

Poland: A Visitor's Snapshot

Poland's scientists and academics are joining in the reform movement that has swept the country, according to several reports, and they have already formed a new trade union independent of the Communist Party. If these first steps are not reversed, research will be freer of political domination than at any time in the last few decades.

An American professor of genetics who returned from a visit to Poland in mid-September saw some of the changes and spoke with *Science* about the new mood of self-confidence that he found there. He did not want to be identified, for he feared he might get his Polish acquaintances in trouble. He mentioned, for example, that after a long conversation with some scientists in the dean's office at a Polish university, he went to get his coat from the closet and found a tape machine quietly recording everything that was being said. The train ride out of the country was frightening, he said. On the platforms there were officers with automatic rifles and snarling dogs. Before crossing the border, the train was combed by three officials: a passport checker, a customs man (who made this scientist strip off his clothes), and a "goon" who took apart all the seats with a screwdriver, as he searched for runaways. The American was quizzed at length about a document found in his personal luggage—the curriculum vitae of a young Polish researcher whom he had persuaded to apply for a post-doctoral fellowship in the United States.

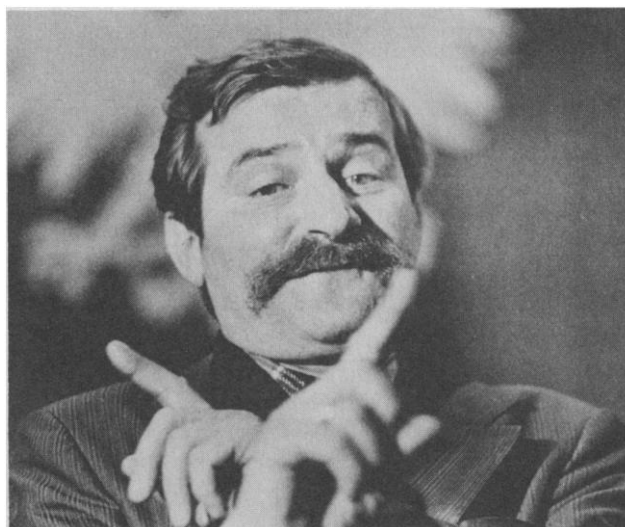
In such an environment, the accomplishments of the union leaders seem all the more impressive. For example, the American scientist learned at the institute of immunolo-

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gy at Wroclaw that 300 of the 400 employees had agreed to dump the old state-run union and join the new one, which will elect its own leaders. In addition, they signed a petition that had five demands, most of which were the usual requests for better working conditions. The American was told that more members of the institute would sign up when they returned from vacation in October.

The excitement had infected the visitor. "They have gone further than we have" in permitting democratic control over the workplace, he said. He was taken with the notion that a group of scientists might be able to march into the dean's office and deliver a list of demands. Yet the American sensed a general concern that things might get out of hand, and that if this happened, the Soviets would move in. It was a stroke of good fortune that the students were out of classes when the strikes began, he said, for this permitted political negotiations to go forward in an atmosphere of order and restraint. The mood may change with the students' return in October.

It is difficult to know how broadly or deeply the move-



AP Photo

Lech Walesa, Gdansk strike leader

Polish scientists are taking a leaf out of his book.

ment has spread among Polish intellectuals. The American visitor said he saw plans for independent unions being drawn up at two institutes in Wroclaw and heard of similar plans elsewhere. Vera Rich reported in *Nature* that the Independent Union of Scientific, Technical and Educational Workers has formed a congress of 286 delegates and is preparing to register as the official representative of the employees of scientific and academic institutions. That cannot happen, however, until legislation is passed establishing the "Gdansk accords," which recognize the right of all Polish workers to set up free unions independent of the political party. Most of the members of the newly formed congress come from Warsaw, and efforts are being made to enlist members from outside the capital. The temporary chairman of the group is Zdzislaw Bibrowski of the Institute of Fundamental Problems of Technical Science at the Polish Academy of Sciences.

The U.S. Embassy in Warsaw, according to the American visitor, takes pains to see that nothing gives authorities the idea that the reform movement is receiving foreign support. American trade unions are being asked not to send money to Polish strikers, for example. There is a good reason for this. The official Soviet newspaper *Pravda* has run several editorials recently claiming that Poland's troubles have grown out of corrupting influences from abroad, and *Pravda* suggested that Poland has been entirely too open to visitors from the West. The Soviets, it is thought, may try to break up the relatively good relations that now exist between Poland's academic community and the outside.

The future of scientific exchanges with Poland and the strength of the entire reform movement will be tested in the next few months. "The situation is obscure," says a visiting Polish electrical engineer who has just arrived at his laboratory at the University of Michigan. "The students are a catalyst. What will happen when they return, nobody knows." —ELIOT MARSHALL