

USSR

Well provisioned

The Soviet Union is at present going through the rituals of adopting a new constitution. Vera Rich reports

THE DRAFT of the constitution which has been presented to the public and is now the subject of 'discussion' (in effect, eulogy and explanation) in the media is, from a political point of view (State structure, the rights and duties of citizens and so on), little different from the existing version. But there is one interesting feature: the emphasis placed on the State's involvement in Science.

The existing constitution, promulgated in 1936, makes virtually no mention of science. In contrast, the new draft stresses that "in accordance with the requirements of society, the State guarantees the planned development of science and the training of scientific personnel", and the implementation of the results of scientific research in the economy (Art. 26).

A new clause (Art. 48) guarantees "freedom of scientific, technical, and artistic creativity", which is "ensured by the wide development of scientific research, inventive and rationalising activity and the development of art". The same clause pledges state support to "voluntary societies and creative unions", and guarantees the rights of

authors and inventors. The "right to work" is now extended (Art. 40) to include the right to choose a profession "in accordance with vocation, capabilities, professional training, education, and in accordance with State needs".

A somewhat ambiguous reference to science in the 1936 version has now been clarified: instead of guaranteeing the right of asylum to foreign citizens persecuted for "defending the interests of the working people, or for scientific activities", which suggested that the Soviet Union hoped to play host to latterday Galileos, the reference is now to "progressive social, political, scientific, or some other creative activity".

The new references to science clearly indicate a serious government commitment. To stress their importance, *Pravda* recently published a long statement by scientists of the Siberian Branch of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, a body which, being less than 20 years old, can well serve to express the viewpoint of the modern scientific community. In effect, the statement proved to be little more than a eulogy of the Soviet system of "guaranteed employment".

Not surprisingly, the eulogies are not echoed by dissident and *refusnik* opinion. Dr Veniamin Fain, a physicist who was allowed to emigrate in June,

recently told *Nature* that he was very doubtful that the new clauses would bring about any major changes as regards academic freedom, and the status of *refusnik* scientists.

The picture he describes, of scientists dismissed from their posts and forced to find work as janitors or lift-attendants simply because they wish to leave the country, accords ill with the new pledge of choice of profession in accordance with one's education. And the history of the Voronel-Azbel seminar hardly reflects the "support" pledged to "voluntary [scientific] societies". Nevertheless, a right once granted on paper can form an important rallying point for those who wish to press for its implementation. □

ARGENTINA

Scientist's plight

ELENA H. SEVILLA is the latest Argentinian scientist whose plight has come to public attention. Senora Sevilla is a 29-year-old atomic physicist who had been teaching at the University of the South in Bariloche and doing research at the Balseiro Institute.

She was arrested in November 1975, just five days after having had a Caesarian operation and whilst still in hospital. Her husband had been arrested two months earlier. Lack of evidence against her led to her acquittal in a court in Rawson in January 1976, but since then she has been held in preventive detention "at the disposal of the executive power". She has been moved several times from prison to prison, most recently to the Villa Devoto in Buenos Aires. There she shares a cell with 20 other women in conditions which are by no means good. Diet causes great concern, and prisoners, whilst allowed to receive three books each month, may not have university textbooks or books related to economics, history, chemistry, physics or languages.

In December 1976, Senora Sevilla applied for permission to leave the country under Article 23 of the Constitution, which allows for those held in preventive detention without charge or trial to opt for exile if they so wish. She has never received a reply. According to Amnesty International, Elena Sevilla has never been politically active. Amnesty asks fellow scientists to write on her behalf to the President, General Jorge Rafael Videla, Casa Rosada, Buenos Aires, with a copy to the local Argentinian Embassy. □

EEC

Halocarbon decision

The European Commission has taken a first cautious and hesitant step towards restricting the use of halocarbons in EEC countries. A special correspondent reports

THOUGH not convinced that halocarbons are harmful, the European Commission is sufficiently impressed with the evidence so far, particularly from the USA, that it has decided to ask environment ministers in the Nine to ban any increase in manufacturing capacity for the halocarbons F-11 and F-12. The Commission also wants immediate measures to "encourage" industry to avoid any leaks of these gases, and to "encourage" industry to intensify research into possible substitutes and alternative methods. And it believes research into the effect of the gas on the environment should be stepped up, with more cooperation and coordination between researchers in the member states.

The Commission has been holding

meetings with national experts since January. If all goes according to plan, the EEC's Economic and Social Committee and the European Parliament will give their views on the Commission's proposals in September and October, and the environment ministers will make their decision in November. The Commission will then in the second half of next year assess the effects of halocarbons on man and the environment and draw up an EEC policy on the subject. Such a policy would need the approval of the ministers of the member countries.

In the meantime the Commission will see if it should try to co-ordinate the work, or if perhaps it should give limited aid under its programme of indirect action. European research at present is concentrated on measuring, on Earth and *in situ*, concentrations of the minor constituents of the atmosphere, studies of spectral properties and reaction speeds and development of mathematical models. □