

THE problems of higher and specialist education have always been particularly difficult for Soviet educationalists, who must seek the best means of using potential talents for the good of the state, while not departing from the theoretical tenets of equal opportunity. During the half century of Soviet rule, a number of solutions have been proposed. At one stage the exceptionally gifted were expected to develop their talents in extracurricular time (traces of this remain in the mathematical "olympiads" for schoolchildren), whereas under Khrushchev, the policy was one of what may broadly be called 'sandwich courses for all'—a coordination of education and work which led to considerable interruption of production and the exasperation of supervisors and managers. During the past few years, the Khrushchev policy has been quietly modified, adapted and legislated out of existence, and a return to more conventional policies introduced.

The new approach includes a certain amount of streaming, or rather creaming, of the highly gifted into specialist schools at a fairly early age. (One interesting facet of Soviet educational psychology is that, although it denies the existence of educational subnormality—except in the case of actual brain damage—it does admit the existence of above-average mentalities—although hedging its bets to the extent of claiming that the intelligence of a "lively" average child can be improved by educating him or her together with the highly gifted). Whatever the theoretical justification for creaming, current Soviet policy seems to have as its pragmatic aim the production of the vast work force of the intelligentsia needed for the expansion of the Soviet economy.

A recent *Pravda* article by the Minister of Higher and Specialist Secondary Education, V. Elyutin, outlines the plans for the 1980s and 1990s, and stresses the need for a new strategy in scientific and technological training for the next 10 years. Present plans include means of "making the training of specialists more flexible, and ensuring the organic connection of education and life, science and industrial activity". One defect of the Khrushchev system was that, for logistical reasons, young people were assigned to factory training that was unrelated to their talents or future professions. Another fault was the difficulty secondary school children had relating their school studies to the specialist technique of industry, in which they were supposed to participate. Minister Elyutin's stress on the cooperation of higher educational institutions (from Moscow Uni-

versity downwards) with industry—a policy which is to be "extended further" in the immediate future—indicates that the emphasis will now be on such industrial training at a later age, when it can be more meaningful to the student and less disruptive to the factory. He notes, however, that such cooperation between institutes, or groups of institutes, and industrial enterprises may take "the most diverse" forms. The new plans are still production-orientated ("changes in specialities and specialisations" will be introduced

## Russia today

from Vera Rich, London



"in accordance with the needs of the national economy as they arise"), yet underlying the whole statement one senses a realisation that such a policy can only be fruitful if it is implemented in accordance with the special circumstances of each institute.

● The failure of the latest Soyuz to complete its link-up with the orbiting Salyut space station will not, repeat not, have any effect on the joint Soyuz-Apollo mission planned for July 1975. So we are told quite firmly by both parties to the project. Commander Richard Truly, the back-up capsule commander of the US team, said at a press conference in London, on his way to Moscow for a joint training mission, that the Americans still have every confidence in the joint mission and are satisfied with the safety aspects of the flight. The Russians, for their part, were eager to explain that this Soyuz was not the model which will be used for the joint mission, but an earlier version that had been "less diligently" checked than the system planned for the link-up. International goodwill and cooperation continues unaffected.

Yet in spite of the mutual reassurances, one wonders why the Soviet planners chose to announce the failure

at all. It had not risen above the horizon of foreign tracking stations and need therefore never have been mentioned. Presumably it was the forthcoming joint mission which prompted the Soviet planners to make the announcement—but was their motivation one of cooperation, or fear of further setbacks? In the latter case, an aborted flight with the safe recovery of the cosmonauts might serve as a reassurance: even if the rocket fails, the men are safe. The old rumours of Vladimir Ilyushin, Gagarin's alleged predecessor on the launch pad, have never been entirely squashed in either East or West, and the Soyuz failure does offer a certain "substantiation" in that a crew-carrying rocket can be launched and fail without being tracked by foreign stations. The latest Soyuz venture is, at all events, a success for Russian safety procedures, and this fact may well have motivated the decision to release the news.

● Intimations that increasing pressure was to be exerted on participants in the illicit Sunday seminar for "refusnik" scientists have, unhappily, been justified by recent events. A letter to western "Academies of Science, Scientific Societies and Individual Scientists", signed by 45 participants of the seminar, states that increasing pressure is being exerted on individual participants "in order to interfere with the seminar's work." Methods mentioned include the issue of call-up papers for retraining in the Soviet Army (which could later be interpreted as access to classified information, a *prima facie* reason for refusing a visa), prosecution for "parasitism" (being without employment, although the scientists concerned have been deprived of their jobs as a result of applications for exit visas) and, in the case of Mark Azbel, the physicist, a kind of *de facto* exile. Professor Azbel, formerly Head of the Department of Electron Theory at the Landau Institute of Theoretical Physics of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, had been visiting relatives in Chernovtsy, and was about to return home to Moscow when he was stopped at the railway station and told not to go there for several months "or he would find himself further east" (in Siberia). Azbel is now stranded in Odessa without friends or money. It seems that, since the seminar continues to meet, in various venues, the authorities are now trying to erode it by pressure on the individual participants. They still seem unwilling to take the simple step, suggested by the seminar's founder, Aleksandr Voronel, of granting the whole group exit visas and thus letting them transfer their vexing activities to Jerusalem or Tel-Aviv.