

Introductory Remarks: On the State of Radiation Research

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Starting points

Some years ago I participated in a meeting of the European Society of Radiation Biology and was late for the opening session because of flight delay. Together with me was a young, very bright, very attractive (female) colleague. When we opened the auditorium door we saw the audience already assembled and my young colleague spontaneously exclaimed (fortunately only audible to me): "My God, all old age pensioners!" I do not know where she is now, definitely no longer in radiation research, apparently she opted for a younger science...

This scene always comes to my mind when we discuss the state of our field. No doubt, radiation research does not very well nowadays. This is certainly true for Germany but also – with gradual differences – for most other countries. Japan appears to be an exception what I cannot explain. According to a survey conducted by the German Radiation Protection Commission (SSK) the number of research institutions dedicated to radiation research declined from 25 in 1993 to only 9 in 2000, that is a loss of 64%. As a consequence of this alarming situation the Federal Ministry of Education asked the "Company for Reactor Safety" (GRS) to convene a meeting with experts and state representatives to discuss possible ways out which took place in spring 2002 in Köln. All state governments which in Germany run the universities were invited – not a single one came. This demonstrates that political bodies are not interested at all although the lack of radiation experts is clearly also a political issue. More importantly, however, radiation research seems to have lost its standing in the scientific community. Otherwise it cannot be explained that many faculties greed without protest to the closure of existing, sometimes quite famous institutions. During the meeting the idea was born to have a workshop where the role of radiation research in the life sciences should be freely discussed. This workshop took place from October 3 to October 7, 2002 at the "Radiation Centre" (Strahlencentrum) (an institution which has meanwhile also ceased to exist) of the university of Giessen, Germany. This book contains the proceedings of the meeting and is aimed at provoking discussion.

Before the contents are commented on more general remarks are in place.