

Editorial

The life and work of Josef Rudinger – a postscript

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My Memoir [1] of Josef Rudinger was published to coincide with the recent symposium [2] in Prague, at which there was a session [3] dedicated to his memory. It stimulated no little discussion and reflection about him before, during and afterwards. Some of the points arising are worthy of record, and in any case there is a correction to the Memoir which needs to be made, hence this Postscript.

So let me begin with the correction. EPS-1 attendance was described [1] on p.399: 'There were 27 official participants, but only six from the West, and **one** from America'. Dr GT Young, who was there, has gently pointed out to me that all were European. It was indeed so. My last phrase has lost a single character through the intervention of a ghostly hand, resulting in an exasperating inversion of meaning: it should read 'and **none** from America'. In fact there was nearly one from America (though not belonging to America) — we heard from Leo Benoiton that Leonidas Zervas, who then spent much of his time in Bethesda, was invited but had to write from there and decline because his arm was in plaster.

I was asked why I had not cited *The World of Peptides* [4] in my Memoir. It does have a short section on Rudinger, and mentions him and his work many times. But although this book is indeed a very valuable source of information on many aspects of the development of peptide science late in the last century, it should not be taken as historical authority, and in fact its short section on Rudinger's life is rather misleading in several respects.

Among the more remarkable details to emerge was the fact that in 1937 Erich Wünsch's father Gustav, Mayor of Liberec-Harcov [Reichensberg] in Bohemia, met officially with a group of Communists including Josef Rudinger's father, following an anti-Hitler demonstration. Later, the young Wünsch and the young Rudinger were aircrew in opposing air forces, and might have met in action; but fortunately the first encounter of these two leaders of peptide science was on the ground in peaceful circumstances, at EPS-1.

In my brief outline [5] of Rudinger's life I showed a photograph of the delegates at a Gregynog (Wales) meeting in 1970, to illustrate the fact that Rudinger attended small meetings as well as the major Symposia. There he is in the front row with his great friend Geoffrey Young; many other denizens of the field are

there too (so am I, but modesty forbids identification). I had forgotten, however, that after this meeting George Kenner whisked Rudinger away to Liverpool for a meeting to discuss the difficulties of the lysozyme synthesis then being attempted there. Rudinger's knowledge of the peptide literature was as legendary as his gift for languages, which with his practical expertise made him a valuable as well as willing consultant.

On Rudinger's attention to practical detail, one contributor [6] took as an example the technique favoured by him at the Prague Institute for preparing analytical samples, using a little bulb tube with an integral sintered glass filter in a side tube, use of which 'was practically a ceremony'. I was myself introduced to this technique by Rudinger on one of his visits to Oxford about 1965, and all the analytical samples for the crystalline compounds in my own DPhil thesis were prepared this way. Similarly, some years later when I was making a hesitant start in independent research, not long before he died, he introduced me to the 'mixed bed' ion exchange resin technique [7], which provided an instant solution to a problematic purification I was struggling with at the time. I feel sure these personal experiences are typical of what many others will have learned from him.

Most sad of the anecdotes driven from the undergrowth of memory is one which was related by Michal Lebl [8]. Not long before Josef Rudinger's death, his successor in Prague, Karel Bláha, set out to see him, bearing a letter from his numerous Prague friends. But at the airport he was stopped and searched, someone having reported (reader, before condemning the sneak, reflect what you would have done with the State on your back). The letter was found and Bláha was sent away, his possibility for foreign travel inhibited for several years. As Michal Lebl told us, it was only concern that there would be gross political fallout which prevented dedication to Josef Rudinger of the great Prague-edited work [9] on neurohypophyseal hormone analogues.

Peptide Science has had many great leaders; mostly they have made their important contributions while young, or at worst middle-aged. So the young people now active may be tempted to think that what I have said here and elsewhere is sentimental hyperbole. Forget it, young cynics: Josef Rudinger was a one-off.



Figure 1 Participants at the Gregynog meeting in Wales, 1970. Numbering from the left, the well-known European peptide scientists present include: *front row* 6 Bodanszky, 7 Kenner, 10 Wieland, 12 Hassall, 13 Rudinger, 14 Young; *middle row* 8 Rydon, 10 Beyerman, 13 Davies; *back row* 2 Sheppard, 8 Scoffone, 13 Bricas, 16 Szelke.

When I met him I was also a young cynic, not easily impressed by anybody five minutes older than me, but I was immediately hanging on his every word. He was a great man; I wish I had known him better.

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