

# 75th BIRTHDAY OF ASSOC. PROF. LUBOMÍR SYRŮČEK, M. D., C.Sc.

In the autumn of 1995 the National Institute of Public Health celebrated its 70th anniversary. A distinguished personality of the Institute is the microbiologist and epidemiologist Assoc. Prof. MUDr. Syrůček, C.Sc., who contributed by his activities in a major way to the fame of the NIPH in the scientific world. And perhaps it is a coincidence that in the same year 1995 L. Syrůček celebrated his 75th birthday.

L. Syrůček was born in Prague on December 31, 1920 where he completed his secondary education in 1940. Similarly as thousands of other secondary school graduates he could not start his studies in microbiology as all universities were closed down by the Nazis. Only after the liberation in 1945 he started to read medicine at the re-opened Charles University where he qualified in 1951 and in the same year he entered the microbiological and epidemiological department of the NIPH in Prague. He remained in this department, although it underwent several administrative changes as regards its name, up to the time of his retirement in 1986. In 1959 he defended his PhD thesis on the microbiology, epidemiology and ecology of Q fever. Three years later he became assistant professor of microbiology at the Medical Faculty of Charles University.

He played an important role in the NIPH and its successor departments, in particular in the Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology (ÚEM) as its longstanding deputy director (nominated in 1963) and senior worker in the field of microbiology and epidemiology and contributed to the high esteem of Czech medical microbiology and epidemiology worldwide, in particular in WHO. Also the director of ÚEM, Prof. Karel Raška, DrSc., found in his pupil and many years' collaborator a partner who due to his personal qualities, generosity and magnanimity made it possible for him to devote himself to work in WHO Geneva while Dr. Syrůček was in charge of ÚEM.

In the fifties international attention was aroused by the research of Syrůček and a team of workers at the NIPH on the ecology and epidemiology of Q fever, in particular the development of a new natural focus of this infection in Bohemia, formerly unknown in this country. His work on birds who acted as hosts of the causal agent and experimental evidence of the transovarian spread of *Coxiella burnetii* became part of textbooks (Syrůček, L., Raška, K.: Q fever in domestic and wild birds, Bull. Wld. Hlth Org. 15, 329, 1956; Syrůček, L.: Q fever in Western Czechoslovakia, Proc. roy. Soc. Med. 52, 620, 1959). He was also engaged in a number of epidemics (poliomyelitis, scarlet fever, typhoid fever, salmonellosis, dysentery, tick-borne encephalitis, viral hepatitis etc.). He was concerned with the microbiology and epidemiology of whooping cough, he participated in the elaboration and introduction of effective immunization against this very widespread infection, he was involved in problems of L. forms of bacteria, streptococci etc.

In 1953 he was entrusted to elaborate and implement himself the microbiological diagnosis of some highly infectious diseases such as cholera, smallpox, plague, typhus fever, i. e. diseases with which the Czech health services lacked experience. He made therefore a trip to the People's Republic of China and some areas of the USSR (1955); he was sent as an expert of the Czech Ministry of Health to Vietnam, India etc.

In 1959 he had a WHO scholarship in the Central Laboratory of the Public Health Service in London, in the Microbiology and Pathology Institute of Aberdeen University in Scotland and later in the virological laboratory of the children's hospital in Philadelphia (USA).

He applied his experience from abroad as head of the research group on viral respiratory infections. The results of his work focused on their etiology, epidemiology and possible prevention were summarized in the following publications: Die Bedeutung des RS Virus und *M. pneumoniae* für die Erkrankungen der Atemwege. In: Probleme der Verhütung von Viruserkrankungen. Springer Verlag, 1967; Animal reservoirs of influenza. In: Viral and Rickettsial Vaccines. PAHO/WHO, 1967 etc.

In 1984 he founded the National reference laboratory for AIDS and was nominated its head. His extensive experience in virology ensured that the team he headed - which was entrusted with this new task - will be able to cope with the problem with respect to public health within the shortest possible time. The laboratory became a reference department of WHO.

The professional activities of L. Syrůček ensued always from topical problems faced by Czech microbiology and epidemiology. He acted as the main specialist in medical microbiology at the Ministry of Health of the CSR, he chaired the advisory committee for the development of microbiology and epidemiology of the Chief Hygiene Officer and other advisory bodies. He was member of the presidium of the Scientific Council of the Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic (1981) and member of its commission for evaluation of completed research tasks etc.

His extensive knowledge, scientific and professional work drew attention of WHO HQ in Geneva. L. Syrůček founded and acted as director of the Virological Centre of WHO for research and reference activities, he was a longstanding member of the WHO Expert Committee on Respiratory Viruses and member of the WHO/FAO Expert Advisory Panel on Zoonoses in Geneva. He participated at many sessions of WHO expert groups in Geneva, Denmark (AIDS - 1984), FRG, former USSR, Spain (AIDS - 1985), USA, Great Britain etc. His activities in WHO also served as a basis for his work on health problems in the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance. He was member of the advisory board for complex problems of Influenza and Medical immunological preparations.

As to teaching, Dr. Syrůček's activities concentrated in the first place on postgraduate medical training. Since 1959 he lectured regularly in the Postgraduate School of Medicine and Pharmacy in Prague (ILF) and in 1963 he was appointed head of the Chair of Medical Microbiology in ILF and member of its scientific council. For many years he worked as member of the National commission for awarding the titles of C.Sc. and D.Sc. in epidemiology and communicable diseases.

L. Syrůček published alone or with others more than 180 papers concerned with virological, rickettsiological, bacteriological and epidemiological problems. When the Journal of Hygiene, Epidemiology, Microbiology and Immunology was founded, he helped several years to ensure its high scientific standard. Nowadays this journal, frequently quoted in the scientific world, has as its successor the Central European Journal of Public Health. An international appreciation of the professional esteem of L. Syrůček was his many years membership in the editorial board of Current Contents - Life sciences (Philadelphia, USA) and in Current Topics in Microbiology and Immunology (Springer Verlag, Berlin, Heidelberg, New York).

The research and professional activities of L. Syrůček were rewarded by several awards and honorary distinctions in Czechoslovakia as well as abroad. He is laureate of the National Prize of the CSR, awarded by the Czech National Council for his results achieved in research on the etiology, epidemiology and prophylaxis of viral diseases of the airways (1982), the most distinguished medal of J. E. Purkyně Medical Association, etc. He is honorary member of the Czech Medical Association, honorary member of the Czech Society for Epidemiology and Microbiology of the Czechoslovak J. E. Purkyně Medical Association, corresponding member of the Society for Microbiology and Epidemiology of the German Democratic Republic etc.

L. Syrůček devoted all his life to the NIPH, he sacrificed to the Institute the most creative years, his abilities, zeal and health.

The editorial board and all who know our esteemed and dear friend wish him many more happy years.

Prof. B. Rosický, D.Sc.