

LETTER FROM BONN



Fresh directions in science

The Brandt regime wants to revamp education, centralize research

by Ted Shoemaker

THE new regime of Willy Brandt has renamed the Government ministry responsible for scientific policy. It used to be known as the "Federal Ministry for Scientific Research." Now it is called the "Federal Ministry for Education and Science."

More than a name is involved; education is being given top billing. Federal educational functions, previously scattered among several agencies, have been concentrated in the newly rechristened ministry.

These administrative changes are the first visible sign of what the new chancellor promises will be a dramatic new emphasis on education and science. In his initial policy statement, Brandt called them "the precondition for the future economic competitiveness of our country."

"Education and training, science and research," Brandt says, "are at the top of the reforms to be carried out. We have concentrated responsibility for this work, as far as it is borne by the Federal Government in the hands of the Federal Ministry for Education and Science."

That phrase, "as far as it is borne by the Federal Government," is an important one. It points up a peculiarity of the German system that may be fatal to the new chancellor's ambitious plans.

The governments of the individual states (Lander) play a much larger role in financing scientific research than do comparable governments in the U.S.

Brandt deplores the waste and duplication inherent in this system. "As long as we lack a universal plan," he says, "it will not be possible to use the human and material resources at our disposal to achieve the optimal effect." He is vague, though, on just how these scattered resources are to be marshaled. He speaks of "cooperation" with the Lander, but promises it would be done "without impugning their competence."

The vagueness has already been attacked by former Science Minister Gerhard Stoltenberg, who will continue to perform the function of the opposition in science policy—a role missing in the United States, where the Presidential science adviser, currently Dr. Lee A. DuBridge, lacks both power and, ostensibly, a political bias. Stoltenberg has reminded Brandt that the members of the new Brandt coalition had spoken out much more forcefully during the election campaign, calling for more Federal control.

Brandt reached outside the political sphere to pick the man to head his new

program. Minister of Education and Science Hans Leussink is a top civil engineer and educator but belongs to no party and has never taken an active part in politics.

He has been chancellor of the Technical University at Karlsruhe, president of the Conference of West German University Chancellors and president of the Science Council. Before entering academic life he founded and headed his own consulting firm, which among other things did work on Egypt's Aswan Dam.

If his early statements are any indication, Brandt will devote more effort to reforms in education than in science. He seems particularly eager to reform the universities, calling for expansion of student spaces through what almost amounts to a crash construction program. He also urges a revamping of "obsolete hierarchical structures at our universities and research institutions."

If the chancellor has less to say about science, it is because sweeping reforms are already in progress. The expenditures for research doubled during the four years Stoltenberg was science minister and would have doubled again over the next four years regardless of who won (SN: 6/28, p. 620).

Brandt rejects the contention that Germany must accept and live with a technological gap. "A country the size of the Federal Republic," he says, "must even today promote basic research in its entirety." He calls for continued international cooperation in science, particularly among European nations.

Data processing is the only field the chancellor is singling out for special mention so far. This, he says, "acts as a catalyst not only in all aspects of scientific and technological development but also in industrial production, administration and other spheres."

The new Government, he says, "intends to appropriate more budgetary funds to promote information data processing and the development of computer languages," an area that "needs more funds than the development of computers themselves."

Stoltenberg, in his rebuttal, notes that these ambitious programs are going to be expensive. But, he observes, the chancellor has not yet said a word about funding them. Most nonpartisan observers agree the program sounds nice, but there is a wait-and-see attitude. Implementing the program is certainly going to require more than renaming a ministry.