Peace Questionnaire: Soviets Seek Views of U.S. Scientists

An item producing a modest ripple in Washington science circles lately is a questionnaire being circulated among American scientists by an organization known as the Scientific Commission of the Soviet Peace Committee.

The questionnaire, which attempts to elicit opinions on questions related to nuclear war and proliferation of nuclear weapons, was signed by A. Kuzin, chairman of the Scientific Commission. The document asks six questions. The first three are specific, designed to identify the respondent's specialty, degree, title, age, and nationality (it is evidently being circulated in other countries as well as the United States). The next two raise issues about the role of scientists in preventing war: "Do you think that scientists can influence public opinion on the need and possibility of nuclear non-proliferation and of preventing thermonuclear war?" and "What are the possible forms of joint action by scientists of various countries to achieve the above-mentioned goal?" The final question, perhaps appealing more to the professional ambitions of scientists than to their pacific instincts, is: "How can the development of science in your particular field benefit from a curtailment of military expenditures (as a first step toward the strengthening of peace)?"

The questionnaire is accompanied by an appeal from the Scientific Commission stating that the Commission speaks "on behalf of Soviet scientists who want to make their contribution to the efforts of all the peaceloving and creative forces of Mankind aimed at preserving peace on our planet." The Commission's efforts, it says, are "based on the profound belief in the prospectlessness of the attempts to solve world contradictions with the help of modern weapons. . . . The establishment of mutual understanding between scientists and their action against war," the appeal continues, "is becoming a matter of prime importance today when the role of science in the life of society and the prestige and influence of scientists are exceptionally great. . . . We are confident," the statement concludes, "that along with all the progressive forces of modern society, scientists should not remain inactive in the face of the danger of nuclear war." The appeal was signed by Kuzin, a radiobiologist and corresponding member of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, who has attended Pugwash discussions, and by three Academicians. They are A. Oparin, a biochemist; I. Artobolevsky, a chemical engineer; and I. G. Petrovsky, a mathematician. All four are described by an American source as rather active Soviet science-politicians who have "specialized" to a certain extent in peace activities.

Unfortunately, the two most interesting questions about the Soviet questionnaire—who got it and who responded to it—can't be answered at this time. The State Department, which had the questionnaire brought to its attention by recipients at the Office of Naval Research, knows nothing about the extent of the mailing or the characteristics of the recipients. Independent inquiry suggests a pretty random mailing: the poll has showed up on both the East and West coasts and in areas in between, within a number of disciplines, and among both governmental and nongovernmental scientists. Within the government, the concentration appears thickest in operating scientific or technical agencies such as NASA; officials of basic research or granting agencies, such as the National Science Foundation, reported no known recipients. And, while this is not certain, the mailing appears not to have been concentrated on American scientists noted for their international peace or disarmament activities; at the very least it can be said that certain rather obvious candidates on such a list have not received the circular. Who has answered the questionnaire is an even more imponderable question.

At the State Department, no one is inclined to take the questionnaire too seriously. It is regarded as a relatively trivial irritation, though as one observer put it, "if they could get the Post Office to tear up all copies entering the country, they'd probably be a lot happier." But the questionnaire exists, it is coming into the country, and it is the business of the diplomats to take a position on it.

The position selected can best be described as ambivalent. On the one hand, the department is caught up in the vision of the world long propounded by its own cold warriors. It regards the Soviet Peace Committee as a "propaganda front," and it has concluded that the purpose of the questionnaire is to elicit responses that could be used to support Soviet propaganda and discredit American policy. It also believes that the questionnaire could have the additional aim of identifying American scientists who are willing to enter into correspondence of this type, leaving them vulnerable to further Russian approaches. They do not see it as a serious effort to expand Soviet-American scientific contacts or to open new fields for disarmament initiatives. As the State Department and other American officials see it, if it were a serious effort it would have gone by the rulebooks: the Russians would have contacted the American scientists and officials most knowledgeable and influential on disarmament matters. Since they did not, the Department believes the Russians intended to trade on the naïveté of less experienced researchers, for their own propaganda purposes.

On the other hand—and whatever the accuracy of its diagnosis of Russian intentions—the State Department is aware of the delicacy of its relations with the American scientific community. Internally, the department's apparatus for scientific affairs has not been in very good shape. Diplomatic considerations have interfered with the international exchanges that scientists welcome and have imposed certain restrictions on international travel. To appear to censor the outgoing mail of American scientists would do very little to help the department improve its image.

Accordingly, what the State Department did was to make its views known to the heads of various science agencies where Soviet solicitation was believed likely to take place, but without issuing any orders. The department merely offered "guidance." The science agencies appear to have responded in varying ways, some issuing memo-

randa, some merely initiating staff discussions. Most appear to have followed the State Department's lead in not proscribing response to the Soviet poll, but, despite the permissive tone of official actions, the implication is clear that the government considers answering the poll a naïve and unconstructive act. (At least one agency, NASA, took an additional step and stressed in a memorandum that contact between American and Soviet scientists—in areas of expertise—was not being discouraged.)

The State Department's assessment that the answers to the Soviet questionnaire could be used to discredit American policy seems plausible enough, but the significance of such usage could easily be misinterpreted. If every American response bore out Soviet propaganda themes, it would prove not so much that the Soviets are adept propagandists as that grave domestic dissatisfaction with American policy already exists. The questions raised in the Soviet poll are questions to which a substantial number of American scientists have already publicly addressed themselves. The Soviet poll would clearly be only one of many vehicles the American academic community has been using to tell the Johnson administration what it feels and fears.

But whatever the conceivable merits of the Soviet questionnaire as an instrument of either international or domestic communication might have been, the intervention of the State Department has probably made its effective utilization impossible. The message to American scientists from the State Department, if gently spoken, is also clear: "Your failure to respond will be appreciated."—ELINOR LANGER

Student Housing: Colleges Line Up for U.S. Loans

The current and growing shortage of student housing on college and university campuses is a mundane subject which cannot compete for headlines with a riotous "free speech" demonstration or an angry faculty petition over Vietnam. Nevertheless, it is being viewed with increasing concern by administrators on many campuses. Colleges and universities would be facing continually mounting enrollment pressures and strains on their student housing facilities if only because of the nation's steadily growing population. However, the government's concern for the needy student—expressed for example in the National Defense Education Act loan program, the antipoverty office's Upward Bound program, and the new Cold War G.I. bill—will contribute also to the demands for college space and facilities.

The full strength of these formidable pressures may be felt by the institutions at a time when the federal government's college housing loan program is overwhelmed by the demands being made upon it. Many academic officials, alarmed by this prospect, are hoping that something will be done promptly to avert housing shortages more troublesome than any that have yet arisen. In April a spokesman for the American Council on Education, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, and five other higher-education groups told a congressional committee that serious shortages already exist.

"Lack of space in which students can live is increasingly becoming the determining factor in admissions," said David W. Mullins, president of the University of Arkansas. "Because of insufficient housing many institutions have ceased to accept new applications several weeks earlier this year than in the past."

Even on those campuses where shortages of academic facilities and qualified faculty are the really decisive factors in limiting enrollment, it is clear that a shortage of relatively low-cost housing will work a major hardship on students living on a tight budget. Military veterans largely dependent on the $100- to $150-a-month G.I. Bill benefits often will suffer. Moreover, even in a period of federal budgetary constraints arising out of the Vietnam war and threats of inflation, some university people think it unfortunate that college housing, usually financed on a self-liquidating basis through rental fees, should be denied adequate federal loan funds.

The college housing loan program, popular since its inception in 1950, acquired still further importance and popularity last year after Congress fixed the interest on loans at a maximum of 3 percent—a rate lower than the rate at which states can borrow through the sale of tax-exempt bonds. Previously, the rate had been based on the cost to the Treasury of borrowing money at long term, plus ¼ of 1 percent to cover the cost of administering the program.

In the past, state institutions frequently could fare as well or better by relying on the private money market. In fact, the law establishing the federal loan program required that private financing be used if available at comparable rates. Private institutions always have found it advantageous to seek the federal loans. The Community Facilities Administration (CFA), now part of the new Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD), estimated in 1963 that the loan program, during its history, had financed 60 percent of all higher-education housing construction. The 1793 loans granted from 1950–1962 totaled $1.8 billion.

Since 1961 the loan program has been authorized at a level of $300 million a year. Even before demand for the loans was increased by fixing the interest rate at 3 percent, the available loan funds had begun to fall behind the colleges' needs. On 1 July 1965 the program began the 1966 fiscal year with a backlog of loan applications totaling $192 million. By 1 February 1966, when it was announced that no more applications would be received until further notice, an additional $568 million in applications had been filed. In the opinion of qualified observers, had applications been received through 30 June, the close of the fiscal year,