

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF ACTA BIOLOGIAE EXPERIMENTALIS-ACTA NEUROBIOLOGIAE EXPERIMENTALIS

This year the Nencki Institute of Experimental Biology will celebrate its 60th anniversary. The journal published by the Institute, *Acta Neurobiologiae Experimentalis*, which is a continuation of the former *Acta Biologiae Experimentalis*, will at the same time celebrate its 50th anniversary. It is one of the few Polish scientific journals which can boast such a long period of unbroken activity.

The first volume of *Acta Biologiae Experimentalis* appeared in 1928. The journal was founded by Kazimierz Białaszewicz, the well-known physiologist and biochemist who was also director of the Institute for many years. From its very beginning the journal has been open to Polish and foreign authors representing various research centers. Articles on physiology and biochemistry, neurophysiology, ecology and protozoology were published. Although published by the Institute, it was not merely the Institute journal. It seems that this particular feature was and still is the main reason for its duration and continuity.

Another important feature was that the editors accepted the rule of publishing papers of Polish authors in translation into one of the "congress languages". Already in the third volume of 1929 appeared an article written in German, which was the language of biology at that time. Beginning with Volume 12 published in 1938, all articles appearing in the journal had been written in one of the congress languages, with the English language being dominant. Later English became the only language of the journal being the present-day language of biology.

Today it seems quite obvious that a scientific journal cannot be limited to publishing articles of only one research institute and the languages used must be understood in the world of science. Journals which publish articles representing a wide variety of subject, with the place where they were written as the only link between them, usually

do not find their way to special libraries, nor to proper information centers. Today we also realize that publishing articles in one of the little known languages automatically limits the number of readers and makes the journal a publication of local importance, which in the case of highly specialized periodicals leads to the lowering of standards. In the 20's this idea and its realization were not yet generally accepted.

Finally, the high level of editorial work was another factor that contributed significantly to the continued existence of *Acta Biologiae Experimentalis*. Only works deserving attention were published and the editing principles up to this day lost nothing of their soundness.

In spite of its merits, the journal had its faults, fairly common at the time: it published articles from many fields of biology and was not issued regularly. It is true that formerly the specialization within biology and biological literature was not as indispensable as it is now, but even then this multi-interest character of *Acta Biologiae Experimentalis* was a disadvantage. Special libraries usually avoid journals of too general a character and researchers do not like to leaf through publications to find the one they are interested in among the multiplicity of other unrelated works.

In spite of that, the journal could be found in many research centers thanks to the large-scale publication exchange program undertaken by the Institute. Articles published in the journal were read and quoted in Polish and foreign biological literature. Nowadays, publishing a biological journal of a very general, comprehensive nature is in fact unrealistic, unless it is a magazine popularizing science. Only very few journals, such as *Nature* or *Science*, can afford this general character. Also a journal published irregularly cannot enter subscription lists, which is almost a denial of its very existence. Establishing the specialization and regular publication of the journal took a long time. In 1962 Jerzy Konorski became editor-in-chief and Stefan Brutkowski the co-editor of *Acta Biologiae Experimentalis* (taking over the editorship after the late Mieczysław Bogucki), and that date marked the change of the journal's profile although the title was not changed till 1970. Thus, the biochemistry articles were dropped, since *Acta Biochimica Polonica* was already a very good and internationally known journal. Articles representing protozoology found a better reading public in *Acta Protozoologica*, a journal published by the Institute, with an international editorial board. Hydrobiology, also represented in the Institute, had its own all-Polish journal founded in the 20's. In this way, after 34 years of existence, *Acta Biologiae Experimentalis* acquired the character of a specialized journal, publishing works on a unified subject, namely neurophysiology.

It seems that this modification of the journal and its regular appearance as a quarterly were the decisive factors in preventing its disappearance from the publishing market. Its last volumes, published before 1962 pointed to a decline. Some authors sent their articles to new and specialized journals which appeared regularly and were read by specialists. Foreign authors were kept away from the journal by its too large scope and irregular issue.

The success of the modified journal undoubtedly was due to its new editor Jerzy Konorski, himself an outstanding neurophysiologist, head of the Neurophysiology Department and later director of the Institute. He was successfully aided in his editorial work by his students and followers, Stefan Brutkowski, who tragically died in 1966, and Bogusław Żernicki. It was their desire not only to save the journal but also to make it a specialized periodical of an international reputation. The editorial staff consisted of Polish specialists and also well-known foreign scientists.

All these changes caused a growing interest of foreign authors in the journal. At the same time the Department of Neurophysiology established new contacts with similar centers around the world. The exchange of scientists enlarged the number of authors and readers of the journal.

The change of character had to be reflected also in the title. The title *Acta Neurobiologiae Experimentalis* was chosen from among several propositions and it was used for the first time in Volume 30 (1970). It seemed to be a well chosen title, since it was close enough to the old one, so the volume numbering remained the same and it clearly defined the field it was devoted to. Up to now seven volumes, 30 (1970) through 37 (1977), were published under the new title.

In a relatively short time the journal underwent a number of significant changes. It can be said that introducing necessary editorial changes became the principle and the policy of the editors.

Jerzy Konorski, the creator of *Acta Neurobiologiae Experimentalis*, was not destined to devote many more years to the journal. His death in 1973 was a great loss for neurophysiology and the journal as well. Still, he built solid foundations for its future development.

Bogusław Żernicki, Konorski's student and co-worker for many years, took over the editing of the journal in 1974. He had been its associate editor since 1967. Irena Łukaszewska, also Konorski's student, became associate editor in 1974 and Ewa Stajudowa managing editor in 1972. At present, 31 persons make up the editorial staff. Some of them represent foreign research institutes from: the Soviet Union, the United States, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, GDR, Italy and Switzerland. There have been some changes in membership depending on the contribution and the cooperation of the members.

One more change helped the regular publication of the journal: it has been granted the status of a priority journal in Poland and has been changed from a quarterly into a bimonthly. This operation also helped to shorten the release time.

The Institute, from the very beginning of its publishing activities, paid attention to the documentation of articles published in its journals. Therefore the *Acta*, today and previously, is and was documented in many well-known reference sources, such as: *Biological Abstracts*, *Referativnyi Zhurnal*, *Berichte*, *Psychological Abstracts* and *Excerpta Medica*. The journal has proved its place among the 1,000 most widely read scientific periodicals because it has been included in the documentation of the Institute of Scientific Information in Philadelphia, of the *Current Contents* and the *Science Citation Index*. Garfield's work on quotations registered in the *Science Citation Index* shows that journal is the second on the list of Polish scientific journals and also the second on the list of all physiological journals published in socialist countries. This popularity indicates the high level of the articles and of the editorial work. Essential to the growth of readership was including in the regular issues the proceedings of international symposia even those not organized by the Institute's own Neurophysiological Department. Such materials are published very promptly: the summary of papers read at the Fifth Annual "Intermozg" Meeting, held in June 1976, appeared within six months.

The way of distributing the journal has been changed too. Previously it was based mainly on the Institute library exchange and because of the general character of the journal at that time it was sent to numerous libraries in Poland and abroad. That, however, was not a true indication of the number of centers really interested in works from the field of neurophysiology. The present exchange, directed by the library of the Institute and, centrally, by the Polish Academy of Sciences is limited to fully justified cases. Free copies are not included in the membership of any scientific society. The journal is distributed mostly through subscription.

All these changes were essential for the existence of *Acta Neurobiologiae Experimentalis*. Nowadays, when so many biological journals appear on the market, only those which are published regularly in a widely understood language, can be obtained through direct subscription, publish the articles promptly and get them widely documented in world reference sources, can count on good contributors and wide reading public. The former and the latter are both decisive for establishing the level of the journal; they are the motive for its publishing.

All that has been said here about the journal, and especially of the

part of its history which started with the change of profile and name, proves its good position on the Polish and international publishing market. However, not all is as it should be. The journal has its problems: quality of paper and advertising in foreign countries. To increase subscription it would be necessary to strengthen the publicity. Thus, the editors must constantly deal with these temporary but troublesome problems.

But I believe that the most important problem facing the editorial board in the future will be again the profile of the journal. Though many problems within neurophysiology are interrelated, it already has become too large an area of science to be serviced by only one journal. Presumably only one or two journals in the world will be able to retain such a general profile. It demands a substantial financial backing and therefore requires a large number of subscribers. This in turn requires a greater organizational effort and a more efficient printing base. It seems possible that numerous neurophysiological journals that have appeared in the last 15 years will either concentrate on certain areas within the broad scope of neurophysiology, or will face a sooner or later decline.

There are good grounds to believe that *Acta Neurobiologiae Experimentalis* will not only avoid such lot, but will successfully make one more maneuver in its 50-year history. The step will not be easy. It is hard to establish now the range of a new specialization, since it may be based on such criteria as subject matter or geographical area. Perhaps a growing cooperation with the Soviet and Czech neurophysiologists attract a greater number of articles from these two countries which would bring specialization based on geographic criterion. Also, merging of some journals, both Polish and foreign, seems to be necessary. A further specialization of the journal and retaining its international character would largely depend on the state and level of printing equipment, system of distribution, and even the efficiency of the mail.

The author of this article is not a neurophysiologist. As a librarian, he reads and evaluates the journal by different criteria. He does not compare articles but journals. He takes into account their distribution, documentation and other, sometimes simple but significant, factors which tell what the journal is like. He even dreams of what the journal should be like.

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