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The minister of Church, Education and Research, Mr. Gudmund Hernes, has given permission to publish a shortened version of his lecture to the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters. In his lecture he sketched a plan for the establishment of a Norwegian Center for Advanced Studies, patterned on the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, in the United States.

10. November 1988

The Institute for Advanced Study

BY GUDMUND HERNES

The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters owns a portrait by our prominent painter Henrik Lund. The portrait is a gift from the widow of Axel Aubert, Director General of Norsk Hydro. Axel Aubert was not only a member of the Academy, he was an honorary member. The portrait is of Albert Einstein, and hangs in the Director's office.

What is interesting is the date of the signature: June 28, 1932. The reason is that, while this portrait of the great physicist was being painted by our great artist, Einstein was in the process of making a very important decision: Where was he going to work, what place was he going to choose for his intellectual activity?

The events leading up to this decision were these: Einstein spent the spring of 1932 at the California Institute of Technology, Caltech. There he met an influential American research organizer, Abraham Flexner, who said the following about his own life: "The decisive moment of my life came in 1884 when, at the age of seventeen, I was sent by my eldest brother, Jacob, to the Johns Hopkins University."

Abraham Flexner became closely associated with the Johns Hopkins University. His name is linked to the so-called Flexner Report on medical education in the United States, which led to a complete change in medical studies in that country. The Institute for Advanced Study was established at Princeton in 1930, under Abraham Flexner's directorship.

Abraham Flexner had actually intended to retire before this. However, he was approached by a representative of Mr. Louis Bamberger and his sister Mrs. Felix Fuld. They wished to donate some money to a good purpose — but had no specific purpose in mind. Flexner, who knew more about the universities than almost anyone else in America, had become increasingly aware of the need for a place where scientists, under the very best conditions but without any form of pressure other than their inner motivation and

professional desire for knowledge, could devote themselves entirely to research. His proposal was to establish a center for advanced studies.

Bamberger was enthusiastic, but made one condition: that Flexner himself should head the project — to which he agreed. A site was found, Princeton in New Jersey, and this is where the Institute for Advanced Study was established.

Flexner met Einstein by chance during a visit to Caltech in 1932, and told him about the project. Einstein was immediately curious. Flexner and Einstein met again during the same year on a few occasions, the last time at Potsdam, a gift to Einstein from the city of Berlin. Einstein's enthusiasm for joining the Institute for Advanced Study had grown, and his parting words to Flexner were: "Ich bin Flamme und Feuer dafür." And again, this came to pass the following year.

This is where we take up the threads from my introductory remarks: While Einstein was sitting for Henrik Lund his thoughts revolved around moving to the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. The challenge *to us* is how to establish a center for advanced studies connected to the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters.

The Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton is a classical example of this kind of institution. Flexner's goal was to create the best possible environment for free research — "untrammelled facilities for easy-going and informal work between men who had passed the Ph.D. stage, had given promise of unusual ability, and who needed now the informal contact with masters which had characterized the German universities in their golden days." That he succeeded in creating such an institute is demonstrated by the contributions made by a whole series of the Institute's members, from Einstein in physics, and von Neumann in mathematics, to Hirschmann in economics.

The purpose of a Norwegian Princeton: It would not be wise to establish a center



*Dr. Albert Einstein,
painted by Henrik Lund.*

which would draw prominent researchers from the universities and colleges. The main purpose must be to give these researchers, for a period of time — normally a period of one year — the very best conditions for being able to devote themselves completely to their research. This opportunity should be offered to researchers at senior level, who are masters in their field, and can help to extend the horizons of their subject. With the emphasis on basic research, they would be able to work undisturbed on problems which do not necessarily give immediate return.

This means that the task of a Norwegian center for advanced studies must be to recognize and reward highly competent researchers, by allowing them to concentrate on what should be their primary activity, without being distracted by the routines and daily demands which otherwise tend to weigh them down.

Why a center at the Academy?

This is clearly expressed in the Academy's statutes. According to section one of the statutes, the purpose of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters is to help to promote science, to function as a national contact body for the individual academic disciplines, and to represent Norwegian science and letters in relation to foreign academies and international scientific organizations. Therefore, to establish a center for advanced studies is almost

imperative in the wording "promote science."

Such a center for advanced studies should be established in Oslo, the site of Norway's largest university. The capital is the most important academic catchment area, and the Academy is already a national institution with a tradition of membership from the whole country. At all centers for advanced studies it is a ruling principle not to have too much standardization, or to press everyone into the same mould. There must be room for both eccentrics and "lone riders." This should also be the case at the center we have in mind.

The center should probably be established as a foundation. It should not be a "club" for renowned men. It will become a reality if we succeed in formulating a vision, if we can communicate to others the things that give us enjoyment and kindle our enthusiasm. We must nurture both the enthusiasm and the talent.

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