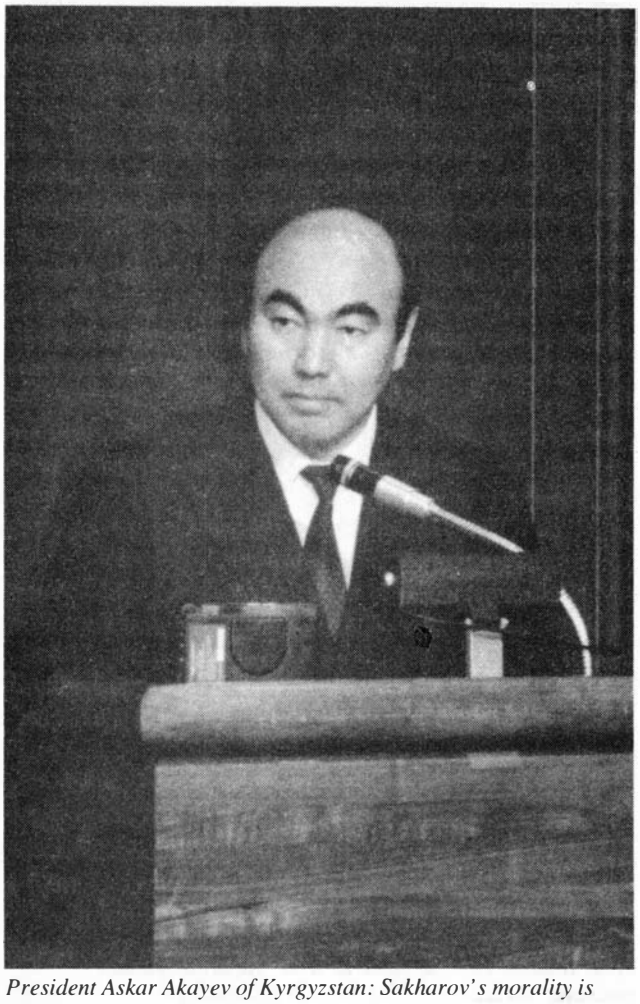
But her critique of western geopolitical maneuvering fell just short of identifying in this persisting western tendency the original geopolitical doctrine of Halford Mackinder and others, which guided both Versailles after World War I and Yalta after World War II. Under this doctrine, which is the explanation for both the appeasement in Bosnia and the economic poison pill being fed Russia, an alliance between western Europe and the so-called "Eurasian heartland" is to be averted at all costs by the "Atlantic" powers. Such thinking guided the terms at Versailles, the support for Hitler and Mussolini among powerful British and American circles up through 1938, and continues to this day.

Elena Bonner: Helsinki Accords were "an act of ultimate cynicism."

'A warrior prophet'

Bonner's keynote address was followed by that of President Askar Akayev of Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia. Akayev distinguished himself in 1989 during the period of transition from communist rule, as the only deputy to defend Sakharov against a Gorbachov-orchestrated attack on him in the Congress of People's Deputies. His speech paid tribute to the moral courage of Sakharov, who endured abuse and ostracism from the Soviet authorities, and frequently put himself at physical risk to defy the Soviet dictatorship, including in a lengthy hunger strike. Sakharov's morality is what must guide all scientists, Akayev said. "An immoral person cannot be a good scientist. Truth and justice must be the scientist's responsibility."

Akayev described the complicity of many scientists who, during the communist years gave in to the pleasures of the world and self-preservation and toed the line, thus causing pain to the entire society. This led to the decline of moral values and psychological deterioration throughout Soviet society. But Sakharov was the "bearer of the cultural flame,"



President Askar Akayev of Kyrgyzstan: Sakharov's morality is what must guide all scientists.

a "warrior prophet" who put human rights and the rights of the individual first.

Akayev later met with President Clinton, and was escorted through Washington with a full motorcade. Unfortunately, agreements between his country and the predatory International Monetary Fund-World Bank were announced the next day.

Sakharov's scientific achievements

The achievements of Sakharov the scientist were reviewed by physicist and Academy of Sciences member Boris M. Bolotovsky. Bolotovsky, who spoke with great modesty and humor, risked his own freedom to visit Sakharov during his period of internal exile under the dictatorship. Later he served as Sakharov's official representative during his campaign for the Russian Congress.

Sakharov's scientific achievements were legion and many stories about him were told in Russia, which Bolotovsky humorously recounted, noting that these were not myths but real.

These began with a story about Sakharov's doctoral exam, where he gave an answer that stumped his examiners, the famous physicists Igor Tamm and Yevgeny Feinberg, for several days. Perhaps most important was the story about how his colleagues perceived Sakharov. Sakharov's courageous resistance to the Soviet authorities was often discussed by his colleagues, Bolotovsky said, and the question of why he did these things often came up. It was sometimes suggested that despite his great genius in matters of physics, perhaps he was deficient in another area—the instinct for self-preservation. But this was not true, said Bolotovsky. Rather it was the case that Sakharov behaved always as a free human being, even though he lived in an unfree country.

Sakharov's perceptive solution to the problem of isentropic compression, that is, the containment of the hydrogen isotopes (the ingredients of thermonuclear fusion) before explosion, made him the true pioneer of the Soviet H-bomb program. His solution, which involved the containment of the light nuclei with a shell of heavy metal, was at first not understood by most of his colleagues. They thought the containment problem would only become more difficult with this approach. Later the method became known as "sugarization"—a pun on the name Sakharov which means "sugar" in Russian. Sakharov was at first reluctant to participate in the Soviet H-bomb program, but ultimately decided that it was better not to leave so powerful a weapon in the hands of only one power. He was one of the first physicists to recognize the cumulative radiation danger from atmospheric testing and to campaign against it.

His theoretical contributions included an early prediction concerning the decay products of pi-mesons, the nuclear particles discovered in the 1940s. In a contribution to cosmology, he attempted to explain the problem known as baryon asymmetry—why there appears to be more matter than antimatter—by suggesting that the proton, though a stable particle, does not have an unlimited lifetime, nor does its antiparticle. Thus, in an earlier period of evolution of the universe, more anti-protons decayed, leaving the present asymmetry. This challenges the prevailing view that there must be concentrations of anti-matter somewhere in space to balance matter.

In another important theoretical work, Sakharov was able to derive the Einstein gravitational equations from quantum considerations. His approach was to attempt to minimize the energy which must be expended, according to Einstein's view, in achieving the curvature of space. By these means, he showed that gravitation is not a separate force but is derived from the quantum theory of the field.

Bolotovsky, recalling his visit to Sakharov and Bonner during their exile in Gorky, relayed in his impression that, here were two people, who despite their conditions, were more free than their jailers. Though individuals such as these are rare, he said, the fact that they exist brings hope to mankind.