During the week I tabled in Parliament details of the financial assistance to be made available by the Commonwealth next year for research projects recommended by the Australian Research Grants Committee. This is the committee established in 1965 by the Commonwealth to carry out the Government's aim for stimulation of high level research out in universities and other institutions by individuals or research teams. An advisory committee, headed by Professor R.N. Robertson, a world ranking plant physiologist and a former member of the C.S.I.R.O. executive, was established to advise the Government on applications made for help under the scheme. The Government set aside $9 million in 1967-69, to cover the entire cost of grants made under the scheme for the triennium.

In a world environment of rapidly expanding technology, there is a continuing need for research in the basic sciences. At this basic level, the scientist searches for new theories, for new ideas. This is research on the frontiers of scientific exploration. Then we have the applied fields, where research is geared towards the immediate needs of this country in agriculture, and the chemical and biological fields — the application throughout industry of new techniques based on new discoveries. The Australian Research Grants Committee scheme provides a pool of knowledge on which the hungry demands of technology can feed. The scheme also supports projects in the field of research which has more direct application to problems of national interest. When projects supported by these funds become promising and are developed to advanced levels, the stage has been reached when other support schemes take over. They then come within the interest of institutions like the C.S.I.R.O. and the National Health and Medical Research Council, or are carried forward through assistance from funds like the industry research funds in wheat, meat and wool, or through the research program operated by the Industrial Development Board.

The Commonwealth has thus demonstrated its desire to assist the advance of science over a wide scale of endeavour. It starts in the secondary schools, with the Commonwealth's substantial program for the building and equipping of science laboratories in government and independent fields. Funds devoted to this totalled more than $42 million in 1964/68 and nearly $38 million has been earmarked for the current period running until June, 1971. The Government's new $27 million scheme providing libraries in all secondary schools will also be a significant contribution to science training. And with the A.R.G.C. scheme, Commonwealth support goes right up to the post-doctoral level to support the type of advanced and in some cases world standard research we have been discussing.
Since the Australian Research Grants Committee was established, the general pattern has been that most of the funds have gone to support the physical and biological sciences, but there has been significant support also for the social sciences and the humanities. Altogether, 572 projects will receive support from the total of nearly $3 million to be apportioned by the Committee in 1969. This sum is the balance of the $9 million provided under the A.R.G.C. program for 1967-69.

These 572 projects cover a wide sweep of science.... mining and metals, the building industry, communications; agriculture; the chemical sciences - the search for new insecticides; drugs of many types; and the social sciences and humanities -- economics, law, politics. More than $670,000 goes to projects carried on in institutions in Victoria.

Problems of national interest are being grappled with in many of the projects receiving support under the scheme. Dr B.R. Davidson, of the University of Sydney, receives $3,390 for his work on the economic effects of declining wool prices on Australian agriculture. Professor D.B. Williams receives $4610 to enable him to continue with his study into changes in the rural workforce. Mr F.W. Musgrave, of New England, is supported for his investigation into productivity and technical change in Australian agriculture.

The attack on biological problems is helped along by grants from the A.R.G.C. fund. A sum of more than $50,000 has been provided for work at the famous Walter and Eliza Hall Institute under Professor G.J.V. Nossal, to support studies in the important basic features of immunology and cancer research.

The struggle to control insect pests goes on. This has attracted interest from the Research Grants Committee, and the Government has agreed to allot more than $70,700 to Professor G.W.K. Cavill and Dr P.L. Robertson, of the University of New South Wales for their work in studying the venoms, attractants and repellents of Australian insects with some hope of finding chemicals useful in their control.

In the preamble to the Charter of the United Nations, the determination of member peoples is proclaimed 'to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.' The signatories of the Charter also declared 'to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours.'

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The echoes to the declaration of these precepts were very hollow indeed when the issue of Czechoslovakia unfolded before us in recent times. There was no cognisance of equal rights of nations, no demonstration of tolerance and peaceful intent with one's neighbours in the brutal overrunning of that hapless country by Russia and her Warsaw satellites.

It was interesting to hear the Australian Minister for External Affairs, Mr Hasluck, speak on the issue of relations between nations in the United Nations General Assembly earlier this month. The aggression against Czechoslovakia, he said, had cast new doubt on the attitude of the Soviet Union towards the provisions of the Charter of the U.N., which quite clearly forbid the threat or use of force against a nation.

He pointed out that the Soviet Union had argued that relations between member countries of the Warsaw Pact were an internal matter and not the concern of other countries. But what this really amounted to was a stance by the Soviet Union that Warsaw Pact members were not to be regarded as independent members of the United Nations and so were not entitled to the protection of the Charter. The External Affairs Minister contrasted this attitude of the so-called 'Socialist Commonwealth' with the British Commonwealth, an essential element of which was the freedom of any one of its members to leave the Commonwealth if it wishes to do so. However, the Soviet Union apparently did not recognise the right of members in its grouping to leave — further, Soviet Union Foreign Minister Gromyko and other Russian authorities had spoken out against any such right.

So much for the rights of nations:

Not everyone is fully convinced that the vast funds spent on manned journeys into space are justified, but few could have failed to be stirred by pride when Apollo 7 returned to earth from a record tour of space this week. The astronauts Commander Schirra, Major Donn Eisele, and Walter Cunningham landed safely after the world's longest earth-orbiting flight, covering more than four million miles. Experts regarded the success of the flight as paving the way for a moon-orbiting flight by two astronauts next Christmas, and leading up to a moon landing some time next year or early 1970. While those back on earth may derive little apparent benefit from these exploits of space, they serve to demonstrate man's relentless mission not only to penetrate the darkness of the secrets locked within his own planet but to make an intrepid assault on those fascinating problems beyond.