to the new observatory. It plans to move its 1.1m Schmidt telescope in two years time. Denmark will collaborate with the RGO over a meridian circle.

In addition to the intergovernmental agreement, two other types of agreement were signed last weekend. One is between the UK Science Research Council, the Swedish Academy of Sciences, the Danish Research Administration and the Spanish Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas. It lays down the details of how the observatory will be used and stipulates the setting up of an international scientific committee to regulate its operation. Each country will be in sole control of 75% of its own telescopes' time. Spain will be entitled to 20% of each telescopes' time and the remaining 5% will be for use by any other country with a stake in the observatory. The UK is also to provide two places each year for Spanish astronomers at British universities, up to four places at the RGO and training at the Canaries observatory. The other agreement, between the Swedish, Danish and British research agencies and the Institute for Astrophysics Research on the Canary Islands, deals with the details of establishing the observatory.

With the opening of the new observatory, most British optical astronomy will move to the Canary Islands. The established centres of optical astronomy in the UK such as the RGO, can adapt to this change, says Professor Smith, by taking leading roles in the management of overseas telescopes, the building and designing of new equipment and in the handling of data from telescopes and spacecraft. In particular, he would like to see the establishment of about a dozen centres for analysing astronomical data with the RGO acting as coordinator. If the SRC were to establish such centres, he says, the UK would be in a good position to act as a data analysis centre for European astronomers using the joint ESA/NASA Space Telescope in the late 1980s.

Judy Redfearn

How the Soviets view exchanges...

"SOVIET-UK scientific contacts are, in general, much worse than 15 years ago, and I am afraid this is mostly the fault of Britain". So Professor Andrei Kapitsa, *de facto* science spokesman of the USSR National Exhibition at Earls Court, London, told *Nature*.

"There are links and agreements", Kapitsa went on, "but somehow they don't work out very well. They can, of course, be improved by mutual efforts, exchanges of publications and mutual experiments, especially in space".

Professor Kapitsa, a geographer working on remote sensing of the environment from space satellites, has perhaps a personal interest in drawing Britain into joint space experiments with the Soviet Union—he was born in England. Moreover, he asserted more than once that the idea of scientific exchange as a one-way flow of information is "absurd"; the idea of the exhibition, he suggested, is to show British scientists and engineers what the USSR has to offer them.

One way of disseminating such information, he explained, was the "Days of Soviet Science and Technology" organised in conjunction with the exhibition. A party of "20 leading Soviet scientists, sponsored by the Royal Society" will lecture in various British universities. This was the first time that such "days" had been organised in Britain, although they had been held in France, Germany, the Comecon countries, he said. (Subsequent inquiries, incidentally, reduced the total number of the party to 11, with the Royal Society being responsible only for three, the remainder, medical personnel, coal and oil technologists, Deputy Minister of Power Sapozhnikov, etc., being cared for by the appropriate professional bodies.)

One purpose of these "days", Kapitsa explained, was to explore the possibility of joint research programmes. His ideas on how exchange should be conducted are firm and somewhat paternalistic.

Exchange of top scientists for short visits would be followed by long-term exchanges of the younger generation "to work under the older ones". When challenged that in the past long-term exchange places were sometimes not filled from the British side, since it was virtually impossible for interested young scientists to find out what individual Soviet institutes had to offer, he merely commented: "But that is what a joint programme is for. The exchange of top scientists provides the necessary information!"

To the suggestion that the flow of such information would be increased if it were made easier for young Soviet scientists to attend international conferences, Kapitsa gave a diplomatic "no". Young people's papers were often not up to standard, and (he implied) could not therefore represent Soviet science. "All they want is an excuse to travel abroad". The American idea that only the younger generation was capable of fruitful scientific ideas was "absolutely stupid", he added. His own father, Nobel laureate Petr Kapitsa, was still doing valuable work in his mid-eighties.

He did admit, however, that the Royal Society and the Soviet Academy, partners in the exchange agreement, did not always operate in the same manner, and made it quite clear which method he thought better. "The Royal Society", he said, "is a society, but the Academy of Sciences is a working board, a research board!"

● Dr R. W. Keay, executive secretary of the Royal Society, comments: "In September 1977, Lord Todd, president of the Royal Society and Academician Anatolii Aleksandrov, president of the Soviet Academy, signed a new exchange agreement, replacing the old rigid system of short-term senior and long-term junior visits by a more flexible arrangement of 49 person-months per year in both directions. Since then the number of exchange visits has virtually doubled." □

... and what they've got to share

KAPITSA'S assertion that the West has much to gain from the maintenance and expansion of exchanges with the Soviet Union reiterates the message of several recent quasi-official Soviet statements. Last month, a lengthy *Pravda* article signed by five members of the Soviet Academy of Sciences (including two vice-presidents and the chief academic secretary) asserted that recent campaigns in the US to sever or suspend scientific contacts with the Soviet Union on human rights grounds are bound to fail and can have no

effect on the progress of Soviet science. An impressive list of Soviet contributions to joint research projects was cited in support.

Last week, Academician Viktor Ambartsumyan, speaking on the North American service of Moscow radio took up the story. While not returning to the Stalinist stance of claiming all discoveries for the Soviet Union, Ambartsumyan claimed that the discovery of the ring of Jupiter by the Voyager mission was not the "complete surprise" claimed in the Western

press; a certain Professor Chashlavskii of Kiev University had predicted it in 1960. The US media, he said, consistently play down the achievements of Soviet science, so as to present exchange programmes as one-sided.

Further, certain US scientists "who probably do not have much political experience", have been "manipulated" into signing a letter making Soviet-US scientific contacts dependent on the fate of "two persons who have been tried and convicted by Soviet courts".

Vera Rich