

Joan Solomon (Ziman)

*John Michael Ziman, FRS*

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John was born in Cambridge, England, but spent almost all the first twenty years of his life in New Zealand. There he developed a liking for long walking expeditions in 'the Bush' with his friends, both for the excitement and the delight which he always took in the natural environment.

He was an outstanding student in science and mathematics at school and subsequently at the University of Wellington, but he also inherited a love of literature from his mother's side of the family together with a very considerable gift for writing which he would later use to good effect. His family returned to England after the War and John enrolled in Balliol College to catch up in Mathematics and take a DPhil in Physics. He took a critical interest in university and student politics which had begun in New Zealand. In collaboration with Jasper Rose he edited a review of Cambridge university, and wrote *Camford Observed* a critique of the way 'education, religion, learning and research' played their part in the two ancient universities.

John's principal scientific work was in solid-state physics which, somewhat strangely, involves the subject of the disordered structure of liquids, and liquid metals. This demanded the highest standard in imaginative mathematics. He was then invited by Neville Mott to take up a post in the Cavendish laboratory, Cambridge, and in 1968 was awarded a Fellowship of the Royal Society, which quite delighted him. This proved to be his most intensive and productive period of work in physics, but even before he received his Fellowship John's interests had been expanding in other directions. In 1964 he took up a chair at Bristol University, and although he worked hard at reorganising the research going on there he did very little 'pure' physics himself. It had become the social effects of science that most intrigued him, and he worked hard at all the related studies this entailed.

I have counted some 22 different books that John authored, most of which have been translated into several different languages. Their substance is too various to describe beyond their titles, such as *Research As Though Relevance Mattered*, *The Human Aspects of Science*, *Aspects of Scientism*, *Prometheus Bound*, *Reliable Knowledge*, *Science and the Rule of Law*, and *Real Science*. No doubt my selection of these titles will have affected readers' reactions to the range of his interests. Inevitably this has excluded much, including great tomes on the properties of electrons and phonons and new approaches to technology and to education in generalist science. Another measure of the width of his reading can be deduced from the numbers of journals shoved into makeshift shelves in the small rooms of our house. In his attempt to learn more about the sociology and philosophy which contributed to the present state of our modern ideas he read, listened, gave lectures, spent time in other countries, and made new friends with whoever would discuss his work. Of these Mary Midgley, the editor of this special issue, became an especially important colleague during recent years when he was delving into the difficult notion of the pluralism required in any approach to modern science. Intersubjectivity was a topic that John had studied from the time when he first began exploring the idea that *Science is Social* (1964) in a talk he gave on what we then called The Third Programme.

Anyone who read the previous paragraph without meeting John Ziman might be forgiven for wondering whether such a breadth of output would have been too much for serious scholarship, but the depth and regularity of his reading, his ready understanding and enthusiasm, made the very idea of 'too much' quite unthinkable. So when an argument did take place, he would welcome it as though revelling in the possibility of disagreements to be sorted out. He was always keen for his ideas to be taken seriously, like those of any other scholar, and to be discussed with others, whatever their discipline. Some sociologists seemed to find that his earlier achievements in science made such discussion curiously difficult.

More engaged activities crowded into the end of his life. In the 1970s he had already convened a group of thinkers for predicting problems related to new technologies, and publishing warning reports — *The Council for Science and Society*. He served on many other groups, from security and the armaments industry (ISIS — International Security Information Service) which supplied information to members of parliament, international science (PUGWASH), and Public Understanding of Science (RS). But what may have brought him most pleasure and friendship was joining an altruistic group of

fund-raisers who were working for peace, human rights, and social change to whom, in addition to money, he dedicated a great deal of his time and care.

John married twice, and is survived by three of his four children and his second wife.