

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by MAX NEF.

On August 1st, the day of the Swiss National Holiday, the "Swiss National Fund for the Promotion of Scientific Research" was solemnly inaugurated and proclaimed at a session held in the hall of the Council of States, in Berne. It was not by mere chance that this day was chosen for the foundation of this Society. As Federal Councillor Etter remarked, when he transmitted the greetings of the Federal Council on this occasion, it should always recall the fact that Swiss science must always remember its loyal duty towards its country. The true greatness and significance of a nation, especially of a numerically small nation, is conditioned by the importance and the strength of its spiritual yield. For it is in that, that we find lasting values, as opposed to power, wealth and political influence, which are all subject to the buffets of fate and to the tragedy of history. And, although science is not bound by any political frontiers, the scientist remains indebted to his home-land.

The Confederation is granting one sole subsidy of a million francs towards the foundation of this society; it will then contribute 2 mill.frs. towards its maintenance the following year, 3 mill.frs. the year after, and then 4 million francs per annum as from the third year. Both the Federal Assembly and the Swiss People have approved this appropriation without any objections being raised, recognising, as they do, that our country which is so poor in natural wealth depends to a large extent for its well-being from the scientific research work which goes on in the laboratories and research centres, the libraries and the clinics. Economy and technical progress are directed by means of fundamental research. It is true that big industrial undertakings have realised this a long time ago and that considerable success has been achieved in this domain as a result of the important financial support brought to it by private enterprise and personal donations. There are also the universities and the Federal Technological Institute which are also doing very good work in this respect. Unfortunately, however, in view of the fact that the Swiss universities rank as autonomous Cantonal

secondary schools, their financial means are not sufficient to cover all that they are able and desirous of accomplishing in the domain of science. As a result, Switzerland is menaced by the fitting to other countries of her young research workers, if they cannot find sufficient means of existence when carrying out their pioneer work at home.

On the Roll of Honour of those whose discoveries in the past have been epoch-making, there are a good many names of Swiss to be found, and during the last few years numerous Nobel prizes have found their way to our country. The generous action of the Confederation in regard to Swiss science will serve to maintain and to promote the Swiss reputation abroad, in this particular field of labour. The Swiss National Fund for the Promotion of Scientific Research is not only in respect of natural science, but also juridistical and economic science and even the so-called science of the Arts.

The Organisation intends to establish research Committees in all the Swiss Universities. The co-ordination of all these endeavours will be the task of the Foundation Council, consisting of members of Science, politics and Economy. A Committee of 7 to 9 members will be set up, to serve as a national Research Council, which will carry out the principal work and will take decisions regarding the distribution of the various subsidies.

Although the Confederation is also represented in the National Fund as a donor, this does not mean in any way that the freedom of research activities will be in the slightest curtailed or hampered in its independence. Two outstanding scientists have been appointed as delegates of the Government, in this way showing quite clearly that the authorities have no intention of interfering or attempting to give any State direction to this organisation.

The pillars of the newly created Institution are the well-known private scientific associations, such as the Swiss Society for Natural Science Research, the Academy for Medical Science, the Swiss Society of Lawyers and similar associations. It is stated in the Statutes that the National Fund shall give financial assistance in such cases where scientific research work cannot receive the requisite means from any other source.

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