

ASTRONOMY

Soviet Astronomy Attacks

Abuse heaped on Western astronomy by Soviet non-scientist faction is a method of keeping communistic doctrine alive in Russian astronomy, expert declares.

► A SMALL group of non-scientist "outsiders" whose "mumbo jumbo" has the support of the Soviet government is to blame for recent Russian attacks on Western astronomy, believes a Russian-born astronomer.

Dr. Otto Struve, honorary director of the University of Chicago's Yerkes Observatory, Williams Bay, Wis., and the McDonald Observatory of the University of Texas, Mt. Locke, Texas, told Science Service that abuse is being heaped on Western astronomy and astronomers by Soviet officials appointed to keep communistic doctrine alive in Russian astronomy.

Rarely trained scientists, these government-backed outsiders to the field, "have not enough knowledge to coordinate the antiquated scientific views of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin with reality," Dr. Struve declares.

To combat "the threat to science" in this development, Dr. Struve urges that American astronomers prepare for publication "a more or less official statement to give voice to the American point of view." He proposes that the statement be drafted by a committee of two or three leading American astronomers. The committee, he suggests, might include persons of different political opinions. One member might be Dr. Harlow Shapley, director of the Harvard College Observatory, "or others who have in the past succeeded in influencing Russian public opinion," Dr. Struve says.

Because of the Soviet astronomy position, he feels that the next meeting of the International Astronomical Union should not be held in Russia, as is now scheduled.

Recognized Russian leaders in astronomy are vastly different from the officials attacking the West, emphasizes the American astronomer. Dr. Struve has met and visited with delegations of them several times in the past few years and has done research since the war with Academician G. A. Shajn.

Postwar relations with Russian astronomers have been "entirely harmonious," a group who visited this country only three years ago "acted in a modest, pleasant and entirely friendly manner," Dr. Struve recalls.

While the Soviets have made great official claims, Dr. Struve says that he has found their astronomers personally "often too modest."

But the attackers of Western views of the universe are men who would have been called "political commissars" in earlier days, the American astronomy leader ex-

plains. Unlike genetics, where a major controversy is raging between the Soviet's party views and accepted theories, the astronomy differences are not ideologically clear-cut, Dr. Struve feels. The Soviet officials uphold materialism and won't admit that there are any problems a follower of Marx and Stalin cannot solve.

"Perhaps," he suggests, "it is simply that the official Soviet mind abhors anything that is left unexplained."

Sharpest indication of the "party influence" in Soviet astronomy, Dr. Struve finds, is the acceptance of the theories of Academician Otto Y. Schmidt. Mr. Schmidt is a famous Arctic explorer who has developed his ideas of such matters as the origin of the solar system.

While Mr. Schmidt has become "well known for his brave exploits in the Arctic,"

his theories of astronomy are another matter, Dr. Struve emphasizes.

The American astronomer has studied Mr. Schmidt's theories in some detail, because "he was kind enough to send to me autographed copies" of some of his works. Dr. Struve found Schmidt's astronomical papers "rather naive and usually completely wrong."

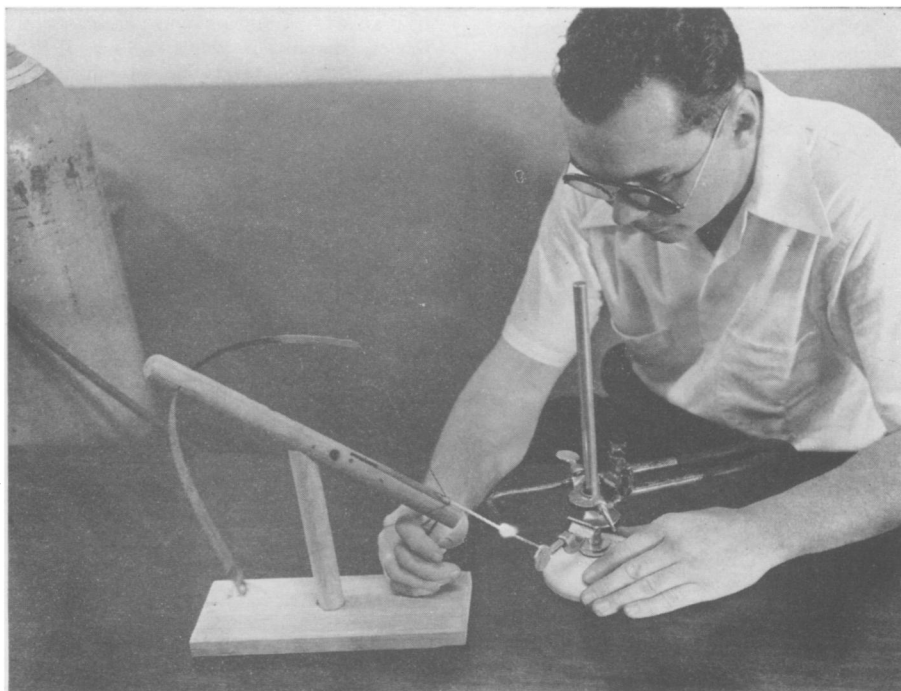
The Schmidt theories were disproved by Soviet astronomers at a meeting recently of the Moscow Institute of Astrophysics.

"But," notes Dr. Struve, "the very fact that these distinguished men were compelled to spend their valuable time disproving the fallacies of a person (Schmidt) who had no real claim to astronomical knowledge is an indication of the way things are developing in Russia."

Even when the recognized leaders of Russian astronomy attack American astronomers and theories, they tend to do it at the beginning and end of papers, Dr. Struve points out.

"It is as though they did not think in these terms when they were writing their own ideas."

"The Russian astronomers are engaged in precisely the same type of work that is done by our men of science," concludes



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