



Miloš Ondřej

Member of Editorial Board

1940 – 2012

Miloš Ondřej has gone forever

On 10th December 2012, Assoc. Prof. RNDr. Miloš Ondřej, DrSc. succumbed to long illness. He is survived by his beloved family. He will no more educate university students, preside over the Czech Committee for Genetically Modified Organisms and Products, review any manuscript for Biologia Plantarum, and write books.

Miloš Ondřej was born during the Second World War. He spent his childhood and youth in a small town Sedlec in Central Bohemia. When he reached his tenth, his father died and Miloš helped to his mother with housekeeping and upbringing his younger brother. All these circumstances influenced deeply his personality. He learned to live modestly and think more about needs of others than of himself. This character accompanied firmly his whole life. He was ready to help everybody at anytime.

*Young Miloš enjoyed reading books and gardening, what together with the possible influence of his uncles, university teachers, led him to love nature. After successful graduation from the secondary school, he started studying biology at Faculty of Science, Charles University, Prague. His Diploma Thesis at Department of Plant Physiology, Microbiology, and Genetics was oriented to a challenging topic of plant genetics at that time – the evaluation of possible influence of calcium and magnesium ions on frequency of gene recombinations in barley. He graduated from Charles University in year 1962 but already during the last year of his study, he took an opportunity to co-operate in scientific activities of his future long-term employer – the Institute of Experimental Botany of the Czechoslovak Academy of Science (IEB CAS) in Prague. During the years 1962 - 1974, Miloš started his scientific career in IEB CAS when studying cytogenetics and mutagenesis in *Drosophila*. Later on, he was interested in plant cytogenetics, and since the year 1980, he fully focused to the research of plant transgenesis. He was among the first biologists who moved from Prague to a newly established Biology Centre in České Budějovice. Thanks to his enthusiasm and an enormous effort, he initiated formation of the IEB CAS Department of Plant Breeding Theory (a key part of the later Institute of Plant Molecular Biology AS CR) and started development of plant transgenesis in former Czechoslovakia.*

Miloš Ondřej was fascinated by new plant technologies and their applications in practice, especially in agronomy. Soon, he started to give lectures on plant biotechnology at Faculty of Agronomy in České Budějovice and following the formation of University of South Bohemia, he also managed the Department of Genetics of the Faculty of Biology, transformed later to Faculty of Science. He educated there numerous students in genetics, molecular biology, and gene engineering. After political changes in the country, he was very active in establishing an international co-operation of faculty with other universities abroad and mutual exchange of students. Among others, he was a co-ordinator of the TEMPUS project. Miloš Ondřej became soon well known as an author of two important book monographies: "Cytogenetics and Molecular Genetics of Plants" (1985) and together with Prof. Jaroslav Drobnič "Gene Engineering of Cultivated Plants" (1992) which became popular textbooks among university students, Ph.D. students, and important source of information to specialists in plant biology and agronomy. We cannot also forget about his excellent organizing skills as he initiated numerous courses on molecular genetics, plant gene engineering, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Together with Prof. Drobnič, they soon recognized an enormous potential of new biotechnology and its possible risks. Already in 1986, five years before the first legislative act on GMOs came in power in Czechoslovakia, they established the Czech Commission of Plant Transgenesis which consulted biosafety aspects of GMOs with scientists, plant biotech companies, and Ministry of Environment (ME). High scientific credit of the Commission ruled by Miloš Ondřej led soon to its role of an advisory body of ME and tight co-operation in Czech GMO legislation formation. In 1991, Miloš Ondřej became a first chairman of the Czech Committee for GMOs and Products. He did not forget about popularization of science in media, especially by writing articles and organizing seminars and discussions to a wide public. For a long time, he was also an active member of the Biologia Plantarum editorial board. Serious health problems forced him to close his scientific and university activities in 2004 and later on also the others.

We all admired his extraordinary personality, and it makes our bereavement even sadder. On behalf of his colleagues, Czech Committee for GMOs and Products, editorial staff of Biologia Plantarum, and the academic community, I would like to thank him for the scientific heritage he left behind and the inspiration he endowed us for all his life.

Slavomír Rakouský