

# World eavesdrops on the Moscow 'peace' conference

- Sakharov challenges both superpowers *L6*
- Gorbachev sounds a cautionary note

London

LAST weekend, an International Forum "for a non-nuclear world and the survival of humanity" took place in Moscow. Formally the 1,000 plus participants came as 'individuals', and the meeting had no connection with any government, including that of the Soviet Union. This did not inhibit Mr Mikhail Gorbachev from entertaining the delegates to a closing reception at the Kremlin, where he delivered a major speech, castigating the United States for "effectively trying to scrap the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty of 1972" and warning that the Soviet Union would be resuming the testing of its own nuclear weapons. But the concept of individual participation did allow the organizers to invite Dr Andrei Sakharov to participate, thus attracting the attention of the world media.

Sakharov's presence was an entirely voluntary act. His personal campaign for nuclear disarmament goes back almost twenty years — indeed, he made his debut as a dissident with an essay on "progress, peaceful coexistence and intellectual freedom" which was triggered by his concern over the arms race. Moreover, his stance on the US Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) was formulated in an article in *Foreign Affairs* in 1983: namely, that for such a system to operate as an adequate deterrent, it would have to achieve a degree of precision not feasible within the current or foreseeable state of the art. This same argument was advanced earlier this month by a spokesman for the Soviet government, Gennadii Gerasimov, who compared the degree of precision involved with that needed to produce a library of several thousand volumes without a single misprint. At this point Dr Sakharov's views coincide with those of the government. This may well have influenced those who decided to end his exile — although they do not challenge his credibility of independence of thought.

The only limit, as far as this particular forum was concerned, was the external one imposed by the Soviet media. For, in his address to the working group of scientists he criticized both superpowers, saying on the one hand that "the West must not try to corner the Soviet Union", for "a cornered nation is always dangerous", but on the other hand that a "more democratic and open society" in the Soviet Union (including the right to emigrate from it) would be a major safeguard of peace. The Soviet media, however, re-

ported only his criticisms of the Western stance and of SDI technology, ignoring his remarks about the Soviet Union.

Dr Sakharov's presence, while focusing world attention on the forum as a whole, nevertheless meant that some other issues were overlooked in official statements. (The sessions themselves were closed.) Nothing was publicly said, apparently, of the missing computer scientist Vladimir Aleksandrov, who worked on the Soviet computer model of a possible 'nuclear winter' and who vanished from a peace conference in Madrid in spring 1985, although his continuing absence is itself a source of international tension among his former colleagues. Nor was much notice paid by the West to the peace initiatives of the Bulgarian-launched 'Ecological Forum', several of whose leading members were present in Moscow. One of the movement's founders, Dr Nansen Bekhar, explained during a visit to Britain last month, that this body aims to be not simply a "professionals for peace" group,



Yelena Bonner and Andrei Sakharov in their Moscow home.

but to work actively for the elimination of environmental problems which can themselves provoke or exacerbate international tensions.

As far as the Moscow meeting was concerned, Dr Sakharov's rehabilitation seems to have been complete. He was present at the Kremlin reception where he warmly applauded Mr Gorbachev's statement of his commitment to "new approaches on humanitarian issues". But to those conference participants who attended the forum in the hopes of influencing Soviet policy, Mr Gorbachev sounded a warning — the new response to humanitarian issues was not, he said, a response to pressure from the West. This stance tallies with the statement by Central Committee member Georgii Arbatov last weekend that the release of the Jewish activist Iosif Begun was actually delayed by the Moscow protests on his behalf. The Soviet leaders, it would seem, are prepared to exercise a new clemency, but do not wish to be seen as acting under compulsion.

Vera Rich

# Space station partnership still in jeopardy

Washington

INTERNATIONAL collaboration in the US space station remains in the balance, but less precariously than before last week's meeting of delegations from the US and potential partner governments. The statement issued after the meeting says that Canada, Japan and the members of the European Space Agency (ESA) will continue their negotiations with the United States towards a civil space station. But the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the prime mover of the project, seems as worried by internal as by international threats to the project.

The objective of allowing the three non-American partners to satisfy themselves that the space station will not be dominated by the US military seems only partly to have been attained. The statement saying that negotiations are to continue gives no timetable, even though ESA, for one, needs to know where it stands by its next council meeting in June.

Observers who accept NASA's contention that it has never hidden the possibility of US military participation admit that some partners may have been shaken by the prospect of the space station being used for testing components of the Strategic Defense Initiative. The need now is for a form of words assuring non-military users that their projects will not be overridden by military needs while not usurping NASA's overall responsibility for managing the station. Part of the problem is that there are two agreements to be negotiated, one among the participating governments and one between NASA and other operating agencies such as ESA.

Both the programme office and NASA's comptroller have carried out reviews of the project, which have in turn been reviewed by Dr James Fletcher, NASA's administrator. Fletcher is now negotiating with the White House's Office of Management and Budget about the cost, believed to be much greater than the \$8,000 million originally forecast. Whatever the outcome, some delay seems unavoidable. By 1994, the date first fixed for full operation of the space station, the best that can be hoped for is the launching of some parts of it.

Terence Finn, a deputy director at NASA's space station office, says that the station could allow the United States to regain its leadership in space science. Accommodating the Pentagon's interests should be feasible but will require diplomacy, he says. He admits to worry that the Department of Defense might become "insensitive to the international and research flavor" of the space station. □