

## USSR

● The Soviet media have recently been devoting considerable attention to peaceful nuclear explosions (PNE). Although the Soviet PNE programme dates back to 1965, so far explosions have been carried out without publicity. Recently, however, a number of Soviet press and radio reports have extolled the use of PNE in digging the Pechora-Volga canal, and the construction of water and underground gas storage reservoirs. An interesting feature of this campaign is that all three major broadcasts on PNE achievements were in English (one being in the African service), and therefore aimed at the outside world; in one case, the contents of the broadcast was then issued in a *Novosti* press release.

Soviet experts do not share American doubts on the commercial viability of PNE, and are eager for the ratification of the PNE agreement, already initialled in Moscow and awaiting ratification by Washington, which would ensure mutual on-site inspection and instrumentation rights. Although the Soviet delegate to the Geneva disarmament talks, Mr V. A. Likhachev, recently called for a total cessation of all nuclear weapon tests, there are clear indications that the Soviet Union would not be willing to accept a ban or a moratorium on PNE. The recent burst of publicity may well be intended to make the Soviet attitude clear to those governments which would favour a total ban on all nuclear explosions.

● Conservation of the country's resources, including energy, is an important feature of the present Five-Year Plan. Targets include savings of 14-16% ferrous metal in machine construction, 5-7% metal, 5-6% cement and 12-14% timber in building, and 5% electrical and thermal energy and 8% petrol and diesel fuel.

This winter, inspections and surveys have been made in many parts of the Soviet Union to monitor fuel consumption. A supporting campaign in the media, commending the economical consumers and rebuking the wasteful, is aimed at all levels of the community—from the electrical generating industry, which last December cut its specific consumption by 2 g fuel per kW-hour (saving some 1.5 million tonnes of coal), to the workers of Vladivostok, who by their "thousands of valuable suggestions" have allowed some 13 million kW of electricity and 49,000 tonnes of rated fuel to be saved.

Particular criticism has been directed at the Ministry of Fuel and

Power (for slowness in converting to more efficient boilers), at the metallurgical industry (for poor use of recycled resources), and the Ministry of Construction of the Oil and Fuel Industries (for delays in constructing gas refineries, so that "thousands of millions of cubic metres of gas" have had to be burned off into the atmosphere) and various local authorities (for lighting and heating empty build-



ings, using expensive fuel from elsewhere rather than cheap local coal, peat or wood).

● Three Moscow refusniks, the cyberneticist Aleksandr Lerner and Vladimir Slepak and Anatolii Shcharanskii, both engineers, are attempting to bring a libel suit against Dr Senya Lipavskii and the editor of the government newspaper *Izvestiya*. Dr Lipavskii, a former associate of the refusniks, is the author of an "open letter" published in *Izvestiya* alleging that a number of the prominent Jewish activists, including the three men, are CIA agents.

Such denunciations have in the past always been followed by criminal proceedings, and it would be unprecedented if no action were to be taken in this case. Shcharanskii, who often acts as unofficial spokesman for the group, has already had all his documents except his internal passport confiscated. To try to refute the expected charges, Lerner, Slepak, and Shcharanskii have attempted to initiate proceedings for libel, although various bureaucratic barriers are being placed in their way.

Together with the economist Ida Nudel and Dina Beilina, an engineer, they have also written a letter to President Carter, asking him to do something "constructive" to ease the situation. Although the text of the letter has not been released by the

signatories, it seems that they would urge a firm but "soft" response. The letter of Academician Sakharov to President Carter last January, which called on the President to "raise your voice" against human rights violations in the Soviet Union, was interpreted by the Soviet authorities as a provocation to cold war, as was the recent meeting of the President with Vladimir Bukovskii. Lerner and his friends, it would seem, are unwilling that their case should be used to undermine the very real benefits of détente.

● The new Soviet 200-mile fishing zone, which came into force on 1 March, has inaugurated a new era in Japanese-Soviet fishing relations. So said the Japanese Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Zenko Suzuki, during four days of stiff negotiation in Moscow at the turn of the month. By the end of the talks it was clear that the new era was not to be one of immediate agreement: indeed, Mr Suzuki and the Soviet Minister of Fisheries, Aleksandr Ishkov, could not even agree on a joint communiqué, and the talks ended in a formal exchange of notes.

During the talks Mr Suzuki stated that for constitutional reasons Japan could not accept certain provisions of the decree establishing the Soviet zone. His concluding note to Ishkov stated that Japan would also be establishing a 200-mile zone in the near future. This will encroach upon the new Soviet zone on the west coast of Japan and in the region of the La Pérouse and Kunasharskii straits. In spite of these diplomatic difficulties, however, certain practical conclusions were reached, pending the interim pact (expected by 31 March). Japanese fishing vessels will be permitted to operate within the new Soviet zone, but may not engage in herring or salmon fishing. Negotiations are to be continued towards a long term agreement.

A similar position, but with the Soviet Union in the role of the applicant seeking to enter an exclusive zone, has arisen in the fisheries talks between the Soviet Union and the EEC. The first round of talks, in February, were hailed as a diplomatic breakthrough; the second round failed this month to produce the "mutually acceptable results" which Mr Ishkov had hoped for. Since both sides realise that they are at present too far apart to reach an early agreement, the talks have been postponed until 19 April.

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