

Polish universities

Government launches purge

At least 40 leading Polish university officials will lose their jobs as a result of the 1985 amendments to the Higher Education Act. The amendments increased the control of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education over the universities, and in particular, curtailed the rights of the universities freely to elect their own rectors, pro-rectors and deans. Despite assurances from government spokesmen last July that the changes then before the Sejm (Parliament) did not signal a purge in the universities, few academics were convinced. Their pessimism, it appears, was justified.

Under the amendments, rectors, pro-rectors and deans now in office will receive written confirmation of continued tenure from the ministry not later than the

end of January 1986, or else will be replaced. On 3 November, the underground newsletter of the pro-Solidarity Social Committee for Learning warned that the ministry planned to change the whole team of rector and four pro-rectors at Poznan's Adam Mickiewicz University.

This was surprising. Although the minister refused to confirm in office the rector elected in spring 1984, Professor Jerzy Fedorowicz, the current rector, Professor Franciszek Kaczmarek, a physicist, seemed an acceptable compromise.

Since then, however, there have been several pro-Solidarity incidents at the university. Moreover, the current Minister of Science and Higher Education, Dr Benon Miskiewicz, was the rector until his promotion to the post of minister shortly after the declaration of martial law. It seemed possible, therefore, that Minister Miskiewicz had singled out his own university as an example.

According to the Social Committee for Learning, the new rector was to be Professor Jacek Fisiak, a personal friend of the minister and a party hard-liner. Fisiak is a man of many parts. As head of the English department, he was responsible for the dismissal from the university, in 1978, of Dr Stanislaw Baranczak, the gifted poet and translator of English literature into Polish. He holds a British civil decoration, the Order of the British Empire, for his services to English studies in Poland.

Now, it appears that, according to Mr Andrzej Stolarski, chief spokesman for

the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, the new law specifically provides for a review of academic personnel throughout Poland, a statement somewhat at odds with the previous assurances. The Main Council for Higher Education, the supreme elected representative body of universities and higher colleges which, during the last academic year coordinated the campaign of the universities against the proposed revision of the law, met in closed session last Friday, but made no immediate statement. The Main Council, however, is known to be out of favour with the minister, who attacked it in parliament as being unrepresentative of the higher education community. It seems unlikely, therefore, that the Main Council will allow the dismissals to pass unquestioned.

Since the dismissals refer, so far, only to administrative posts, the rectors, pro-rectors and deans affected by the "review" will still, for the present, be able to carry on teaching — although there are strong rumours that the minister's next plan is for a "review" of teaching staff.

One rector who is to pay the price for putting his duty to his students before the demands of the authorities is Professor Wladyslaw Findeisen of Warsaw Polytechnic, who last year refused to identify and discipline those of his students who had carried the university banner at the funeral of the murdered Solidarity priest, Father Jerzy Popieluszko. The news of his dismissal last week evoked a massive and emotional demonstration by the polytechnic students, who gathered in the Great Hall of the Polytechnic. When the rector appeared, the students showered him with flowers.

Vera Rich

One US-Soviet pact

Washington

WHILE President Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev were getting acquainted in Geneva the other week, another relatively unknown US-Soviet meeting was taking place in Moscow. Lee Thomas, administrator of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Yuriy Izrael, chairman of the USSR State Committee for Hydrometeorology and Control of the Natural Environment, signed a memorandum presenting plans for cooperative work on 38 scientific and technical projects in the general field of monitoring the environment.

The meeting was the first high-level meeting on environmental cooperation between the two countries for six years. It took place under the auspices of a bilateral agreement originally signed in 1972 and since extended. Though the agreement has never been abandoned, deepening strains between the two countries had led to a steep decline in the number of scientists exchanged, from over 300 in 1977 to only 67 in 1984.

US officials say the United States has benefited in the past from the agreement, especially in earthquake prediction and environmental transport modelling. There have also been some difficulties: visas are often not available until the last minute, and last year one US official who had visited the Soviet Union several times under the agreement was suddenly denied a visa and slandered in *Izvestiya*.

At the recent Moscow meeting, eight areas of cooperation that had not been fruitful were abandoned, and four more were initiated. Nevertheless, the total number of scientific exchanges under the agreement is now expected to increase once more, according to Dr Gary Waxmonsky, EPA's executive secretary of US-Soviet programmes.

Tim Beardsley

Max Planck Gesellschaft

More cheer for Eureka than SDI

Bonn

THE Max Planck Society (MPG) seems eager that its 60 institutes and 10,000 employees should contribute to the European Eureka programme of technological research, but wary of the possibility that they might be caught up in the US Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). So much emerged last week (27 November) when Professor Heinz A. Staab, the president of the society, introduced its annual report.

Professor Staab announced that the Max Planck Society is playing a leading part in one of the first Eureka projects, an inter-Europe collaboration in atmospheric chemistry. He said that the objective of the Eureka programme, at least as seen by MPG, is to complement the "existing one-way street to the United States" by more interconnections within Europe.

On SDI, Staab said that MPG has not so far been asked by the West German government to consider playing a part, so that MPG had not given formal consideration to the project. But he added that he could

not imagine that secret research could be carried out at any of the society's 60 institutes. He went on to say that plans for the development of basic research should not be "slipped over the scientific community" by politicians, whose influence should be used to strengthen existing collaborations.

MPG had funds of more than DM1,000 million to spend this year, and its budget of 1986 represents an increase of 3.8 per cent. But after allowing for the start-up costs of two new institutes, one for polymer research at Mainz and another for sociological research at Cologne, the increase for next year works out at only 2.8 per cent. Staab complained last week that the finance ministers of the *Länder* governments, which are responsible for half of MPG's budget, had originally worked for a mere 3 per cent increase of the total budget. Even now, Staab said, the increase would not be sufficient to cover the cost of inflation, reckoned to amount to between 5 and 6 per cent a year in the cost of research.

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