rejected the students' request for tutorial assessment.

Students maintained their position, arguing that skill at examinations is unrelated to the skills it takes to be a competent scientist and that gearing the course towards quantitative assessment actually reduced learning. In January, a second boycott was called, with the addition that any

resitting of the exam that included boycotters would be disrupted.

The second boycott was far less successful with only 10% of the students failing to attend. Nevertheless the university rescheduled the exam to include students who had participated in the boycott. The exam was disrupted by 25 students who occupied the room. A second resitting was re-

scheduled, this time with faculty, police and photographers in attendance, but the students banged on tin cans and drums outside the examination room.

On 1 June, the two students were summoned to the vice-chancellor's office and expelled for their part in the disturbances.

Joe Schwartz

Soviets get their fun from learning about science

SOVIET society is in many ways surprisingly Victorian—a trend shown in the great popularity of the scientific lecture as a form of cultural entertainment. The organisation of such lectures is the task of the *Znanie* (Knowledge) Society, founded in 1947, which, in Soviet society, plays roughly the role of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, the Royal Institution, and the Worker's Educational Association in the United Kingdom.

Recently, two notable representatives of *Znanie*, Nobel Laureate Academician Basov and Dr Vladislavlev, toured the UK as part of the "Days of Soviet Science and Technology" organised in connection with the Soviet Exhibition at Earls Court. A delegation of 11 scientists and some 10 support personnel took part in the "Days". The host was the British Association—although, by some failure in communication, they were not aware until the delegation arrived of the great significance which Soviet science publicity puts on the organisation of such "Days". Nevertheless, one outcome of the visit was agreement to exchange lecturers between *Znanie* and the British Association—although it seems unlikely that the Soviet public will have the direct benefit of words of wisdom from the BA in the foreseeable future.

For *Znanie*, although lauded in official handbooks as being built on "democratic principles", is a hierarchical organisation. Although the society is supposed to organise lectures for any Soviet collective farm, factory or club that demands them, it would be impractical for top-flight lecturers to be constantly commuting, say, between Moscow and Vladivostok. "What we do", explained Vladislavlev "is to organise lectures for lecturers' in such remote places. Then the lecturers we have trained can give lectures at the local level".

If a top specialist is required, then the organisation requesting him must pay his fare. This suggests that the remote areas are somewhat dis-

advantaged—an idea which the visitors resolutely denied. As far as the Virgin Lands, and the far north of Siberia are concerned, they explained, there are special funds—and for the rest, there are no problems. Local lecturers are well trained to do their job in popularising science.

Lecturers, in fact, form the only 'members' of *Znanie* (apart from administration personnel). The main privilege of membership is to give frequent lectures (usually gratis) to whatever audience demands your services, and to attend frequent seminars on the latest developments in your field and the newest methods of lecturing. "The main problem", Vladislavlev explained, "is to make lectures appropriate for different audiences. That is why it is obligatory, when you ask for a lecturer, to describe the intended audience."

Not all lectures are simply a cultural diversion. *Znanie* is also responsible for the 'People's Universities', a fairly new feature of Soviet life. Courses are organised by plants and ministries to provide workers with the means of improving their professional qualifications.

Znanie itself is only concerned with the academic side—it is up to the factory commissioning its services to provide the facilities and to organise funding. Some 60% of *Znanie* funds, he added, come from non-state sources—factories, and trade unions. Of course, if a worker simply want to study, say, English Literature, he added, "then he pays for himself, just as if he was going to the cinema!"

To the Soviet mind, 'science' implies, as Academician Basov put it, "all advances in knowledge". Thus the 'flow-diagram' of *Znanie's* work includes 'Houses of atheism' in parallel with its planetaria. The most popular lectures organised by the society, according to Vladislavlev, are those on international affairs, followed by medicine.

Only the lecturers and organisers, not the audiences, are members of *Znanie*. If, say, some Ukrainian collec-

tive-farm wants to start a 'Bird-watchers' club', *Znanie* will provide lecturers and suggest reading matter, but the club cannot become an associate member of *Znanie*. Only high-level professional societies, such as the "Popov Radio-technical Society" has that privilege. (Some 40 such societies at present are 'collective members' of *Znanie*.)

Even so, with more than three million active members (lecturers and paid local organisers), there is no need to invite further people to join. "We have too many members already", Basov said. Some prominent personalities, of course, are virtually *ex officio* members. All Soviet cosmonauts, said Vladislavlev, are exploited enormously. "In fact, their bosses are always telling us to leave them in peace to get on with their job."

"There is an increasing demand for scientific knowledge and an increasing interest" said Vladislavlev. "The more one knows, the more one wants to know." As for the social impact of science, Academician Basov reiterated an earlier communication to the British Association that "science is not always good!" It would appear, however, that, in spite of a vast quantity of general science reporting (all major discoveries are reported in *Pravda*, Basov said), the Soviet public have not developed a "doomwatch outlook".

"It is *not* disasters that interest the public in science", said Vladislavlev, referring to Harrisburg. "The interest comes naturally from the rising cultural level."

And, as far as the Soviet citizen is concerned, everything is done to encourage that rise. "First we offer him a single lecture", said Vladislavlev. "Then, having caught his interest, a course of lectures. And finally, enrolment in a People's University. We are concerned in what you would call continuous adult education, and its development is our main task for the future!"

Vera Rich