

In Memory of the Academician, Prof. Dr. Davorin Dolar (1921 – 2005)

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With November 2005, when Prof. Dolar passed away, Slovenia lost one of the most important creators of the Slovenian chemistry school and a scientist. Prof. Dolar was a long-time Head of the Chair of Physical Chemistry, a regular member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts and Professor Emeritus of the University of Ljubljana. Slovenian science and chemistry in particular have lost an outstanding teacher, a scientist and an exceptional person.

Prof. Dolar was respected by numerous generations of Slovenian chemists: being a nestor of Slovenian physical chemists, he became a synonym for the field itself since his life was tightly connected with science. After completing the grammar school in Kranj in 1939, he was weighing between three options: mathematics, physics and chemistry. His mathematics teacher was trying to persuade him into studying maths, but he finally opted for chemistry studies. The main reason for his decision was rather simple and pragmatic: he was hoping to get a job as a chemistry engineer in a factory in Jesenice to be close enough to the mountains which he had always liked. He remained an ardent mountain hiker for the rest of his life. He graduated in 1944, just before the end of WW II. Important for his later research orientation were his post-graduate studies which he took at the Leningrad University in the period from 1946 to 1947. At that time Leningrad University was already at the level of western European and American universities. Under the mentorship of Prof. Nikolski he learned to master chemical thermodynamics, which later, after coming back from Russia, he further elaborated in all detail, applying research work to teaching. He started his career at the Medical School and Faculty of Arts, and continued his work at the Faculty of Chemistry, which at that time belonged to the Technical College. For almost four decades, from the beginning of his career in 1952, until his retirement in 1989, he was holding teaching positions in physical chemistry and lectured on other specialised subjects to chemistry students at undergraduate and postgraduate level, as well as to students of other faculties. He was known as an excellent lecturer who successfully managed

to combine research work and teaching, which consequently produced both an outstanding scientist and lecturer. He was mentor to numerous graduate and post-graduate students. He has special merits for the development of the modern Slovenian physical chemistry school out of which all academic teachers in this field have emerged. What created the desire of Prof. Dolar to go into the teaching profession to pass on the knowledge to the young is probably due to his early childhood education: His father, Dr. Simon Dolar, was a well known professor of mathematics. He was the first one to initiate him into the world of science, to learn to admire the exactness of mathematical language, and this is what consequently led him into the world of natural sciences.

The guiding principle which Prof. Dolar always followed was that it is necessary to be involved in high quality and diverse research to achieve good pedagogical practice. His research work was focused around polyelectrolyte solutions, charged polymer molecules, thus combining the properties of simple electrolytes and polymers. This research orientation stemmed from his early research into ion exchangers which he performed at the Institute of Nuclear Physics in Vinča in 1952, and later at the Polytechnic Institute in Brooklyn, U.S.A. in 1955, working with Professor Gregor. His basic approach in research work was to seek for suitable physical explanations, based on various theoretical models in all experimental observations. This is where he combined his rich knowledge of mathematics and physical chemistry. His scientific achievements inspired him for tackling new, more demanding problems. His extensive research opus brought him reputation in Slovenia and worldwide. He was offered visiting professorships at various universities and was a leader of numerous scientific

meetings, also spending longer periods doing research abroad. His scientific work was crowned by nomination as member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1970. He also received the Kidrič Award in 1979 and the Zois Award for his lifework in 2004.

Prof. Dolar held numerous university and external functions. To enumerate just some of the positions he held: Chairman of the Slovenian Natural Sciences Society during 1985 – 1989, followed by the position of its co-chairman. He was awarded the Order of the Republic with silver wreath, the Honorary Award of the Faculty of Science and Technology, the Samec Award by the Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical Technology, and a Golden Plaque with the title of Professor Emeritus by the University of Ljubljana.

His retirement did not stop him from continuing his research and keeping contact with the Faculty. In fact, just until recently he was visiting us. He remained mentor, making his time available to students, offering both professional help and also advice on any other common problem. Those who had contacts with him could admire his knowledge and broad mindedness and respect his knowledge in mastering his professional field.

He always loved returning to Trenta, to be close to the mountains which he used to climb as a young man. Earlier he was known as top mountain climber and mountain rescuer and later remained an ardent mountain hiker. His disease slowed down his steps and bent his body but never broke his spirit. Until his last days he wanted to be kept updated with the news from the Faculty and other current events. To his last day he remained lucid, always welcoming us with a warm look. He will be greatly missed.
