To Poland with Love: U.S. Brass, Scientists Warm to Copernicus Fete

February 1973 will mark the quinquecentennial anniversary of the birth of Nicolaus Copernicus, the renaissance astronomer who found that the earth moves around the sun instead of vice versa, and in doing so revolutionized the premises of all subsequent astronomy and cosmology. Poland is Copernicus' native country, and it is preparing to celebrate this event with a host of activities, including some international ones.

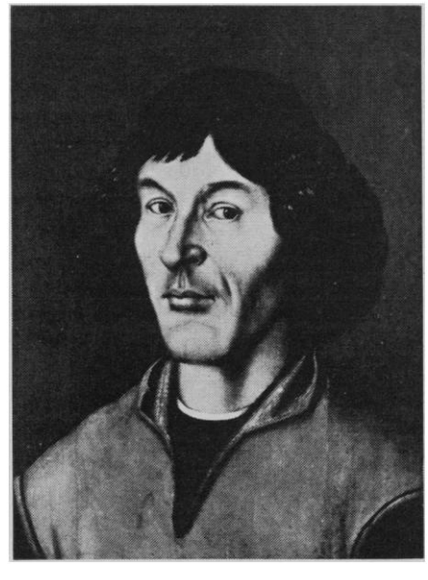
The United States is also not exactly letting Copernicus' birthday go by unnoticed. Strengthening ties with Eastern Europe has been a principal element of President Richard M. Nixon's foreign policy ever since he took office; the last year or so has seen a plethora of diplomatic visits to Poland and agreements with the government there. At the moment, then, it appears that Copernicus' birthday next year will be celebrated by scientists in the United States and Poland under the most favorable diplomatic auspices.

In 1970 the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) set up a special committee for the celebration of the Copernicus Quinquecentennial,* which has both Polish and American astronomers as members and which is compiling a book, planning a symposium, and trying to obtain "hardware and facilities," as one member said, for Polish science. One plan is for a Copernicus Astronomical Center, which would be located possibly near Warsaw and built with U.S.–owned funds. Most plans are pushing ahead at full speed —except for one, an attempt to obtain a big $100,000 IBM computer. The computer project has been mired in considerable problems so far, and may symbolize, in part, where U.S.–Eastern European relations are at present.

Poland is a convenient Eastern European nation to be the recipient of U.S. diplomatic blessings. For one thing, it is politically stable thanks to the present party head, Edward Gierek. The present Minister of Science, Higher Education, and Technology, Jan Kaczmarek, is a close associate of Gierek's and is reputed to be a progressive.

Also unlike any other Eastern European nation, Poland now holds approximately $351 million worth of Polish zlotys in U.S.–owned counterpart funds. These are known as "wheat money" because they accrued as the result of U.S. agricultural sales to Poland after the war, or as "funny money" because, while they can be spent through congressional authorization, they do not deplete the domestic federal budget. In short, the special foreign currency (SFC) funds afford a convenient mechanism for the U.S. to implement all sorts of projects in Poland at, literally, no cost in dollars to our government.†

Hence, according to one estimate, in the last 2 years alone, cooperative research activity between Poland and the U.S. has increased four times over. (In the last year alone a parade of U.S. officials has been trooping through Poland, from President Nixon and his entourage, to missions from the Department of Interior, the Department of Transportation, the Department of State, the Department of Commerce, and the Environmental Protection Agency.) On 13 July, science adviser Edward E. David, Jr., concluded a 5-day tour of Poland, and issued a joint communiqué with Kaczmarek which indicated that a bigger agreement was in the works. In a recent interview, David admitted that the outpouring of visits and agreements involving Poland was in part orchestrated by the White House, although he added that there have been improved relations with other Eastern European countries as well.



Muzuem Okregowe W Toruniu
Nicolaus Copernicus

But the focus of U.S.–Polish science relations lately has been the Copernican birthday, which has caused one bureaucrat, describing all the in's and out's of the arrangements, to sigh, "Well, it only happens once every 500 years." The main gesture to Polish scientists from this country could be the authorization for construction of a Copernicus Astronomical Center, funded under NSF's SFC Program. According to officials involved, the present Institute of Astronomy is an identical replacement for the one destroyed during World War II, except that it now houses biologists and rented apartments as well as theoretical astronomers. The new building would provide added work and meeting space to give astronomers badly needed elbow room. Theoretical astronomy is considered by U.S. scientists to be an area in which Polish science is highly advanced; U.S. astronomers have frequently collaborated with their Polish counterparts. Hence, the center would put bricks and mortar around a longstanding international friendship, and make it, so to speak, more concrete.

Earlier this year, Philip Handler, president of the NAS, began exploring possibilities for funding the center. This year's NSF budget had already been submitted to Congress in its final form and, hence, congressmen of Polish origin, and others, were approached about the possibility of a supplemental funding bill. While some expressed a willingness to help if necessary, one Hill staffer had doubts. "We wanted to make sure that the Polish authorities wanted this center. There's a terrific housing shortage in Poland, and the diversion of construction industry per-

* Members of the committee are: Antoni Sygmund, University of Chicago, chairman; Jerzy Neyman, University of California, vice chairman; Owen Gingerich, Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, Harvard University; N. U. Mayall, formerly of Kitt Peak National Observatory; Stanislaw Mrozowski, State University of New York; C. R. O'Dell, Yerkes Observatory.

† Other countries where U.S. counterpart funds are held are: Guinea, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Burma, Pakistan, India and Yugoslavia. Israel had SFC programs until the money ran out and Yugoslavia's SFC funds are now said to be depleted.

sonnel to build a center," while this situation persists, could be awkward, he explained.

However, NSF subsequently determined that it could find the sum—reported then at about $1.4 million—from other parts of its SFC authorization. NSF's Head of the Office of International Programs, Bodo Bartocha, says that he is ready to entertain a proposal from the Poles. Bartocha is careful to say that a proposal for such a center will be subjected to a normal review procedure. But it is obvious that it has received enthusiastic preliminary boosting from top-ranking science officials in government.

"When I think of celebrating Copernicus' birthday I think of something that's going to produce results—namely hardware and facilities for Polish astronomy," says C. R. O'Dell, of the Yerkes Observatory, University of Chicago, and an active member of the NAS Copernicus committee. O'Dell's chief concern has been trying to obtain for the Poles a big computer —a project that turns out to be surprisingly difficult, despite the favorable setting for such a gesture.

The first computer suggested as a possibility came to the attention of the Smithsonian Institution several months ago. It was an older IBM 7097 which had found it way onto the General Services Administration's surplus lists. However, says O'Dell, the Polish astronomers, as well as some at the Smithsonian, "looked the gift horse in the mouth and counted its teeth," only to discover that the machine was not usable at present, and that the price of putting it into good repair and keeping it so—a price to be borne by the Poles—would be fairly high. Moreover, a number of officials who were aware of the Smithsonian suggestion indicated that it was not sufficiently sophisticated for the advanced work planned for it.

O'Dell explains that the Poles now are planning to develop their own big computer several years from now, but that there will be "a need, anyway, for an intermediate class computer," and all sides seem to have settled on an IBM 1130, which costs, in the United States, roughly $100,000.

Ironically, while the NAS group could raise the money privately, buy the computer, and give it to the Poles, the group could not make such a gesture if the money came through the Foreign Assistance Act. The act, which governs U.S. foreign aid, prohibits aid to Communist-ruled countries.

Nor can the NSF use part of its SFC Program funds to pay IBM for the computer; Polish money, like that of other Communist-governed countries is nonconvertible; that is, on the world currency market, Polish zlotys are not readily exchangeable into dollars. Conceivably the Poles themselves could buy the computer and pay for it in zlotys; but, as Larry Mitchell, of NAS, who has been dealing with the Copernican celebration says, "IBM doesn't want zlotys."

Barring an outright gift, or a sale of an 1130 computer to the Poles, the only alternative is some form of long-term loan arrangement. The NAS committee is now trying to raise the money privately, and O'Dell is optimistic that the amount can be raised, perhaps through a dinner. Should a lesser sum be raised, however, it could be used to buy an MH2-equipped spectrograph that would be used by the observatory in Torun, where Copernicus was born.

The final question, and one asked frequently about this country's sometimes-misguided attempts to benefit less well-to-do countries abroad, is what the United States will get from a Copernicus Astronomical Center in Poland housing an IBM computer. Bartocha, of NSF, who will act in effect as broker for the center deal, replied in the vein of most of those interviewed. "We will get a recognition of having honored one of the great sons of Poland." Scientifically, he said, the work done at the center will become known in this country because of the pressure on the American astronomers, who will also be using the center, to publish their results as quickly as possible. This way "we do get research results for which we do not have to pay in dollars." Making arrangements for a building and a computer would seem to be a small price to pay for an event which only occurs once every 500 years.

—DEBORAH SHAPLEY

APPOINTMENTS

H. E. Hoelscher, dean, School of Engineering, University of Pittsburgh, to president, Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand. . . . **Robert D. Sparks**, dean, School of Medicine, Tulane University, to chancellor, Medical Center, University of Nebraska. . . . **Frank A. Camm**, division engineer, U.S. Army Engineer Division, South Pacific, San Francisco, California, to assistant general manager for military application, Atomic Energy Commission. . . . **Bernard R. Gifford**, fellow, Institute of Politics, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, to president, New York City–Rand Institute. . . . **Norman H. Cromwell**, executive dean for graduate studies and research, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, to vice president for graduate studies and research and dean, Graduate College, University of Nebraska System. . . . **Hans Popper**, dean for academic affairs, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, City University of New York, to acting president and acting dean of the school. . . . **Hans W. Liepmann**, professor of aeronautics, California Institute of Technology, to director, Graduate Aeronautics Laboratory at Caltech. . . . **Bernard G. Greenberg**, chairman, biostatistics department, University of North Carolina School of Public Health, to dean of the school. . . . **Adrian H. Daane**, professor of chemistry, Kansas State University, to dean, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Missouri, Rolla. . . . **May Brodbeck**, professor of philosophy, University of Minnesota, to dean, Graduate School at the university. . . . **Robert O. Schulze**, executive director, Thomas J. Watson Foundation, to dean, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Northern Colorado. . . . **Clarence K. Williamson**, chairman, microbiology department, Miami University, to dean, College of Arts and Sciences at the university. . . . **Lee Taylor**, professor of sociology, Louisiana State University, New Orleans, to chairman, sociology department, University of Texas, Arlington. . . . **Robert C. Ward**, physician, Mt. Clemens, Michigan, to chairman, family medicine department, Michigan State University. . . . **Stanley C. Grenda**, associate professor of chemistry, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, to chairman of the department. . . . **John S. Garvin**, clinical professor of neurology, University of Illinois College of Medicine, to head, neurology department, Abraham Lincoln School of Medicine and University of Illinois College of Medicine, Chicago. . . . **Calderon Howe**, professor of microbiology, College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University, to head, microbiology department, Louisiana State University Medical Center. . . . **Allan M. Cartter**, chancellor and executive vice president, New York University, to senior re-

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