Molecular Crystals and Liquid Crystals Incorporating Nonlinear Optics

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IN MEMORIAM
MENDEL DAVID COHEN, 1925–1988

One of the saddest duties anyone can perform is to report on the demise of a trusted and valued colleague. When the one being eulogized is someone like Mendel Cohen, it becomes doubly sad, and difficult—difficult because one cannot summarize in a few words a man who contributed so much, both in open and hidden ways, to his science, his institute, to his colleagues and coworkers.

Mendel was born in 1925 in what was then called Rhodesia. His early education was in South Africa. He received a B.Sc. from the University of Capetown and a M.Sc. from Natal University. He went on to receive his Ph.D. in from Iowa State University in 1952. From 1952 to 1953 he was a research associate at Florida State University. In 1954 he joined the Weizmann Institute as a research associate. In 1959 he was promoted to Senior Scientist. In 1969 he became an Associate Professor and a full Professor in 1978. In 1972, following the death of Gerhard G.M.J. Schmidt with whom he had collaborated on so much seminal work, he became head of the Department of Structural Chemistry at the institute. In all, he was the author or co-author of 68 publications, many of which were of great significance. His fundamental contributions to the development of the concepts of topochemistry were of basic importance to our understanding of so many solid state reactions. In addition, his many contributions to the study of eximers and several other topics broke much new ground. He was the organizing secretary of the second of these ICCOSS symposia, which was held at the Weizmann Institute, and was a member of the scientific committee of the first, third, fifth, sixth and seventh of these meetings. I could add much more but a curriculum vitae is but a collection of dry facts. It hardly begins to picture the real person or summarize his real contributions or importance.

I first met Mendel when visiting the Weizmann Institute about thirty years ago. It was immediately apparent to me that he was a thoughtful person and an imaginative thinker, very knowledgeable and very capable in his field. Though still under Gerhard Schmidt's wing back then, it was quite evident that, despite his quiet manner, he was an important figure in organic solid state chemistry in his own right. The stream of publications on topochemistry, eximers, photochemistry and several other topics, many of which are classics in their field, firmly established his stature as a scientist. These, however, are only the easily visible aspects of his contributions. I knew Mendel to be an unpretentious man, many of whose most important contributions were not readily apparent to those who did not know him. High among these I would rate the unflagging support, encouragement and advice he gave to the structural chemistry group which he headed so ably for many years.

Under his wise guidance the group expanded its scope in many fruitful directions and came to contribute so much to the development of organic solid state chemistry as well as to other important fields. Among these, Mendel had the vision to support and help develop a protein group within his department which became involved in a pioneering

effort to crystallize ribosomes and to characterize them by x-ray diffraction. As a result of these early efforts, the protein group is playing a leading role in ribosome crystal structure determination. In spite of a prolonged ailment, which eventually led to his death, he continued to work unstintingly.

Unfortunately, my direct interactions with Mendel were rather more limited than I would have liked. Because of the physical distance between our two institutes, they were largely confined to those occasions when I visited the Weizmann Institute, or he visited my laboratory at Brookhaven, or when we met at conferences we both happened to attend. Of course, we sometimes communicated by mail so that I was largely aware of what was going on in his group. However, from these contacts, and, in later years, the relatively more frequent encounters with the members of his group, the importance of the man and the significance of his work on behalf of his group and his science was readily apparent. He was a wise scientist and a true pioneer in his chosen field, respected by all who knew him. He will be sorely missed.

Mendel died of a heart ailment in December 1988. He is survived by his wife and three children.

George Adler