

Nencki Institute of Experimental Biology

In memory of Professor Lech Wojtczak

2019-09-30



We regret to inform you that on 30 September 2019 Professor Lech Wojtczak - our Teacher, Mentor, Friend, has passed away.

Polish science suffered a great loss - one of the most eminent scientists, the father of Polish bioenergetics.

Professor Lech Wojtczak spent his entire scientific life at the Nencki Institute of Experimental Biology PAS, where he worked since 1947. He received his doctoral degree in biochemistry in 1954 and the title of professor in 1967. Professor Wojtczak is the author or co-author of two hundred scientific papers. He promoted 15 doctors of science. His students are three successive directors of the Institute: Prof. Maciej Nałęcz, Prof. Jerzy Duszyński, and Prof. Adam Szewczyk.

Since 1971 Professor Wojtczak was a correspondent member of the Polish Academy of Sciences and since 1989 a full member of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He fulfilled, among others, the following duties and functions: Head of the Department of Biochemistry of the Nencki Institute (1968-71); Chairman of the Cytobiology Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences (1972-75); Chairman of the Scientific Council of the Nencki Institute (1990-92); Editor (since 1981) and then (since 1994) Chairman of the Editorial Board of "Acta Biochimica Polonica"; delegate of the Polish Biochemical Society to the FEBS (1975-80, 2006-08); member of the FEBS Scholarship Committee (1978-80); member of the Central Qualification Committee; vice-chairman of Section III (1973-81, 1994-96), then president (1974-80 and 2005-08) and honorary member (since 1995) of the Polish Biochemical Society. In 1988 he received an honorary doctorate from the Medical Academy in Magdeburg. Professor Wojtczak has been awarded, among others, with the following honours: the Gold Cross of Merit, the Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta, the Officer's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta and the Commander's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta.

Professor Lech Wojtczak will remain in our memory forever.

SHORT REMEMBRANCE OF LECH WOJTCZAK

Apart from being a great scientist, Lech Wojtczak was also a fantastic teacher, and an excellent scientific supervisor. As a passionate experimental researcher, he really loved doing experiments, which for his young collaborators meant that they were never left alone, spending full days with him, and acting during experiments under his careful supervision. Lech was also a very kind and calm man, who never raised his voice, even when a poor student was committing one error after another. Such incidents were then discussed, mistakes explained, and quickly forgotten, but with an assumption that they should never be committed again. Lech believed in his pupils intelligence, and ability to learn quickly. But if a student was not up to his expectations, or was showing signs of laziness, or a lack of scientific passion, his/her days in the Lab were usually shortly counted.

Lech was well recognized in the world, and had many close scientific contacts, what led to many travels of all members of his research group. Not only for conferences or courses, but also to perform experiments in a foreign laboratory collaborating with us. This was very important for young students, opening our minds to the world, and to other cultures, and helping Lech in his ambition to form from his collaborators, the next generation of good scientists and future leaders.

Lech was also excellent in social contacts, and in creating a friendly atmosphere. Together with his wife Anna, they kept an open home, often inviting collaborators to parties that usually led to long scientific discussions. They were also helpful and willing to assist if a member of a group was facing problems, even of a private nature.

Lech was always very keen on technological novelties, and loved using new models of scientific equipment, or any new electronic device revolutionizing daily life. E.g. he was one of the first in the Nencki Institute to use a personal computer for writing papers, e-mail, and searching the literature.

Prof. Maciej Nałęcz