Letter from Svante Arrhenius to Georg Bredig,
March 1922


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Translated by Jocelyn R. McDaniel

English Translation

Image 1

The Fields for Experiments at the Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry, 1 March 1922

My dear friend Bredig:

Thank you very much for your kind letter in honor of my birthday. We gradually grow old and feel it slightly. I’m 63 now. According to the usual laws here in Sweden, I should be retiring in two years. However, during the difficult war years, money was devalued, and we had to resort to using reserve funds. That proves that they won’t have any money to pay me a pension. Hence, I’ll probably be here for a while longer, but I don’t think my ability to work will suffice. For my family, especially my children, it will be a great blessing to be able to live here until better times arrive. Of course, life in the country is more beneficial for me than life in the city.

In June, when I was traveled from southern Germany and stayed in Berlin, I paid a visit to Nernst. I always felt deeply sorry for him after he lost his two sons in the war. He graciously welcomed me, which was very pleasant. However, I always felt that we were quite different. He thinks he’s a great diplomat. He even said that he might now pursue a political career. However, it was interesting for me
to have seen and spoken to him again.

I had the impression that Germany is currently experiencing difficulties and will continue to suffer for many years to come. The economy is completely shattered because of the low value of the Reichsmark and without an improvement in the currency, general despair will persist. However, if the value of the currency rises, especially if it is quick, industry will be paralyzed, and a strong recovery will follow. Similar to those countries, whose currency has remained steady, we are currently experiencing this phase of inadequacy.

Image 2

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Unemployment is massive. The state, as well as the municipalities, must muster all their strength and raise the necessary funds. Savings have been consumed. Public companies do not pay dividends. The taxes will bring in very little next year. Disparity must worsen before workers are willing to work. As soon as industry begins to gain some traction because prices allow for an increase in labor, the workers will strike so that no profits will contribute to capital. There is no sentiment for the general welfare of the state. The workers’ old standard of living, which they have fought so hard for, should not be forfeited.

It's pretty quiet here in the laboratory. Nobody has money to receive training here or to work for their ideals. At the end of the month, I’m traveling to France, Belgium, and Holland to visit my old friends there. I will probably also be asked to give a few lectures. I must prepare them carefully now and I won't be able to do any work again until I return in early May.

Otherwise, I have to say that, as far as I know in the civilized world, we Swedes have suffered the least from the war. In fact, most of Europe is devastated and it will take another ten years before we return to pre-war circumstances.

My family and I are doing well. We have experienced a long and dreary winter with lots of snow, which has been greatly beneficial to the children’s health. They are growing and thriving, so it's a real joy. We elders also pacify ourselves well.

Thank you again for the kind letter. Warm regards from our home to yours.

Yours faithfully,
Svante Arrhenius