

SOVIET SCIENCE

Human Rights ?

from our Soviet Correspondent

THE confiscation, last week, of the passport of Soviet physicist Valerii Nikolaevich Chalidze, while on a lecture tour of the United States, indicates a considerable threat to any future Soviet "liberal intellectuals" permitted to travel abroad. As Dr Zhores Medvedev points out, in his samizdat (underground) essay *Fruitful Meetings between Scientists of the World*, representatives of the Soviet Union, the technically independent delegations of the Ukrainian and Byelorussian Soviet Republics and five "countries of national democracies" were the only delegates which did not vote in favour of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. So presumably they do not consider themselves bound by Article 13.2 which states "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country".

Valerii Chalidze was one of the three founder members of the illegal Human Rights Committee in 1970, whose aims were to study problems of rights and to help the Soviet authorities to introduce desirable reforms. He has been active, over the past few years, in contributing to the samizdat *Chronicle of Current Events* on matters of human rights and freedom of expression. Possibly on account of these activities, he was dismissed, in autumn 1970, from his position as head of the polymer physics school at the Moscow Institute of Plastics Research.

The Human Rights Committee has always insisted that it has no political aims and has constantly endeavoured (albeit unsuccessfully) to have itself registered as an official organization under Soviet law. Mr Chalidze, as secretary of the committee, has always preserved an attitude of great caution and discretion, so that this latest move may be construed as the pragmatically most effective means of neutralizing his protests. Earlier this year, the mathematician Alexander Esenin-Volpin was pressurized into emigrating "as a Jew" on the understanding that, if he did not emigrate, he would be either imprisoned or confined again in a mental hospital. Previous occasions when Esenin-Volpin was "hospitalized" as a dissident led to considerable public protest from Soviet intellectuals, so that in spite of the general policy of hindering Jewish intellectuals from leaving the country, the Soviet government apparently found it expedient, in this case, to urge him to leave. In fact, Esenin-Volpin never went to Israel at all, and is now teaching in New York.

In accordance with his previous stand for human rights, it is understood that Mr Chalidze will appeal against the

deprivation of his Soviet citizenship although he can have little hope for success. This latest move will leave physicist Andrei D. Sakharov the only notable member of the Human Rights Committee still active.

BROADCASTING

Sir Michael Moves On

SIR MICHAEL SWANN, principal and vice-chancellor of the University of Edinburgh, will succeed Lord Hill as chairman of the British Broadcasting Corporation on January 1, 1973. The announcement, made last week, will still speculation that Sir Michael was to succeed Sir Brian Flowers as chairman of the Science Research Council.

Sir Michael, who is 52, has been at the University of Edinburgh since 1952 when he was elected to the chair of Natural History at the university. Since 1965 he has been principal, and he was knighted earlier this year. During his time at Edinburgh Sir Michael has served on numerous public committees. He was a member of the now defunct Council for Scientific Policy from 1965-69, a member of the Medical Research Council from 1962-65, chairman of the Nuffield Foundation Biology project from 1962-65 and since 1969 he has been a member of the

Science Research Council. A spokesman for the council said last week that there was nothing in the SRC's charter to prevent Sir Michael from continuing to serve on the council.

Perhaps Sir Michael is better known for three other committees of which he was chairman. One report was on manpower resources, which pointed out that sixth form students were turning away from science, another considered whether it was advisable for Britain to partake in the 300 GeV accelerator project now under construction in Geneva, and a third advised on the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry and veterinary medicine. At present Sir Michael is a member of a committee looking into the veterinary profession.

The chairman of the BBC is expected to devote only part of his time to the job. The University of Edinburgh said last week that Sir Michael will have limited involvement with the corporation to start with, and he will still be active in the university until the end of the 1972-73 academic year. He will then sever connexions with the university and devote more time to the corporation. The chairman of the BBC normally holds office for five years, but as the corporation's charter expires in July 1976, Sir Michael has been formally appointed only until then.

SCOTLAND

Row over Gas Terminal

PROFESSOR V. C. WYNNE EDWARDS, former chairman of the Natural Environment Research Council is one of a distinguished group of academics and conservationists who are seriously concerned over joint proposals from the Gas Council and the Total Oil Company to build a gas terminal at Crimond airport between Fraserburgh and Peterhead north of Aberdeen. Only two weeks' notice has been given for objections to the scheme to reach Aberdeen County Council planning committee.

Crimond, a disused airfield, is situated by Loch Strathbeg near Rattray Head. The loch is the largest dune slack pool in Great Britain and is classified as being of exceptional scientific interest by the Nature Conservancy on three counts—wildlife, coastal geology and limnology.

In a letter to *The Scotsman*, Professor Wynne Edwards, who has the chair of Natural History at the University of Aberdeen, and G. M. Dunnet, Professor of Zoology at the university, make it plain that nothing like enough notice has been given of the proposal which is coming up for consideration by the planning committee today. The application is for outline permission only and the professors state that "the threat . . . cannot be assessed unless

detailed plans are provided. It seems to us quite incredible that an application for planning permission in principle, without details of the proposals, can even be considered when so much is at stake".

Dr R. Goodyear of the Scottish Nature Conservancy said last week that the loch "is an outstanding example of a northern dune system" which is important as a wildlife sanctuary and as an unusual example of mixed brackish and freshwater biology. According to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which is adamantly opposed to the scheme, 5 per cent of the world's pink-footed goose population winter on the loch which is also an exceptionally important staging post for whopper swans on their way south from the breeding grounds in Iceland and the Soviet Union. Many thousands of ducks, swans and geese populate the loch.

Professor Dunnet last week emphasized that not only is he concerned about the possible damage to the site but also about the way the matter is being handled. He suspects that there is a lack of any real planning behind the proposal and says that there is no evidence that other sites have in fact been considered. Professor Dunnet is also afraid that other industry will be attracted to the area once the terminal is built.