

Mr Gromyko and Mr Reagan

Last week's meeting in Washington seems to have something to do with future talks on arms control, but nobody knows quite what. The best hope is that Mr Reagan will redefine his policy.

MR Andrei Gromyko caused such a stir on his visit to Washington last week that observers could have been forgiven for thinking him a candidate for the US presidency. On the face of things, he has many of the essential attributes. He has been around for a long time and he is also an elderly gentleman. But his looks belie his age, suggesting that the longevity that comes with the successful exercise of power is on his side. He is also capable of those mercurial changes of mood that, in senior politicians, pass for inscrutability; a tough hardliner's speech at the United Nations on the Tuesday, an exit from the White House with his hands clasped in the traditional boxer's gesture of self-congratulation on the Thursday. By popping in and out of the United States like this, Mr Gromyko has cleverly changed the agenda of speculation from mundane questions such as whether interest rates will rise still further (and, if so, before or after the election) to simpler issues — what did he say to the real president (who is not quite as old), and in what tone of voice?

We shall have to wait until after the election to find out. It would have been no part of Mr Gromyko's purpose to help Mr Ronald Reagan to his re-election a month from now, for which reason it was never on the cards that a tangible agreement on anything would have emerged from last month's meeting. The Soviet Union has nothing to lose, and everything to gain, from postponing serious talk about East-West relations until after the election. But there was also, last week, much to be gained from emphasizing in the run-up to election-day the importance that the Soviet Union attaches to what politicians in the West may be tempted to say in the heat of an election campaign. Mr Gromyko, at least, will not have forgotten that President Reagan's previous election campaign was marked by repeated declarations that arms control negotiations then negotiated, Salt II in particular, were Soviet traps for the unwary. In the event, the first Reagan Administration took two years to learn that that position was untenable. Nothing could have been lost, and everything gained, by reminding the incumbent president of that waste of everybody's time and of the need to avoid a repetition of that error.

Nature and the Soviet Union

ON 22 November, *Nature* will publish a survey of science in the Soviet Union.

When the project was first planned, early in 1983, it was hoped to visit a number of institutes and laboratories in the Soviet Union, but repeated requests for assistance have now been met with the information that arrangements cannot be made until 1985. Accordingly, *Nature* would be glad to hear from scientists with recent first-hand experience of work in the Soviet Union, or of collaboration with Soviet scientists and/or institutes.

Those able to help are asked to write to the editor as soon as possible at one of the editorial offices in London, Tokyo and Washington. Please include a telephone number.

Anonymous correspondence will not be dealt with. All correspondence will be confidential unless otherwise agreed. Information will not be published without corroboration. On this occasion, *Nature* is exclusively concerned with content and texture of Soviet research, not with problems of dissent and emigration. □

It is also in everybody's interest that the momentum of arms control negotiations should pick up again once the election result is known. On the assumption that Mr Reagan will not be a lame-duck president waiting for a successor to take office, the fallow period before the next inauguration day could be used constructively, especially if Mr Reagan should let slip during the election some strictly verbal promise likely to appeal to Mr Gromyko and his fellow-countrymen (not to mention many of Mr Reagan's). An undertaking that a moratorium on the testing of anti-satellite weapons would be a precondition of negotiations on these instruments would suit capitally. (Mr Reagan will have had a chance to let that carrot show in his speech this week to the United Nations.) The temptation to seem conciliatory must be huge. There will be no complaint if Mr Reagan should succumb to it.

Preparing the ground for negotiations on anti-satellite weapons is not however what matters most. Both Mr Reagan and Mr Gromyko should remember that. For practical purposes, the agenda for arms control in the next few years should not be determined by the imagined anxieties of statesmen on either side. The US Administration's ambitions for a star wars defensive system are not an immediate threat to stability, but a threat to the anti-ballistic missile treaty (part of the Salt process) ten years from now, a threat to stability twenty or thirty years from now — and a threat to everybody's pocket-book in the meantime. The immediate issues, however, have been what they have been for ten years — the needless investment in missile systems on both sides, their fluctuating imbalance and needless pieces of irrationality such as chemical weapons. The United States is right to have been insisting that these are the subjects crying for discussion.

Can the present administration, or a successor in the same mould, bring itself to consider these questions constructively? Mr Gromyko may also have been looking in Washington for guidance on that point. Nobody can say for sure, and indeed in the past few months, there have been disconcerting signs that too many senior officials in Washington are convinced (entirely against experience) that agreements with the Soviet Union are not worth the paper they are written on. That mood, or those people, will have to be exorcised if ever there is to be serious negotiation on arms control measures that will count. Fortunately, the election provides the president with an opportunity to redefine the basis for negotiations without spilling the blood of those who have helped him loyally in the past four years. The perennial problem of politicians running for office, that of making too many speeches with too little material, might be deftly solved by using an occasional speech to lead the White House out of its old-fashioned xenophobia. It would be ironical if Mr Gromyko had been putting Mr Reagan up to that old democratic trick. □

Another culprit

The largest of the British research councils is not blameless for the plight of British research.

BRITISH self-contentment over the mechanism of research support has taken several hard knocks in the past few years, nowhere more conspicuously than over what is called the dual-support system, the mechanism by which public funds for academic research are channelled from two supposedly