

Soviet dissidents (4)

Trying to keep in touch

Yevgeny Levich describes the complex procedure involved in obtaining permits for travel abroad

WESTERN scientists welcomed the development of scientific contact with the USSR which came with *détente*. But enormous obstacles remain. A Soviet scientist intending to go overseas to take part in a conference or in some scientific exchange programme has to go through a complicated bureaucratic procedure, like any other Soviet citizen going abroad.

The first stage consists in obtaining a character reference (*kharakteristika*) which must be confirmed by the administration of his place of employment, by the local party organisation and his trade-union branch. The reference deals, among other things, with such matters as the applicant's participation in public activities, his moral image and his relations with the all grades of staff at his place of employment. Accompanying the reference is a detailed questionnaire covering the applicant's nationality, his party membership, details about all his former places of work and so on. The applicant is also asked to supply detailed information about his close relatives (including divorced spouse). When he has obtained the reference he is called for an interview to the Regional Committee of the Communist Party, where he is given the instructions which complete the open part of the procedure.

The main mechanism of issuing permits for foreign travel remains hidden from the eyes of the applicants. The outsized apparatus of the foreign Section of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (General Korneev of the KGB has been head of this section for many years) or the ministries in charge of the various scientific research institutes are the bodies which deal with "travel matters". The central KGB has the last word in making decisions, which are communicated to the prospective traveller, as a rule, a day or two before his intended date of departure. There have been cases when a travel permit was taken away when the person was boarding the aeroplane.

In practice, the administration of the local institute (and especially its "first section"—the secret section which exists in every scientific institution and is connected with the KGB) plays an important part in making the decision. The deputy director of the institution, who is normally the head of the "first section", is also responsible for all international contacts. The information about the applicant which is passed on

through the closed channels has much more weight than his official reference. After the sanction of the Foreign Section has been received and confirmed by the KGB the "travel case" is transferred to the "Commission on Travel", headed for many years by the Politbureau's chief ideologue Mikhail Suslov.

The considerable efforts which are made to obtain permission to go abroad reflect the attraction that travel has for the Soviet scientist. Purely scientific considerations play the significant part here, of course, especially considering the almost complete isolation of the Soviet scientists in the recent past; but such academic interests are reinforced by financial attractions and considerations of prestige. Foreign travel is graded, like the Soviet elite's other privileges, according to value. Short trips to scientific conferences for which the scientist himself must pay are thought to be least attractive. It is much more difficult to be included in an official delegation going abroad at the state's expense. Then there is the rare possibility of going abroad for a long period of time, for example, within the framework of scientific-exchange programmes. Additional grading differentiates between travelling to the countries of Eastern Europe (not always easily obtainable) and travelling to the West.

The possibility of receiving a permit to travel abroad, and the efforts which must be undertaken to obtain it, are determined by a vague but identifiable correlation between the prestige value of the trip and the applicant's personal qualities. Being a party member, holding an official academic position, having personal connections in the administration and personal initiative are all to the applicant's credit; having relatives abroad, an unsuitable nationality, and a lack of interest in the party are not. Negative characteristics are usually critical and they automatically block off the entrance to some—if not all—ladders of privilege. On the other hand, some persons can arise to a level of the administration and party where they can by-pass the usual procedures and plan their trips more freely.

Moving up on the ladder of privileges and, in particular, gaining access to overseas contacts presents additional demands, the violation of which could mean the immediate loss of all that had been achieved. Scientific contacts between Soviet scientists and the West



Sakharov, attacked

are subject to fairly strict control. Two examples:

- Every scientist must present a detailed report, including not only details of scientific and industrial significance, but also characteristics of all the Western scientists whom he met, to the Overseas Section of the Academy of Sciences.

- Each scientist meeting with overseas colleagues at his home or at his institute must receive permission for such a meeting from the "first section" of his work-place. He must also present a detailed report about the meeting to the "first section" afterwards. Evasion of these obligations automatically stops access to foreign contacts. On the other hand, some Soviet scientists deliberately overestimate the importance of their overseas contacts and their knowledge of scientific and industrial works in the West in order to increase their chances of a permit for their next trip.

Strict control applies not only to personal contacts, but also to scientific publications: all materials sent abroad, including letters to colleagues, must go through the special commission in every institute, which include representatives of the "first section". After being checked by the commission the materials must receive the sanction of the censorship office (the *Glavlit*). A particular form of control has appeared with the inclusion of Soviet representatives on the editorial boards of some international magazines, providing an opportunity to prevent publication of articles in foreign magazines.

Those who can travel abroad because of their position naturally enjoy significant advantages in the struggle for power which goes on in the upper layers of the Soviet academic community. But whereas scientific life inside the USSR is controlled to a significant extent by the representatives of the Soviet scientific elite, in matters connected with foreign contacts the

critical influence is concentrated in the hands of the party apparatus and the KGB. The selectively chosen representatives of the scientific elite have, however, merged with the administrative and party elite: those who have signed letters attacking Sakharov, those who have dismissed Jewish scientists wanting to emigrate from the USSR, and later signed false secrecy certificates of these scientists, are themselves scientists. Their actions are dictated not by their scientific but by their administrative interests, by their proximity with the party oligarchy and their desire to use this in their struggle for rank and power. They are the ones who appear most often at international conferences; they are the ones who gain most from the "scientific détente". The strengthening of scientific contacts

with the West, as long as they develop in a way suitable for the Soviet authorities, increases the influence of the most rigid elements of the Soviet establishment and provides them with additional levers to influence scientific life in the Soviet Union.

Soviet citizens differ from one another in everything, just as citizens of any Western country do. In accordance with the spirit of the "third basket" of the Helsinki Declaration, contacts ought to be developed on the individual level and not on the level of the delegations selected by the authorities. The organisation committees of international conferences should reserve the right to invite to conferences Soviet scientists who are prominent in their field, and should make their attendance a condition for the attendance of the

official Soviet delegation. The participation of Western scientists in any scientific exchange programmes must be conditional on the Western side being able to choose at least some of the members of the Soviet delegation and being able to have free contacts with any scientists in the USSR whom they would like to meet. Soviet scientists must also retain the right to send their articles to foreign magazines through members of the editorial board as well as through the Soviet regional editor.

Measures such as these would not cause a halt to scientific contact with the West. The needs of the state, and of the members of the elite, ensure that. And they represent something more than mere declarations of support or solidarity. □

COMECON

WITH growing industrialisation, fuel and power supplies are a matter of increasing importance to the Comecon block, particularly as the new policy of economic integration begins to take effect, and considerable reliance has come to be placed on oil, gas, and electricity delivered from the Soviet Union by pipeline and cable. But despite official Soviet statements that fuel and power export commitments would remain unaffected by the new drive for economies at home, it seems that there will after all be an export cutback. During a recent Miners' Day rally in northern Bohemia it became apparent that deliveries of Soviet oil to Czechoslovakia over the next five years would "fall short" of original estimates. Accordingly, the Czechoslovak Government has concluded that "we shall be unable to maintain the growth rate of past years".

There are other problems too. An article in the Slovak *Pravda* notes that in spite of the additional 4,000 MW or so of new generating capacity planned for the next five years (which should include two atomic reactors at Jaslovské Bohunice, providing some 35% of the total new capacity for Czechoslovakia), the generating system will still have "minimal reserves" and will be constantly stretched.

Nuclear power is a matter of pressing importance to Comecon, and, not surprisingly, there is considerable international cooperation. Joint research into the construction of the necessary equipment, which has resulted in the development of new types of generator, is carried out by Interatomenergo and Interatom-instrument. The latter organisation

is the only Comecon enterprise to have its own autonomous accounting system and operating capital of convertible currencies. Atomic power stations are being constructed (with Soviet aid and expertise) throughout the Comecon block, notably at Lake Zarnowiec in Poland, and Paks in Hungary. Ultimately, they should all



be connected with a 750 kV grid, the first line of which, from Ukraine to Hungary (with a later extension planned to Yugoslavia), should be commissioned in 1978. By 1990, nuclear power stations should meet one-quarter of the forecast electricity demand of the Comecon block.

In the meantime, to fill the energy gap, conventional fossil fuels are in ever increasing demand, and intensive work is being carried out both to modernise existing coal mines and to develop new ones. One such project, described recently by the Prague television service, bears a touch of inadvertent humour. A new open-cast coal mine, which will provide fuel for a power station in northern Bohemia, is, in line with the Socialist custom of naming important enterprises after

revolutionary heroes, to be called after Maksim Gor'kii. One of Gor'kii's most famous works is entitled *'From the Lower Depths'*.

● The drought which this year has affected all the European members of Comecon together with certain western parts of the Soviet Union (though not the Moscow region, where too much rather than too little rain has been the problem), has forced the authorities to place a new emphasis on the utilisation of water resources. Some research had, indeed, already begun with the mapping last winter and spring of Carpathian water-resources. That survey did not, however, extend to the eastern regions of the Carpathians (Ukrainian SSR), where over-zealous tree-felling is apparently resulting in erosion and consequent "destruction" of the water table. Precipitation in the Carpathians is of vital importance to the water supplies of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary and Ukraine.

Several local water economy schemes are now being implemented. These include anti-flood measures on the Tisza, Mura and Raba in Hungary, a dam on the Cirocha in Slovakia, a special turbine-type aerator for the purification of polluted river water (developed at the Purification Equipment Institute in Sofia) and a reservoir on the Odra near Mietkow in Poland. Although, like the Carpathian survey, many of these projects were already envisaged or under way before the drought became a pressing problem, the considerable media coverage they have received indicates that water supply has become an issue of grave importance.