



Jiří Velemínský

**Member of Editorial Board
of Biologia Plantarum**

septuagenarian

It should not be a celebratory cliché to state that Jiří Velemínský who will be seventy this year, is a person who enjoys general trust and love. That he gets it not only from his colleagues in the laboratories of his Institute, but also from the highest echelons of the academic establishment, the management of the Academy of Sciences in Prague. The source of his extraordinary popularity lies in his personal integrity which did not leave him throughout his whole scientific career.

For example, during years 1990-1998, the time of exceptional social change in our country, he was at the wheel of the Institute of Experimental Botany of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and he managed to lead it successfully through a period of unexpected perils. Not only through property restitutions, asset stripping of many organizations, but also through a real natural disaster of floods of unexpected magnitude which in 1998 afflicted the Moravian Laboratories of his Institute. In the moments of crisis his thoughtful decisions were based on his longlife experience. People could not help it but to be impressed by his natural authority, by his conceptual thinking without loosing the sense of purpose, by his ability to listen to everybody and discuss the problems, and if necessary to look for the best compromise on the way of reaching the right decision. He is the ideal arbiter who himself works hard, who acknowledges the principle of personal responsibility and the concept of scientific ethics. For those who surround him he is a true leader, a trusted colleague and a good friend. He is simply a decent man. It seems to be a simple description but very few people would be able to earn it throughout their whole life. It lies at the base of Jiří Velemínský's general popularity, gives trust to his advice and provides answer to the question why is he still able to keep his important position at the leadership of the Academy of Sciences.

Jiří Velemínský comes from a farming family. He was born in 1933 in Southern Bohemia, in the town of České Budějovice. His childhood interest in nature has eventually channelled into studies of natural sciences. In 1957, after his first degree at the Faculty of Biology of the Charles University in Prague he started his research assistantship at the then Institute of Biology of the Academy of Sciences. He achieved his PhD at the Institute of Experimental Botany, where he is doing his scientific work until today. In 1968 he was awarded RNDr at the Faculty of Natural Sciences of the Charles University.

His first and major scientific study was an outcome of his doctoral thesis, called "The Interaction of Mutagens with a Plant Cell, Suffered Damage and Reparation of its DNA". All the subsequent work was based on molecular and cellular approaches to plant mutation. He has been mainly concentrating his research on DNA damage by plant mutagens and its repair mechanisms. That itself is connected with the problem of enzymologic repair of DNA and expressions of the corresponding repair genes. If he were a sportsman, he would have received gold medal already for his first achievements. A review in Mutation research reads: "The repair of plant DNA damaged by alkylating agens has been

studied mainly by the group at the Institute of experimental Botany in Prague. The results from 1972 and 1973 represent the first positive proof of the capacity of plant cells (barley) to repair mutagen damaged DNA by the dark repair.

Those were the days of the first steps in general direction of the molecular biology research and Jiří Velemínský's experiments were methodically focussed upon DNA. That, with innovative use of the current model, has brought him excellent results in the study of plant genetics. His other achievements - he was one of the first scientists who imported into our country the plant *Arabidopsis thaliana*. Nobody knew then that it eventually will become the Queen among the plants. Articles in *Arabidopsis* research from that time remind us more of freemasonry secrets than of the start of promising research. Intention of this article is not to write a regular CV, but it would be a mistake not to mention that he has published more than 150 scientific articles with rich bibliography. His affiliation with the world scientific establishment led him to long term stays in various countries. He worked in Germany (Institute of Genetics and Crop Plants, Gatersleben, and in Department of Agronomy, University of Göttingen), in Sweden (Department of Biochemistry, University of Stockholm) and USA (Department of Biology, Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, NY, and Department of Biology, WSU, Pullman, WA).

As a member of the highest Czech scientific organization, the Academy of Sciences, he has held before and after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 many conceptual and executive functions. For example in the Scientific Council, in the Academic Council, and also in the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic. He also participated in the academic running of the Charles University and of the Southern Bohemian University in České Budějovice. It is also his share that The Academy of Sciences once again became a body supporting serious academic research and recovered it's once lost social status and credibility. In no small extend his ability to be a patient negotiator, who listens to his colleagues and prefers the dialogue to a monologue, helped to achieve that noble goal.

What has not been mentioned yet in our evaluation of the jubilant's social and scientific merits? The human side of his personality? It would be rather difficult to finger it out, because there is no marked difference between his understanding of public and civic life. However, his friends know that he likes to spend his holidays in his cottage in Vysočina (the Highlands), where he started to plant trees. We still have to wait for the results of his efforts. He likes classical music and art exhibitions. His pet is a cat.

Editorial Board of *Biologia Plantarum* consider themselves very fortunate to have Jiří Velemínský among themselves and are grateful for all his work and his good will to publish his articles in their magazine.

In the name of the scientific community, his colleagues and friends we wish him Very Happy Birthday. We are looking forward to many years of mutual cooperation.

On behalf of Editorial Board
J. KREKULE (Praha)