

Politics and the Public Sphere in Recent German Science: The Case of the Max Planck Society

Symposium at the 10th Conference of the European Society for History of Science
(Brussels, 9 September 2022)

Abstract:

The Max Planck Society (MPS), founded in 1948 as the legal successor to the Kaiser Wilhelm Society, is today the leading organization for top-level research in Germany, funded in equal shares by the Federal government and the German *Länder*. In order to establish and maintain this strong position in the German research system, the Society's leadership and the heads of its institutes (MPIs) engaged actively with political authorities, as well as the media. The interdisciplinary research program „History of the Max Planck Society“ has been investigating these developments since 2015, with the aim of uniting history of science and contemporary German history. The proposed Symposium presents a selection of results from this large-scale project, now nearing completion, in two parts.

Symposium 1 addresses the political aspect of this topic, including the role of the MPS in science diplomacy (Carola Sachse), and the role of the MPS in the process of German unification (Mitchell G. Ash).

Symposium 2 addresses the role of the MPS in the public sphere, focusing in particular on the conflict of the MPS with the Scientology movement over the role of Kaiser Wilhelm Society scientists in the Nazi-era „euthanasia“ program (Florian Schmaltz) and the decades-long confrontation with the animal welfare and animal rights movements (Juliane Scholtz). The Symposium will end with a commentary from John Krige, an expert on the history of science and technology during and following the Cold War.

Session 1 Chair: Carsten Reinhardt (University of Bielefeld):

Introductory Remarks: Carsten Reinhardt

Carola Sachse (Berlin): Science for and against diplomacy. The Max Planck Society's Role in West German Foreign Policy – Soviet Union and China in Comparison (1955-1995)

Mitchell G. Ash (Vienna): The Max-Planck-Society in the Process of German Unification 1989-2002

Session 2 Chair: Carsten Reinhardt (University of Bielefeld):

Florian Schmaltz (Berlin): The Max Planck Society's Nazi past as a Political Challenge: Legal Conflicts Surrounding Scientology's Instrumentalization of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society's History against the Max Planck Society

Juliane Scholz (Berlin): 'Are we willing to fight for our research?': Max Planck Society's lobbying and communication strategy during the reforms of the Animal Welfare Act in Germany 1986-2002

Comment: John Krige, Atlanta/Paris