

Lenin's Irkutsk

Regional university chases young

LENIN's generosity towards the University of Irkutsk may also be a millstone around its neck: by making the university a depository library, entitled to receive a copy of every book or journal published in the Soviet Union, he may also have condemned it to the fate of being a librarians' university. Asked last month what the university was most proud of, vice-dean Viktor Isayev mentioned (in this order) the library, the computer centre and science education.

The city would be incomplete without a university. Some of the tree-lined streets have rows of old wooden Russian houses, but the centre is dominated by the headquarters of the regional soviet (parliament) and by an unfinished headquarters of unparalleled hideousness for the regional party.

The university has a curious history in the modern Soviet state. At the turn of the

special school at Novosibirsk and tend to continue at the university there.

Like other universities in the Soviet Union, Irkutsk is finding it more difficult than in the old days to recruit students into science and mathematics. Law, journalism and historical studies are, just now, most popular among school-leavers, with six candidates for every vacant place.

Isayev says that the demand for a place in the natural sciences has fallen, in the past 10–12 years, to only a quarter as much. Rural students, he believes, are not nearly well enough prepared for science (for which reason the university does what it can to bridge the gap with introductory courses in the early years).

Irkutsk follows the general pattern of education in the Soviet Union by providing its full-time students with full-time instruction during their first three years, and then placing them in semi-vocational settings, research institutes or pedagogical institutes as the case may be. Half of the

10,000 students on its books are part-timers, people already working at jobs in industry and administration, which is an unusually large proportion.

The university would like to grow, but financial constraints imposed by the university's paymasters, the ministries responsible for the Russian Republics as well as the Ministry of Higher Education, may blight that prospect. There is also some anxiety about the proposal that employers of graduates from Irkutsk should pay the university 3,000 rubles, or 30 per cent of the cost of a five-year education, for every graduate hired.

Meanwhile, the university echoes many others in higher education in its belief that the decline in the numbers of people applying for science places represents merely a weeding out of the feckless from the dedicated. "The demand is from serious students still." Even so, Irkutsk has followed most other universities in the Soviet Union in sending its teachers out to the high-schools of eastern Siberia as proselytizers of its cause. It seems to be learning empirically about the market for higher education. □

Siberia's academic town

Grow old gracefully in Novosibirsk

How does a town full of researchers age? The *akademgorodok* of Novosibirsk, the Soviet Union's largest special-purpose civil research community, is some 35 km north of the Siberian city of Novosibirsk, itself on the Trans-Siberian Railway at the western edge of the Siberian plain and on the northerly flowing Ob (not now to be diverted south).

The academic town, founded in 1957, is a monument to the early days of Khrushchev's policy aimed at the settlement and exploitation of Siberia. The policy is still working away, but more gradually than that impetuous man would have liked.

The town has become a major scientific and technological centre. Apart from more than a score of academy institutes, it provides the headquarters of the academy's Siberian Division. There are also institutes of the academies of agricultural and medical sciences as well as of several of the production ministries. There are 70,000 people working in more than 100 institutes. Despite the academic character of much of the work, the deliberate intention is to assist with the application of research to the special problems of Siberia.

Ten years ago, *akademgorodok* seemed an idyllic place, at least in comparison with industrial Novosibirsk, with its tower blocks and empty shops. That remains the case, but the fabric of the town has aged. The birch trees are taller, but the doors and other external wooden fittings of the

older buildings plainly show the marks of ten Siberian winters. Some buildings, the special school for example, have grown to look positively slummy. The community's central restaurant has become shabby, dominated after dark by the noise from the standard over-noisy pop group accompanying groups of exceedingly restrained dancers.

What of the people, getting on for 200,00 altogether? They have mostly stayed in their jobs, with the obvious result that the proportion of young children in the community has fallen. More important, some of the people born in *akademgorodok* have grown up not to be scientists like their parents (the town's excellent schools are strong on music, among other things) and have moved away, but often only to Novosibirsk.

For most of the mid-career people in *akademgorodok*, the life is satisfying and self-sufficient. Institute work for many is relieved by a spell of teaching at the town's university or even at the special school (see p. 797), which creams off Siberian high-school students in the last two years of their courses for special instruction in science and mathematics.

For many now working at the institutes, this *akademgorodok* has been the whole of life. Progression from the special school to the university to a post at one of the institutes seems commonplace. Those questioned about the isolation of their lives nevertheless insist that they have no sense of being cut off from the rest of the world.



The Trans-Siberian Railway is no longer the only artery to the developing eastern zone.

century, Irkutsk was a prosperous merchant city that flourished on the trade with China. Soon after the revolution of 1917, V.I. Lenin, no doubt conscious of the city's strategic importance, decreed that it should have a university. But the region turned out to be a hotbed of counter-revolution, not quashed until 1921. The university came into being in the interregnum.

In reality, the university is best known for its historical studies (counted as a part of science in the Soviet Union), oriental studies and philology in particular. But Isayev is also proud that 25 full and corresponding members of the 'big' academy have graduated from Irkutsk.

To face facts, Irkutsk is a worthy regional university. The best potential students in science and mathematics in eastern Siberia are creamed off by the