

GENETICS

Politics, Science at Odds

American biologists believe opposing views on Mendelian genetics taken by Soviets represent a conflict between politics and science.

➤ SOVIET science leaders' attack on Mendelian genetics, considered valid in the Western world, "does not represent a controversy of two opposing schools of scientific thought. It is in reality a conflict between politics and science."

This is the declaration of the Governing Board of the American Institute of Biological Sciences, a coordinating organization in which all leading American biological societies participate. The Board's conclusion was reached after consultation with the executive committees of the two societies most directly concerned: The Genetics Society of America and the American Society of Human Genetics. The full statement is published in *SCIENCE* (July 29).

After reviewing how the official Soviet position was arrived at by methods essentially political rather than by impartial examination of all available facts, the Board comments:

"The progress of science has always depended upon free inquiry. The inheritance of acquired characteristics, and other doctrines that the Russians now set forth as the official party line, have had their proponents in America; some non-geneticists still hold to these ancient opinions. Nevertheless, they are allowed to investigate or philosophize, and they have a hearing.

"In Russia, on the other hand, geneticists are being rooted out as dangerous, bourgeois, reactionary, idealist, fascist, regard-

less of their political views, simply because they, like geneticists everywhere else in the world, know and accept the facts of experimental breeding and microscopic observation which Russian politics has branded false.

"It is of the utmost importance for the preservation of free inquiry in that part of the world where it still exists that these facts be known and fully appreciated."

The statement concludes with three propositions:

"1. The conclusions of Lysenko and his group regarding the inheritance of adaptive responses in higher organisms have no support in scientific fact.

"2. Genetic researches definitely support the reality of the gene and the validity of Mendel's laws. They do not support the official Communist claim that Mendelian heredity is an illusion, and any attempts on the part of Russian proponents of the Lysenko doctrines to bolster their case by citations from the works or conclusions of Western scientists are gross distortions of the meaning and intent of these scientists.

"3. We condemn the action of the Soviet government in presuming to banish a firmly established science from its schools, publishing houses, and research laboratories, and in persecuting scientists because their field of inquiry is distasteful to the government."

Science News Letter, August 6, 1949

PSYCHOLOGY

Soviet Vision Aids Fail

➤ ANOTHER Russian claim has failed of confirmation in American laboratories.

If you need to see better in the darkness of night, it won't help you a bit, it seems, if you sniff oil of wintergreen, listen to an alarm clock, or do bicycle exercises. Better stick to your red goggles for dark adaptation.

During the war, reports came through from Russian laboratories to the effect that light physical exercise could serve to reduce the time necessary to adapt the eye to darkness from the customary 25 to 45 minutes to only five or six minutes. And that stimulating the other senses—hearing, smell, taste, or the skin senses—would make the dark-adapted eye more sensitive. This was, of course, of great importance to the soldier or sailor in combat.

But details of the Russian research, as reported to the British journal, *NATURE*,

and other organs available to the Western world, were extremely skimpy. Dr. A. Chapanis, of the Johns Hopkins University, tried to get the information in 1943 through military and diplomatic channels. But his attempts met with no success. In December, 1947, he tried to communicate directly with the Russian scientist who reported the "discovery," Dr. K. Kekcheyev, but the letter was returned unopened from Moscow.

Experiments to test the claim were conducted at the Aero Medical Laboratory, Wright Field, Dayton, O., and are reported in the *JOURNAL OF EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY* (Aug.), by Drs. Chapanis, R. O. Rouse, and Stanley Schachter of Johns Hopkins, Williams College, and the University of Michigan.

Six persons were tested for the length of time necessary to adapt their eyes for dark vision. Two were given oil of wintergreen

to smell. This is an odor used for testing for leaks in oxygen masks and is "rather strong and pungent" but not offensive. They were also timed for dark adaptation without it. Another pair listened to a 1,000-cycle tone of about 50-decibel intensity. They were timed with and without the noise. The third pair were required to ride a bicycle ergometer, which "can best be described as a very light exercise." The tests provided "no evidence that any of the stimuli used either facilitated or inhibited dark adaptation."

In another experiment, the individuals tested tried to read a test chart under dim illumination. Pressure of a heavy weight or a light weight on the back of the hand, or exposure to either a loud sound or a weak one produced no change in the ability of those tested to read the chart.

The third experiment tested ability to make out the form of objects under very dim illumination. The subjects were first dark adapted by use of red goggles. Again neither an odor, this time of eugenol derived from cloves or cinnamon, the sound of a buzzer, the taste of a slice of lime, nor light exercise squeezing a hand dynamometer, was of any help in making out the shape of the dimly-lighted objects

Science News Letter, August 6, 1949

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