

Solidarity calls for change

London

POLAND'S multi-viewpoint 'round table' of experts, convened to seek a solution to the country's long-standing economic and social problems and from which has emerged the concession of open elections to one of the two parliamentary chambers, is also agreed on at least one thing; the urgent need for improvements in science and education.

At the opening of the subgroup on science and education last month, statements by the co-chairmen, Education Minister Jacek Fisiak for the government/party side and Professor Henryk Samsonowicz, former rector of Warsaw University, for the Solidarity/opposition wing, turned out to be virtually interchangeable.

Both said that Polish science and higher education have been damaged by long years of financial neglect, low wages and the lack of social prestige for teachers, and the restriction on the universities' rights to decide their own staffing policy, research and teaching plans.

The difference between the two spokesmen was chiefly one of timing: Solidarity wants immediate change, the official side would prefer to go more slowly. But by the final meeting of the subgroup last Saturday, a timetable had been agreed.

Although the round table includes representatives of all strata of Polish society, from Politburo members to clerics, philosophers, steelworkers and private farmers, its main achievement (and one that took several months to negotiate) has been to bring to the official conference table some of the chief figures from the 'democratic opposition' and the Solidarity movement.

Thus the education and science group includes such scholars as Stefan Amsterdamski and Wladyslaw Kunicki-Goldfinger from the Society of Academic Courses ('Flying University') of the late 1970s, Wiktor Kulerski, Solidarity's main spokesman on education during its legal existence (1980-81) and later a leader of underground Solidarity for the Warsaw region, and Wladyslaw Findeisen, who was removed from his post as rector of Warsaw Technical University in 1985 for refusing to discipline students who took part in pro-Solidarity rallies.

Likewise, the medical subgroup was co-chaired by Dr Zofia Kuratowska, whose haematological clinic was closed in 1985 in reprisal for her work among internees during the martial law period. And Janusz Onyszkiewicz, the Warsaw University lecturer in mathematical logic, resumed his former role of chief press spokesman for Solidarity — at least for the duration of the round table.

But the presence of Solidarity at the

round table does not mean that life in Poland is completely back to the *status quo ante* martial law. As Samsonowicz noted, several cases of teachers and lecturers dismissed or penalized on political grounds during the martial law period are still outstanding. Fisiak has accepted a list of these cases "for review" and told a press conference that many other professionals are now being reinstated, there could be no reason why teachers and lecturers should not have the same satisfaction.

This represents a major policy shift. The rationale behind the education ministry's power to intervene against university staffs on political grounds, laid down in the 1985 higher education act, is precisely that teachers and lecturers are not comparable with other kinds of workers

IMAGE UNAVAILABLE FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS

Lech Walesa counts the achievements of the roundtable talks last week (AP).

because they influence and shape the outlook of the next generation.

The 1985 act, which largely negated the liberalizations of the 'Solidarity' period and which was introduced in the face of concerted protest from the universities, is now itself scheduled for revision. But shortly after the subgroup began work, Fisiak's promise to restore a measure of autonomy to the universities seemed imperilled when student demonstrations in Krakow took a violent and overtly anti-Soviet note. The reforms, warned government press spokesman Jerzy Urban, depended on university authorities realizing that "autonomy does not mean anarchy".

Solidarity spokesmen have nevertheless been urging that if the banned pro-Solidarity Independent Students' Association (NZS) were reinstated, the students would not have to take to the streets to make their grievances known. The round table, Lech Walesa said, needs three legs in order to stand firm. Two legs had been provided by government promises to legalize Solidarity and the private farmers' organization 'Rural Solidarity'. The third 'leg' — legalization of the NZS — was eventually promised, during a meeting last week between Walesa and Interior Minister General Czeslaw Kiszczak.

Vera Rich

Industry co-sponsorship

Paris

YVES Sillard, the former French coordinator of the European EUREKA programme seeking industrial co-sponsorship for competitive product research, thinks the principle could be extended to defence research. Sillard, who recently took over as head of the French Committee on Armaments (DGA), would like to see industry put up venture capital for pre-production studies of new military applications, in the expectation that military approval would be rewarded with government production contracts.

Military research now accounts for more than a third of French government research and development spending (about \$4,000 million). Sillard believes that as European trade barriers fall in 1992, there will be opportunities for transnational collaboration, even if some domains (such as nuclear arms) would not be suitable. Sillard's idea is being studied by the DGA before being put to other European defence agencies.

Peter Coles

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

No action on research

London

THE British government last week rejected calls from the House of Commons Trade and Industry Committee for an increase in the number of undergraduate and graduate courses in information technology (IT) in order to tackle an emerging skills shortage.

The committee had said, in a report on IT, that there are 30,000 unfilled vacancies for people with IT skills and that the shortage was worsening. But the government now says, in a policy paper setting out policy on IT, that measures to combat the shortage have already been introduced. A £43-million programme launched four years ago will by 1990 have provided 5,000 extra places on undergraduate and post-graduate courses, it said.

It also rejected the committee's call for increased spending on research and development in IT, saying that £100 million will be spent by the government next year for this purpose. It stressed that the chief responsibility for financing industrially relevant research lies with industry, and rejected the committee's suggestion that the government should encourage industrial investment in IT by identifying a target level of research. It said that the government would not require that investment be disclosed in company accounts, as this would be burdensome to industry.

The committee had called for reinstatement of the post of minister for information technology, on the grounds that since the post was abolished there has been no significant increase in interest in the subject among ministers. But the government says it is neither feasible nor desirable to locate responsibility for all aspects of IT policy in a single department. Christine McGourty