

## Polish universities

# Reforms threaten independence

POLAND'S Main Council for Science and Higher Education, the representative body of the university community which serves as an intermediary between the universities and the Minister of Science and Higher Education, stands to lose most of its powers in the planned reform of the 1982 Higher Education Act. Since the discussions on reform began last autumn, the Main Council has resolutely opposed the proposals which would effectively annul the university autonomy won during the Solidarity era. A vote taken on the proposed changes early in March showed only one member of the council in favour of the changes, with a handful of abstentions. Now, a new draft of the proposed reforms, which reached us last week, threatens the status of the Main Council itself.

The 1982 Act established the Main Council as the supreme elected organ of the university community. It has seventy members, fifty from the universities and colleges under the ministry and the rest from the medical, physical training, art, drama and maritime colleges. The council has power to decide on the direction of research and the organization of studies, to set the conditions for the awarding of academic degrees and has the right of consultation with the minister on a wide range of financial and administrative matters. The original version of the reform strengthened ministerial control and disciplinary powers over the universities, bringing the "students' self-government committees" within the framework of the Party youth organizations, but the role of the council was left virtually unaltered.

With the Main Council resolutely opposed to the proposals, however, the government clearly decided to think again. Of late, the issue has no longer been in the hands of the minister of science, Dr Benon Miskiewicz, but had been handed over to the government's Committee for Social and Political Affairs, under Deputy Prime Minister Mieczyslaw Rakowski. The new draft which has emerged would impose considerable restrictions on the Main Council. First and foremost, the members of the Main Council would no longer be elected, but instead would be "appointed by the chairman of the Council of Ministers at the request of the Minister of Science and Higher Education" (Art. 18.1). "Directions of study" will now be decided not by the Main Council but by the minister (Art. 8.2). And, under the greatly revised Art. 2, the Main Council will no longer "decide at the request of the Minister" but only "give an opinion" on "possible and definite plans for the development of higher education". The same article does, indeed, leave decision-making on research within the universities and in the competence of the Main Council, but with the proviso that its decisions

must be within the framework of the central economic plans. On matters affecting the terms of employment of academic staff, the minister will decide "after hearing the opinion of the Main Council" instead of, as at present, "in agreement with the Main Council".

The latest version of the reform will therefore reduce the Main Council to, at best, a powerless talking shop for the universities and, at worst, a rubber stamp for

the decisions of the minister and the economic planners. During a special plenary session of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party last month, General Jaruzelski reiterated the official viewpoint, that the universities cannot any longer be allowed to be the breeding ground of political opposition, but must be more closely incorporated into the socialist structure. This triggered nationwide student protests, as a result of which Rakowski and Miskiewicz found it necessary to assure university rectors that the reforms would not be made an excuse for a political purge. **Vera Rich**

## Electricity supply

# Cross-Channel power games

FRANCE will begin pumping 1,000 MW of its cheap nuclear electric power across the English Channel into the British grid later this year, when the first stage of a new 2,000-MW undersea link is completed.

The new cables — four of them — run from Les Mandarins, south of Calais, to Folkestone. They will increase the French-British power linkage more than tenfold, from the present 160 MW transferred along a line between Dungeness and Boulogne mainly to even-out peak demand on each side of the Channel.

But the new link will open in two 1,000-MW stages. And while the English utility, the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) and its French partner, Electricité de France (EDF), have reached agreement on the first stage, for France to supply Britain with cheap power, the use of the second 1,000 MW is still in dispute.

On its side, EDF would like CEGB to buy another 1,000 MW of "baseload" continuous power at French marginal supply prices, which EDF is quoting at attractive rates. This is not surprising, as within a few years the French electricity supply will

be more than 70 per cent nuclear. Nuclear reactors are hard to turn on and off, so the responsiveness of the French network to demand fluctuations has been decreasing, despite efforts to make French pressurized water reactors more variable.

CEGB, on the other hand, in considering a second 1,000 MW from France, is said to be concerned about its agreements with the British National Coal Board (NCB), now recovering from its year-long coal strike. CEGB is by far the coal industry's biggest customer, and is contractually committed to buying large amounts of NCB's coal. CEGB cannot buy too much French power without endangering those agreements, and the British coal industry, it is claimed.

Or, to put it differently, it seems that while 1,000 MW of French electricity is convenient enough to make a sharp point to the government and NCB about the value of nuclear power — and a warning that coal prices had better be kept down — 2,000 MW from France might be contractually uncomfortable.

**Robert Walgate**

# CSIRO on the right rails?

## Canberra

THE Australian Minister for Science, Mr Barry Jones announced last week the appointment of Dr N.K. (Keith) Boardman as the next chairman of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). Dr Boardman, for the past eight years a member of the three-man CSIRO full-time executive and formerly chief research scientist of the CSIRO Division of Plant Industry, will take the reins for nine months in the first instance, beginning in September when the present chairman Dr J.P. (Paul) Wild retires. Mr Jones also announced the appointment of two new part-time members of the executive, Dr Adrienne Clark, a Melbourne University botanist, and Dr Kevin Foley, chairman of the Australian Industrial Research and Development Board. Like that of Dr Boardman, their appointments are

for nine months pending the outcome of a series of reviews into government-sponsored science in Australia being undertaken by the Australian Science and Technology Council, in the course of which CSIRO is only the first research establishment to come under scrutiny.

The conclusion of the CSIRO review is meant to coincide with Dr Wild's retirement. A former chief research scientist of the CSIRO Division of Radiophysics and 1980 Royal Medallist of the Royal Society, Dr Wild has personally lifted the public profile of CSIRO through highly-visible and commercially-orientated work on the new aircraft landing system Interscan and, more recently, his plan to link Australia's two largest cities with the national capital Canberra using trains operating at speeds of up to 350 kilometres per hour.

**Jeffrey Sellar**