

Personal report

## Obituary to Professor Paul Grange (1943–2003)



Paul Grange was born in Lyon during the war. He graduated from the University of Lyon, which, in 1970 granted him a Ph.D., for a work done at the Institut de Recherche sur la Catalyse, in Villeurbanne-Lyon. For his military obligations he chose volunteer service overseas in the National University of La Plata (Argentina).

Almost immediately after his return home, he got a post-doctoral position in the recently created Laboratory of Catalysis and Solid State Chemistry in the newly split Louvain University. To be precise, he was half of the two people staff of this lab, the other person being myself, arrived 2 years before. Paul Grange had plenty of projects. In this large group he could exert with remarkable efficiency his diplomatic skills in conflicts, reserving to a much smaller circle his capacity to grouch and grumble and to emit sarcastic opinions against bureaucracy. Conversely, humour and jokes were generously distributed in an equitable way. In the following years, he never lost this pleasant attitude. The innumerable friends participating in the funeral ceremony and the messages received show that, through all his life, he had made indefectible friends among students, post-docs and colleagues, all over the world.

In the course of years, the scientific activity of Professor Grange progressively shifted away from solid state chemistry, his initial interest during his Ph.D. Later his results in the synthesis of high transition temperature superconductors and outstanding success with highly dispersed nitrides, oxynitrides and the very original synthesis of more compli-

cated compounds schematically represented by AIPON—ZrPON—AlGaPON—VAION, made this background crucial. Rather than transforming the “pioneer” period to established activity, the momentum was not lost. As solids, the oxides were followed by sulphided catalysts, carbides, nitrides, then again oxides, and hydrotreatment followed by hydrogenation, some acid catalysis, base catalysis and complete oxidation of pollutants. Changes made him happy, thanks to his natural dynamism and imagination. He even forgot the handicapped drosophila flies of the geneticist neighbour that periodically invaded his desk in the pioneering days of Leuven. But another “pioneer” flavour should have been spared to him. In the course of 31 years, he changed position no less than seven times: either you are too young, you have too much experience, or your diploma is not the right one! In spite of that, or because of that, he could manage to have some sort of a “sabbatical leave”, in 1983–1984, at INTEVEP in Caracas, a stay rich in fruitful teachings, not exclusively those that you could expect. The following period corresponded to still more activity extensions, Paul Grange having the full responsibility of a large part of the laboratory programs.

The last change was in 1996, the unexpected, incredible promotion directly from part-time Assistant Professor (“Chargé de Cours”) to Full Professor (“Professeur Ordinaire”). From that time on, the remarkable dynamism of Professor Grange led him to combine fundamental research on selected advanced subjects of catalysis (especially oxynitrides, basic catalysis) with more application-oriented developments. In most cases the work was directly related to specific problems of industry, but nevertheless permitted the completion of 29 Ph.D. theses and 43 graduate research programs, and the publication of 418 articles.

Paul Grange engaged in an impressive development of activities, initiating co-operative programs in Belgium and with foreign universities (Bucharest, Tunis, Caen, Argentina), and creating one of the activity branches of CERTECH, a university subsidiary for applied research. In UCL, he became member of various committees, was selected as member of the Research Advisory Council of the university, where his work impressed the Rector and his colleagues of all departments, and was elected Chairman of the Department of Applied Chemistry and Bio-Industries a

few days before his death. In less than 7 years Paul Grange was able to fully develop his broad capacities. He certainly felt that as a deserved compensation after many years of uncertainties. But the price was worries and work overload, with that terrible end in July.

B. Delmon

(P. Grange was correspondent for the Newsbrief Section, Applied Catalysis, until 31 December 1989; member of the editorial board, Applied Catalysis A, 1998–2000).