

Russian science magazine dates from before the revolution

PRIRODA, the Russian popular science journal, appeared in its 750th issue last month, with the original *art nouveau* cover of 1912, and containing reprints of significant articles published in the last 66 years. Any cover from the early years of the century must inevitably have an aura of the antique, but the first *Priroda*, with its antiquated spellings and obsolete letters comes as something of a shock—the very orthography is at once a living reminder that this is a journal from before the Revolution.

Priroda was founded in 1912, the same year in which *Pravda*, albeit illegally and abroad, first saw the light of day. *Priroda* was founded as a popular science journal, under the auspices of the "Man and Universe" Society, and its pre-Revolutionary editors included Vladimir A. Vagner (biologist and physiologist), Lev V. Pisarzhevskii (chemist), Lev A. Tarasevich (microbiologist) and Nikolai K. Kol'tsov (biochemist). From this era, the jubilee issue reprints Il'ya I. Mechnikov's 1915 address to the Pasteur Institute, and a fascinating article by Maksim Gor'kii on "Science and democracy" which appeared in May 1917, during the heady political turmoil between the February and October Revolutions.

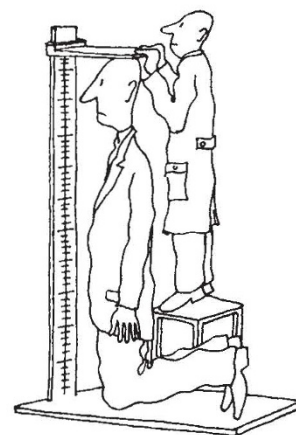
Revolution, however exciting, does not favour the publication of science, although *Priroda* managed to struggle through, albeit with occasional double issues until 1920. The following year, it was refounded as the organ of the "Commission for the Study of Natural Productive forces of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR" and the place of publication transferred from Moscow to Petrograd. In 1930 it came under the direct auspices of the Academy. During these years, the nature of the journal changed, becoming increasingly specialised, although some papers, such as Pavlov on "The activity of the higher nervous system" (1932), Vernadskii on the evolution of species and Artsimovich and Alikhan'yan on "the problems of the physics of the atomic nucleus" (1941) still seem aimed at the interested amateur rather than the specialist. An interesting reprint from this time is "The problem of the genesis of cultivated plants in our present state of knowledge", by Nikolai I. Vavilov, who was later to be discredited by the Lysenkoists and was only fully (post-humously) rehabilitated in 1971.

In 1951, a special resolution of the Academy restored *Priroda* to its original purpose, the popularisation of science, and the specialist articles were

banished to more learned forums. At the same time, the editorial offices were moved back to Moscow. The format of *Priroda*, with prominent scientists, often Academicians, writing for the popular market survey articles on the achievements of Soviet and foreign science became essentially that we know today. With the passing of Stalinism, humour took a lighter touch—one recalls in particular the cartoon of the female biochemist earnestly knitting a double helix, while at the same time often subtly critical of official policy or negligence (the lab. assistant

December 1998 and *Priroda* 1000. (Articles 'reviewed' include "The radiation of blue holes in the pink part of the spectrum", "The proposed international alphysical dictionary", a declaration from the Academy that they will not consider articles on telepathy "since the telepathic link has been conclusively proved", reports of traces of organic compounds in moon rock, and Dirac monopoles whose vibrations reproduce the "old-time love-song" *Ochi cherniya!*)

Turning from fantasy to fact, and congratulating *Priroda* on its enduring standards and impressive survival and equally impressive circulation figure (85,000), one must not fail to remark one minor



Priroda style humour: the saving mutation (left): science always finds a way out (right)

throwing tin-cans and cigarette ash into the fish-tank "to create a natural environment"). Humour is not lacking from the jubilee issue, taking the form of the regular round-up of literature—but in this case looking forward to

detail. The 1912 cover gives the price of a single issue as 50 kopeks. Two world wars, two revolutions and 66 years later the cost of a single issue remains—50 kopeks.

Vera Rich

Czechs and Soviets meet in record space flights

CZECHOSLOVAKIA has won the "little space race" for the third nation to put a citizen into orbit. The Czechs were odds-on favourites, although Poland and East Germany are confidently expected to 'place' later this year. The launch of 'Pilot Cosmonaut of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic' Vladimir Remek, as one of the crew of *Soyuz-28* is not, of course, unexpected; the *Interkosmos* programme envisaged the participation of Comecon cosmonauts, each with a Soviet partner, in *Soyuz* flights starting this year, and it has been rumoured for some weeks that these "international" flights would dock with the *Salyut* station. The only contention was which of the eight 'junior partners' in the alliance would be first.

Czechoslovakia has from the beginning been a major contributor to

Interkosmos, both in technical expertise and the provision of tracking facilities. Nevertheless, the Czech press played down this aspect, maintaining (*Rude Pravo*) that the joint flight was an example of Soviet selflessness and the principles of proletarian and specialist internationalism, and stressing (*Zemedelske Noviny*) that the Soviet Union bore about 95% of the cost of the *Interkosmos* programme—a claim that can neither be confirmed nor refuted, in view of Soviet reluctance to publish estimates for the space programme.

The new 'international' link-up was certainly the occasion for considerable euphoria—both at the control centre 'somewhere near Kalingrad' and in orbit. Indeed, the celebrations aloft seem to have exceeded expectations, since, according to the flight director