

A leading figure in the field of plant physiology

RNDr. Bohdan Slavík, DrSc.

passed away on 1st August 2018 at the age of 93.

Growing up in a family of teachers in Hradec Kralove, it was obvious he would go to university. We met Bohdan again a few months after the end of the World War II (1945) at the Faculty of Science of Charles University where he enrolled for the summer term to study natural history and chemistry. His real area of interest was experimental approaches in the biology of plants. He applied to do a thesis under supervision of Prof. Sylvestr Prát at the Department of Plant Physiology. The subject of his proposed thesis was moss. His work was essentially in the field of cytology.

*Work at the University was totally disrupted when the communists seized power in 1948. Though this led to changes in personal circumstances, Bohdan was able to complete his PhD thesis. It was at the particular point, when basic structural changes in Czechoslovak science were made. A soviet style structure was implemented along with the creation of a Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, which incorporated a wide spectrum of disciplines. In 1953 Bohdan was accepted at the Institute of Biology, which included the Department of Plant Physiology and the Department of Phytopathology. In 1967 these two departments combined to become the independent Institute of Experimental Botany at the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. This is where Bohdan spent the rest of his scientific career. He began by defending his PhD thesis before Dr. Rudolf Řetovský, the head of the Department of Plant Physiology at that time, on the subject of “water deficit in plants”. The actual experiments suffered from a lack of equipment and experience, in other words, it was “a greenfield work”. It was necessary to improvise. With the support of Prof. Bohumil Němec, Bohdan Slavík took the first important step and initiated the creation and publication of a national magazine *Biologia Plantarum* in 1959. This was the first domestic platform for the presentation of the country's own intellectual output. It is notable that all the time, while searching for components for the construction and maintenance of specialised apparatus to measure water potential, photosynthetically active radiation, and infrared analysis of CO₂ concentration, Bohdan was always looking for ways this could be used by a wider scientific community. A moral principle in practice. The general aim of all this was the complex study of the water deficit on photosynthetic production. A fundamental issue in agriculture and forestry.*

Bohdan's intellectual ability was very effective in international promoting the Department of Plant Physiology, and from 1962, the independent Department of Experimental Botany. As early as in 1965, he initiated the first international symposium on Water Stress in Plants. At the same time, his monograph on “Methods of Water Transfer in Plants” was published and subsequently translated by the publishing house Springer.

Internationally, he played a role of scientist and organiser, and at home, he assumed the position of the head of the Department of Photosynthesis and Water Regime.

On the domestic, at that time a still Czechoslovakian professional and social front, Bohdan was very active in countless ways. Undoubtedly aided by his considerable charm, he was successful at organising, coordinating, and evaluating. At the core, however, there was his personal authority. He was able to assess a situation at a glance. With a natural ability to distinguish between the ephemeral and the substantial, and the vision to see the distant horizon, Bohdan belongs to a generation, the current one has forgotten. However, I do not doubt for an instant that his moral and intellectual legacy is instrumental in maintaining the welcoming and inspirational atmosphere that pervades the Department of Experimental Botany, which he helped create, to this day.

J. Krekule