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Special issue: Editorial [Issue dedicated to Albert Perez]

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SPECIAL ISSUE: EDITORIAL

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Albert Perez by a group of his pupils and younger colleagues on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of his decease. For many of us, he was a person who significantly influenced our professional lives, and we believe that he deserves to be recalled to those who did not know him well.

RNDr. Albert Perez, DrSc. was born in Athens, Greece, in January 1920, and graduated in mathematics in the early 1940s at the National Polytechnic School there. The promising career of a gifted young mathematician had to succumb to the war and occupation of Greece by German and Italian armies. Albert Perez took part in the movement of *résistance* in the brigades of the left-oriented National People's Liberation Front, known as ELAS. He continued the cooperation with ELAS even during the Greek Civil War after 1945, and after the defeat of it, he had to leave his country. He was able to visit it again only after the end of the military dictatorship.

His itinerancy via Europe began in Paris and found its destination in former Czechoslovakia in the very late 1940s. Albert Perez started to cooperate with the newly established Department of Information Theory of the Institute of Electrical Engineering. In 1953, he graduated the second time, now at the Charles University in Prague. His modern mathematical thinking, corresponding to the ideas of a newly-born cybernetics, found an adequate environment in the group led by professor Antonín Špaček; this group was oriented on new applications of the Probability Theory and related topics. As a member of this group, he became a researcher of the Institute of Information Theory and Automation of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences in 1959, and he remained there, at the position of the head of the Department of Information Theory, till his retirement in 1990. He continued his scientific activities even after his retirement, kept in contact with his former pupils, and discussed their research results with them till his last days. He also cooperated in new publications.

The mathematical activities of Albert Perez were remarkably wide, but his main focus was on the Information Theory and the related fields of Probability. In the early 1960s, he was one of the leading personalities of the world-famous Prague school of Information Theory; and in 1964, he defended the degree of the Doctor of Sciences. His position among Czech cyberneticists was also reflected when he was elected for the first President of the Czechoslovak Cybernetic Society.

The adaptation to the new environment after his arrival to Prague was not easy at all; and we, who were close to "Doctor Perez", as we called him, felt that some features of the Czech mentality and habits remained obscure for him all the time, from our culinary habits to the Czech traditional approach to discipline.

Albert Perez was, in the roots of his individuality, a well-organized and respectable man. But, generally speaking, he respected authorities and was respected as an authority himself. The Czech traditional distrust to those in power was hardly understandable to him.

In this respect, there occurred a significant and exciting conflict between Albert Perez's moral values and the reality of his new home. Since his youth, he strongly believed in the ideals of a socially-equal society, so demagogically abused by the communist ideology. He had spent several years in the fight for that ideology, and then he came to a country which claimed to employ those ideals in its everyday propaganda and policy. He could not ignore the contrast between the simulation of democracy, and the reality of the totalitarian regime. It was evidently a challenge to his character, forcing him to cope with this absurd reality and to find his way of life in such a society. It was a deep experience for us to watch his endeavor and its sometimes seemingly paradoxical outcomes.

He never joined, even though having been pressed to do it, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, however his past looked like predestinating him for it. In private discussions, he passionately defended the left-wing ideology; but, with identical passion, he looked for any way that could help his younger colleagues from being politically discriminated. His inner conflict between ideological predestination and honesty, combined with thoughtful fairness toward his colleagues, was, in the crucial situations, decided in the favor of his moral integrity. Only his close fellow-workers could observe the price he paid for it, and view a certain disproportion between his sovereignty in the principal leadership of his department (often with the patriarchal air of a demanding but protecting father), and sometimes even touching embarrassment in his coping with some of elementary practical problems.

Specific but important reflection of this conflict of dreams and reality was Perez's approach to the research. The situation of research teams and individual researchers of that time is hardly imaginable now, even for those who remember it. Ideologically, they were motivated to develop new results and "revolutionary" discoveries, but in the reality, every really new idea meant a disturbance in the system, an unexpected situation for administrative (understand, political) authorities, and consequently problems for authors. In such atmosphere, some researchers accepted a comfortable strategy of passivity combined with pretending some research within the limits of expectable development, and some moderate political activity.

Nothing like it was acceptable for Albert Perez. He taught his pupils and his colleagues in the department to be scientists with all the enthusiasm and endeavor that work deserves. Such attitude, however it did not look like it, was an essentially threatening to the passive immobility of the totalitarian regime, and it was intuitively understood as such. In this sense, the way in which Albert Perez attained his scientific goal was an exciting experience for his pupils and colleagues. It was an effective school of scientific responsibility, creativity and also freedom. By his example, he influenced the thinking of several generations of his colleagues. They learned to accept responsibility for the quality and productivity of their research, the ethics of publishing their results, and the honesty of cooperation with colleagues. This heritage turned out to be more significant for our future scientific growth than many other factors that we have met; and this is the main reason why we have decided to form this special issue to Albert Perez's honor.

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