510

THE WAY TO THE IPY/IGY.

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The North-West-Passage expedition under the command of Sir John Franklin (1786-1847) and Francis Crozier (1796-1848) perished with 129 persons and caused the greatest series of search-expeditions in the history of mankind. This not only taught these expeditions how to travel und survive in Polar Regions und unveiled the Canadian polar archipelago but involved a serious trauma not only for the Navy but also for British society. It was not until 1865 that Sherard Osborn (1822-1875), a prominent veteran of the search expeditions had the valour to suggest a new polar expedition to the public - this time to the pole itself. Osborne's approach was acclaimed and generally supported with the outmost enthusiasm by August Petermann (1822-1878), a German geographer, member of the Royal Geographic Society and publisher of a well known geographical journal of that time.

But nevertheless a discrepancy came up very soon. For Osborne the way to the pole lead through the Kennedy Channel (between Ellesmere Island and West Greenland) whereas Petermann wanted to reach the pole by ship somewhere east of Greenland. He was motivated by this remarkable hypothesis. He had to realise however that the British expert would never adopt his plans. This rejection led to the agitation for a German Expedition. Up until 1874 seven expeditions were made - some with considerable international response.

In December 1874, the Bremer "Polarverein" (Bremen Society for polar research) had forwarded a proposal to the government for the support of a new East Greenland Expedition in 1875. One of the main goals was the execution of coordinated simultaneous observations with the British expedition to West Greenland which was said to take place the same year.

For the evaluation of this approach a commission of experts was summoned. Indeed these scholars created a comprehensive polar research program (which later influenced the IPY program), but the government rejected a REQUEST FOR funding. This rejection was justified with the remark that the most important scientific questions under discussion could only be solved in a broad international joint venture. This argument was in accordance to the ideas which were widespread by Carl Weyprecht (1838-1881) at that time. In addition Weyprecht's access was easily brought in line with the evolutions in meteorology and oceanography (then called physical geography of the sea) which were caused by the publications of Matthew F. Maury (1806-1873) which were strongly given attention to and were promoted by various German experts.

On the international congress of meteorologists April 1879 in Rome the calling of a Polar Conference was decided for the same year. This meeting took place in Hamburg. It was hosted by Reichsinstitut Deutsche Seewarte and its Director Georg Neumayer (1826-1909). Neumayer was elected president of a newly established Polar-Commission and the implementation of an International Polar Year projected. A lot of material is still available on the details of the commission's work, its scientific goals even about the political acceptation of an IPY (particularly in Germany). Here just one remark: It was the Danish government which first gave an official agreement.

Due to Neumayer's efforts, the southern hemisphere became part of the IPY. Considering the scientific and political aftermath of the IPY makes it easy to draw a straight line to the Antarctic expedition series around 1900. From this, resulted another attempt by mainly Belgian scientists to establish an International Polar Commission again. With the outbreak of the World War, this noble undertaking was brought to a sudden halt.

In 1928 Johannes Georgi (1888-1972), a pupil of Alfred Wegener (1880-1930) brought a second IPY to the agenda. His initiative found much consent but the performance of the second IPY 1932/33 finally suffered greatly from the world wide economic crisis of theses years.

The most ambitious international scientific joint venture that ever happened was the "third IPY" which was then called International Geophysical Year (1957/58). From this, the Antarctic Treaty System directly followed. A beautiful example for the fact that scientific cognitions can lead to political decisions of international dimensions. We should be aware of the excellence of the AT-System but not stay content in just keeping it running but to try to adopt it out to other vulnerable areas of the globe. Polar research is earth system research!