Polish universities

Government admits sackings

THE Polish government has now admitted that more than seventy university and higher college rectors, proctors and deans and department heads have lost their administrative posts, almost twice as many as was first reported.

An official announcement last Friday explained that under the amendments to the Higher Education Act, passed last July, the Minister of Science and Higher Education has the right to "review" senior university staff, not only on the basis of their academic work, but also of their "civic attitude". By the end of last month, university officials whose work or "civic attitude" was unsatisfactory had to be informed that they would not be confirmed in the offices to which they had been elected before the change in the law.

The dismissals have been interpreted throughout Poland as a move to regain some of the government and party control over the universities lost during the "liberalization" of the Solidarity era. This is, to some extent, confirmed by the official announcement which stresses that universities must be run according to what it calls the "state and socialist character" of higher education. Throughout Poland, students and academics have been vocal in condemning the changes, and at least one rector not himself affected by the dismissals, Dr Kazimierz Szepietko of the Poznan Agricultural Academy, is said to have

resigned in sympathy.

Concern has also been expressed elsewhere. In London last week, the Polish ambassador, Mr Stefan Staniszewski, was summoned to the Foreign Office for what was officially described as a "sharp" exchange of views with the Minister of State Malcolm Rifkind. Mr Rifkind warned the ambassador that the dismissals were bound to have an adverse effect on British parliamentary and public opinion, and said that they did not sit well with official Polish assurances that normalization and reconciliation were proceeding satisfactorily in Poland. Mr Staniszewski is said to have expressed surprise that the British government should interest itself in an internal Polish matter, and said that the British government should stick to its 1981 stance that internal developments in Poland were for the Polish people to settle. Mr Rifkind replied that an expression of concern did not constitute interference, but that the dismissals made the Polish government claims seem rather hollow.

Mr Staniszewski himself departed from his stance of non-interference by observing that those concerned in the changes had not lost their teaching jobs whereas in Britain thousands of university lecturers were out of work. In the Polish universities, however, there seems to be a consensus that the dismissal of the officials is only the first step.

Vera Rich

Nobel peace prize

Controversy over the winner

THE 1985 Nobel peace prize ceremony this week was surrounded by last-minute controversy over one of the two persons delegated to receive it, Dr Evgenii Chazov, Deputy Health Minister of the Soviet Union.

The prize was awarded to the organization International Physicians against Nuclear War. In October, when the prize was announced, it was stated that two officials of the organization would represent it at the ceremony in Oslo, Dr Bernard Lown from the United States and Dr Chazov from the Soviet Union. The trouble started, late in November, when it became widely realized that Dr Chavoz had, in 1973, signed a letter from Soviet scientists attacking Academician Andrei Sakharov, who himself received the Nobel peace prize in 1975. Some human rights groups called for the 1985 prize to be withdrawn, and one group organized an "alternative peace prize" ceremony in honour of Dr Anatolii Koryagin, now serving a 7-year labour camp sentence for having published in *The Lancet* in 1981 a detailed study of the political misuse of psychiatry in the Soviet Union.

Dr Chazov's co-recipient, Dr Lown, has

been vocal in his defence. Dr Chazov, he says, has said nothing against Sakharov "since 1980". That was the year when the International Physicians against Nuclear War was founded, and also the year in which Dr Sakharov was exiled to Gor'kii. It is not clear which of these events (of both) Dr Lown had in mind. In fact, as recently as last week, Dr Chazov, speaking on the Norwegian ARD-Tagesthemen news programme, said that he was "not in agreement" with some of Sakharov's statements on the nuclear arms race, and quoted an unnamed US physicist to the effect that Sakharov was being made "a prawn in the cold war" and exploited "in a pharisaical manner" in pursuit of anti-communist aims.

Dr Lown, however, seems to have had considerable difficulty with his media statements. In particular, he was reported to have told the wire services that he considered it "shameful" that the US ambassador to Norway had decided not to attend the award ceremony, and then, several hours later, to have told the BBC's "World At One" programme that this was the first he had heard of the ambassador's decision.

Vera Rich

US defence contracting

NASA chief steps aside

Washington

THE US Army's Sergeant York anti-aircraft gun, whose development was cancelled in August after \$1,800 million had been spent on it, seems more effective at damaging people than aircraft. Last week, Mr James H. Beggs, administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) for the past four years, was forced to take indefinite leave of absence after being indicted by a Los Angeles grand jury for complicity in an alleged fraud by General Dynamics on the US government.

General Dynamics, best known as the constructor of the *Trident* submarine and the F16 fighter aircraft, has been one of several military contractors in trouble with the Department of Defense over cost accounting, and was suspended from receiving US government contracts for a period earlier in the year. Mr Beggs was a vice-president of General Dynamics, and the one in charge of the company's brief involvement with the anti-aircraft gun until he moved to NASA.

This unexpected development is bound to be a setback for the agency. It seems to be agreed that the year ahead will decide how quickly, if at all, NASA secures the funds with which to build the permanent space station on which NASA has set its heart.

Against the background of a probable budget squeeze early in the new year, this is also a time when an agency cannot easily afford to lose its chief administrator for an extended period.

Both Beggs and General Dynamics hotly deny the charges levelled against them, which centre on allegations that the company, while working on a fixed-price US Army contract to make prototypes of the Sergeant York gun, charged excess costs on the project against other military contracts.

The amount involved is alleged to have been \$7.5 million in a total contract price of \$40 million. On the basis of the prototypes, the development contract was eventually awarded to the other bidder, Ford.

At no point does the Los Angeles indictment suggest that the alleged fraud was other than for the benefit of the company. Three other officials of General Dynamics have been indicted, together with the company itself. Company spokesmen have been suggesting that the origin of the charges lies in the procedures used for charging particular costs to various contracts.

The length of Begg's absence from NASA is undetermined, but will presumably be at least as long as the time it takes for the case to come to trial. □