

## EDITORIAL

## INTERNATIONAL SOCIETIES AND THE KING'S ENGLISH

In 1965 in New Orleans, Louisiana, during a memorable conference on the lymphatic system arranged by Professor Hyman Mayerson, I vividly remember strolling through the quaint streets of the French Quarter with Alois Ruttimann who related upcoming plans to organize the International Society of Lymphology (ISL). I not only enthusiastically endorsed the idea but recognized that its formulation was unique.

Global scientific societies are usually an outgrowth of national specialty interests such as Surgery, Cardiology, and Neurology. In contrast to local societies whose members are often chosen individually, international organizations usually stem from a conglomeration of powerful national groups with members automatically incorporated *in toto*.

In 1965, the "usual" arrangement was not possible because national societies devoted to study of the lymphatic system were non-existent. Thus, from the outset the flavor of the ISL was distinct with origins rooted in the camaraderie of a world-wide cross-section of individuals rather than from a loose federation of firmly entrenched national societies. Final incorporation of the ISL in Zurich in 1966, the biennial Congresses, and the official scientific "mouthpiece"—LYMPHOLOGY—undoubtedly triggered a renaissance of interest into the mysteries of this elusive vascular system. Ironically, national societies of Lymphology later evolved from the parent organization and there are now official chapters in North America, Japan, Italy, and France.

From the inception of the ISL the of-

ficial language has been English. More than half of English words derive from Latin and the rest are largely Anglo-Saxon. Thus, English is replete with Romance and Indo-germanic influence and, accordingly, for purposes of international scientific exchange, is probably a reasonable compromise. On the other hand, many members of the ISL emanate from countries where English is not the native tongue. For them it is especially difficult to express ideas spontaneously and clearly, to participate creatively in open discussion where comments are commonly impromptu, fresh concepts expounded and probed without the luxury of a text prepared in advance. Equally disquieting, English spoken at international conferences is often an amalgamation of numerous dialects from Texas to Tokyo and, therefore, vastly different from "Oxford" or the "King's English" learned in many lands where English is not "inborn".

I raised this issue in New Orleans at breakfast with Mayerson and the late John Kinmonth. I was surprised and somewhat bemused when Kinmonth expressed difficulty understanding our Creole waitress with her thick Louisiana drawl. Perhaps the official language of the ISL should more accurately be Oxford English, that is, English understood everywhere, devoid of slang, local idioms, and regional dialects. At the Congress this simply means that participating members speak Oxford English, a restriction not overly taxing for our Australian, Canadian, and American brethren. After all, German, too, has various dialects, and, for example, if past President Leo Clodius were to address a

German-speaking Congress in the colloquialisms of Zurich, the local chairman of the session may well call for an interpreter! Similarly, when President John Casley-Smith speaks in Europe, South America, or Asia he exclusively uses Oxford English, and I, as a native Hungarian, have no difficulty with understanding. Yet, if J.C.S. lapses into a full-blown Australian dialect I comprehend almost nothing.

It is a serious mistake to underestimate the profound limitation of language at a scientific meeting. A few years ago, I attended a microcirculatory symposium in Italy. It was organized and attended primarily by German-speaking scientists with a smattering of participants from Scandinavia well versed in German and to a lesser extent English. Nonetheless, the language of the meeting was officially English. Presentations were notoriously uninspired and discussion dull until one frustrated and visibly upset participant suddenly sparked an exchange in German. Immediately there was an explosion in speech and intensity of scientific ideas.

Despite the desirability of having English and more specifically Oxford English as the official language of the ISL, there is an enduring beauty and national pride in other great languages. The French, for example, adore their Latin tongue and no matter which government is in power in France, use of French is officially encouraged at scientific meetings. Unfortunately, less enthusiasm seems to exist for speaking German at scientific meetings in the Federal Republic where the trauma of National Socialism and more recently Neomarxism has apparently seriously undermined national history and culture. With this unfortunate state of affairs in mind, I recently encouraged Professor Eva Mannheimer to organize a German-speaking Chapter of Lymphology for West and East Germany, Austria, and part of Switzerland. Like the English of Shakespeare, the French of Voltaire, and the Italian of Dante, the German of this Society is to be Goethe.

In the final analysis, however, the success of the national chapters, distinctive in their local customs and dialects, ultimately is traceable to the ISL whose founding members with considerable vision sparked a lymphologic revival that transcends specialty groups, national boundaries, and diverse languages. Accordingly, local chapters should encourage members to join the ISL, and openly support LYMPHOLOGY, the only official scientific publication of the ISL, to foster that pervasive spirit.

### M. Foldi



*Founders and past Presidents of the ISL. Left to right: Manuel Viamonte, Alois Ruttiman, P. Ruben Koehler.*