

IAU General Secretary 1967–1970

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Abstract. This paper discusses my time as IAU General Secretary, 1967–70 and the General Assemblies in Prague in 1967 and in Brighton in 1970. I cover my work with Jean-Claude Pecker, whom I succeeded as General Secretary and with Donald Sadler, who was General Secretary 1958–64. The work of J. Kleczek for the *International Schools for Young Astronomers* is discussed.

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1. Thirteenth General Assembly in Prague, 1967

It is a rule to appoint a person for a three-year period as Assistant General Secretary (AGS) followed by the same period as General Secretary (GS). In my case it meant that the discussions were conducted in the early '60s. I started as AGS in 1964 taking care of the IAU Colloquia and Symposia. It was also expected that newcomers to the Executive Committee (EC) would host meetings. Consequently, my predecessor, Jean-Claude Pecker, assumed in 1964 the post of the GS and invited the EC to meet in Nice in September 1965, and I invited the following meeting of the EC in September 1966 to Prague. The main task of that meeting was preparing the thirteenth General Assembly, which was supposed to come to Prague.

The Prague Assembly was an enormous success beyond expectations at that time and at that place. A record number of 2429 participants attended, out of that number over 600 from the USA, 233 from the USSR, 267 from France, 200 from the UK, and 111 from Czechoslovakia. Among commission reports, the report on Solar Activities by Svestka and his international team excelled. Joint discussions dealt with Röntgen radiation, extragalactic radio sources, close binaries and other subjects. A two-metre telescope, a new solar laboratory and a set of meteoric cameras were inaugurated and the Charles University awarded titles of doctors honoris causa to Pol Swings and Victor Ambartsumian. A gala dancing dinner accommodating all participants terminated the Assembly.

In 1967 the IAU faced a financial problem. Expenses exceeded income and the banking accounts showed a fifty per cent decrease. Increasing national contributions of some countries would have changed the balance. The EC decided to introduce a “unit of contribution” and calculated national contributions in these units. An increase of the unit thus did not change the balance between countries. It was also necessary to stop the free distribution of the *IAU Transactions* and to find a less expensive publisher. These measures permitted to retain the important principle of individual membership, rather an exception than the rule among scientific unions.

The statutes of the IAU required some changes. The EC created a committee for that purpose. The chairman was O. Heckmann, members were D. Sadler, J.-C. Pecker,

M. Schwarzschild, L. Perek. Legal advisers were R. Walters, legal adviser of ESO and A. Jappel, executive secretary of the IAU. Proposed changes were approved by the EC and finally by the General Assembly in Brighton in 1970.

Another problem concerned the 500th anniversary of Copernicus in 1973. The IAU General Assembly was already promised to Australia, but Poland invited the Assembly to Poland for the anniversary of its most important astronomer. The problem was solved by keeping the regular Assembly in Australia and organising an extraordinary assembly centred on the global significance of Copernicus in Poland.

Professor Otto Heckmann was satisfied with my work in the Executive Committee. He proposed my name for election as a member of the *Academy of Natural Sciences Leopoldina*. Heckmann also knew of my work on planetary nebulae and offered me observing time at the European Southern Observatory at La Silla in Chile in April 1969. I measured the radiation in $H\beta$ of a fairly large number of faint planetaries around the direction of the Galactic centre.

2. Fourteenth General Assembly in Brighton, 1970

The second General Assembly of my period took place in Brighton in southern England. The number of participants increased again. Attending were 850 IAU members, 2255 invited participants and about 600 guests. It was necessary to accommodate 167 commission meetings without any conflict of interest. Local organisation was in the hands of my friend and teacher, Donald Sadler. The congress of course had many British charms. An invitation for a gala dinner came from “*The Worshipful Company of Clockmakers*”. This meant attending in proper attire of black tie (or white tie?). Local people have it and are used to wearing it, but overseas guests would have to rent it and feel embarrassed. Martin Schwarzschild evidently had some experience in these matters and proposed to meet for lunch. This happened, and I spent a delightful meal and a discussion of mechanical transformation of solar time into astronomical time using relatively small prime numbers needed for the construction of toothed wheels in the gear box.

The Minister of Education and Science, the Right Honourable Margaret Thatcher, invited, in the name of the government of Her Royal Highness, the IAU Executive Committee for dinner. My wife Vlasta was seated on her right.

The *Royal Astronomical Society* highly appreciated the congress. I was rewarded with appointment as Associate Member of the RAS with a life-long privilege of receiving the RAS Monthly Notices. I returned that privilege with thanks when the MN became available in an electronic form.

Arno Jappel and Mrs. J. Dankova continued in their posts in the IAU Secretariat. They moved to Utrecht to follow C. de Jager, to Thessaloniki to follow G. Contopoulos and to Lausanne to follow Edith Müller. Their successful service lasted until the year 1979.

3. International Schools for Young Astronomers

A very Important IAU activity was organizing Summer Schools in cooperation with UNESCO. The IAU entrusted Josip Kleczek of the Czechoslovak Astronomical Institute with the organization of the Summer Schools (later known as *International Schools for Young Astronomers*, or ISYA). Josip persevered for close to 25 years in finding suitable and deserving locations in South and Central America, in Asia, Africa or Europe with a total attendance close to 1000 students and with experienced astronomers as teachers. His last ISYA took place in 1991 at the IAU Congress in Buenos Aires. The IAU GS Derek McNally expressed his satisfaction with his work. The successor of Josip Kleczek was Donat Wentzel of the University of Maryland.

4. Other activities

My last task as IAU General Secretary was concerned with the foundation of the *European Astronomical Society*. Sometime in 1990 I received a telephone call from Martin C.E. Huber, Chairman of the Astronomy and Astrophysics Department of the *European Physical Society*. In the conversation I offered Prague as the seat of the secretariat of the EAS. Professor Huber was pleased with this offer and suggested to put the proposal before the council of the EAS as soon as the council was established. For that purpose a Nominating Committee was convened by mid-December 1990 to the premises of the European Southern Observatory in Garching near Munich. According to my notes the members of the Nominating Committee were former general secretaries of the IAU: Edith Müller, George Contopoulos, Derek McNally, Jean-Claude Pecker, Luboš Perek, Patrick Wayman and Richard West. For some reason J.-C. Pecker could not attend but – again by telephone – the two of us discussed and proposed Jan Palouš for the post of secretary of the EAS. The Nominating Committee agreed with this proposal and Professor Jan Palouš was elected. He successfully served in that position for six years.

My other engagements, such as the construction of the 60-cm telescope at the Astronomical Institute of the Masaryk University in Brno and of the Two-Meter Telescope of the Astronomical Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Ondřejov, in the *Division for Outer Space Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat* in New York, in the *International Astronautical Federation* and in the *International Institute of Space Law* are parts of other stories.