

USSR

Bottling up dissent

Vera Rich reports on recent developments concerning dissidents in the USSR and Eastern Europe.

LEONID PLYUSHCH, a former prisoner of conscience who was interned in the Dnepropetrovsk psychiatric penal institution, visited London recently. His presence formed a rallying point for all those concerned in the cause of human rights and freedom of thought in the USSR and the Comecon bloc.

Plyushch, a cybernetician who was arrested in 1972 for "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda", was tried in his absence and interned as suffering from "creeping schizophrenia". His release was effected in 1975 following a massive campaign both from the mathematical and psychiatric communities abroad. Speaking in his native Ukrainian, a medium of expression which he explained was itself a symptom of "dissidence" to Soviet forensic psychiatrists, Plyushch declared that he did not wish to recall the details of his incarceration—the massive doses of neuroleptic drugs, the ambience of the genuinely sick and the "doctors" whose

white coats only partially covered their police uniforms.

In an interview with *Nature* he indicated he was concerned rather to campaign for those still in captivity, either his fellow internees in mental institutions or those who, like Vladimir Bukovskii or Semeon Gluzman, are now serving prison sentences for bringing the Soviet abuse of psychiatry to the attention of the world scientific community. Some 1,000 detainees, he estimated, are incarcerated in penal or ordinary mental institutions simply because their views on politics and human rights do not coincide with the official norms. Asked whether he had any regrets in his own case, Plyushch replied that, speaking with hindsight, he could now see that it would have been advisable to proceed more "cannily", to be less open and naive, and to make sure that the authorities had less opportunity to gather a dossier against him.

Having acted as a liaison officer between the movement for self-determination in his native Ukraine and the Sakharov human rights committee in Moscow, Plyushch gave some interest-

ing new sidelights on the dissident movement. He stated that the campaign for human rights and civil liberties was primarily a movement of the scientific community, and had as yet little grass-roots following, thus differing sharply from the movement for religious liberty and the "national" movements in the Union (that is, non-Russian) Republics, which included all sections of the community. Only in certain specific areas, notably in West Ukraine (incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1939) is there a close link between the demand of the workers and peasants for better living standards and the campaign of the intellectuals for greater democratisation "on the Czech model".

As a cyberneticist himself, Plyushch stressed that the scientists in the dissident movement must put forward a "new kind of planning" if their ideas are to command the kind of mass support that he sees as the only sure foundation of democratisation.

The kind of union of workers and intellectuals which Plyushch advocates is an important feature of the new protest movement in Poland. Following the protests of workers in the Radom and Ursus plants against rising food prices, a defence committee was

A letter from the USSR

Nature has received this letter, addressed "to all scientists of the world":

Dear colleagues,

By this letter we want to call your attention to the tragic fate of biologist Sergei Kovalev. We want scientists to have a clear realisation of the conditions under which those who venture to protest against arbitrary rule are compelled to live in the Soviet Union. By the nature of their profession scientists strive for adequate cognition of the world. That is why we hope that it will be scientists who gain the best insight into certain features of the Soviet regime. This understanding could be of great importance.

Sergei Kovalev is a gifted scientist, specialist in the field of heart and cell physiology. In December 1974 he was arrested, and in December 1975, after a year of imprisonment, sentenced to seven years of prison camps of severe regime to be followed by three years in exile.

Kovalev's alleged "crime" was that in accordance with his convictions he could not and did not obey an unwritten Soviet law: to keep silent about all acts of arbitrariness and injustice done by Soviet authorities. Kovalev

was one of the first to join the Human Rights Movement. In May 1969 he entered "the Initiative Group" for protection of human rights. At a moment when "The Chronicle of Current Events" (a typewritten journal of political repression in the USSR) was savagely persecuted, Kovalev together with T. Velikanova and T. Khodorovich courageously announced that they would do their best to disseminate this journal since it gives true information about the violations of human rights in the USSR. All his activity in protection of human rights was imbued with noble spirit and humanism.

Sergei Kovalev committed no crime. In any open society he would be one of its most respected members. The Soviet authorities declared Kovalev a dangerous criminal. His imprisonment is not a mere limitation of freedom. In the camps they are trying to "rectify" Kovalev's convictions by isolation, hunger and humiliation. A renowned scientist is forced to do exhausting monotonous physical work, he is limited in correspondence (two letters a month), in visits of close relatives (one visit every four months at most, in practice still less). Malnutri-

tion also is one of the "rectifying" measures; accordingly, during three and a half initial years Kovalev will not be allowed to receive parcels.

But all this does not seem enough. Kovalev is constantly persecuted by the camp administration. He is not given qualified medical treatment and has no possibility of curing a painful chronic disease which makes his prison life unbearable, hard enough as it already is.

We call scientists of the whole world to make use of every opportunity to draw public attention to the tragic fate of Sergei Kovalev.

We call scientists to appeal to Soviet legislative, governmental and party bodies on behalf of Sergei Kovalev.

We call biologists to withhold scientific contacts with the Soviet Union until Sergei Kovalev is released.

ANDREI SAKHAROV, VALENTIN TURCHIN, YURI ORLOV, YURI MNYUKH, NINEL PANFILOVA, YURI GOL'FAND, VENYAMIN LEVICH, GALINA SALOVA, YURI GASTEVA, ALEKSANDR LAVUT, TATYANA VELIKANOVA, ALEKSANDR LERNER, TATYANA KHODOROVICH, IGOR MEL'CHUK, ALEKSANDR KORCHAK, VLADIMIR ALBREKHT, NAUM MEIMAN, EFREM YANKEVICH, ELENA BONNER, YURY SHIKHANOVICH, MARK AZBEL.

set up, including writers, lawyers, historians and scientists. Among those already subjected to reprisals, biochemist Piotr Naumski has already suffered a short term of arrest, while Mirosław Chojewski, a chemist, has been dismissed from his post at the Institute of Nuclear Research in Swierk.

A letter from the Defence Committee to Academician Andrei Sakharov, appealing to his "moral authority and fellow-feeling", evoked a declaration from him that although he did not know what concerted actions could, at the present time, be aligned with the actions of the Polish defence committee, he was nevertheless seeking ways in which the Soviet human rights movement could "effectively cooperate" with similar movements throughout Eastern Europe.

There seems to be enough dissident activity to suggest that the time is ripe for such a concerted effort, if only one of moral support. In the Soviet Union a press campaign has been launched against Aleksandr Voronel, the founder of the illegal "Sunday seminar" for Jewish refusniks, denouncing him as a traitor. The seminar, which survived Voronel's departure for Israel in December 1974, is now approaching its fifth anniversary, and is planning a

special Jubilee session (Sakharov is to be on the jubilee Committee). Nevertheless pressure on the Seminar continues; recently several of its leading members, including physicist Mark Azbel, the organiser, were held by the police for several days.

In East Germany, the chemist Robert Havemann is subject to house arrest, for having protested against the exiling of Wolf Biermann, the dissident poet and ballad-singer. Havemann's dissident "career" dates back to 1964, when he was dismissed (on account of his "revisionist" views) from his post as Professor of Physical Chemistry at the Humboldt University, Berlin.

From Bulgaria it is understood that an attempt to disseminate some controversial material in *samizdat* form led to the removal of their author (a physicist) to a mental hospital. Although he was subsequently discharged, he was not reinstated in his university post but was instead retired on a disability pension, thereby effectively removing his ability to speak from a position of authority.

This appears to mark a new development. The dissemination of Soviet technology and ideas among the countries of the Socialist block is a basic concept of Comecon. So far, however, the incarceration of dissidents

in mental institutions has been primarily a Soviet phenomenon, although there have been hints of isolated cases in Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic.

● Lord Todd had some words to say last week on the Royal Society's role regarding scientists and human rights. Delivering the Society's Anniversary Address, he said it was hard to see in what way the Society could occupy a special position. He pointed to the Society's adherence to the Declaration issued by the International Council of Scientific Unions and by its cooperation with that body in efforts to uphold it in all its member countries. In appropriate cases, he said,

the Society has drawn and will continue to draw the attention of the Soviet Academy of Sciences or the corresponding body in any other country concerned, as well as our own Government, to the facts and to the need for action with, I believe, good effect. It is my firm belief that the Society as such can achieve much more in this way than it can by subscribing to or issuing public declarations. For it must be recognised that a scientist, as such, is in the same position as any other citizen of his country, subject to the same laws and having the same obligations to the society in which he lives. His profession does not entitle him to special privileges which are denied to his fellow citizens; nor should it deny to him those privileges which are the right of every man. □

WEST GERMANY

Reactor reactions

A Correspondent reports on recent developments on the nuclear power front in the German Federal Republic.

THE future of nuclear power in West Germany depends critically on imminent decisions over the construction of nuclear reprocessing and storage facilities in Lower Saxony. The rumble of anti-nuclear feeling, which recently erupted in demonstrations at the Brokdorf power station site, led the Interior Minister, Werner Maihofer, to announce earlier this year that no new permits for the construction of atomic power stations would be issued until firm plans existed for dealing with spent fuel. The salt mines of Lower Saxony are considered the only suitable site for long-term waste storage. The Prime Minister of Lower Saxony was begged four weeks ago by Bonn Cabinet ministers to allow the plant to be built and seems to have been persuaded: the proposed site of the plant is to be announced soon. But determined local opposition will ensure that its path will not be smooth.

The 20% of Germans against nuclear energy probably entertain strongest fears about reprocessing and storage of nuclear fuels. But the most violent

protests have been not in Lower Saxony but at the site 50 km north-west of Hamburg where Kraftwerk Union is beginning to build West Germany's latest nuclear power station. Brokdorf, on the Elbe, has seen two ugly confrontations between demonstrators and police in the past few weeks, with many injured. The protests are not against any particularly unsavoury feature of Brokdorf but rather against nuclear expansion in general and the way industry is steadily transforming the lower Elbe region into another Ruhr.

The protests could equally well have been focused on Biblis, another Kraftwerk Union product and the world's biggest nuclear plant, which was forced to shut down for three months during the summer after screws had been found dislodged from a cooling pump. An even more controversial aspect of the plant is the intention of the owners, Rheinisch-Westfälische Elektrizitätswerke (RWE), to increase storage capacity for spent fuel pending construction of a reprocessing plant in Germany—RWE apparently find French and British reprocessing too expensive and prefer to sit on their fuel for an extra five or six years until the first German reprocessing plant is in action. Another worry for safety-con-

scious Germans is the prospect of the reactor which the chemical company BASF is to build in an urban area at Ludwigshafen. And a third reactor—that planned for Whyll on the Rhine—is as yet unstarted because of public protest. Even discounting the political element in the demonstrations, it is clear that the new anti-nuclear feeling is not to be taken lightly.

This is recognised by the Free Democratic Party, the junior party in West Germany's coalition government, who have voted at their party conference to put strict limits on new nuclear construction. Though the vote has no binding effect for the government it is thoroughly awkward for them and in particular for the Economics Minister, FDP member Hans Friedrichs, a strong nuclear supporter.

Altogether embarrassing timing for Siemens's announcement of its intention to take on AEG-Telefunken's 50% of Kraftwerk Union, the leading West German power station constructor, thus becoming sole owner. But Siemens is probably the happier of the two concerns. It is confident about the future of nuclear energy and has the resources to see the voracious and currently unprofitable Kraftwerk Union through the next few lean years. AEG-Telefunken, though glad to be rid of what it sees as an albatross, is not getting a particularly good deal. □