

## HON. Mr. SULLIVAN'S SPEECH



I HAVE felt a special pleasure in accepting your invitation to be present at this year's Annual Meeting of the Council of the Royal Society of New Zealand, as it does afford me an opportunity on behalf of the Government to thank New Zealand scientists for the notable part which they have played during World War II, which ceased less than twelve months ago.

I consider I can best express the Government's feelings of gratitude and appreciation through the Royal Society of New Zealand, which is representative of every branch of scientific activity and thought.

Your Society has a remarkable record of service since its foundation in 1867. It has followed with distinct credit in the footsteps of its predecessor, the Royal Society of Great Britain, which was so intimately associated with the voyages of Captain Cook to New Zealand. I recall that Sir Joseph Banks came on one of these voyages, and that he was for a long period President of the Royal Society of Great Britain. Very early in New Zealand's history recourse was had to the services of scientists, and some men of remarkable ability came to these shores. The names of Haast, Hochstetter, Hutton, and Hector were associated with this period, and were among those who laid the foundations of this Society and set a high standard of achievement for all those who followed in their footsteps.

From 1867 to this day, amid the vicissitudes of the years, the New Zealand Institute and the Royal Society have continued to foster and give encouragement to scientific endeavour in every sphere. An examination of your membership reveals the names of a multitude of men who have rendered, and are rendering, distinct service to New Zealand science both in times of peace and of war. Your *Transactions* provide a record of remarkable scientific achievement in the published papers of many notable men, such that any country could rightly be proud of.

I am aware that this unfaltering encouragement which your Society has consistently followed now for some eighty years has been largely instrumental in ensuring that in the times of stress which came with World War II, New Zealand was provided with men of the calibre and qualifications which were needed in our days of dire peril. In paying tribute to the deeds of our scientists during this period, I wish also to express appreciation to your Society and acknowledge our debt for the part it has played in maintaining, during the years, that active interest which made our war achievements possible.

As Minister in charge of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, I have for more than a decade been brought into close association with scientists and scientific activity in the Dominion, and I have seen scientists in action both in times of peace and war. This is a fitting occasion to pay, through your Society, my Government's tribute to the service which they have rendered in the realms of pure science, and in science applied in agriculture, industry, and in the needs of defence.

In view of the fact that it was the Royal Society of New Zealand whose representations were in no small measure responsible for urging on the Government of the day the need for greater encouragement on the part of the State to the co-ordination and funding of scientific endeavour in New Zealand, which led to the creation of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research in 1927, I would like to make brief reference to the association between the State and research which has been a very characteristic development of the years since World War I.

The State is anxious for the national welfare, that the advantages which are now almost universally recognised as accruing to scientific endeavour in every sphere should be realised and availed of in the fullest measure possible. It therefore values that education of public opinion, and that exercise of foresight, which a Society such as this can provide in helping towards this end. Your Society has often given a lead in such matters. I have already mentioned what it did to have the Council of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research established, and I am aware of its efforts in regard to the conservation of our soils, our forests, and our bird life. Amid the many matters which a Government is called upon to deal with, there is often far too little opportunity to realise the import and significance of new scientific development. Too often even signs of matters developing right in front of us are missed because their significance—very obvious later on—is not realised in time. The tempo of the times has speeded up markedly in this century and, therefore, the Government will appreciate an outside and independent body of scientific thought, such as is represented in the Royal Society of New Zealand, taking an active part in examining all scientific fields and bringing to its notice those matters which it thinks should receive the attention of the State in the cause of national well-being.

The years following World War I saw a marked change in scientific activity and attitudes the world over. In view of the stupendous developments culminating in the harnessing of atomic energy which have occurred in World War II, one cannot but feel that science is now on the eve of changes greater than ever. One cannot refer to atomic energy without recalling not only the foundational part that that eminent New Zealander, Lord Rutherford, played in this remarkable work, but also how impossible it seems to be to realise how far the results of some piece of fundamental research may go.

I have always appreciated that it is futile to attempt to build industry—or build anything—without the fullest collaboration of the men of science. We are endeavouring to secure that collaboration in New Zealand: the Government will spend increasing sums on scientific research in all its phases, and I can honestly say that my colleagues in the Government deny us nothing when our plans indicate they are worthy of support—research committees, etc., etc.

The state of world insecurity—politically, socially, and economically—throws a great burden of responsibility on public men, but social progress depends largely upon the efforts of the man with the test tube. World famine and sub-standards of life suffered by teeming millions is the most serious challenge the nations, collectively, have ever faced. To raise the living standards of the unfortunate people calls for prodigious efforts, and a peculiar responsibility rests upon the scientists of the world. I know that specialists of all kinds tend to restrict their field of vision to their own immediate work, but the humanitarian needs of the times demand that these restricted horizons be lifted to embrace the world in which we live. I consider that we have tended to shun the social aspects of scientific work, and I feel you will not misunderstand me when I say that the mass of the people, the general public, look to such bodies as the Royal Society to assume a special measure of social responsibility in the application of the knowledge they possess and the techniques they have developed.

The people must be fed, clothed, and housed. And we must remember also that men “do not live by bread alone.” All people, under a division of labour, are entitled to enjoy the fruits of the earth as they labour to produce them. We must all, in our own particular fields of endeavour, realise the social aim, in fact the spiritual aim, of the life the democracies of the world are striving to obtain.

I trust that the Royal Society of New Zealand is not unaware of the changed setting in which it functions in a post-war world, and as Minister of Scientific and Industrial Research I make this earnest appeal to you all: to use your leadership effectively in the drive for better things—through the agency of psychology, physiology, physics and chemistry, and all the rest—so that New Zealand may make a worthy contribution to world thought, and to live up to the tradition created by such eminent men as our own Ernest Rutherford.

It is a heavy responsibility. I trust that you will be given the grace and strength to discharge it.