

Soviet Union

Orlov's fate in balance

DR Yurii Orlov, the Moscow physicist and human rights campaigner, last week completed a seven-year prison sentence for slandering the Soviet system. Ironically, the expiry of his term (on 10 February), coincided with the announcement of the death of the Soviet leader, Mr Yurii Andropov, who at the time of Orlov's trial was head of the secret police (KGB). Dr Orlov is now due to serve a further five years in Siberian exile. Last week, however, his supporters in London and Geneva announced proposals aimed at ameliorating the remainder of his sentence.

At his trial, Dr Orlov openly admitted charges of circulating and distributing to the Western press documents alleging breaches of the Helsinki accords and international human rights conventions within the Soviet Union. The basis of the prosecution case was that these allegations were false. However, Mr John Macdonald, who failed in his attempts to travel to Moscow to serve as Orlov's defence lawyer, still maintains that they were true, and last week, at a press conference held at the Institute of Physics in London, announced his intention of petitioning the Soviet courts to reopen the case on the grounds that much pertinent defence evidence was never considered. Such a petition has little chance of succeeding because Mr Macdonald's proposed witnesses are either citizens of Western countries or else recent emigrants from the Soviet Union — people whose motives would be suspect from the Soviet point of view.

A more realistic proposal is a petition that Dr Orlov's "internal exile" be commuted into "external exile", that is, that he be sent abroad. One suggestion is that he could be offered a job at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN) with the LEP (large electron-positron) storage ring project. The governments of the thirteen member-states of CERN have been unofficially canvassed, and most of the replies so far received have been cautiously supportive. CERN has, incidentally, a long-term cooperation agreement with the Soviet Union which was extended six months ago, and which includes work on LEP.

As to Orlov's scientific fitness for such a job, this was beyond dispute before his imprisonment, and it is known that he has tried to keep up his scientific work while in the prison camp, although, after a few early letters (an extract from one was reproduced in facsimile in *Nature* 277, 591; 1979) the camp censors clamped down on anything resembling a scientific equation for fear it could be a coded message. If he is, indeed, sent to Siberia, Mr Macdonald has suggested that scientists from CERN should apply for visas to visit him — and if refused should consider some form of "non-cooperation" with the Soviet Union.

CERN has a vigorous "Orlov Committee" whose activities have included defence of scientists in Uruguay, Turkey, Morocco and Poland as well as the Soviet Union, mustering on occasion over 600 signatures out of a scientific workforce of 3,500. This committee supported Mr Macdonald's proposal but stressed that each individual must decide for himself the "appropriate" response to a refusal. (Ethics apart, it would make no sense for one solitary member of a large team to opt out of a joint project.)

Finally, Mr Macdonald suggested the establishment of a \$50,000 annual "Orlov

prize" for the defence of human rights, for which he would approach the Rockefeller Foundation in the United States for funds. The CERN Orlov Committee again approved the idea in principle but suggested that it should be funded either by a consortium of European universities or by neutral governments such as Sweden and Switzerland, since the backing of these bodies would disarm possible Soviet criticism that the prize was simply a capitalist propaganda ploy.

At the time of writing it is uncertain whether Dr Orlov has been released from prison. Soviet legislation provides for an extension of sentence if prison rules are contravened and Dr Orlov has already lost visiting and correspondence rights for alleged contraventions. **Vera Rich**

West German universities

The price of protest

Bublingen, West Germany

A PROTEST in West Berlin last week by 90 university lecturers against the siting of Cruise and Pershing missiles in West Germany, in defiance of instructions from the presidents of the Free University and the Technical University, was echoed at a conference here organized by the anti-*Berufsverbot* campaign. *Berufsverbot* — the exclusion from employment in the government service of those whose political views are deemed to present a threat to the state — has been practised in West Germany since the early 1970s.

The procedure is deemed by many constitutional lawyers to be contrary to the guarantees in the West German constitution of civil liberties and freedom of conscience. The practice was authorized by a special decree of the federal government, and has never gone through the parliamentary law-making procedure. Its implementation varies in the different *Länder*, and in Hesse, where the Greens hold the deciding vote in a hung parliament, they are pressing for the practice to be dropped altogether.

The new development since the last anti-*Berufsverbot* conference in Hannover in 1982, the campaigners say, is that restrictive measures have been increasingly employed against peace campaigners. There were complaints that the practice of *Berufsverbot* has been supplemented by restrictions on demonstrations and penalties for those taking part on the grounds of public order.

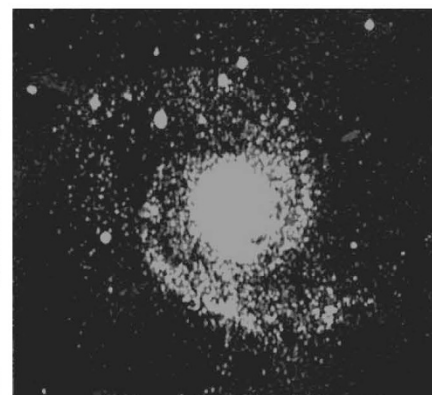
Surprisingly, and in contrast with previous conferences, there was little to report this year from the university sector. University lecturers and schoolteachers, being paid by the state, are considered to be "public servants". One view is that all lecturers at risk have already been sacked, while new graduates with doubtful political views are unable to gain university employment.

The only striking new *Berufsverbot* case

affecting the universities reported at Bublingen was that of Hans Joachim Wunderlich, a mathematician who was dismissed last year from the Karlsruhe University Computer Centre on the grounds that he constituted a security risk, since the computer was also leased for defence-related industrial research. So far, university staff taking part in peace activities have not been penalized. This contrasts sharply with school teachers, many of whom are now facing disciplinary proceedings for taking part in the "five-minute strike" for peace organized by the Trade Union Federation (DGB) on 5 October 1983, or for allegedly "over-emphasizing" the theme of peace in school projects and concerts.

The universities have not been directly affected by the "Strike for Peace" because it took place on a Saturday (in West Germany a working day for schools but not for universities). The Berlin protest may be different. **Vera Rich**

La Palma's Newton



THE Whirlpool Nebula (M51) as seen by the United Kingdom's 2.5-m Isaac Newton Telescope, newly erected at the La Palma Observatory in the Canary Islands. The official "First Light" was received by the telescope on 13 February.