

NEW WORLD

Academy, Fundamentalists and Soviet Jews

by our Washington Correspondent

A VISIT by a group of scientists from the Soviet Union added a fresh spark of interest and a focus for protest at the autumn meeting of the National Academy of Sciences last week. In other respects, the business meeting of the academy, held in decent secrecy, closely followed the format established during the past three meetings of that august body. One resignation was finally accepted and action on another was deferred, William Shockley was again rebuffed by members of the academy who declined to initiate a study of the basis for his belief that genetic factors make blacks less intelligent than whites, and there was again talk of how the academy should set about getting younger blood into its ranks. Another, and perhaps the most important, action taken during the meeting was the adoption of a resolution urging the California State Board of Education not to adopt regulations which would require special creation to be given equal prominence alongside the theory of evolution in high school textbooks (see *Nature*, 339, 420; 1972). The California education board will consider such a requirement when it meets on November 9.

The group of Soviet scientists, who visited the academy hard on the heels of a group of Chinese doctors, was led by Dr Mstislav Keldysh, President of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. His presence among the group had been kept secret by the academy, partly because once before when the academy announced that he would arrive he had to call off his visit at the last moment, and partly because of fears of protests about the treatment of Jewish scientists in the Soviet Union. In the event, the meeting was picketed by demonstrators who expressed their distaste for the emigration taxes recently imposed on Soviet citizens who wish to leave for Israel, and Keldysh and his group were also the recipients of some vigorous questioning by academy members during a meeting from which even staff members were excluded.

According to reports of what took place at that meeting, academy members questioned the Soviet scientists about the treatment of scientists in the Soviet Union without specifically mentioning the plight of Soviet Jews, although the implication was clear. The Soviet scientists, for their part, said that they believe that their government's policy has been misrepresented. They

pointed out that scientists in the Soviet Union receive their training from the state, and thus have some obligation to their government—in much the same way that grants and scholarships given to American students often carry obligations concerning employment. Dr Keldysh was due to hold a press conference at the academy last week, but cancelled it because he said he did not know enough about American science. He did promise, however, to hold a press conference before he leaves the United States.

To coincide with Keldysh's visit to the academy, six Soviet Jewish scientists who have been harassed since they applied for permits to emigrate to Israel, telephoned a message to Dr David Korn, professor of Russian studies at Howard University, and asked him to relay the message to Dr Philip Handler, President of the

National Academy of Sciences. The scientists, Dr David Asbel, Dr Alexander Ya Lerner, Dr Benjamin Levich, Dr Boris Moisheson, Dr Roman Rutman and Dr Alexander Voronel, asked Handler to pass on their message to Keldysh and to discuss with him the measures that he must take to protect their basic human rights. Handler passed on the message during dinner with Keldysh last week.

In many respects, the most important action taken at the meeting last week was the passage of a resolution urging the California State Board of Education not to adopt a requirement that creationism be given equal prominence alongside the theory of evolution in school textbooks. Although in most other countries the conflict between religious doctrine and scientific theory, as they relate to the development of man, has long ceased to be a matter of

NOISE

Regulating Noise

by our Washington Correspondent

WITH almost its dying gasp, Congress last week sent to President Nixon a bill designed to regulate noise makers in the United States. Dropped from the bill at the last moment, however, was a provision which would have made it virtually impossible for Concorde or any other supersonic aircraft to land at any US airport. The bill had been bogged down in Congress by a fight over whether the Environmental Protection Agency or the Federal Aviation Administration should have the power to set limits on aircraft noise—a bill passed by the House of Representatives earlier this year gave such authority to the FAA, while the Senate wanted to give it to the EPA with FAA retaining a veto on safety matters. There the matter rested until a few hours before Congress adjourned, when final agreement was reached on a formula which essentially gives EPA the power to set regulations, but the FAA will have the last word.

In short, the bill requires the Environmental Protection Agency to draw up noise emission regulations for products such as trucks, automobiles, construction equipment and compressors, and in arriving at the regulations, an assessment of the best

available technology must be taken into account. The EPA will draw up regulations for aircraft which will be subject to public hearings, and after consultation the FAA will be required to accept, reject or modify them and to propose methods of implementing them. The whole process will be open to public hearings and if necessary court proceedings.

As for supersonic aircraft, a provision tacked on to the bill when it came up for debate in the Senate would have required Concorde to meet the noise requirements established for subsonic aircraft. Since, according to Senator Alan Cranston, architect of the amendment, Concorde is expected to make between six and twelve times as much noise as subsonic aircraft, it would have found all US airports closed to it. Although the provision was dropped at the insistence of members of the House, who were prepared to ransom the rest of the bill to get rid of the amendment, it may not yet be a dead letter. For one thing, the EPA in drawing up its regulations will necessarily take into account the likely noise emissions from supersonic aircraft, and its requirements are likely to be as stringent as those for subsonic aircraft. And, for another, Senator Cranston's amendment was adopted in the Senate by such a lopsided margin—62 to 17—that Congress may put it back in next year.