

In May 1971, I was once more invited to take part in another visit to West Germany by its Science Ministry, following the previous ones, [see Titles 168 and 212]. Although the general briefing on German science policy took place at the end of the visit in Bonn on 11 May, it will be best to review it first and then the impressive background of what we had seen at the beginning.

In Bonn our group of British Science Correspondents met Dr W. Finke, the Head of Economic Planning at the Federal Ministry of Science. He told us that Germany was determined to reach again the high standard of science which it had lost during the period of the Hitler Regime and World War II. Now, after their *Wirtschaftswunder*, the phase of economic recovery, science could once again receive priority. The recovery had been due to hard work at all levels of the population, following the 'Marshall Plan' and currency reform.

A growth rate of the science budget of 35 % per annum during the years 1971-1974, was then being planned and would be achieved Dr Finke explained. The first result of this priority plan was a massive return of German scientists and engineers from America to ameliorate the major shortage of natural scientists as university teachers. Amongst the ambitious new projects he outlined were the building of two new oceanographic research vessels, the launching of two satellites, one scientific and a second application one, a special station to evaluate new desalination techniques and transportation research for magnetic levitation inter-city trains at a speed of 500 km p h. This famous 'Maglev' project was developed but cancelled in 2000, after 29 years of research.

Our group met at Heathrow, London's main airport, flew to Munich and directly proceeded to the Zugspitze, Germany's highest mountain, 2963 meters, which we reached by a comfortable ride in a rack and pinion railway, mostly built inside the mountain itself. On top and also inside the mountain, the Fraunhofer Society had established its research laboratory for the collection of meteorological data and for monitoring atomic fallout from nuclear tests. So for example the scientists there found that it took seven days for fallout from Chinese tests to reach the Zugspitze. The total solid matter in the air was also measured to determine lead pollution.

Our next stop was in Tübingen at the Max-Planck Institute for Virus Research, where I was much impressed by its precautions against contamination. Before entering the laboratories I had to pass through an air-lock with a 2.5 cm layer of disinfectant on the floor. Even at the Biological Warfare Laboratory in Porton, [see Titles 160 and 161] there were no such measures. In an emergency, the Tübingen Institute can be sealed completely and is self-contained. At the time new and highly infectious virus diseases, like Ebola and Marburg, had been discovered and caused great concern about secure isolation.