

Eighteenth Congress

Copenhagen—1950

E. LUNDSGAARD, *President*



FIG. 1. Professor E. Lundsgaard,
President of the Congress.

At the closing session of the previous congress in Oxford, on behalf of the Danish physiologists, I extended an invitation to the International Physiological Congress to hold its next meeting in Copenhagen in 1950, and this invitation was accepted. It was intended at the time that August Krogh should be the President of that congress, but as a result of his death in September 1949, I was obliged to take over this duty.

The congress was held August 15–18, 1950, and was attended by some 1235 active members and 378 associate members. In 10 simultaneous sessions, during 4 half-days, 540 papers were presented. The program also included 8 symposia, in 3 mornings, and 29 demonstrations.

The Secretary-General of the Congress was Professor P. Brandt Rehberg, and the Organizing Committee consisted of F. Buchthal, H. Dam, R. Ege, H. Holter, K. Linderstrøm-Lang, and K. O. Møller. Professor E. Hansen served as Treasurer.

It was a daring enterprise to hold one of the biggest international congresses in Copenhagen in 1950. The hotel situation was very difficult and the financial support that could be obtained was limited. When we succeeded in carrying the congress through in—as I think—a fairly satisfactory manner, it was thanks to the fact that the spirit of solidarity and cooperation from the time of the occupation was still alive.

After a campaign in the press, a number of rooms in private families were placed at the disposal of the congress. Only a small number of rooms could be obtained in the few student colleges available, but by using some hospital wards and even a soldier hostel as supplement to the available hotel rooms, the housing problem was solved. It was announced that lodgings under “barrack conditions” in student colleges, hospital wards, and soldier hostels would be free of charge, and under those conditions there were enough volunteers so that nobody had to be assigned to such primitive housing conditions against his will.

The evening before the scientific program began there was a reception in the Town Hall at the invitation of the City of Copenhagen. The brief official opening was held in the congress headquarters the following morning with an opening address by the President of the Congress and one by the

Rector of the University of Copenhagen, Professor H. M. Hansen. Immediately thereafter, three symposia were held in different halls on conditioned reflexes, cardiac output, and thermodynamics of muscle function. All of Wednesday and Thursday mornings were also used for five other symposia on the retina, active transport, fat metabolism, spinal cord activity, and salt and water excretion. In the afternoon there were 10 simultaneous sessions of volunteer papers.

Wednesday afternoon was free for an excursion to Elsinore and to Frederiksborg Castle in Hillerød. Tea was served at Elsinore. In the evening there was an informal dance at the Congress Headquarters Reception Hall. On Thursday evening there was a congress banquet at the restaurant "Vivex" (now no longer in existence) in the corner of the Tivoli amusement park. Here there was room for only 1000 guests, but fortunately only this number applied. For other members of the congress the amusement park was open that evening, free of charge. When the dinner was over the doors of the banquet hall were opened, and I tried personally, together with other members of the congress committee, to direct as many as possible of the other congress members to take part in the dance that was going on.

One little feature in connection with the banquet is vivid in my recollection because it illustrates, I think, the spirit of the whole congress. One thousand guests were to be admitted through a single entrance and directed to assemble in the rooms above the banquet hall. The congress had arranged that two small children of about 10 years of age should function as door keepers at the entrance. When the manager of the restaurant heard about this he declared that it would be necessary to have two able-bodied men for this purpose. I insisted that it would work much more smoothly with the two children. It did indeed work smoothly as planned.

Two large gymnastic halls, situated in the congress center, each measuring 920 m², had been put at our disposal. One of these was used as a lounge containing the congress bureau, bank, post office, news stand, and an exhibition and shop from the Permanente Exhibition. In acknowledgment of this exhibit space, the Permanente had decorated the walls with paintings and draperies and had provided the larger part of the lounge with comfortable chairs and small tables. The lounge was divided into sections with plants and flowers, which contributed to its cheerful aspect. From an oval bar in the center of the lounge, tea, coffee, beer, drinks, and open sandwiches were served. It is my impression that this large common lounge contributed greatly to the establishment of personal contacts during the congress.

The other hall was used for the opening and closing sessions and for some special lectures. One evening it was used for a concert followed by a dance during which hot dogs and Carlsberg beer were served ad libitum.

Thanks to the spirit of solidarity and the help we got from many sides, the costs of the Congress could be held low. We had dared to raise



FIG. 2. Professor Lundsgaard, at right, conferring with some Soviet colleagues. Left to right, at table: D. A. Berukov, A. V. Palladin, K. M. Bykov. Behind table: G. D. Smyrnov and V. S. Rusinov.



FIG. 3. The lounge at Congress headquarters.

the traditional congress fee of 2 English pounds to 50 shillings. From the State Ministry of Education we had obtained a grant of 40,000 Danish crowns (2000 English pounds) and a similar sum from private sources, mainly pharmaceutical firms. I was very proud after the Congress to be able to return 23,000 crowns to the Ministry of Education. A corresponding percentage of the funds obtained from private sources, with the permission of the donors, was used for some travel grants for young physiologists attending the Montreal Congress.

Among the speeches at the congress, I particularly remember the speech of thanks A. V. Hill made on behalf of the guests at the reception in the Town Hall of Copenhagen and the speech of Adrian at the banquet. Both speeches were characteristic of the British "dignified informality" that I tried to imitate to the best of my ability in my handling of the congress.

Members of the congress were presented with a facsimile edition of the *Discours sur l'Anatomie du Cerveau* by Nicolaus Steno, together with an English translation of the lecture by G. Douglas, taken from an anatomy text published in London in 1733.

Practically all the work of the congress was done on a voluntary basis by the staffs of the various physiology departments. The Army volunteered to establish special telephone communications between the various lecture rooms. For the announcement of the communications given in the various sections, a system was used that, according to my view, worked very well. In each lecture room hung a board on which the various sections were indicated. The numbers of the papers to be read were hung on hooks on the board. After completion of a paper its number was removed from the board. Numbers of canceled papers were simply omitted. There was no fixed time schedule and therefore no gaps in the proceedings when an author did not appear to present his paper. Thus members were kept aware of the progress in other sections and could move at leisure from one room to another as desired.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The editor recalls this congress very well with the cheerful lounges and so many facilities conveniently arranged. The excursions were indeed memorable. Tivoli provided a most attractive diversion for any spare moments. The vast array of food at the reception in the Town Hall still comes vividly to mind, especially for those who made the mistake of having dinner at the Tivoli just before the reception. What a monumental blunder that was!

Two printed accounts of this congress are available, both published in *Science* (112: 767, 768, 1950); one is by R. W. Gerard of the USA and the other by C. Bykov of the USSR. Gerard's report expressed the satisfaction of all participants because of the smooth operation of the congress which "has enriched and encouraged all who participated in it."



FIG. 4. The Congress Banquet.



FIG. 5. Plenary Session of the Congress.

At the closing session the Permanent Committee circulated the proposed statutes for an International Union of Physiological Sciences. The plan to form such a union was approved by the business meeting. This action was particularly pleasing to the American delegation because the American Physiological Society had actively promoted the idea through a committee headed by Professor H. C. Bazett of Philadelphia, who at the time of the congress was the President of the American Physiological Society. It was a particularly sad time for Americans, however, because Dr. Bazett died on his way to the congress and never saw his hopes for a union realized.

From the point of view of anyone now charged with the responsibility of organizing another similar but much larger congress, the most remarkable feature of the Copenhagen Congress was the low cost. It is hard to believe that so much could have been done with so little, by so few people. There must indeed have been a great deal of purely voluntary work from the people of Copenhagen.