

## On the Occasion of the Seventieth Birthday of Professor Vladimir Prelog

There are days in the life of an individual, organization and even of humanity when it is especially worth while casting a glance at the past, analyzing the present and looking towards the future. In a way, all the four aspects mentioned above deserve consideration now when this issue of the *Croatica Chemica Acta* is dedicated to the seventieth birthday of Vladimir Prelog.

We should like to use this opportunity to remind our readers that he is the second Croat, the second Yugoslav, *i. e.* the second native son of our country to win the highest scientific reward in the world while working abroad. In what way and to what extent could the results of his work, for which he achieved the status of a Nobel prize-winner, have been accomplished had he stayed in our country after 1941 is difficult to guess. Yet, the wide range of his studies, as reflected by the accompanying list of his publications, in a way reminds us that in addition to talent, working and creative capacity and especially individual motivation, the work of a scientist is also determined by the equipment of the laboratory and the richness of the library in the institution where he works and by the scientific orientation and atmosphere of his environment. Undoubtedly all these factors contributed to the formation of his scientific personality, so that 35 years after leaving the University of Zagreb he appeared as a Swiss scientist to deliver his Nobel lecture in Stockholm. The text of this lecture, which is being published in a Croatian translation, thanks to the good will of the Nobel Foundation (Nobelstiftelsen) and of the lecturer, also explains the reasons why this high honour was awarded.

Although in the past we used to commemorate quite a few anniversaries of our distinguished chemists, now we do it only exceptionally. I must admit that Professor Prelog was in principle against such festive commemorations. Therefore, we did not ask his students, collaborators and friends to send us special contributions for this commemoration, as we did when we devoted a special issue of our journal to the seventieth anniversary of Professor L. Ružička (*Croat. Chem. Acta* **29** (1957) 139—476).

We believe that on this occasion we must not forget to say something about Professor Prelog as a man acting in quite a different field. Thirtyfive years have only recently passed since the time when Professor Prelog found himself in a position capable of influencing the fate of several hundred thousand people during the war immediately before and after the occupation of Yugoslavia. At that time when he was in the ranks of those opposing evil, and abiding by the principle that they should oppose it without doing anything evil themselves, he saved many people from repressive measures for whom the formula that »the Zagreb waters are poisonous« could have been fatal.

In our analysis of Professor Prelog's interaction with our society, especially with our chemists, universities and economic circles, we have found a number of data which are worth mentioning; however, since most of them will be published by other organizations which have a more profound influence on our society, we have decided to limit this presentation to a few essentials.

Professor Vladimir Prelog was born on 23rd July, 1906 in Sarajevo. He completed his secondary school in Osijek and Zagreb and graduated at the Technical High School in Prague where he also obtained his Ph. D. degree in 1929. Between 1935 and 1940 he was Assistant Professor and from 1940 to 1941 Associate Professor in Organic Chemistry at the Faculty of Chemical Engineering of the University of Zagreb. In 1941 he joined Professor L. Ružička's laboratory at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule in Zürich, where he acted as Private Assistant Professor from 1942 to 1945, as Honorary Professor between 1945 and 1947, Associate Professor from 1947 to 1950, Professor of Special Organic Chemistry from 1950 and Professor of Organic Chemistry from 1957. His first paper in the *Archives of Chemistry and Pharmacy* (*Arhiv za kemiju i farmaciju*), the predecessor of *Croat. Chem. Acta*, about the life and work of Professor Emil Votoček, was published in 1932. In a series of his publications his co-authors were his students and collaborators from Yugoslavia: E. Cerkovnikov, V. Hahn, D. Kolbah, M. Piantanida, A. Režek, S. Heimbach, K. Božičević, R. Seiwerth, K. Balenović, N. Šoštarić, E. Guštak, P. Stern, A. Komzak, M. Proštenik, M. V. Mijović, S. Borčić, M. Lj. Mihailović, M. Ternbach, T. Tomljenović, B. Serdarević, Z. Cimerman, D. Bedeković. Eight of his 365 scientific publications between 1921 (1927) and 1976 appeared in Yugoslav journals.

Professor Prelog's direct participation in our scientific, university and economic (pharmaceutical industry) life has by no means been limited to those seven years of his activity in this country in the capacity of a university professor. Therefore, the outstanding prize awarded to Vladimir Prelog by the Nobel Committee of the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences, as well as the commemoration of his seventieth anniversary are only reminders of the great value and importance of an exceptional man, both in the space and time of those interactions which, by the mediation of science, represent the best and the most precious general human activity.

Zagreb, May 15th, 1976.

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