

THREE QUARTERS A CENTURY

FOREWORD TO SPECIAL ISSUE DEDICATED TO PROF. MILOSLAV HAVLÍČEK



Such a number of years makes one think, as the famous phrase in *Some Like it Hot* goes. In cases like the jubilee that this *Festschrift* celebrates, there is indeed a lot to think about, because the life of Professor Miloslav Havlíček has been anything but boring. This is clear already from his curriculum. One of the first graduates of the newly-founded Faculty of Technical and Nuclear Physics in 1961, he started his mathematical career teaching algebra. At the same time, he worked on applications of algebraic methods in quantum theory, under the strong influence of Professor Václav Votruba, the nestor of Czech theoretical physics.

Infinite-dimensional Lie algebras were the topic of his PhD thesis, and algebraic problems have remained his favourite subject throughout his life. However, his interests have been broader than that. He has dealt with problems in functional analysis, differential equations, foundations of quantum mechanics, and other topics.

Since 1973, he has spent several years at the Laboratory of Theoretical Physics, JINR, in Dubna, where he also wrote and defended his higher doctoral thesis on *Canonical Realizations*, a certain algebraic representation theory of Lie algebras. Back in Prague, he worked at Charles University, but in the second half of the 1980s his research came under pressure from those who wielded power but had no understanding, and he decided to return to the Department of Mathematics of his *alma mater*.

The great political rift of 1989 changed his life. In particular, it removed the obstacles that had prevented him from obtaining the academic *laurea* that he deserved. He obtained his habilitation in 1990, and three years later he became a full professor. In 1990, he was also elected dean of the faculty, and he served in this capacity for two terms; he was the principal *spiritus movens* in the transformation of the faculty to the conditions of a free society. One of his memorable achievements was to found the Doppler Institute, which cemented and boosted the existing informal collaboration of several groups working on mathematical physics in Prague.

These are the dry facts. However, we who have known him for about two thirds of his present age can testify that there is much more in Miloslav. His professional – and not only professional – life has been ornamented by an array of stories too numerous to be told in this short preface. Some are anecdotal, like the story of his doctoral thesis being confiscated by a Soviet border guard, who suspected subversion in a text on Lie algebras. Some are rather complex, like the story of our textbook on linear operators in quantum physics, tenderly known as *Blue Death* by our students, which started out four decades ago as a lecture note project to utilize an orphaned chapter of a manuscript, passed through years of reworking under the eye of mean editors, and through administrative hurdles so typical for certain periods in the history of this country, not to mention the bankruptcy of a publishing house, to achieve one Czech edition and two English editions with three different publishers – and who knows where it will go from here.

It is a good custom in our field that we honour a colleague and a teacher as he celebrates a jubilee by putting forward some results which, we think, might please him. In this volume, we have collected short papers from Miloslav's friends, collaborators and students, in the hope that he will enjoy them.

Pavel Exner