

editorial

Detente in science

In recent months the relations between Soviet and Western-world scientists have been strained by concern about reported mistreatments of prominent Soviet physicists and other scientists by their own government (see Sept. 1972, page 69; Sept. page 78; Nov. pages 9 and 69). It is heartening to note that despite this current difficulty as well as the more general diplomatic uncertainties, both governments are continuing to take steps that will strongly encourage close working relationships in the future between the Soviet and US scientific communities.

The daily papers report that the US-USSR joint space program is progressing exactly as planned. In July 1975, we still expect that a Soviet Soyuz spacecraft with two cosmonauts aboard will rendezvous in orbit with an Apollo space vehicle containing three astronauts. After testing out and standardizing docking procedures for future use, the two crews will spend the rest of their time in orbit engaging in scientific experiments with the possibility of collaboration on some experiments.

Of even greater interest to physicists, however, is the agreement reported in this issue (page 77) reached by the US-USSR Joint Committee on Cooperation in Atomic Energy to enter into a 10-year program of closer cooperation for research in the fundamental properties of matter, in fusion and in nuclear reactors. This is the first time such an accord has been signed by the heads of state themselves and the ten-year period is the longest-term joint commitment yet entered into by the two countries in a science area. In addition, the terms of the agreement encourage the visiting country to contribute sizeable capital investments adding to the experimental facilities of the host country. The agreement also holds out the opportunity for easing bothersome restrictions on travel of scientists between the two countries and may even lead to resurrection of plans for a joint high-energy accelerator.

Further evidence of the growing spirit of cooperation has been apparent in the ongoing negotiations that the American Institute of Physics is conducting with the Soviet Union concerning the exchange of copyrighted materials. As reported in our February article (pages 24-25) by AIP's director H. William Koch, with the recent signing by the USSR of the Universal Copyright Convention the way has been opened for the first time for

agreements between the Soviets and AIP setting up ground rules under which physics information appearing in the journals of one country can be photocopied or translated for the use of physicists in the other country. Koch has since attended a meeting in Moscow on this subject and was recently able to report to the AIP Governing Board that the prospects are very promising for the execution of such a copyright agreement between the Soviets and AIP in the near future.

Clearly, these signs of progress towards a "scientific detente" merit the enthusiastic support of all scientists. Closer working relationships in research between the world's two major powers will directly benefit the progress of science itself and can only help to diminish any present sources of tension between scientists in the two countries.

—Harold L. Davis