

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by DR. MAX NEF.

A short time ago, it was decided that the European Laboratory for Research in Nuclear Physics would be established in Geneva, after other countries, such as France, Denmark, and Holland had withdrawn their claims for the seat of this scientific institute to be in their country, in favour of Switzerland. None will grudge Switzerland, and above all, the University city of Geneva, the pleasure and the particular satisfaction felt at the thought that the international communal work of peaceful, scientific research is to be carried out on her soil. The scientific, moral and cultural traditions of Geneva have been still more firmly confirmed by the creation of a new international centre for research.

It has been more and more fully recognized among scientists that the structure of matter is a great deal more complicated than was generally thought to be the case, a few years ago. In addition to the already discovered atomic nucleus and electrons, there obviously exists an entire spectrum of tiny elementary parts, which research has still to go to study more closely. They have been discovered in the cosmic rays of the universe. In order to know them better and to be able to establish their peculiarities, it is necessary to possess laboratory equipment which will make it possible to create conditions such as are to be met with in the universe. In other words: it is necessary to be in a position to be able to generate extraordinary high concentrations of energy amounting to many thousands of millions of electron volts, in order to attain an equivalent of those of the cosmic rays.

The setting up of such equipment, exceeds the possibilities which are available to any individual, single country. The danger therefore existed that only the United States might be in a position to carry out research work in the domain of nuclear physics. This meant that, with time, European science would become stunted, and this had to be avoided on both cultural and traditional grounds. Apart from this, it is prejudicial to scientific research when it is not possible for scientists from a great many different countries to work at it and then put the results of their labours together and to exchange the knowledge they have gained in the process.

And it is thus that the idea was born to establish a research centre for nuclear physics, in Geneva, at which scientists from all lands could engage in

research work in common. For the present the following countries are taking part in this scheme: Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Holland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Norway, Sweden, Western Germany and Switzerland. Scientists of international renown have got together and agreed to place their efforts in common in order to search for new knowledge in the domain of the science of physics, in Europe.

The fact that Switzerland was unanimously chosen to be the seat of the new Research Institute is a manifest proof that the work which is to be conducted therein will have no military purpose and will not serve any desire for domination on the part of any great Power, but will be restricted to the pursuit of scientific knowledge by the countries in question. Switzerland's participation in this scheme was made dependent, already during the preliminary discussions, on the condition that this new Research Laboratory would be available to all the countries of Europe, that its work should in no way be of a secret nature and that it should serve exclusively civilian and scientific purposes. It has therefore also been agreed that the results of research activities in the Institute for Nuclear Physics in Geneva, should be published regularly and that the experience gained should be currently exchanged with other research institutes, of the same kind.

The fact that it would be impossible for any one country to bear the expense of setting up all the requisite apparatus and technical equipment it clearly demonstrated, when one realises that a single apparatus, the so-called Synchrotron, will cost some 60 million Swiss francs to be put up. It possesses a magnet of more than 200 meters in diameter and will be larger than any existing machine of this kind. Its construction will be carried out in common, in accordance with principles which have never yet been applied. All the countries we have already mentioned are participating in the costs, which will surpass 100 million francs.

Work on the construction of this new Institute is to begin in Geneva, next year. It will take about seven years to set up the technical equipment. However, even the preparatory work will bring with it intensive collaboration on the part of the scientists from these, and perhaps from a great many other, countries, which may be interested in this scheme. It is to be hoped that this new form of collaboration in the interests of science will bear the ripe harvest which is expected from it.

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Recently, a conference took place between the Federal Council and the Heads of the Governments of the 25 Cantons-and-half-Cantons. This annual gathering has become a firm tradition. It originated during the war years, at a time when it was not possible to deal in a public manner with every problem which faced a small neutral State, surrounded on all sides by the seething breakers of war. But, whereas, in those days it was confidential information that the Federal Council imparted, in its capacity of the National Government, to the Governments of the Cantons, stress being laid on the fact that the views and the attitude taken up by the Federal Council must be propagated downwards, nowadays there are naturally no more secrets to be dealt with during such conferences. Nevertheless, it has been deemed desirable that, at least once a year, questions which do not solely concern the Confederation, as being the Central Authority, but are also of interest to the member-states within the federative structure of the Confederation, should be discussed in common. It is true that in the parliamentary institutions which have been set up in accordance with the system of an Upper and a lower House of representatives, the requisite machinery is at hand in order to shape the will of the people in a political and administrative manner. In the life of a nation, however, there exist numerous problems which can, with advantage, be discussed in common when they are still in a state of preparation, by the responsible authorities of both the Confederation and of the Cantons. And it is this purpose which is served by the conferences with the Heads of the Cantonal Governments.

For a long time past already, it has been the practice for the responsible leaders of corresponding departments in the Cantonal Governments to arrange joint meetings with their opposite numbers in the Federal Departments, and thus, there have been conferences of Finance Directors, Military Directors, of Heads of Educational departments and Heads of Police departments. During these meetings, only special practical questions are dealt with, as for instance when it is necessary to make sure that the execution of a Federal Law or the application of a Federal privilege is carried out in a uniform manner. These conversations possess more of a technical and practical character.

When, however, the Federal Council convenes a sitting with the Heads of the Cantonal Governments, then it is a matter of discussing questions which have only just arisen and, in regard to which it is deemed

expedient to obtain the views of the other partners, before proceeding to take the necessary action.

This time, the Federal Council consulted with the representatives of the Cantons, in order to know their opinion in regard to what measures should be taken for the protection of the civilian population in case of war, now that the Draft Bill on the erection of air raid shelters in the existing houses, had been rejected by the Popular Referendum held on the 5th October. The Federal Council, conscious of its duties as a responsible authority, does not consider that it has been released from all responsibility as a result of this negative vote on the part of the people. Whether, and what kind of measures should be taken, and what form be given to this solution, these are all questions which were passed on to the Heads of the Cantonal Governments for their careful consideration. The problem itself will have to be solved by the Confederation.

The conditions were reversed in the matter of boring for oil, for here, as has been decided unanimously, it is the Cantons which dispose of the right to grant permits, as well as concessions for the exploitation of such natural riches of the soil, should, as has not yet proved the case, investigations result in the discovery of the presence of oil, in Switzerland. If, in spite of the clearly recognized sovereign rights of the Cantons in this matter, the Confederation also shows interest and deems it necessary to discuss things with the Cantonal authorities, the reason for this lies in the fact that the independence and the security of the country could be threatened were concessions to be granted to foreign companies, or were foreign capital to be invested to any great extent. The Federal Council, therefore, considered it to be expedient to draw the attention of the Cantons to such potential dangers and to suggest to them that it would be a good thing if such questions could be discussed in common with the Federal Authorities, in order that Swiss interests, as a whole, might be safeguarded.

These two examples show how manifold and how closely intertwined are the reciprocal relations between the Confederation and the Cantons, and how important it is, in the case of delicate questions, that a solution be sought for, which is the best for the country and the people, by means of immediate and close contact. This in no way means the effacement of any constitutional rights and responsibilities. On the contrary, a definite line of demarcation can result, right from the first, which should prove useful to both high dignitaries, the Confederation and the Cantons.

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