

Poland

University advances checked

THE Polish government's plans to reform the 1982 Higher Education Act will go ahead, in spite of strong opposition from the academic community. Last week, Warsaw University held a massive protest meeting and launched a last-minute appeal to the Sejm (Parliament) against the changes. Nevertheless, it now seems obvious that the government and party authorities were determined from the beginning to press ahead with the amendments, and the public discussion, launched at the end of December, was merely a placebo to the university community.

The amendments, which would annul the autonomy won during the Solidarity era and would give the Ministry of Science and Higher Education virtually unlimited disciplinary powers over the universities, have been strongly opposed not only by the academic community, but also by the government-sponsored "Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth" (PRON), launched during the martial law period in order (it was hoped) to attract the support of the masses to the ruling junta (WRON — the similarity of the acronyms was hardly coincidental). PRON in fact has not picked up the expected mass support, although it has consistently tried to woo the academic community, backing, for example, a proposal to convert the Białystok "filial" of Warsaw University into an independent university by 1991.

Originally, it appears, the state and party authorities had hoped to amend the law without public outcry. Unfortunately, in October 1984, a confidential draft of the proposed changes was leaked to the underground press. Although Dr Benon Miskiewicz, the Minister of Science and Higher Education, denounced the alleged leak as a "provocation", he shortly afterwards laid his own proposals for change before the Main Council for Higher Education (a kind of parliament of the universities, with one elected delegate from every higher educational institution in Poland, except the Catholic University of Lublin which elected to remain aloof when the Main Council was constituted in 1981). Although 60 per cent of the delegates to the council are party members, they strongly opposed the changes, on the grounds that to revise the law so soon after enactment would tend to "destabilize" the universities. Largely as a result of the main council's opposition, a "public debate" on the amendments was launched at the end of the year by the Committee for Social and Political Affairs, which reports directly to the cabinet.

Articles appeared in the press from leading academics condemning the amendments, and virtually the only organization that favoured them was the party-approved Association of Polish Students (ZSP), which under the proposed changes would

become the only representative organization of Polish students. (At present, ZSP has very little active support). Referenda organized among university staff and students produced almost embarrassingly high votes against the changes. Nevertheless, the usefulness of such referenda and articles was questioned by a document signed by the underground Solidarity leadership of Warsaw's eight universities and higher colleges, which, by the end of February, could be found lying about in classrooms and libraries. This claimed that the alleged public discussion was merely a means of allaying public concern, while the authorities pressed ahead with the changes.

At about the same time, a ministry spokesman admitted that the issue was simply whether or not the universities "belonged to the state", and that if they did, the changes must, willy-nilly, go through. (My tape-recording of this interview was subsequently confiscated by the

Polish customs (see *Nature* 14 March, 1985, p.120).) After the referenda ended in mid-March there were several weeks of seeming impasse. Then, on 13 May, during a special plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party on the role of the intelligentsia, Politburo member Jozef Czyrek stated explicitly that the universities were indeed "state owned and socialist" and that therefore the changes must go through, to ensure that "anti-socialist groups" did not exploit university autonomy for their own ends.

A week later, on 21 May, the government press spokesman, Mr Jerzy Urban, announced that there would be no further consultations with the public and that although he could give no date, the amendments would soon be laid before the Sejm. Warsaw University's 3,000-strong protest meeting the next day, which included an address by the former leader of the university's Solidarity chapter, Maciej Geller, and from which all outsiders were excluded by student "guards", made it clear that the university community will fight to preserve its hard-won autonomy. **Vera Rich**

Synchrotron source

Italy drives a hard bargain

ITALIAN science minister Luigi Granelli is not at all happy with the Franco-German *fait accompli* that led, effectively, to the choice of Grenoble in south-east France as the site for the planned European Synchrotron Radiation Facility (ESRF). Mr Granelli may have to accept the Grenoble site — Italy had proposed Trieste — but France and Germany may see little sign of his lira unless, in the accepted diplomatic tradition, Italy receives something in exchange. It now seems that he is not to be bought off with a promise that a European tritium-handling facility — needed for the time when the Joint European Torus, JET, or its successor, the Next European Torus, NET, need to use tritium to reach nuclear ignition — will be built at Ispra, north of Milan. It had been thought that this was the *quid pro quo* that would yield Italian acquiescence to, and money for the Grenoble site, but this is "not quite right", Mr Granelli said in London earlier this month.

At present there is deadlock in the European council of ministers, which meets next on 4 June, over ESRF, Granelli intimated, as "everyone is using their veto" to prevent France and Germany moving forward. Italy has proposed a site in Trieste, a region which the government is keen to develop in order to maintain its historical toehold at the top of the Adriatic, and offered more financial support than any other single country (including France or Germany). And still Italy must have something in Trieste to balance its support for Grenoble, Granelli insisted.

"There could be the large laboratory in Grenoble, and something different in Trieste", he said. "We should look at the

wider context and consider making two or three laboratories." He was prepared to be flexible about what those laboratories would be. Denmark for example, which had offered a site at Risø for ESRF, would be happy with a laboratory for oceanography.

"The council should always consider a number of facilities at the same time, then the opposition doesn't become so stiff", said Granelli. The tritium handling facility could not go into the package with ESRF, however, because "from all points of view it is not an Italian request. It's a common interest for the European Community."

Granelli would like to see big machines for Europe discussed in a more flexible way in future "as long as the Commission of the European Communities is involved". There could be arrangements where two or three countries might agree on a facility but the Commission should also be made a partner, to allow other European states to participate in a smaller way through the Commission.

Professor Paolo Fasella, director-general for research at the Commission in Brussels, agrees that this would be a useful formula. "In a slow and practical way we're already investigating it", he said. The Commission had made initial approaches to national laboratories such as the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory and the Daresbury Laboratory in the United Kingdom and Frascati in Italy, for part-participation on behalf of the Commission's "stimulation programme". "We want to develop collaboration in a flexible way", said Fasella.

Robert Walgate