

Max Planck's New Policy toward East

On 15 November the Max Planck Society's governing senate adopted a resolution providing for the creation under the aegis of the society of new "working groups" and "project groups" in the five eastern states just incorporated into the Federal Republic of Germany. The working groups are supposed to be small teams that will be set up in close association with universities for up to five years; each will collaborate closely with at least one existing Max Planck institute, and each will have teaching as well as research responsibilities. The project groups are intended to be larger and possibly permanent: They either could be prototypes for new Max Planck institutes or, in exceptional cases, could be created as new institutes outright.

In a letter sent to members of the Max Planck Society in late October, Hans F. Zacher, the society's president, emphasized that finding additional funding for the new working groups, project groups and institutes will depend on preparation of convincing proposals. He asked members to submit an initial batch of proposals to his office by 30 November, so that the society senate can decide on recommendations by 30 March 1991. Zacher said that recom-

mendations would take account of initiatives from the Science Council, which is evaluating all major research institutions in the five eastern states, as well as proposals from Max Planck society members.

The door seems to be open, in other words, for conversion of some East German research institutes into Max Planck institutes, contrary to a policy enunciated by Zacher last summer.

The idea of creating working and project groups was formulated this year by the society's presidential commission, in keeping with what it termed three fundamental principles of the society: support of significant researchers under conditions that minimize distracting responsibilities; support of newly developing fields, especially extra- or cross-disciplinary fields that are not yet ripe for incorporation into the curriculums of the technical universities; and support of novel research tasks requiring especially expensive or unusual equipment that cannot easily be provided by universities.

The commission described the working-group concept as consistent with the principle of transferring research in the five eastern states from the old East German Academy of Science institutes back into the univer-

sity system. Each group is to be headed by an East German researcher, each is to exchange personnel regularly with a sponsoring MPG institute and each is to be subject to review by the sponsor's advisory board of internationally recognized experts. Each will have substantial teaching responsibilities, and each will carry the designation "Working Group of the Max Planck Society at University X."

Project groups can be established for limited periods of time, where completion of a research project can be anticipated, or—in a testing or definition phase—as a preliminary step to the creation of a full-fledged Max Planck institute. Preference will be given to research fields that up until now have not been funded at all or have been funded inadequately, and thus are ready essentially to be built from the ground up. Consideration also will be given, however, to conversion of academy institutes, on recommendation of the Science Council. Like the working groups, the project groups will be expected during the transition period to assume more pedagogical responsibilities "than has been normal up until now in the Federal Republic," the commission said.

—WS

and state governments.

To judge at least from the reception given technical presentations at the IUPAP meeting in Dresden, and from laboratory tours offered in connection with the meeting, most East German physics lags well behind forefront research in the field. And so, when the Science Council completes its work in 1991 and reports to the government, it is to be expected that many institutes will be closed completely and that many others will be sharply scaled back. A lot of older German physicists will lose their jobs and will have to take early retirement, and a lot of younger East German physicists—who did not have a lot of respect for their elders to begin with—will look to the West. "Unless we can find some way of making some very positive signs quickly," said Karl Lanius, a leading East German particle physicist who works at CERN, "this will become a country of old people." (Lanius was a member of the DDR's IUPAP delegation at Dresden.)

Because of the way East Germany's economy has collapsed in the

process of unification, and because of the region's general backwardness vis-à-vis the West, it commonly is asked whether unification has yielded a country that is less than the sum of its two parts. And so it is natural to raise this question in connection with physics.

My overall impression, despite signs to the contrary and many uncertainties, is that physics will come out quite a lot stronger. First of all, the admittedly exacting review of East German physics institutions will leave the ones that survive leaner and tougher, and their full exposure to the bracing air of Western science will give them a strong new pulse. Beyond that, there will be an exchange of people between East and West that will leave many individuals and groups working harder, with more enthusiasm and with greater creativity.

Institutes and industry

East German science was done primarily in a network of institutes—some 50 in all—organized under the aegis of the Academy of Sciences.

Around 24 000 professionals were working in this complex at the time unification took place, and many of the academy's institutes were very large: For example, the Central Institute for Electron Physics in Berlin employed about 650 scientists and the Central Institute for Nuclear Research in Rossendorf (near Dresden) about 1400; about half the scientists at both institutes were physicists.

The East German system closely resembled the USSR's, except that the East German academy is thought to have been even more deeply politicized than its Soviet counterpart. It is said, for example, that the (pre-*perestroika*) Soviet government could veto nominees to the academy but not impose a nominee, while in East Germany the government could and did insist on its own people. Party membership was a prerequisite for appointment to managerial positions in the science complex; department heads and team leaders often were selected from a pool of individuals determined, at a young age and heavily on the basis of party loyalty, to be eligible for such positions; and of