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The Indian Research Council

The appointment of the Marquis of Zetland as the Secretary of State for India may be used as an appropriate opportunity for reviving the question of the establishment of the National Council of Scientific Research. His Lordship, during his tenure of office as Governor of Bengal, evinced great solicitude in promoting the cultural advancement of this country, and in April 1933 he caused a circular letter to be issued to a select body of scientists and representative leaders of public opinion in India, offering assistance in case they should agree to co-operate with him in founding an Indian Academy of Sciences and Arts. It may be recalled that almost simultaneously, but independently, *Current Science* in its issue for May 1933 published an editorial in which cogent reasons were put forward for the institution of an Indian Academy of Sciences. Where His Lordship and this Journal contemplated a single authoritative institution, the movement initiated by them resulted in the inauguration of two scientific bodies, viz., The Indian Academy of Sciences and the National Institute of Sciences. Both on grounds of finance and of expediency we deprecate plurality of institutions, and one of our co-operators wrote to us as follows on this subject:

“The danger, of course, is that if we attempt to establish too many scientific bodies requiring support from Governments and Universities, we make it more difficult for existing institutions to continue: it must be remembered that at present we find it sufficiently difficult

to obtain adequate support for the Indian Science Congress and for our journal – *Current Science*.”

The existence of multiple scientific bodies of the Academy status must make it increasingly difficult for the Central Government to recognise the claims of any one of these bodies as the official expositor of scientific opinion in India, and must definitely retard all proposals for the establishment of a National Advisory Board of Scientific Research.

Those who have been following the trend of modern scientific progress in this country must have noticed two distinctive features. The first characteristic is that a close and steady co-operation between different groups of investigators, – medical men, physicists, chemists, biologists and engineers, – is almost indispensable for an adequate solution of all social and economic problems. The second is that scientific discoveries in any one branch of science, whether theoretical or applied, find direct and ready application in apparently unrelated branches of knowledge. We have several research institutions in India equipped and maintained by Government subsidies, and it is obvious that investigations in them should proceed uninterrupted by the fluctuations of financial assistance and the inhibitions of departmental influences. There is therefore a great need for a central agency for the prevention of overlapping of effort and the duplication of expenditure of national revenues. It ought to be one of the functions of such an institution to secure the intimate co-operation of the medical, agricultural, industrial and forest research departments and stress the importance of a clearly defined policy of scientific investigations in these departments for the promotion of the national health and the economic efficiency of the country. It seems to us that the functions of the Research Council should not be restricted to the encouragement of co-ordination of research work alone, however important and necessary it may be for the intellectual advancement of the

country. In a sense and perhaps for some time to come, this body must occupy the status and fulfil the functions of the Parliamentary Science Committee in Great Britain. It should seek opportunities for establishing a link between science and Government on the one hand, and on the other, between science and society.

The new Secretary of State for India who, as Governor of Bengal, had, more than any other administrator, evinced the greatest practical concern in the promotion of the cultural life of this country, and whose interest in the scientific progress of its people had never abated even in the midst of his other pre-occupations, may be expected to use his rare influence in establishing a right relationship between science and Indian administrative problems. Professor F. O. Bower once acknowledged that it was owing to the energy and enthusiasm of Lord Balfour that science was welcomed into the inner circle of Imperial Administration; and India may confidently hope that the critical and constructive mind of the Marquis of Zetland may formulate a plan which would ensure a reasonable appreciation of the value of science in the administrative departments of the Government of India. We hope that an atmosphere favourable for initiating a movement for the establishment of the Indian Research Council will soon be produced by scientists in India who, by reason of their knowledge and capabilities, are entitled to exercise a greater control over such administrative problems of the country as fall within the range of scientific influence. These problems should no longer be permitted to be entrusted to the hands of those who have no first-hand knowledge of science, and the first step in this direction is to remove the reproach that India is practically the only civilised country without a National Research Council, to which the Government of India could look up for advice and guidance in all practical measures affecting the moral and material advancement of the people.