

Murmansk - that is, through the Northeast Passage. A West German firm proposes trips to Svalbard and Zemlya Frantsa-Iosifa, and Norwegians would like to extend their coastal service to Murmansk.

The Soviet Union suggests that Soviet icebreakers could be employed in the Canadian Arctic, and has indicated that one, either *Murmansk* (1968) or *Kiyev* (1965), is to be available for sale to a foreign country. Soviet masters and crews with ice experience may be available for work for foreign shipowners.

Problems in the current operating system

Recruitment of seamen for nuclear icebreakers is difficult because, while high standards are insisted on, service in foreign-going ships is more attractive as commanding pay which is not only higher but partly in foreign currency. It is also necessary to revise the way in which icebreaker and freighting services are paid for by the customer; at present the charges are at a flat rate for any given class of vessel and do not vary with the amount of work done.

The cost accounting system (*khozraschet*) is presenting problems. The port inspector at Nizhneyansk complains that his inspectorate is hamstrung because it has no real independence, being administratively subordinated to the shipowning authorities. In the Lena river fleet the Kirensk group was unable to fulfil its plan, and thus pay its way, because someone higher in the hierarchy blocked getting cargoes. However, increased openness of discus-

sion is appreciated: for instance, on the pros and cons of nuclear-powered ships.

There is increasing awareness of environmental pollution. The worst example quoted this year was in the river Irtysh around Tobol'sk, where the cleanliness standard upstream from the town was violated by a factor of 14, and downstream from the town by a factor of 187.

Science

After drifting station SP-28 had been relieved by *Rossiya* in Fram Strait in January 1989, the research ship *Otto Schmidt* continued the work of the station in sea ice and oceanographical studies until she herself was relieved at the exit from Denmark Strait. *Sibir'* released from the ice of the Kara Sea some hundreds of white whales, which had been spotted in difficulty by a helicopter.

A complaint was made in the press that the best ice reconnaissance aircraft, the IL-14, had been withdrawn from service without any replacement. This action may have been connected with the crash of an IL-14 near Pevek on 19 July, with all ten persons on board killed.

Ice

Little reference was made to ice conditions, which may therefore have been neither specially good nor specially bad. The Ob' was said to have broken up late, but the eastern sector of the sea route opened in June, which is rather early.

Correspondence

First direct flight from Australia to Antarctica: a correction

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Your October issue (*Polar Record* 25 (155): 359) stated that Giles Kershaw and Dick Smith made the first direct flight from Australia to Antarctica in 1988. I realize that this is repeated from *ANARE News* but thought I should correct it. The first flight was made from Melbourne to Byrd Station by a US Hercules aircraft under the command of Rear Admiral James Reedy, USN, on 30 September 1964. The flight departed from Avalon Airfield, near Melbourne, at 1756 hours. James Reedy had been keen to make the last inter-continental flight that remained unaccomplished and had planned and directed it. Captain of the aircraft was Cdr Fred S. Gallup, USN, Commander of Operation Deepfreeze Squadron VX6. He had a crew of six. Two Australians had been invited to participate, the journalist David Burke and myself. Some other US servicemen brought the total to 18.

I had expected the flight to be a routine affair but it turned out to be quite eventful. Arriving over the South Pole but being unable to land because of the low temperature (-85°F), the Hercules dropped mail and fruit to the station and headed for McMurdo. However, the sliding door, opened for the air-drop, jammed and would not close. We shared the inhalation of oxygen from a couple of cylinders as the plane crossed the Queen Maud Mountains

A radio message then informed us that the weather had closed in at McMurdo, so we changed course for Byrd Station. Arriving there, the nose-ski could not be lowered and, after a half-hour struggle to release it, Gallup decided to land without it.

Putting down the heavy Hercules and balancing it on two skis for the length of the runway was a fine job of flying, and it was a very relieved group of men that emerged when, after slewing around when the nose was finally dropped onto the snow, the aircraft came to rest.

The distance flown, 4420 miles, had taken 15 hours 39 minutes, the longest duration in Antarctic aviation history up to that time.