

IN MEMORIAM

Prof dr Velimir B. Vouk

1919—1984

Velimir Vouk, an internationally recognized scientist and expert in the study of the relationship between chemical agents and environmental health died on 23 July 1984 at Nort Carolina Memorial Hospital in Chapel Hill, N. C., USA. The Croatian Chemical Society has lost its former President (1960—1962), this journal a member of the Editorial Board (1952—1964) and the scientific community of this country a distinguished colleague.

Some people build their lives around a specialized theme, a single thread; Vouk built his around many, and by the end he had woven them into a rich and harmonious fabric. No one but Vouk himself could be fully aware of all ramifications of his varied endeavours. This writer who had known him as a supervisor, co-worker and colleague for a few years, and as an intimate friend for some thirty years, cannot hope to do justice to more than limited aspects of his multifaceted life.

Vouk's career, which led to international distinction, friends throughout the world, and extensive travel and work in almost all parts of the globe, radiated from the region of Lika: Born on 9 December 1919 in Gospić, Croatia, V. B. Vouk grew up and was educated in Zagreb where he graduated in chemical engineering in 1944. Having spent two academic years at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine under C. N. Davies, T. Bedford and S. Masey he received his Ph. D. in physics from University of London in December 1948 after successfully defending the thesis: »Scattering and Extinction of Light by Dust Particles«. At the same time he studied statistics, statistical mechanics, thermodynamics and mathematical methods in physics and quantum mechanics at post-graduate level and received corresponding certificates of the University of London. The experience gained at the time served him in good stead for his later teaching engagements at home in these, then relatively new subjects.

Dr Vouk started his teaching career at the University of Zagreb as Lecturer in the Department of Physical Chemistry, Faculty of Pharmacy, in 1945. In 1949 he moved to the Department of Hygiene and Social Medicine, Faculty of Medicine where he was promoted to Senior Lecturer (1952) and Associate Professor (1955). In 1960 he was elected Associate Professor in Physical Chemistry, Faculty of Science. From 1954 to 1956 he was appointed Acting Director and in the period from 1959 to 1964 he held the position of the Director of the Institute for Medical Research and Occupational Health of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb.

From 1964 to 1967 he was Visiting Professor and Consultant for health and safety at the Atomic Energy Establishment in Cairo, Egypt, and for the period 1967—1980 he worked within the Division of Environmental Health,

World Health Organization, Geneva. In 1974 Dr Vouk was appointed Chief of the Control of Environmental Pollution and Hazards Unit, and in 1978 Manager of the Environmental Health Criteria and Standards Unit. In these capacities his main responsibility was the preparation of environmental health criteria documents, which became the most authoritative scientific information in the field of environmental health. He took a very active part in the planning of the new International Programme on Chemical Safety.

In 1980 Dr Vouk became Visiting Scientist at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, USA. In 1983 he was appointed Acting Director and in 1984 Director of the Office of Health Hazard Assessment within the same Institute.

Dr Vouk has written more than one hundred papers in the field of physics, physical and analytical chemistry, physiology, and environmental health.

Dr Vouk was co-editor with L. Friberg and G. F. Nordberg of the *»Handbook on the Toxicology of Metals«*, published by Elsevier, Amsterdam, in 1977. His ideas, knowledge and stringent analytical views were invaluable in the preparation of this Handbook. Dr Vouk is co-editor of the second edition of the Handbook which is in preparation.

Dr Vouk's rich scientific background, his sound judgement and extensive experience made him an outstanding authority in his field. He will also be remembered as a loyal, generous and warm friend who always responded to a request for advice or assistance and who has given to many of us many pleasant and bright memories. He will certainly be missed by his many colleagues and friends.

It seems appropriate to end this obituary by quoting Dr David P. Rall, NIEHS Director who said: *»The sense of shock can be felt tangibly among his colleagues at NIEHS. However, despite the sudden loss of Dr Vouk, all of us feel privileged to have worked with this exceptional scientist, who was also a fine human being and a friend.«*

O. A. Weber