

# Soviet 'mental illness' spreads to Czechoslovakia

Dr Snezhnevskii, of the Serbskii Institute of Forensic Psychiatry in Moscow, is well-known as the man who provided a theoretical basis for the practice of interning dissidents in mental hospitals. According to Dr Eva Dubska who left Czechoslovakia in 1977, at the time of her departure, Snezhnevskii's works were gaining support among certain sections of the Czechoslovak psychiatric establishment. A case history has now reached *Nature* which suggests that the Czechoslovak political establishment is prepared to add its weight to them.

According to Snezhnevskii, "all psychological illness is a form of schizophrenia. Further, he identifies a number of subtypes and symptoms not recognised abroad. These include "sluggish schizophrenia" (with no perceptible symptoms), "delusions of reformism", "a mania for protest" and the like. In the case of Augustin Navratil a 45-year-old Czech recently committed to the mental hospital in Kromeriz, there are disturbingly clear indications that the same diagnostic procedures have been used.

Navratil, who served as a local councillor for the revived People's Party under the Dubcek regime and who has since worked as a railway signal-box guard, was charged in January 1978 with slandering the state. (He had been collecting signatures for one of the many civil rights petitions which sprang up in the wake of the Charter-77 movement.)

After considerable bureaucratic delays, he was sent to the local mental



"I'm afraid, doctor prosecutor, you are suffering from hysterical self-stylisation as a psychologist with an inability to adapt to an adequate view of humanity"

hospital for examination, and found unfit to stand trial; accordingly he was formally committed for treatment. The diagnosis includes such Snezhnevskii type expressions as "hysterical self-stylisation towards the ideal of a strong leading personality and with a strong moral responsibility which the subject understands as 'fidelity to his principles' and an inability to adapt to an adequate view of social reality". Further "by analogy with the fate of past personalities the subject thinks that 'for the truth one must logically suffer'."

At times the report becomes near ludicrous, quoting IQ figures as evidence of an unbalanced personality, urging treatment although admitting that Navratil cannot be brought to change his views. However, it is suggested, it may be possible to make him conform at least outwardly.

It is, perhaps, this Kafka-esque cynicism which is the most alarming aspect of the case. Reading the report, one gains the impression of a trained scientist desperately trying to adduce some kind of substantiation for a diagnosis already determined. □

## French stress scientific side of detente in space

Mr Brezhnev's invitation to France to supply a crew-member for a joint manned space-mission with the Soviet Union did not come as a complete surprise to the Centre Nationale d'Etudes Spatiales (CNES). Shortly before President Giscard d'Estaing left for his "official working visit" to the Soviet Union, the chairman of CNES, Professor Hubert Curien, said that CNES was considering the possibility of Franco-Soviet cooperation in materials-processing in conditions of weightlessness.

CNES welcomed Mr Brezhnev's proposal in principle. They are not, however, interested in France simply being another country to have one of its citizens in orbit. "We are a scientific group", a CNES spokesman told *Nature*. "Such cooperation could be quite interesting, but we want to know what programme or programmes would be involved. We have a lot of interesting programmes in hand, and if the cooperation comes to pass, it would probably be one of the people in charge of one of these programmes who would take part."

No date has yet been even tentatively set for such a mission, nor have any details been worked out. But if CNES stand by their wish that "he would be an experimenter rather than a pilot", a significant change in Soviet procedure would be involved. Since the

three crew members of Soyuz-11 died tragically during re-entry, Soviet cosmonauts have always worn space-suits aboard the *Soyuz* transport vessels. The extra bulk means that only two cosmonauts can be launched in one craft. Although one is officially designated the pilot, the other is trained to be able to take over the controls in an emergency. CNES, however, would appear to prefer their representative to be essentially a passenger, ferried up to an orbital station where he would then proceed with his experiments.

Although CNES, as scientists, deprecate the publicity value of participation in the Soviet space programme, both the French and the Soviet governments seem to place great stress on it as what Mr Brezhnev last week called a "barometer of detente". France has occupied the leading position among non-Comecon countries in bilateral space cooperation with the Soviet Union.

The first general cooperation programme to include space was signed in 1966, and was presumably intended by the Soviet Union to encourage de Gaulle in his attempts to detach France from the US and NATO. Although French foreign policy has changed under succeeding presidents, the general world climate of detente and the impetus which the Franco-Soviet

space programme had already built up ensured its fruitful continuation.

France has, accordingly, taken part in a number of joint projects with the Soviet Union, including a laser-reflector experiment to determine accurately the distance to the Moon, a study of the atmosphere of Venus, investigation of solar radiation from Mars probes, studies of the magnetosphere, solar neutrons and gamma rays, and a programme of simultaneous rocket launches to study the *Aurora borealis* and *australis*.

At present, aboard Salyut-6, cosmonauts Vladimir Lyakhov and Valerii Ryumin are responsible for a France-Soviet materials-science experiment to synthesise magnetic alloys from materials which do not give rise to magnetic compounds in conditions of Earth gravity. This type of experiment will certainly be in the CNES planners' minds when they work out their programme for their "experimenter". Before he dons his space-suit, however, one important point remains to be settled by that branch of the Academie Francaise which regulates neologisms and loan-words. Is it the nationality of the crew-member or the registration of his craft which determines his designation? In other words, will he be officially described as an astronaut or a cosmonaut? □