

## Soviet Union

## New appointment binds science closer to industry

ACADEMICIAN Gurii Marchuk has been appointed Chairman of the State Committee for Science and Technology, in place of Academician Vladimir Kirillin, whose resignation, was announced on the same day as the banishment of Andrei Sakharov from Moscow.

The appointment of Kirillin's successor came remarkably quickly. The post is of ministerial rank (and carries with it, virtually automatically, the position of a Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers). Posts of this calibre are seldom filled immediately — a lapse of several months has, of recent years, been the rule. Moreover, at 54, Marchuk is unusually young by Soviet standards, for high office. The average age of the country's leadership is in the late 60s.

Not that Marchuk is unknown to Soviet science. He has already held the corresponding position of head of the Commission for Science and Technology of the Soviet of Nationalities (lower house). More important, he is head of the Siberian Branch of the Academy of Sciences.

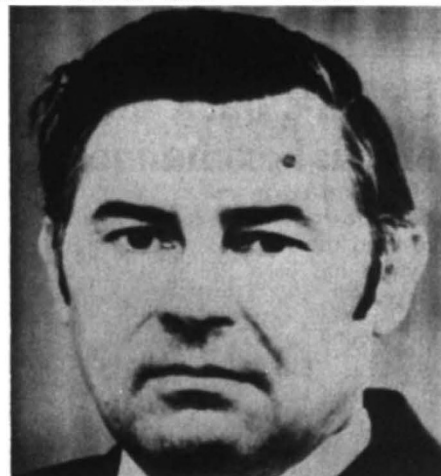
The Siberian Branch of the Academy was set up in 1957, housed in the new

Akademgorodok (Academic Village) at Novosibirsk, and briefed specifically to work on scientific problems of greatest relevance to the development of Siberia and the far east. By 1966, the branch had become surrounded by a network of research institutes, design bureaux and experimental production factories subordinated to individual ministries but under the scientific supervision of the branch.

This system of dual control has caused concern to a number of Soviet scientists, who have felt that the ministries might burden the R&D facilities of the branch with small-scale, day-to-day tasks, or even bypass the scientists altogether in decision-making.

Since he took over the chairmanship of the branch in 1975, Marchuk has written extensively on the dual control problem. Although at times he has complained that certain ministries have been lax in providing suitable conditions for successful work, his overall view is that the dual control system works well.

Of recent years, there has been constant emphasis in the Soviet press that science and industry must be more closely linked.



Marchuk: head of the Siberian Branch of the Academy of Sciences

Last November, when castigating the State Committee for slackness, Mr Brezhnev suggested that the Academy of Sciences should take a greater lead in organising the applied research the country needs. The precise division of labour and responsibility between the State Committee and the Academy is a complex subject (the head of the State Committee is regularly a Vice President of the Academy). Marchuk's Novosibirsk background, however, suggests that the long-discussed Soviet policy of integrated planning and the close coordination of research and production will be a keynote of the next five year plan for science. **Vera Rich**

## United Kingdom

## Industrialist made part-time director of biophysics unit

THE UK Medical Research Council (MRC) has taken the unprecedented step of appointing as a part-time director of one of their research units a scientist who is permanently employed within industry. As soon as Professor Maurice HF Wilkins retires as Honorary Director of the MRC Cell Biophysics Unit at Kings College, London, he will be replaced by the combination of Dr David Rees, 43 year old Executive for Scientific Policy for Unilever Research and 56 year old Professor Brian Boycott who is on the Unit's staff. Whereas Professor Boycott's post will be full time, Dr Rees will be in the service (and pay) of the MRC for only one day per week, on average, and will retain his present position with Unilever.

The hunt for a new director has been on for well over a year since Professor Wilkins let it be known that he would like to retire as soon as a replacement could be found. But it has proved extremely difficult, and ultimately impossible, to attract someone of the right calibre and scientific background to be director. The solution adopted is based on the belief that Dr Rees' scientific credentials as a

carbohydrate chemist with a strong interest in cell biology will complement those of Professor Boycott whose expertise is as a neuroanatomist of the retina.

Professor Boycott told *Nature* that he was glad to have someone familiar with current molecular biology as an Associate Director. The MRC expects Dr Rees "to inject good science into the unit" first by spending a continuous two to three months there and then by one day a week appearances and through having two of his research staff working in the unit. In return they hope that members of the unit will wish to sample the facilities and atmosphere of the Unilever Research laboratories.

A spokesperson for the MRC said that the link with industry was an experiment as much of serendipity as of design but that the MRC was now anxious to foster relationships between itself and industry. Although no other links were currently planned, as opportunities arose they would be considered seriously. □

## Temperate vegetable seed bank set up

OXFAM, the Oxford-based famine relief organisation, has raised £700,000 by special appeal to establish a seed-bank for vegetables. A target of some 10,000 species

will be collected in a  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  store associated with potting facilities, laboratories, and greenhouses.

According to Oxfam's director, Mr Brian Walker, two-thirds of the seeds collected will be temperate, and only one-third tropical; but, says Walker, "in many parts of the Third World people eat temperate vegetables: cauliflower, onions, carrots, potatoes, cucumber, tomatoes.

"In a tropical country you only have to go a little way into the hills to meet temperate conditions. A large part of India's potatoes are grown in the hills." Moreover, winter in the northern plains of India was little different from the growing season in the US.

The origins of the Oxfam initiative go back to the Rome food conference of 1974, when it gathered a group of senior scientific advisors to survey world seed-banks and report on deficiencies. The group reported that while there was good coverage of cereals, there was no embracing collection of vegetables, which are important particularly for people growing cash crops around the borders of towns.

The seed-bank will be established at the UK Agricultural Research Council's Vegetable Research Station at Wellesbourne, Warwickshire. Oxfam's £700,000 will pay the capital costs, and the running costs for the first seven years. Then the bank will be taken over by the ARC. □