**A symposium for Robert Balazs: A long career in neuroscience with no end in sight**

Institute of Neurology, University College London, 15th May 2017

The occasion for this well-attended symposium was to pay tribute to Robert Balazs’s remarkable career in neuroscience, spanning more than six decades. The audience included colleagues and students from various phases of Robert’s career and also members of his family and friends. The symposium was opened by Professor Mike Hanna, Director of the Institute of Neurology, University College London and introduced by Professor John Hardy, Head of the Department of Molecular Neuroscience and the host of the meeting. These were followed by presentations and the speakers also represented different periods of Robert’s career. A common theme of the presentations was an expression of the respect for Robert’s many scientific achievements and the acknowledgement of the support refugee scientists have been traditionally receiving from their British colleagues.

Robert went to Medical School in Budapest, Hungary and as a student he developed an interest in the biochemistry of the central nervous system. He graduated with ‘summa cum laude’ in 1950 and subsequently did a PhD in the Institute of Medical Chemistry under the supervision of F. Bruno Straub, the discoverer of actin and a pupil of Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, one of the great pioneers of biochemistry.

Robert came to the UK after the Hungarian uprising against the Stalinist regime and Russian occupation was crushed in the autumn of 1956. Having met serendipitously Derek Richter at a conference, he was invited to join the Neuropsychiatric Research Centre in Whitchurch Hospital, Cardiff that became later the MRC Neuropsychiatry Unit and, like many refugee scientists in the past he was initially supported by the Rockefeller Foundation. Robert continued to work with Derek Richter, a founder member of the International Brain Research Organisation (IBRO) and the Brain Research Association (BRA), for 16 years becoming the acting Director of the unit in 1972. From 1975 until his retirement in 1987 Robert was the Director of the MRC Developmental Neurobiology Unit, based at the Institute of Neurology, London. The official retirement only meant a change in the scenery of Robert’s scientific career. At the invitation of Dick Schwab at the Netherlands Institute for Brain Research he moved to Amsterdam where he spent seven productive years as senior scientist, followed by Research Professorship at the Institute for Brain Aging and Dementia, University of California, Irvine between 1987 and 2005. Having returned to the UK, Robert continued to remain active; he became Honorary Professor at the Wolfson Institute for Biomedical Research, University College London and, since 2009 he has been at the Institute of Neurology, University College London where he has established new collaborations leading to publications and successful grant applications.

Robert’s scientific career is widely recognised and was acknowledged by a special issue dedicated to him in *Neurochemical Research* in 1995. Robert started his lifelong interest in glutamate during his PhD project. In addition to the study of the neurobiology of excitatory amino acids for many years, among the many contributions he and his research groups made during the past several decades one could mention the elucidation of the trophic role of glutamatergic neurotransmission and the role of epigenetic factors, including under-nutrition and thyroid hormone in the developing brain, biochemical characterisation of morphological structures of the brain and more recently the study of pathomechanisms in Alzheimer’s disease, including the effect of the amyloid-ß peptide and proinflammatory cytokines on signal transduction in neurons and the role of DNA methylation. Robert has a most impressive publication list with his latest last author paper being published in 2015. Robert is also the co-editor of three books and a special issue of a journal and he is a member of several learned societies.

He is one of the four founder members of the ‘Black Horse group’, which was set up in 1965 to promote informal discussions and exchanges of ideas between neuroscientists in various London-based institutions. After the formation of the BRA in 1968, the predecessor of the British Neuroscience Association, he served at one stage on the Council of the BRA. He is also a founder member of the International Society for Neurochemistry (ISN) and the International Society for Developmental Neuroscience (ISDN). He was President of the ISDN and served on the Council of the European Society for Neurochemistry, ISDN and ISN. He was a member of Editorial Boards of several scientific journals of high reputation.

At the end of the symposium and during the dinner that followed we all wished Robert many healthy and productive years to come.

**Professor Tamas Revesz**

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30 May 2017