

50 Years Zellcheming Round Table Discussion for Cellulose Chemists (Cellulose-Chemiker-Rundgespräch)

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The story began in 1952 when I returned from my stay with Prof. Hermann Mark in Brooklyn, USA. I wanted to get acquainted with the German chemical industry, and applied for a position. My first interview was with J. C. Funke from Bemberg, Wuppertal, a rayon producer in the VGF group. After an amiable talk he arrived at the opinion, that with my background I would better fit into a research facility. So I was forwarded to a member of the board of directors. This one told me “we already have a scientist in the trust”, but eventually consented to attach me to the “trust scientist” as an assistant. So I landed in Oberbruch, near Aachen at VGF (Vereinigte Glanzstoff Fabriken AG), then one of the biggest producers of Viscose and Perlon fibers, namely in its “Forschung V” (research department viscose). My boss was the “trust scientist” Dr. Richard Bartunek. He was a pulp expert with a lot of practical experience. He was chairman of the Fachausschuss FA III, then named “Reyon, Zellwolle, Folien” (Rayon, Staple Fiber, Foils). But he was also very interested in basic research. He himself had developed a swelling-hypothesis based on ion-hydrates. Bartunek was an amiable, broadly educated and interested man. Soon we developed a very good relationship both professional and private. We were a good team. He taught me pulp technology, I discussed with him his ion hydrate swelling theory, which, in his opinion, could explain the swelling maxima in NaOH and KOH solutions - the plant people had little interest for these ideas. Already in 1953 he sent me to the “Zellcheming Hauptversammlung” (Gen-

eral Meeting of the German Cellulose and Paper Chemists and Engineers) to deliver my first lecture at this forum. Later, during our critical review of the meeting we both came to the opinion, that there were too many technical lectures, basic research was underrepresented. Therefore, we decided to do something about it. Finally the idea was born to organize a forum for free discussion of such topics, namely a round table discussion - the “Rundgespräch” - for cellulose chemists along with the general meeting. There free discussion should assume the first place. Bartunek introduced me also to the Fachausschuss FA III. So my cooperation with Bartunek was certainly a good match. Soon he became my mentor and friend.

In 1954 I returned to Graz to the institute (Physical Chemistry) of my former teacher Otto Kratky to head its cellulose and polymer department. However, I stayed in close cooperation with Bartunek and Zellcheming. I regularly attended the Zellcheming General Meeting, gave lectures, and remained a member of the Fachausschuss FA III. Since in Graz too my field of work comprised to at least 50% cellulose research, I remained professionally in the same field too. With Bartunek, we continued to discuss the idea of a “Rundgespräch”, and he devised a first draft. It should consist of twice 3–4 short lectures, the discussion should be open ended and form the center of gravity. Bartunek would take over the leadership and organization. Since at first Zellcheming hesitated, Bartunek took the initiative into his own hands.

However, the preparative work took longer than we had thought. Only in 1958

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the first “Rundgespräch” could take place in Baden-Baden. We counted about 30 attendants, mostly from the viscose industry, including the members of the Fachausschuss FA III. Nearly all of them were personally known to us. The Rundgespräch was officially no part of the General Meeting, its program was printed on an extra sheet which was enclosed with the invitation to the General Meeting and handed out to the participants. Also, the Rundgespräch started as a “Vorspann” (leader) on Monday, while the Hauptversammlung was officially opened only on Tuesday. A very lively and vivid discussion developed immediately between cellulose chemists and practitioners. Most of the time the discussion became very vehement, sometimes like mad (“dass die Fetzen flogen”). Outstanding were the spirited disputations between W. Meskat and H. Dolmetsch. Except the first one, the Rundgespräch took place, very fittingly, in the round salon (Runder Saal) of the casino. Bartunek was the initiator, chairman and moderator; he was the soul of the event. I was his *adlatus* and assistant. Since Bartunek chaired both the Rundgespräch and the Fachausschuss FA III, there was a close connection between both from the very beginning. The journal “Das Papier” published the full text of both the lectures and the discussion - this amounted up to 48 pages! Free reprints were handed out to all authors. The reports (Rundgespräch Berichte) were compiled by myself up to 1970, from 1971 on by Walter Schempp. Heinz Ruck, Rundgespräch veteran of the first hour, speaker and zealous disputant, wrote lively reports for the journal APR, which were always competent and critical. Sometimes, it is true, he touched the wrong note. He proposed to honour Richard Bartunek with the title “Mister Rundgespräch”. Georg Jayme was steady, Hermann Klare frequent participant. The colleagues from the DDR were well represented, above all Burkart Philipp (Teltow) and his coworkers, later also Hansjörg Jacobasch from Dresden. Indeed, the Rundgespräch had, from the very

beginning, best contacts with the scientists from the then DDR. This goes, not in the least, certainly back to the sensible and cooperative policy of Zellcheming towards the “colleagues from the East”. Further, it was certainly advantageous that the Rundgespräch was a “Vorspann” and therefore no official part of the General Meeting, thus no pure “westerly” presentation. H. Klare took every effort to help the cellulose chemists from the DDR to take part in the Rundgespräch. Meanwhile, the number of participants had risen to about 100. In 1955, Bartunek retired. However, he remained chairman of both the Rundgespräch and the Fachausschuss. Bartunek chaired the Rundgespräch from 1958 up to 1968, I was his helper. From 1968 on I was in charge.

In 1969 there was an important caesura. I followed a call to Darmstadt to succeed G. Jayme as head of the Celluloseinstitut, which at the same time was transformed into an “Institute for Macromolecular Chemistry”. This change brought about about some innovations. I took over the chairmanship of the Fachausschuss, which changed its name to “Cellulose and Cellulosederivates”. The Fachausschuss was headed by Bartunek during the years 1958–1970, by myself 1970–1975, and 1975–1994 by W. Schempp. Also, the organization of the Rundgespräch was assigned to the Fachausschuss. In the Rundgespräch, the scope of the topics was broadened; now subjects as fleece materials, zetapotential, environment, microbiology, biotechnology were included. From 1971 on, the Rundgespräch became fully presentable; now it was an official part of the Hauptversammlung and its program was printed in the official invitation. In 1971, it was opened for the first time by Zellcheming president H. Cornell. Guests of honour were G. Jayme (70 years) and M. Rebek (80 years). The report 1970 was dedicated to R. Bartunek at the occasion of his 70th birthday. We counted 160 participants. The colleagues from the DDR were, as usual, well represented. They took part in the moderation and in the planning. In

1974, R. Bartunek died. Now I managed the Rundgespräch with the help of the Fachausschuss. From 1979 we introduced an “introduction”, a statement of position, which I delivered. The report of 1984 was dedicated to me at the occasion of my 60th birthday. With only a few exceptions, Baden-Baden was the location of both the Hauptversammlung and the Rundgespräch. One of these exceptions was Hamburg 1993. There was a funny episode. During a break, the participants left the lecture room and came to a side room, in which an opulent buffet was prepared. The participants made good use of it. Only later we learned, that the buffet was meant for another group of another meeting - but then it was too late.

In 1998 the 40th Rundgespräch took place. The report in the “Papier” was the last one, since this journal stopped publication. From now on the reports were published in the journal *ipw*, in a separate section “Das Papier - Science and Technology”. Unfortunately, the proceedings were no more published in full, but only in the form of a short summary. Also, there were no more reprints. In 2001, I resigned on grounds of my age. The Hauptversammlung moved to Wiesbaden, the Rundgespräch was named, from 2007 on, “Cellulose Symposium”. Its organization lies now in younger hands. But, as ever, it enjoys lively interest and at the same time keeps up the old tradition.



Prof. Heinze, chairman of the expert group “Cellulose and cellulose derivatives” (left) and Prof. Josef Schurz (right).