

LETTER FROM FRANKFURT



Science a political issue

**Both parties propose shifts
in science, education,
as election looms**

by Ted Shoemaker

With an election coming up in just a few days, and with the American space triumph still fresh in their minds, thoughtful Germans have been examining their country's scientific policies.

Both the present Federal Government, and the political party that hopes to assume power after Sept. 28, have issued major statements in the field. And newspapers have made numerous editorial comments on the state of German and European science in the wake of America's demonstration of what can be done with money and a concerted research effort.

The Government statements, dealing with scientific research and university programs, were issued by Science Minister Gerhard Stoltenberg. The opposition statement comes from the Social Democratic Party (SPD), which polls show has some chance of breaking the 20-year dominance of the Christian Democratic Party (CDU). The statement shows that research would remain important if the SPD gains power, but that there would be some marked changes of emphasis.

Stoltenberg says the Federal Government's contribution to scientific research has risen from \$250 million in 1965 to \$625 million this year. And it plans to raise it to a full \$1 billion by 1975. The main points of the program, Stoltenberg says, will be the construction of reactors and medical, nuclear, anti-pollution, space, data processing and oceanographic research.

The SPD concurs on the fields of research, but doesn't feel the projected Federal spending is large enough. The Science Ministry foots less than half of the total bill for research in Germany, with the state governments handling much of the rest. This, the SPD feels, leads to duplication and inefficiency which would be eliminated if the Federal Government played a bigger role than it now does.

On the subject of universities, Stoltenberg feels that more secondary school graduates should go to the nation's technical colleges, where the costs of their education are much less. The SPD feels this is wrong, and would like to see all institutions of higher learning made into degree-granting universities.

Both Stoltenberg and the SPD feel that higher education must be greatly expanded in Germany. Stoltenberg would like to see 100,000 more student places by 1975. The SPD calls for the establishment of two brand new universities in the next decade.

The SPD also seeks a "democratization" of the universities, so that every young person has an equal chance to go. Germany also has a system of scholarships and student aid. But, as in the United States, a student has a better chance of getting the education he wants if his parents can afford the tuition.

The SPD currently is the junior partner in Germany's grand coalition. Both it and the CDU hope to gain an absolute majority in the election, so that they can govern without a partner. If the SPD were to gain an absolute majority, Foreign Minister Willy Brandt would replace Kurt Georg Kiesinger as chancellor, and the Christian Democrats' Stoltenberg would almost certainly be replaced as science minister.

It was the Apollo 11 moon landing, however, that really started Germans thinking about Europe's role in the scientific world. Wernher von Braun, speaking in Salzburg, Austria, just before the moon landing, said: "If effective European management had correctly placed the available scientists, they would have proved superior to American and Russian ones in the field of space technology. The (European) capacity for technical innovation is more widespread than it is in either the U.S. or U.S.S.R."

Respected science writer Kurt Rudzinski of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung recently lashed out at European science policies, which, he maintains, do nothing but imitate the American example. He says there is no need for this, since the joint industrial, scientific and financial base of Western Europe is similar to America's.

He feels the gap is due mainly to a lack of scientist-managers like von Braun, who are best equipped to make decisions on complicated scientific matters.

He is especially incensed at a recent decision of Stoltenberg's all but halting research on a steam-cooled fast breeder reactor in favor of a sodium-cooled one. This, he feels, is another case of following the leader. Germany had a commanding lead in the development of a steam-cooled breeder, he says, but is throwing it away in favor of a reactor type on which four other countries are also working. The U.S. breeder program is concentrating on sodium.

The argument, he says, was that the breeder would have had to be promoted alone in the world. "In other words," he adds with a venom Europeans recognize, "without American backing."