

Ein erfülltes Leben ist zu Ende gegangen

Obituary

Benno Müller-Hill

5.2.1933 – 11.8.2018

A life well-lived has come to an end

We mourn the passing of Benno Müller-Hill. He was an exceptional colleague, and a fearless trail-blazer in more than one regard. Benno Müller-Hill was 35 years old when he was offered a professorship at the then new Institute for Genetics at the University of Cologne, and he has been a formative influence in our Institute for the next three decades, safeguarding the unconventional style of the Institute, always cutting to the core in discussions, fierce, passionate, and not always diplomatic in the pursuit of truth.

These characteristics have served Benno Müller-Hill well, when he almost single-handedly revealed the far-reaching entanglement of geneticists and other scientists in Nazi Germany in euthanasia programs and the mass murder of Jews and Gypsies. His book about this topic, *Tödliche Wissenschaft* (Murderous science) has been highly influential, eventually shifting the mainstream opinion from the earlier concealment to acceptance of the sordid history.

Scientifically Benno Müller-Hill's name is most closely linked to the *lac* repressor, which he discovered as postdoc in Walter Gilbert's lab. The isolation of the *lac* repressor was the first identification of a transcription factor, so it is hard to overstate the significance of these findings, which are now textbook knowledge. Benno Müller-Hill also did ground-breaking research in a completely different field, with his discovery of the precursor protein for the beta-amyloid peptide, the hallmark component of plaques in neurodegenerative diseases.

Benno Müller-Hill was exemplary in the clarity of his scientific thinking, as well as in his civic courage. He was unpretentious, widely read and fun to discuss with. We will miss him.