

## USSR

## Discrediting the dissidents

*Vera Rich reports on efforts within the Soviet Union to play down the strength of dissident opinion*

THIS autumn, the Soviet Union will be celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the October Revolution. Unlike previous anniversaries, this one will take place against a background of dissident opinion which, to the obvious embarrassment of the official concept of Marxist-Leninism as a 'scientific' basis for society, includes among the dissidents a number of scientists.

Accordingly, it would seem that there is a last-minute campaign to reduce the impact of the dissident movement on the outside world before the celebrations commence, by means of media propaganda.

A recent article in the prestigious *Literaturnaya Gazeta* attacked the Oxford conference on physical chemistry and hydrodynamics which was held in honour of the sixtieth birthday of Corresponding Academician Veniamin G. Levich. Totally ignoring the scientific work of the meeting (for which see *Nature* 268, 298-299, 28 July, 1977), the article set out to prove that the organisers, Sir Derek Barton and Professor Brian Spalding, had been little more than figure-heads for organisers

"far removed from science". It cited the fact that a few of the Soviet scientists invited were already dead. Professor Spalding said that he had found the names of the Soviet scientists in a 1976 edition of the *World of Learning* and added that a few clerical errors were inevitable in organising a large conference.

Commenting on the article's other main charge, that Professor Levich had long ceased to work in science, Professor Spalding pointed out that this was a particularly wicked accusation, since it was the Soviet authorities' harassment that hindered Levich from continuing his scientific work. Spalding further noted that the author of the article seems to have violated the secret archives of the Academy of Sciences, concerning Levich's failure to be elected full Academician. Since the Academy elections are still by secret ballot, this seems ominous.

Somewhat similar in tone were the numerous broadcasts (largely in western languages) which preceded the Honolulu Congress of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA). The message was simple: Soviet psychiatry is a purely therapeutic activity, and all suggestions of the psychiatric repression of dissidents are simply propaganda. A number of western psychiatrists were cited

as having concurred in the diagnoses given to alleged dissidents. However, Dr Avtandil Papiashviliar, a psychiatrist who recently emigrated to the West, said in London that such claims were "a straightforward lie". He further maintained that during the WPA Symposium in Tbilisi, in 1974, the KGB had arranged for a genuine mental patient to break into the meeting, claiming to be persecuted by the police, in the hope that the visiting delegates would first protest, and then have to admit that the man was indeed in need of psychiatric attention. In the event, the Honolulu Congress passed (albeit narrowly) a motion censuring Soviet psychiatric repression of dissidents and the Soviet delegation decided not to secede from the WPA.

Honolulu can rightly be claimed as a success for all those concerned with the human rights movement in the Soviet Union. No such success, however, can yet be claimed for the recent Anatolii Shcharanskii hearing in the Swedish House of Parliament. Shcharanskii, a young mathematician who was a founder member of the Moscow 'Helsinki Monitoring Group', was arrested last March accused of spying for the CIA. The Stockholm hearing, before Hårje Stenberg, Master of the Swedish Appeal Court, not only presented circumstantial evidence of Shcharanskii's innocence, but also pressed for his human right of a fair trial. □

## NEW ZEALAND

●The latest budget from the New Zealand government gives a substantial fillip to the country's Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. Although the country is going through difficult economic times expenditure on science-related activity is to rise by 16% to \$NZ 35 million for the financial year 1977-78 (£1=\$NZ 1.78). That increase should keep pace with inflation and provide for some real increase as well but staff figures in the Department continue to be held at just over 2,000.

The budget allocation breaks down into \$NZ 14 million on agricultural work; \$NZ 3.15 million on energy; \$NZ 3.41 million on manufacturing; \$NZ 6.81 million on the natural environment; and the balance on miscellaneous activities. The department is making a special effort on energy research in efforts to discover long-term alternatives to New Zealand's reliance on overseas sources of fuel.

Meanwhile university research personnel gained some benefit from the budget, having gone through a very

lean time. Last year the Universities Research Fund was denied funds by the government in a savage attack on spending. This budget allocates the Fund \$NZ 750,000.

●A master file of over 14,000 earthquakes in earthquake-prone New Zealand has been established. The file has been placed on computer tape and runs from the first recorded earthquake in AD 1460 to the most recent shocks of 1975. The file will greatly assist the task of scientists working out the geographic patterns of earthquakes and researchers in the construction industry.

●A Royal Commission on Nuclear Power is sitting in New Zealand in an effort to discover the real needs of the country before any step is taken to set up nuclear power stations. The Labour opposition has been vigorously opposed to nuclear power but the Conservative government is waiting on the Commission. The Minister of Energy Resources, Mr George

Gair, says he believes the country has at least five years in hand before any decision need be taken.

●The government has set up a working party to examine the need for legislation to control genetic engineering experiments which are going on in New Zealand. So far, the few scientists working in the field have agreed to abide by the Williams Committee guidelines from the United Kingdom, but now the government believes further study is needed.

●Just to produce and supply electricity to New Zealand's three million people is calculated to cost about \$100 for every person. In an effort to recoup the costs the government continues to allow energy prices to rise. But in the search for alternative sources the government will control a major on-shore drilling programme, take over an off-shore mining company and the Natural Gas Corporation which controls the Maui gas field.

Bruce Wallace