

German research agency

Ethologist takes the helm

Hamburg

PROFESSOR Hubert Markl, the distinguished ethologist from the University of Konstanz, is at 47 the youngest-ever president of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), West Germany's principal agency for the support of basic research with federal government funds. Markl succeeded Professor Eugen Seibold, the geophysicist, at the beginning of the year. He has been elected as president for a period of three years in the first instance, having served as Seibold's vice-president.

Markl says that the appointment of one as young as he is "an experiment". On the telephone last week, he said that he regretted having to give up his university tasks and his scientific work for science administration, but that he was eager to fall in with the wishes of the members of DFG that he should be their president.

In his own way, Markl is somehow the representative of a new generation of scientists, and is endowed with remarkable optimism, dynamism and farsightedness. He says his most important tasks are "the justification of science to the public" and "the defence of the autonomy of science from which scientists cannot retreat".

Markl has strong views about the development of the university system in West Germany. On the contentious issue of the role of elite universities, Markl says that "one cannot simply copy systems that work well in other countries".

He sees no place in Germany for private elite universities, but instead looks for more competition between universities for good students. This, he believes, could lead to a system in which universities are distinguished by the fields in which they

excel, with one being "top in agriculture, for example, another standing out for its chemistry". In this way, Markl says, "our scientific productivity will be used more effectively".

With the reduction of demand for student places now in prospect on demographic grounds, Markl believes that changes of the kind that he would welcome will come about automatically, especially as universities have more resources to devote to graduate education. He acknowledges that the age structure of university staffs in Germany is at present unsuitable, but hopes that DFG, with its annual budget of DM1,000 million, will be able to provide some relief. He is not especially alarmed at the risk that younger scientists will be sucked away to posts abroad, believes scientific exchange to be an important element of personal development, but says he would act to counter any threat of substantial loss of able people.

Markl has strong views on the social responsibility of science, which he says belongs not to "science as such, but to the individual scientist. Moral precepts never apply to abstract systems, but to the particular people who work for them."

He knows what he is talking about from his eventful life so far. Markl completed his doctorate (in Martin Lindauer's group at Munich) at the early age (by West German standards) of 24, and afterwards spent a year in the United States (at Harvard and the Rockefeller Universities). At the age of 29, then at Frankfurt, he completed his *Habilitation* (the formal qualification to hold a university professorship) as a zoologist, moving in turn to Darmstadt and Konstanz (in 1974).

Markl is likely to enjoy his spell as president of DFG, although his habit of saying what he thinks directly, even bluntly, could cause trouble from time to time. Markl recognizes the danger, saying that the years ahead will give him "a practical training in the applied ethology of science politics" and that "if I choose to walk through fire, I cannot complain of the heat".

Jürgen Neffe

Antarctic treaty

Argentina expands research effort

ARGENTINA is to support its territorial claims in Antarctica by means of a major programme of research and geological exploration. According to the journal *Noticias Argentinas* last month, Argentina may also agree to an international system for the control of Antarctic mineral resources, but this, the paper said, would not prejudice Argentina's "reservations" about its sovereignty rights and maritime jurisdiction.

Argentina is alone among the seven countries that had laid territorial claims to the Antarctic continent before the 1959 Antarctic Treaty in still maintaining the apparatus of statehood there (including passport control). (It was partly the overlapping territorial claims of Britain, Chile and Argentina that led to the formulation of the treaty by which all claims to sovereignty were "frozen" until 1991.) Since the signing of the treaty, mineral wealth in the sector claimed by Argentina has been found to include chromium, nickel, cobalt, copper, gold, silver and iron.

Argentina maintains 16 bases on the Antarctic continent, including six permanent establishments, but only one of these has been engaged on scientific work. One result is that Argentina has carried out less scientific research than the other signatories of the treaty.

During 1985, Argentina sent 33 scientists, mainly geologists, to the Antarctic. In 1986, this number will be increased to 107 "scientists and technicians"; the possi-

bility of opening a further base with a major airstrip is under serious consideration. The new emphasis on science is being presented as a "demilitarization" of Argentine Antarctic policy, although it is officially admitted that this will not mean a reduction in the logistic support provided by the Argentine armed forces. The (military) Argentine involvement in the Antarctic is said to cost some US \$3 million a year. Partial "demilitarization" could make the effort partly self-financing, if Argentina sell equipment and services for Antarctic research and rents out its naval icebreakers for transporting scientific expeditions.

Official Argentine sources explain the need for the new policy by claims that New Zealand's "anti-nuclear" policy could lead to that country being used as a starting point for expeditions sponsored by the socialist bloc. There have also been unofficial indications that Argentina (and also its main Antarctic "rival" Chile) has been perturbed by the new "third world" interest in the Antarctic, demonstrated by the major expeditions by India and China which, it is considered, are operating far outside their own bailiwick.

The Indian position on this issue is, however, explicit; Antarctica is the southern boundary of the Indian Ocean, and may have an important influence on the monsoon and on the climate of India in general. China and Brazil, the two other recent recruits to the Antarctic Treaty, have less specific interests.

Vera Rich

Seibold in Europe

Hamburg

PROFESSOR Eugen Seibold, who retired as president of DFG at the end of 1985, after serving two successive three-year terms, has been for many years one of the chief advocates in West Germany of international collaboration in research. A geologist by training, he was largely responsible for the development of the Geological Institute at the University of Kiel in the 1960s and 1970s.

Since the appointment last year of M. Hubert Curien as a minister in the French government, Seibold has been president of the European Science Foundation. In that role, he says, he will encourage the more rapid completion of the European Geotraverse, the deep seismic sounding of a dog-leg North-South section from Scandinavia to North Africa that is one of the foundation's chief projects.