

which the ministry wanted to introduce into the bill, without the consent of the academic community. In particular, the academics said, the ministry had tried:

- To limit academic freedom.
- To restrict the autonomy of the universities in disposing of their financial resources.
- To extend the competence of the courts over students' organizations.
- To limit the right of workers in academic institutions to protest against discussions.
- To return to the former system of selection of university rectors, deans and collegiate bodies.

These amendments, the academics maintain, would virtually nullify the liberalization of academic life introduced in the past year which the bill was supposed merely to codify.

After a number of meetings with academics — and a stormy press confer-

ence with educational journalists on 15 September — the minister found himself facing a number of "strike alerts" from academics and students, due to take effect when the academic year opens on 1 October. Although the majority of protest messages stressed the academics' desire for peaceful negotiation, some hard-liners were less amenable. In particular, the Independent Students' Association at Poznan Technical University called for all negotiations with the ministry to be called off. The only bill to go forward to the Sejm (Parliament) for ratification, they said, should be that drawn up by the Codification Commission; Minister Nawrocki has now promised to put this bill before the Council of Ministers. However, he is adding an appendix giving the ministry's own views on disputed points. In particular, says Nawrocki:

- The minister should have the right to set an upper limit on university intake "so as to ensure a rational employment policy.
- The university, as a budgetary unit, cannot have the right "freely to shape its pay fund", but must shape employment within the framework of the pay fund allocated.
- The rector should have the right to call for the dissolution of an assembly on university premises if it infringes public order or strikes at the political and social system of the state.
- Academic staff should have six weeks vacation, not eight.
- Rectors should be elected either by the university senate or electoral college, or by the senate and college in conjunction, as envisaged by the university statute.

In fact, some of these points were never in dispute. The academics had sought only budgetary autonomy within the funds allotted, not for unlimited funding. Nobody had questioned that the rector might need to call for help to quieten a disorderly assembly; what was agreed in the Łódź accords which settled last winter's student unrest was that the police should not come onto a campus uninvited.

The idea of an upper limit on university intake is reasonable enough, since Poland now faces the grim possibility of up to 1 million unemployed if the economy is to be made to balance, and the Prime Minister, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, has committed his government not to pay unemployment relief.

If such a policy is to be implemented, however, the present atmosphere of academic autonomy would suggest that it should be agreed by the various rectors and senates concerned, acting through the new Permanent Conference of Polish Universities, not sprung on them suddenly.

This, in fact, remains the bone of contention — the fact that the ministry tried to introduce the changes unilaterally and with virtually no time left for academics to voice objections. In spite of the minister's statement, therefore, the tension continues.

Vera Rich

Research sponsorship

Agony at MIT

Faculty members of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) are holding a special meeting today (Thursday) to discuss a controversial offer from Mr Edwin (Jack) Whitehead, the founder and former president of the laboratory instrument company Technicon Corporation, to fund a free-standing institute for research into molecular approaches to developmental biology.

Under the terms of the offer, \$20 million would be provided for the construction of a building in Cambridge to house the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research, which has already been formed, with Dr David Baltimore, at present American Cancer Society Professor of Microbiology at MIT, as its director.

Mr Whitehead will also provide an initial \$5 million a year to cover the running costs of the institute, enough to support 20 new research professors. MIT would receive an additional endowment of \$7.5 million to cover costs associated with its links to the institute, and eventually the Whitehead Institute would be provided with its own endowment of \$100 million to guarantee a permanent income.

Top administrators at MIT are enthusiastic about Mr Whitehead's proposals, which they see as maintaining MIT as one of the leading biotechnology research institutions on the East Coast.

Commission man

The European Commission has appointed an outsider as director-general of Research, Science and Education (DG XII) in succession to Dr G. Schuster, who resigned in August after a nine year stint. Paolo Fasella, professor of biochemistry at the University of Rome, takes over the post on 1 October.

Professor Fasella is, however, well versed in European research policy. He has been involved in the running of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory and in the years 1975-79 was president of the European Molecular Biology Conference. He has also served on various committees dealing with research policy in energy and biotechnology both at a European level and in his native Italy. Since 1973 he has been an adviser to the Italian government on such matters and has taken a particular interest in the problems of relating research results to industry.

One of Professor Fasella's first tasks in his new appointment will be to formulate a revised research strategy for the commission. In particular he will be devising the four-year indirect action programme which begins in 1983.

Professor Fasella's research work has been mainly in enzymology.

Judy Redfearn

Hidden spectre

Doubts have emerged about the validity of some important claims in photosynthesis research based on experiments carried out by Mr Mark Spector, much of whose recent work on protein kinases in relation to tumour viruses has been retracted by his erstwhile boss, Professor E. Racker of Cornell University (see *Nature* 10 September, p.93).

A paper published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* in February 1980 by Spector and C. Douglas Winget produced a considerable impact because it reported the purification from chloroplasts of the long sought-after enzyme responsible for the photo-synthetic splitting of water to release oxygen. Other laboratories which hastened to confirm and extend this finding found difficulty in repeating the published experiments but, particularly when Spector ascended to the respectability of Racker's laboratory, these difficulties were put down to nothing more than the everyday problems of reproducibility of much biochemical work. Inevitably, however, there are now questions about the validity of the Spector and Winget claim as well as about an extension of the work reported by Dr Winget at the Fifth International Photosynthesis Congress held in Greece in September 1980.

Dr Winget, who did postdoctoral work with Professor Racker, is in the painful process of checking the experiments he published with Spector. Perhaps because he has not yet had time to check everything, the picture is confusing and not altogether comforting. Although he can repeat some parts, there are others which, despite considerable effort, he has been unable to reproduce. Dr Winget, reached by telephone on Monday afternoon, was afterwards unavailable.

Peter Newmark