

USA

## Five-year stretch

*The USA and USSR have agreed to another five years of scientific cooperation. Colin Norman reports from Washington*

WHEN former President Richard Nixon travelled to Moscow in May 1972, he came away with a clutch of agreements for Soviet-American scientific exchange programmes which symbolised the new era of detente. Since then, the warmth of detente has been chilled by disagreements over arms control and human rights issues, but the scientific exchange agreements have proceeded apace. Last week, after a cordial meeting between Soviet and American officials in Washington, the agreements were renewed for another five years.

The renewal was negotiated at a high-level meeting of scientific delegations led by Dr Frank Press, President Carter's science adviser, and Academician V. A. Kirillin, Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, and chairman of the State Committee of the USSR Council of Ministers for Science and Technology. Press later described the meeting as "extremely cooperative, upbeat all the way". To underline the political importance attached to the agreements, President Carter met Kirillin for a widely publicised discussion shortly after the ritual signing ceremony.

This outbreak of cordiality in the midst of Soviet-American ill-feeling lends itself to a number of interpretations; the most widely touted is that the Soviets are willing to put aside their differences to continue with exchanges from which so far they have benefited greatly, while the Americans are eager to demonstrate that the Carter Administration's stand on human rights need not jeopardise mutually beneficial arrangements between the two countries. In any case, extension of the agreements was never seriously in doubt.

In preparation for last week's meeting, however, Press commissioned a review of how the exchanges have operated so far, and as a result there will be some changes in the way the arrangements will work in future. The review was carried out by a committee of the National Academy of Sciences, headed by Richard Garwin, a respected physicist who works for IBM. The Garwin panel interviewed scores of scientists who have participated in the exchange programmes, and its

central conclusion was that the agreement should be renewed because of "the positive benefits and real interaction evident in some of the projects under the agreement, [and] the intangible and unevaluated (but widely felt) non-substantive benefits commented upon by the participants". Nevertheless, the Garwin panel pinpointed a number of problems.

The science and technology agreement is in fact only one of about a dozen exchange pacts negotiated as a result of Nixon's May 1972 Moscow summit meeting (separate agreements exist for cooperation in space, environment, energy, medicine and other areas), but it is widely regarded as the most important. It established joint programmes in such fields as chemical catalysis, physics, forestry, the application of computers to management, electrometallurgy and science policy. Some 250 American scientists have participated and the cost to the US treasury has been about \$13.2 million over the five-year period.

The Garwin panel reported that progress has been decidedly mixed. In the physics programme, for example, "no exchange or substantive interaction has taken place thus far", while as a result of exchanges in the electrometallurgy programme, "familiarity with differences in approach and perceptions in solving technical problems in the USSR has stimulated a considerable amount of rethinking of technical approaches in the US".

There have also been a number of problems common to most of the programmes. For example, the Garwin panel noted that although virtually every participant interviewed emphasised the helpfulness and warmth of individual Soviet scientists at the working level, there appear to be "layers of stifling bureaucracy which enforce a rigidity in the interaction which very much diminishes its value to the US and to the USSR". As evidence of such stifling bureaucracy, the panel cites inflexibility in travel arrangements for US scientists visiting the Soviet Union and lack of notification of the time, date, or place of arrival of Soviet visitors to the United States.

But the problems do not lie entirely on the Soviet side of the exchanges. The Garwin panel noted that US delegations are often ill-prepared before they visit the Soviet Union. There is little interaction between participants in different exchange programmes, and American scientists are seldom briefed on Soviet research and development

policies and practices.

The Garwin panel recommended that a small, permanent bureaucracy should be established in the United States government to plan and co-ordinate the exchange programmes and to prepare US scientists for their visits to the Soviet Union. According to one official involved in last week's talks, such a group is likely to be established soon, probably in the National Science Foundation.

A frequent complaint raised in the United States, particularly among conservatives, is that the flow of information from the scientific exchanges has been virtually a one-way street, from West to East. The argument is that since the Soviet Union lags behind the United States in many fields, it is eager to use the exchanges as a conduit for American technology. The Garwin panel did not specifically address that concern, though it noted in its report that participants in the programme frequently point to "significant political and cultural benefits in addition to the relatively few citations of benefits to US science and technology". Such intangible benefits should also be weighed in assessing the overall impacts of the agreements, the panel suggested.

Nevertheless, the Administration is understandably sensitive to charges that the exchange agreements are resulting in a significant drain of technical information from the United States, and according to one official familiar with the programme, greater attention will in future be paid to securing a better balance of information flow throughout the programme.

Press said that some of the concerns raised by the Garwin panel were brought up during the negotiations last week, and the Soviet participants were willing to discuss ways of smoothing future arrangements. At one point, Kirillin said that if problems arise, he and Press would communicate directly by telephone to iron them out. Asked whether human rights problems were mentioned during the talks, Press said that they were not.

For their part, the Soviets seem anxious to press on with the exchanges, while the Carter Administration seems to feel that for an outlay of only about \$2-3 million a year, the agreement is an inexpensive way to foster better relations. □

### Correction

In last week's item about Czechoslovakia a line crept in to confuse the meaning of a sentence. Dr Zdenek Mlynar's dismissal was for being a member of the campaign known as Charter 77. Our apologies.