

Editorial

In October, 19, 2009 Paulescu Triumphed in Canada

When, in 1996, I published – in the Genesis Printing House – the monograph entitled “*Insulin – the medical discovery of the century belongs to the Romanian N.C. Paulescu*” – I was convinced that the truth included in this quite lengthy title could not be mystified for an indefinite period of time. At the time 75 years had already elapsed since the great event, which was correctly related to the year 1921, took place, but which – according to circumstances and subjective preferences – was incorrectly attributed to either Banting and Best (as it appeared in certain medical treaties) or to Banting and MacLeod (as it appeared in other treaties that mentioned the names of those who, in 1923, unfairly received the Nobel Prize for the discovery made by Paulescu).

In 1996 the Canadians organized in Toronto an International Congress named “*75 Years since the Discovery of Insulin*”. This is the ~~town~~ city where the official Canadian historian considered the great discovery to have taken place ~~in~~. It was also considered that time had wiped away the memories of the fervent disputes carried on within the scientific circles and which referred to “*serious errors*” in attributing the great discovery, as well as the dreadful fight that appeared among the four Canadians involved in the 1921-1923 events, so suggestively described by a contemporary witness, under the name of “*that crabs' basket from Toronto*” (Bliss, 1982)

In 1982, after the death of Charles Best (1978) – the last member of the Canadian

group involved in the events related to the great discovery (Banting died in 1941, MacLeod died in 1935 and Collip in 1965) – the publication of the famous monograph entitled “*Discovery of Insulin*” could finally be published; it was authored by the Canadian historian Michael Bliss.

The paper – that laid emphasis on, and gave details concerning the events that had taken place in Canada – had simply wiped away the myth according to which Banting and Best were the discoverers of insulin. The great part of the merit in the discovery of insulin was now attributed to the other two members of the Canadian group MacLeod and Collip. A myth died another myth **was born** – a myth closer to reality, but one that could not definitely be separated from the Toronto events.

As a good Canadian, but not as an impartial historian, the author made references to Paulescu several times in various chapters of his book; it was not with the aim to underline the latter’s monumental contribution to the discovery of insulin, but to somehow weaken the troublesome truth according to which the birth certificate of insulin could have been attributed to nobody else but Paulescu, who published his discovery in August 31, 1921 in the most reputed European Journal of Physiology of the time.

Demonstrating an amazing clarity and clairvoyance, our outstanding and genial scientist presented not only the physiological characteristics of the hormone he discovered and called Pancrein but also its

pharmacological characteristics recorded after its subcutaneous administration, the pattern which is accepted to date. With the firmness and courage of research genius, Paulescu stated that this hormone is “the key to the treatment of diabetes”; this statement would be confirmed less than a year from the day it was uttered.

With a view to participating in the above-mentioned Congress held in 1996 in Toronto, I had the good inspiration to take with me 100 copies of my monograph called “*The Re-Discovery of Insulin*” published in the same year (1996) by the Genesis Printing House. By its title I wanted to underline that the data published by Bliss in his book did not express the reality and that the distortion of the outstanding contribution made by Paulescu in the discovery of insulin reflected in Michael Bliss’s book strongly endangered his reputation as an impartial historian. For the first time I presented formidable arguments against the repeated assertion that the Canadian researchers had not been familiar with Paulescu’s published papers and, consequently, their contribution —although it followed that of Paulescu’s — might have had no connection with it. I demonstrated with the help of real and doubtless documents that Paulescu’s books were known not only to Banting, Best and MacLeod, but also to other two North-American researchers who had been working in the same domain: Ernest Lyman Scott and J.R. Murlin. In this respect there are written documents.

In the letters exchanged in spring of 1996 with the organizers of the Toronto Congress, I was promised the opportunity to express the Romanian point of view regarding the epochal

discovery. Unfortunately this promise was not kept, so that distributing my monograph “*The Re-Discovery of Insulin*” to the main participants in the Congress remained the unique solution to make the real and authentic version concerning the discovery of insulin known as, until then, it had been carefully hidden. I soon realized that my book had a devastating effect on the organizers, who were forced to present in their interventions more about the first usages of the pancreatic extract obtained by them in treating the diabetics (an important success which really belongs to the Canadian group), glossing over the most laborious stage – the one of the antidiabetic effect of the new hormone – without which therapeutic utilization could have not been possible. Indeed, the discovery of insulin as a physiologic reality totally belonged to Paulescu. On this occasion I better realized the damning conclusion of the eminent professor Ion Pavel (1897-1991) – after an exhausting activity (two monographs on the subject, published in English and numberless speeches delivered in international congresses) uttered bitterly:

“I devoted all my efforts in the last two decades to recognising the priority of N.C. Paulescu in the discovery of insulin. On appraising today the circumstances which, for 65 years, have wronged this great scientist, I found out that this injustice is, as a matter of fact, the result of a grievous lack of scientific ethics.”

During the long talks I had with the distinguished professor I. Pavel – one year before his death – he was skeptical in as far as the possibility of correcting this injustice was

concerned. *“Paulescu, great man, poor man”* he sadly used to say. When I told him that his fight was not in vain and that it would be continued, and that I would not leave this world before seeing the truth restored in connection with the discovery of insulin, he turned his almost blind eyes towards me and said: *“Maybe you are right and you have to be right. The fight shall be continued. This unhappy Romanian people does really deserve it.”*

In 2001, due to the moral support granted by professor Nicolae Cajal, on August 31 the date the monumental work published by Paulescu in 1921– we almost miraculously succeeded in uncovering the monument erected in memory of the great Romanian scientist, rised in the south-eastern corner of the park belonging to the Faculty of Medicine in Cotroceni. In the presence of the President of Romania, the speeches delivered by Sir George Alberti, professor from Great Britain – that time the President of the International Diabetes Federation – and of Academician Nicolae Cajal and Academician Maya Simionescu, underlined the exceptional scientific merits the great scientist born in this country made in the field of the diabetes and physiological research. I can still remember that day of August 31, 2001. It stuck into my memory exactly as it really was: a bright late summer day, when one of the most important objectives I had proposed to myself, was accomplished.

In 2003, on the occasion of the Congress of the International Diabetes Federation - by a totally mysterious intervention of the politics in the precincts of the Citadel of Science – the uncovering of a commemorative plaque

bearing the statues of Lancereaux and Paulescu – which was going to take place in the B gallery of the Hotel-Dieu Hospital in Paris – where the two scientists had worked together in the period 1888-1897, as well as the delivery of the Paulescu Lecture by the winner of the competition (Professor Geremia Bolli of Italy), were cancelled as a consequence of a note appeared the previous day in the “Le Monde” that mentioned certain anti Semitic works written by Paulescu.

Being convinced that the Truth will remain the only valid arbiter in establishing the value of a scientist, I was pleased to find out that, on the very first day of the Congress of the Diabetics International Federation (Montreal, 2009), under the name of “Bernard Houssay Memorial Lecture”, the one hour conference on *“The Discovery of Insulin, Science and Controversy”* would be delivered by the well known Spanish diabetologist Alberto de Leiva, professor at the University of Barcelona, the winner of an important collection of international scientific prizes and medals, in recognition of the huge amount of research activity in diabetes (more than 250 published articles and more than 100 chapters in various specialized treaties). Evidently, on Monday, October 19, 8:30 a.m. some Romanian colleagues and I were already in the conference hall.

In the ample presentation that lasted for 45 minutes, half of the time allotted to the speech about the topic was dedicated to a detailed presentation of the scientific activity of Paulescu, which finally culminated in the discovery of insulin. Based on very detailed documentation of the works of different precursors published in connection with this

subject – in the period 1915-1923 - Alberto de Leiva reached a common sense conclusion: the discovery of insulin is really connected to the name of Nicolae Paulescu.

After minutes of applause at the end by the 2000 participants present in the conference hall, I was impressed by the congratulations I received from researchers from various countries, researchers who knew the truth concerning the discovery of insulin, but for whom, for the first time, it became evident after being emphasized amply, at the Congress of the International Diabetes Federation. The congratulations continued to be addressed to me in the following days as well, although the full merit for *Paulescu's re-discovery* belonged to the providential Alberto de Leiva.

In the euphoria of the moment, just all of the sudden, the interventions I have been making in the last five months at the Town Hall of sector 5, on the territory the memorial dedicated to Paulescu is and which being either intentionally or badly meant damaged and needed quick and urgent reparations, came to my memory. It should be necessary for the zone around the memorial to be protected, and for the memorial itself to be properly illuminated at night. The ephemeral political fights shall never consume all our energies. Something has to remain behind us, to the generations to come. To praise our notable forefathers is a sacred and main duty as compared to our temporary activities. I am certain that the message transmitted this way will soon find itself an appropriate solution.

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