

THE FOUNDATION AND EARLY YEARS OF FEBS

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It was Frank Young's and Peter Campbell's fault that I became involved in the formation of FEBS. I succeeded Campbell as Meetings Secretary of The Biochemical Society in 1959, Campbell becoming the Committee Secretary. As Meetings Secretary, he had already persuaded the Committee to look towards continental Europe in two ways. One was to encourage the continental societies to invite The Biochemical Society to hold joint meetings on their home ground. The other was for The Biochemical Society to issue a general invitation to all European societies to have their members attend The Biochemical Society's summer meeting, which traditionally alternated between Oxford and Cambridge. Joint meetings in Finland in 1959 and France in 1960 had already been planned, and I set up further such meetings over the next several years, until 1965, in Belgium, The Netherlands, Sweden and Italy. These meetings were terminated when the annual FEBS meetings began, as their logical successors.

Hans Krebs and Frank Young, as the respective hosts at Oxford and Cambridge, willingly accepted the idea of larger audiences at the summer meetings, and a start was made at Cambridge in 1960 and Oxford in 1961. There followed immediately the Fifth International Congress of Biochemistry in Moscow in August 1961. By this time, through these various contacts, I was beginning to make good friends with fellow officers in the continental European biochemical societies. My further activities in Society affairs might have stopped at this time because I resigned my position as Meetings Secretary. I had begun to be bored with the routine of setting up each Society meeting, and arranging the printing, and I felt that if boredom was setting in, then I was not serving the Society. At the last Committee Meeting I attended as Meetings Secretary in December 1961, there was on the agenda

a proposal that had originated with Young, namely that The Biochemical Society should appoint a foreign secretary. This was agreed, with the amendment, on the suggestion of Henry Arnstein, that the post be called International Secretary. Arnstein in fact became my successor as Meetings Secretary. The suggestion was adopted by the Society at its annual general meeting the following March, and the Committee was kind enough to invite me to occupy this new post, which I gladly accepted because I felt that there was an opportunity here for creativity, in fostering intra-European relations. The summer meeting at Cambridge, to which the continental European biochemists were invited, had already been arranged, and I contacted as many European societies as I was aware of, suggesting that an informal discussion be held during the Cambridge meeting, with the idea of putting intra-European biochemical contacts onto a more established basis. A spur to the idea of more formal contact, and arranging meetings for European biochemists, came from the upcoming venues for the International Congresses of Biochemistry. At that time the congresses were the only open, general meetings available to biochemists, and with New York chosen for 1964 and Tokyo for 1967, it would not be until at least 1970 that another IUB Congress could be held in Europe. This was a distinct disadvantage to the younger biochemists.

The informal meeting was held, and I detected a great deal of enthusiasm towards the idea of such a collaboration. Memories are hazy now, but I have a firm recollection of the support from Otto Hoffmann-Ostenhof for Austria and Jean Emile Courtois for France. The stage was now set for an official meeting between representatives of the Societies, and this took place at the Oxford meeting of The Biochemical Society in July 1963, which Robert Thompson, as

Secretary General of IUB, also attended to give us his advice, and Robert Harte came from the American Society of Biological Chemists. I had produced draft statutes for this so-far unnamed organization. These were discussed and appropriately modified and augmented, with the agreement that they should be sent to the Societies, to ask whether on this basis they wished to join a European biochemical organization. The tentative name Federation of European Biochemical Societies was assigned and was eventually accepted. The only alternative suggestion came from Campbell, who was advised that some eastern European biochemical societies felt that the description of the organization as a federation was too strong a term, and might not lead to approval by their respective governments, in cases where governmental approval was necessary. I resisted this suggestion because I could already see the convenience of describing the organization as FEBS, and the lesser attraction of AEBS. No trouble on this score was, in fact, ever raised.

Keeping up the initiative of The Biochemical Society in promoting this venture, its Committee was persuaded that its annual meeting for March 1964 at University College London should in fact become the first FEBS Meeting. The Federation itself came into official existence on 1 January 1964 with 17 adhering societies, and at the opening of the first meeting, the Society delegates to the FEBS Council, plus the officers of FEBS, autographed a copy of the statutes*. The statutes as worded at that time provided that the host society would appoint the officers of FEBS for the year in question. Accordingly, Frank Happold, as Chairman of the Biochemical Society's Committee, became the first Chairman of FEBS. I became the Secretary of FEBS and Prakash Datta, the Treasurer. The Biochemical Society has usually held its annual general meetings at University College, where the Society was founded in March 1911. This meant, because of my previous activities, that I had already established a close collaboration with Datta as the man on the spot for arrangements for meetings at University College. In particular, the 50th Anniversary Meeting of The Biochemical Society at University College in March 1961 had brought us very close together.

The first Council Meeting of FEBS was held in London on Sunday, 22 March 1964, in The National Lib-

eral Club, and I have two distinct memories from that meeting. The first was the very important decision to drop the word 'national' from the phrase 'national societies', which I had written into the original statutes as a description of the proposed members of FEBS. This was done at the suggestion of the biochemists from the GDR and GFR and was designed to eliminate any political or territorial considerations. The members of FEBS would simply be the societies, and in turn the society members. The other recollection is of E.H. Fischer, recently returned from a visit to Israel, and delegated by the Israel Biochemical Society to present an application to join FEBS, being unable to persuade the Council that Israel was part of Europe.

The meeting itself was highly successful in terms of attendance. We had thought that a print of 1000 for the programmes and abstracts would be more than adequate, but in fact the number of those attending slightly exceeded this figure. Fred Sanger arranged a symposium entitled 'Structure and Activity of Enzymes', which was subsequently published as FEBS Symposium No. 1, edited by T.W. Goodwin, J.I. Harris and B.S. Hartley, and has, I believe, been the best seller of all FEBS Symposia. The speakers were truly international, coming from Britain, France, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, The Netherlands, Sweden, Italy and the United States. The only disappointment was that Sanger was stricken by influenza and unable to see the fruits of his handiwork. It is also a matter of very pleasant record that the first paper ever read at a FEBS Meeting was delivered by Feodor Lynen. The European flavour was further enhanced by Edgar Lederer delivering The Biochemical Society's Hopkins' Memorial Lecture during the meeting.

Someone who should be remembered from the early days is David Thomas, honorary consultant in typography to University College. He left his imprint on FEBS by designing the layout of the program of the first meeting, the charter flight brochures, the Bulletin, and the cover of the *European Journal of Biochemistry*. The familiar FEBS logo was his creation.

In the beginning, FEBS was founded only with the idea that the Societies might come together to hold regular meetings. There was even some doubt whether the meetings would be annual or biennial. For the further growth of FEBS, it was a happy coincidence that the Sixth International Congress of Biochemistry

* Reproduced on p. S169.

was taking place in New York in August 1964. I had developed an interest in organizing reduced rate travel when helping British biochemists attend the Moscow IUB congress and the joint meetings with sister societies in Europe. The upcoming New York Congress was an even bigger opportunity and I was already planning charter flights for members of the British Society. FEBS had come into existence just in time to qualify as a charter organizer. Wearing my FEBS hat, I transferred the arrangements from the British Society to FEBS, and persuaded the French biochemists, who were organizing their own charter, to do likewise. This allowed us to open the charters to all biochemists who were members of FEBS Societies. Societies whose membership was too small to justify an economical charter could now offer this to their members via FEBS, and in the event three charters were organized from London and one from Paris. By deliberate arrangement, biochemists from different countries sat next to each other on the aircraft, as a further means of developing intra-European contact on an individual basis. I have two particular memories of these charters. One was of receiving a phone call from Theodor Bücher's secretary in Munich, asking for a seat on one of the aircraft. I had a vague idea that Bücher was somewhat influential in biochemistry in the GFR, and as part of the process of making contact, I put him in a first-class seat next to Campbell. The contact that he then made with FEBS was perhaps to be significant in terms of later developments, which will be recounted. The other memory is of a rivalry between BOAC and Air France over the degree of hospitality to be accorded to charter passengers, which led to two of the BOAC charter planes returning to London being loaded to the roof with champagne. Lynen, one of the passengers, was highly appreciative of this gesture and took full advantage of it. He was subsequently photographed in a somewhat dazed state on the tarmac at London Airport by Hugo Theorell. When Lynen's Nobel Prize was announced the following November, it was this photograph that Theorell gave to the waiting reporters, and which was to appear in the press and on television.

An informal Council meeting of FEBS was held in New York, at which came the beginnings of ideas other than simply holding meetings. I suggested that FEBS might issue a news bulletin, listing meetings and other types of announcement with which we are now

familiar. This was agreed and the first bulletin was produced in time for distribution at the second FEBS Meeting in Vienna in April 1965.

I attended this second Council meeting no longer as an officer of FEBS. The officers were now, according to statutes, appointed by the Austrian Society, and Hoffmann-Ostenhof was the Chairman. This was a memorable meeting. Three suggestions were made which have become permanent features of the FEBS scene. Arnstein proposed that FEBS should organize summer schools. He became, on this account, the summer schools' organizer and in turn persuaded Christian de Duve to hold the first such activity in Louvain in the summer of 1965. Pointing out that FEBS could do many more things than simply organize meetings, I suggested that officers might be appointed on a more permanent basis than had earlier been envisaged, and that while the Chairman of FEBS should be appointed each year by the host society for the meeting, there should be a secretary, not necessarily associated with the host society, who would act on a longer term basis and deal with activities other than the meetings. A second suggestion was that FEBS might venture into the field of publication. I had particularly in mind something along the lines of *Biochemical and Biophysical Research Communications*, which seemed a first-rate innovative idea with scope for imitation. Sub-committees were set up to consider both ideas and at the third Council meeting, held at the end of the week, I accepted the invitation to become the Secretary General of FEBS for a three-year period. The idea of a journal publication was referred to a sub-committee.

With the Bulletin and Summer Schools already augmenting FEBS activities, the stage was now set for the next development, that of publication. I should inject here the great pleasure I personally felt at the keenness of individual societies to invite FEBS to hold a meeting in their country, and a long list of invitations was quickly built up.

FEBS did not have the funds with which to meet the expenses of convening a meeting of the sub-committee, but by various acts of individual enterprise, six members eventually met in Courtois's office in Paris in November 1965. These were Courtois, Hoffmann-Ostenhof, Uriel Littauer, Claude Liébecq, Pavao Mildner and myself. Peter Reichard could not attend but sent his views. Littauer had been sent by the Israel

Biochemical Society to the Vienna meeting to renew the application for membership, and his powerful advocacy convinced FEBS, where conviction had been lacking the year before, that Israel was part of Europe.

The sub-committee made a recommendation, but not the proposal I had originally put forward. The majority opinion was that if a journal was to be launched, it should be of the conventional type, publishing the customary extended reports. We chose not to wait for the next Council meeting to approve the idea, but instead drew up a specification for the journal and sent it to various publishers, asking for their interest. We received a number of encouraging replies and were particularly impressed by the North-Holland Publishing Company, who were then developing their rapid photo-offset process. Also at this time, I had decided to propose to FEBS that a treasurer should be appointed. While we did not have much income by way of society dues, if we were to go into the field of publication, there would be a lot of financial matters to handle. I could think of no one more suitable than Datta, who had performed this task for the first FEBS meeting and I already involved him informally in FEBS prior to the Council meeting in Warsaw, at which his name would be proposed, by taking him with me and Liébecq to Amsterdam to talk to North-Holland about the journal. This brought us in contact with the dynamic Bart van Tongeren of North-Holland, a most pregnant meeting.

The early years of FEBS were marked by a succession of happy coincidences. The coincidence that now comes to mind is of Bücher being invited to lecture at the Middlesex Hospital, and my receiving a message that he would like to talk to me during his visit to London. I agreed and roped in Arnstein and 'Cuth' Cuthbertson, the Treasurer of The Biochemical Society. During a convivial evening Bücher explained that he had become the President of the Gesellschaft für Physiologische Chemie, and was keenly interested in sponsoring cooperation of the type for which FEBS had been designed. Specifically, he wished to propose that instead of FEBS founding a new journal, he would use his best efforts to persuade his Society in turn to persuade Springer-Verlag to agree to convert the *Biochemische Zeitschrift* into the FEBS journal. I was delighted by this proposal for it seemed to me that we should not be in the business of creating new journals of the conventional type, and enlarging already numer-

ous activities, but rather that we should become associated with an existing journal. Secretly I had hoped that the British Biochemical Society might have made this proposal in relation to the *Biochemical Journal*. The meeting with Bücher occurred in March 1966, and at the Council meeting in Poland the following month, the alternatives were proposed of founding a new journal, or of accepting Bücher's suggestion regarding the *Biochemische Zeitschrift*. It was the second suggestion that was adopted and the officers were empowered to negotiate with Springer-Verlag. At the same meeting the proposal for Datta to become the Treasurer was also accepted. Events then moved very rapidly. The negotiators for FEBS were Whelan, Datta, Liébecq and Hoffmann-Ostenhof, assisted by Bücher and Otto Westphal. At an initial meeting in Heidelberg, we came in contact with the kindly, understanding Dr. H. Mayer-Kaupp of Springer-Verlag. Also at this first meeting was a representative of the *Hoppe-Seyler Zeitschrift*, because an early idea was that both journals might merge into the FEBS journal. This was not to be. It was decided that it would be good to retain a German language journal in the form of *Hoppe-Seyler*, with the *Biochemische Zeitschrift* becoming the truly international FEBS journal. There was a second meeting in Heidelberg, notable for me by Liébecq's hair-raising driving between Frankfurt airport and Heidelberg. Subsequently meetings were held between Datta, Whelan, Liébecq and Hoffmann-Ostenhof in Brussels, and with Mayer-Kaupp in a hotel room at London airport, at which a contract was agreed. Liébecq was already appointed as Editor-in-Chief; Krebs became Honorary Chairman of the Editorial Board, and the rest is history.

I conclude with an account of my final year with FEBS before I left Britain in September 1967 to take up my present post at the University of Miami.

The FEBS charter operation was again repeated for the Seventh International Congress of Biochemistry in Tokyo, with the added innovation that for the return journey there would not be a charter operation, but returning biochemists could travel by the normal service of the airline that had taken them to Tokyo by charter, and with unlimited stop-offs, so that full advantage of the return through the Far East could be had.

I decided to raise again the question of FEBS publishing a *BBRC*-like journal and there were two more

happy coincidences to follow. One was that in June 1967 Bücher had invited me to Munich, to lecture to his medical students. On this visit I discussed the idea of the new journal with Bücher, and found him very enthusiastic. Part of his motivation seemed to stem from one of his colleagues having had a paper rejected by *BBRC*. Bücher felt that it was time for competition. The second coincidence was that Bernard Horecker had been spending the summer in Stockholm, and I took advantage of this to invite him to be a chairman at a symposium that I was organizing as part of the Fourth FEBS Meeting in Oslo. Horecker was, and is, the Chairman of the Editorial Board of *BBRC*. The idea of the journal was proposed at a meeting of the FEBS Publications Sub-committee held prior to the first of the two Council meetings, and it was immediately evident that there was strong opposition. Nevertheless, it was presented to the Council, but because of similar divided opinions it was referred back to the Publications Sub-committee. There were three principal arguments against such a journal. The first was that it would not be possible to recruit an editorial board. The second was that there was not a market for such a journal. The third came from people who felt that short communications are ephemeral and simply overburden the literature, later being replaced by full reports. I felt a compulsion to try to secure approval of the proposal during that meeting. If I did not do so then I would lose any influence that I had, because I was resigning as Secretary-General prior to leaving for Miami. On this basis, therefore, answers to the main lines of opposition had to be found immediately. The answer to the first question was had by using all one's powers of persuasion on prominent European biochemists who were at the Oslo meeting, asking if they would join the editorial board of the new journal, for which a name was already to hand – *FEBS Letters*. It was on this basis that the first editorial board came into being. I believe that every member of the board except Sydney Cohen and Boja Keil was someone who was at Oslo and who agreed to join on the spot, notably Krebs and Sanger. The next question, whether there was a market for such a journal, was answered by the fortunate presence of Horecker. He informed us that *BBRC* had been so successful that the editorial board was thinking of launching a companion journal, with the subject matter being divided between molecular biology on the one hand and biochemistry on the

other. Horecker, on hearing our suggestion, said he would rather see a second such journal, the need for which he and his editorial board were already convinced of, started by a separate organization. Then there would not be a monopoly in the hands of one organization, but there would be competition and innovation. What we realized from this news was that if *FEBS Letters* was not founded then and there, the potential market would become saturated by *BBRC* itself dividing into two journals. Obviously, this gave additional impetus to try to launch *FEBS Letters*. The third argument raised against *FEBS Letters*, namely, that the contents would be ephemeral, in fact proved to be a very positive helpful influence in shaping policy. As a result of discussions with the projected editorial board, it was agreed that it would be the policy of *FEBS Letters* that although its contents would consist of short communications with rapid publication, the board would insist that these were to be publications in a final form, not to be republished elsewhere. A meeting of the Publications Sub-committee was hurriedly summoned, to inform them of developments, and with one dissenting member, they agreed to support the proposal at the Council meeting on the next day.

A truly memorable discussion took place at that Council meeting. The opposition was still there, but less evident now. Bücher was a powerful protagonist, making the point that the journal could be brought into existence without FEBS being involved, but that the editorial board, willing to serve the journal, was in fact making a marriage proposal to FEBS, with *FEBS Letters* as the present from the bridegroom to the bride. However, the issue could still not be resolved, but the impasse was broken by Arnstein's suggestion that the proposal be referred to each of the individual Societies for a vote, using the argument that the Societies had not been able to consider the proposal and therefore that the delegates to the Council meeting did not have instructions. This was accepted, and it was agreed that unofficial approaches could be made to publishers to see whether, in fact, anyone was willing to put the capital into such a journal, because FEBS itself had no capital.

Immediately after the meeting, several publishers were approached with the idea that news could be brought to an unofficial meeting of FEBS Council delegates during the Tokyo Congress the next month.

Despite our contacting four publishers, there was an inevitability that the photo-offset process, so expertly developed by North-Holland, was ideal for the rapid publication envisaged for *FEBS Letters*. The publishers' responses were brought to the meeting in Tokyo. The Societies had already been asked for their votes, and while some were negative, a clear positive majority vote was obtained. Datta, who had thrown all his weight behind the proposal, became the Managing Editor, and the first issue of *FEBS Letters* appeared in July 1968. I shall always be grateful to Datta that the paper I had submitted for this first issue, along with my colleagues Brenda Ryman and Norman Palmer, was inserted by him as the first paper to be published in that journal.

Looking back on those early, heady, first years of FEBS, two thoughts come to mind. The first is that of my good fortune in having had the opportunity to have shared in these memorable experiences. While I may have been propelled into a catalytic role in the founding of FEBS, I stay away from any idea of originality on my part. It was clear, from the first time that the idea of FEBS was mooted, that all that was required was the activation energy. The forces for collaboration were already there and the idea of such a European organization was developing in everybody's mind. FEBS also became the model for sister organi-

zations; PAABS, in the Americas, and FAOB in Asia and Oceania. These three organizations now work closely with the International Union of Biochemistry and greatly assist IUB for the reason that the Union's contacts with individual biochemists are only possible via the societies. The regional organizations link IUB with the societies.

The second thought is that while I have related a succession of what I have called happy coincidences, the happy coincidence that towers above all other was that of my getting to know Prakash Datta and realizing what he might be able to do for FEBS. That, and his insatiable energy and enthusiasm, have been responsible more than any other single factor or person for the outstanding success of FEBS. The staggeringly successful financial fortunes that have come about through the journal publications are the result of Datta's astute management, and the way in which his engaging personality has made friends of everybody. As Treasurer, Managing Editor of *FEBS Letters*, Publisher of the *FEBS Bulletin*, and innovator in so many directions, he has truly become Mr FEBS, and long may he so continue.

Miami, 13 December 1973