Remembering Professor Arnošt Kotyk (1930 - 2020)

Prof. RNDr. Arnošt Kotyk, DrSc. passed away on Sunday 9 August 2020, shortly after having celebrated his ninetieth birthday on 12 July with his family and friends. Arnošt Kotyk was an important representative of our biochemistry, especially in the field of biological membranes and membrane transport. He was considered to be the central figure of membrane science in former Czechoslovakia, as well as the founder of the school of membrane transport. He connected his scientific career with the Academy of Sciences, first with the Institute of Microbiology and later with the Institute of Physiology. Arnošt Kotyk had an aptitude not only for natural sciences but also for foreign languages. This made it much easier for him to establish and develop contacts with colleagues abroad, even under the previous regime. Not mentioning his unprecedented social skills which helped him in this respect. During my student years at Albertov, Prague, he was occasionally invited to give membrane lectures in the advanced biochemistry curriculum - this was always a treat for us, similarly to the field trips to Kotyk's membrane transport laboratory in Prague-Krč. Arnošt Kotyk, then a docent, was a true arbiter of elegance with an engaging, expressively very precise and even disciplined manner of presentation. He definitely approached his scientific work like that, however, he was at the same time socially entertaining, he enjoyed storytelling, and his love for his mother tongue and other languages was reflected in that. Kotyk's membrane transport team earned great acclaim both at home and abroad, and for their original findings on the molecular mechanisms of membrane transport in yeast Kotyk's team received national honors, but also, most importantly, gained substantial international reputation. In the early 1970s they had published a very successful textbook on membrane transport in New York. This was followed by other highly valuable monographs, including "Biochemistry of Transport Processes" by J. Horák, A. Kotyk and K. Sigler (Prague, Academia, 1984). It has been a sought-after source of knowledge in the dynamically developing field of biochemistry and molecular biology of membranes. After the Fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, Arnošt Kotyk also devoted himself to translation and publishing, in addition to translating several books popularizing the modern view of processes in living matter; He had a special merit in the Czech edition of the textbook ´Biochemistry´ by the Voet family (Prague, Victoria Publishing, 1995), as well as in the Czech edition of ´Albertse´ or the textbook ´Basics of Cell Biology´ (Ústí nad Labem, Espero Publishing, 2005). Both of these great works still serve as recommended and popular textbooks in Czech for students of natural sciences and related disciplines. Professor Kotyk was a long-time member of our Society and as a chairman of its Nomenclature Committee he took care of the cultivation of biochemical nomenclature, terminology and the scientific language in general. It is worth noting that he did so at a time when the "omics" era was yet to come to biochemistry and molecular biology, with which came the difficult-to-manage defence against Anglicisms. We are slowly beginning to realize how much we need Professor Kotyk for the linguistic cultivation of professional expressions in our field of science nowadays. Otherwise, we may happen to lose contact with the general public, who will then stop understanding us, which could lead to quite serious consequences. And one must not forget about our students in Czech study programmes either. The list of Professor Kotyk's contributions to the Biochemical Society is certainly not ending, I should definitely mention his long-standing "diplomatic service" in the IUBMB as well as his management of the National Committee of the Biochemical Union. Professor Arnošt Kotyk will remain in our hearts and memories as an outstanding scientific personality who significantly contributed to raising the international fame and reputation of our country in the field of cell membrane biochemistry and membrane transport. He deserves our profound thanks for all the good he has done for our biochemistry.

Deeply honouring his memory!

Libor Grubhoffer
Chairman of the CSBMB