

Polish Academy of Sciences

Foreign travel rights restricted

Scholars employed by the Polish Academy of Sciences who wish to travel abroad will from now on need the approval of "the appropriate party secretary". According to a recent circular from Dr Zdzislaw Kaczmarek, academic secretary of the academy, this change is designed to prevent the issue of passports to "persons whose socio-political activities and attitudes" are "negative" or "openly aimed against the constitutional, and legal order obtaining in the Polish People's Republic".

The circular forms part of the instructions concerning the process of political "verification", now being implemented in two stages within the academy. The restriction on travel has ostensibly been imposed in order to safeguard the prestige of Polish science abroad and to improve the international image of Poland. It is, however, a marked reversal of recent academy policy on foreign travel. Two years ago, after the signing of the Gdansk accord which inaugurated Solidarity and a nationwide wave of liberalization, the academy demanded that it alone should be the arbiter of whether or not its members and employees should travel abroad. Such a clause, it was hoped, would be written into the promised new legislation on the Academy of Sciences; but martial law was imposed last December a few days before the session of the academy that would have debated this and other liberal clauses including proposals to change the role of the academic secretary. Indeed, Dr Kaczmarek's instructions on verification are an ironic reminder of what that session had hoped to achieve. For the academic secretary, whose post is of ministerial rank under the present structure of the academy, is responsible, in the first instance, not to the academy members or council but to the prime minister.

The new restrictions on foreign travel — and indeed the whole verification process — could affect members and employees of the academy deeply. In Poland, the Academy of Sciences is organized completely separately from the universities (unlike, for example, the Soviet Union, where academicians also hold university lectureships) and since the university purges of 1968, the academy has been a haven for scholars whose political views were considered too suspect for them to be entrusted with the teaching of young people. Indeed, the leading dissident group of the late 1970s, the "Committee for Social Self-Defence" (KOR) included among its 33 members two Academicians (Drs Edward Lipinski and Jan Kielanowski), while several others were employed in various academy institutes.

Objections to the new clampdown on travel could, however, in the current

draconian climate, well be taken as further proof of dissent. A recent attack in the party media alleged that cultural and scientific contacts between Poland and the West had been exploited by Western intelligence agencies. At the end of the 1970s, it is claimed, foreign scholarships were given to persons selected as future opposition leaders, while agents were sent to Poland disguised as "scholarship holders, lecturers, correspondents and experts".

Vera Rich

UK universities

Modest hiring prospect cheers

British universities seem this week to have been enormously cheered by the prospect of recruiting some hundreds of younger scientists and engineers to academic posts. The only fly in the ointment is that this prospect is made possible only by the £6 million removed by the Secretary of State for Science and Education, Sir Keith Joseph, from the estimated budget of the Social Science Research Council over the next three years. One research council official confessed earlier this week that the "new blood" money seemed a little like "blood money".

As yet, it seems not to have been decided how much of the £6 million will be available in the coming financial year, a decision that Sir Keith has left to the Social Science Research Council. Nor has it been decided how the funds thus liberated will be shared among the other four research councils, although the Science and Engineering Research Council, the largest and with a direct responsibility for university research, seems certain to get the largest share. The chances are that the funds available will be shared out among disciplines, and that departments will be allowed to compete for the posts available by telling hard-luck stories to the councils.

While the numerical effect of the £6 million that will be available over the next three years remains to be determined, the research councils are already congratulating themselves on having been able to counteract some of the damage done to university research by the financial pressures on university budgets.

Thus the Science and Engineering Research Council has supported at least 23 applications under its Special Replacement Scheme, under which it will pay the salary of a senior researcher for up to five years provided that the university will undertake to appoint a younger researcher to a permanent academic post immediately. Applications under this scheme appear, however, to have tailed off in the past

several months, apparently because of the counter-attractions of the government-backed early retirement scheme.

So far, there appear also to have been few takers for the scheme under which the council will pay the salaries of researchers left stranded by the reorganization of universities involving the closure of departments. Two such awards have so far been made, both of them to casualties of the decision of a year ago that the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Bradford should be "phased out".

Dr Michael Lord, a biochemist concerned with cell organelles, has joined the chloroplast group at the University of Warwick (now renamed plant biochemistry). The council will pay Dr Lord's salary for the next ten years, while the four members of his group transferred from Bradford will continue to be supported from research council funds. Similarly, Professor M.J. Merrett has moved to the University of Wales at Swansea with the help of a research council subvention to the university. ●

Cancer research

French change

Jack Ralite, French minister of health and one of the few communist ministers in the Mitterrand government, is contemplating a major reorganization of cancer research and the care of cancer patients, to judge by his moves earlier this month.

First, he has dissolved the "high committee" on cancer, which was only a little over two years old, essentially because it had failed in its task of uniting the two major French cancer charities, the Ligue Nationale Française contre le Cancer and the Association pour le Développement de la Recherche sur la Cancer à Villejuif (ADRCV). These charities control budgets amounting to more than FF 122 million (£10 million), considerably more than government expenditure on cancer research. But because of personality conflicts, the two have never been able to develop complementary research policies. The "high committee", now abandoned, was the previous government's attempt to knock their heads together.

The Ligue and ADRCV may now have only a temporary respite, however. For the minister has also launched a great national enquiry on cancer (the Concertation Nationale sur le Cancer) which is designed to provide the basis for a new politics of cancer.

Through the enquiry, which is addressed to all concerned, the minister will no doubt learn how French cancer research and care is riven by factionalism and the philosophy of the *savant*. He may also be expecting to confirm some other more debatable ideas about research, which come through clearly in the questionnaire which is the basis of the Concertation Nationale.