

# ХРОНИКА НАУЧНОЙ ЖИЗНИ

## The Second International Workshop on Lysenkoism

*WILLIAM DEJONG-LAMBERT*

City University of New York; New York, USA; wr14@columbia.edu

The Second International Workshop on Lysenkoism was held June 21–25, 2012 at the University of Vienna. The workshop was a follow-up to the first International Workshop on Lysenkoism which took place December 4–5, 2009 at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and the Harriman Institute at Columbia University.<sup>1</sup> Among the important goals of the Vienna meeting was to continue widening the geographic diversity of case studies and address some of the central questions that have emerged in current research. These include situating the “Lysenko affair” within the broader history of “pseudoscience,” describing individual motivations for involvement in the controversy, showing how it was instrumentalized in pursuit of various goals and objectives, current attempts to rehabilitate Lysenko’s reputation in Russia, as well as developing a definition for the term “Lysenkoism.”

The first panel featured two papers on France — a region not covered in the first workshop — as well as presentations on Italy and Mexico. In their papers, Laurent Loison and Stéphane Tirard (Université de Nantes) discussed Lysenkoism in context with French neo-Lamarckism, while exploring the role of key figures such as Louis Aragon, Pierre-Paul Grassé, Jacques Monod, Jean Rostand and Marcel Prenant. Their research showed how the controversy influenced the development of genetics in France after World War II. Along similar lines Francesco Cassata (University of Genoa) showed the role of Lysenkoism in the institutionalization and professionalization of genetics in Italy after World War II. Cassata showed how it served as a cultural resource in context with the politicization of Italian genetics and the conflict between Mendelian genetics vs. “Lamarckian” eugenics and plant breeding during the inter-war period. The last paper on the panel was given by Victoriano Garza-Almanza (Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, Mexico), who described the promotion of Lysenko’s theories in Mexico by Isaac Ochoterena.

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<sup>1</sup> On other recent conferences on the history of Lysenkoism see: *William deJong-Lambert*. International Workshop on Lysenkoism // *Studies in History of Biology*. 2011. Vol. 3. № 2. P. 139–141; *Колчинский Э.И.* Международный симпозиум «Пересмотр “дела Лысенко”» // *Вопросы истории естествознания и техники*. 2012. № 4. С. 199–202.

The second panel featured current research on Lysenko's career and current attempts to restore his reputation in Russia and the Soviet Union. In the first presentation Michael Gordin (Princeton University), workshopped his preliminary findings on what happened to Lysenko — how he was treated by the re-emergent community of geneticists, how he personally interpreted his fall from grace — from 1965 until his death in 1976. Gordin was followed by Kirill Rossiianov (Institute of the History of Sciences and Technology, Moscow), who presented the Lysenko affair in terms of theory, practice and ideology in late Stalinist scientific discourse. The third panelist, Eduard Kolchinsky (St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute for the History of Science and Technology) interpreted current attempts to restore Lysenko's legacy as rooted in the privileging of practice over research in Russian scientific culture.

The third panel began with a presentation by Mark Tauger (West Virginia University) who showed how genetics survived in the Soviet Union during the years of Lysenko's dominance by focusing on the work of Pavel Lukianenko, who laid the foundations for the Green Revolution in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia. Next, Gabor Pallo (Budapest University of Technology and Economics) gave a survey of Lysenko's impact upon Hungarian biology. Pallo's presentation was followed by an invited talk by Daniel Kevles (Yale University) who presented his thoughts on the relationship between Lysenkoism and eugenics, an emerging topic of research which demands further study.

The fourth and final panel of the day featured papers on Romania and Poland, as a presentation on how the rhetoric of Lysenko and his followers can be considered as Orwellian "newspeak." The first presenter, Cristiana Oghina-Pavie (Université d'Angers) began with a bas relief of Michurin, sculpted in 1963 by her great uncle, Gheorghe Munteanu, which hung in her house when she was a young girl. Her talk covered the influence of Michurinism — as distinguished from Lysenkoism — upon fruit tree breeding and vine selection in Romania. Next, Piotr Köhler (Jagiellonian University) presented his work on role of *Trybuna ludu*, the mouthpiece of the Polish United Workers Party, in promoting Lysenko's theories. The final panelist, Agata Strzodała (University of Opole) analyzed binary oppositions such as "Michurinism" vs. "Morganism," "Creative Darwinism" vs. "Darwinism", as well as the ritualization of language, use of military metaphors, neologisms etc. as classic examples of totalitarian language.

The opening panel on the second day featured three presentations on Japan, an area of particular interest considering the United States' role in the postwar reconstruction of Japan, as well as the prior isolation of Japanese geneticists. In the first presentation Kaori Iida (Graduate University for Advanced Studies, Kanagawa Prefecture) explained the reasons why some Japanese geneticists were interested in Lysenko's ideas, and how these sympathies affected funding for the establishment of a new institute of genetics. Next, Hirofumi Saito (Tokyo Institute of Technology) discussed how the estrangement of Japanese geneticists from the global genetics community prior to World War II influenced the reception to Lysenko. The third panelist, Tsuyoshi Fujioka (Doshisha University), described now the number of Lysenko's supporters — which initially included left-wing scientists — was reduced to a core group of committed Marxists following the VASKhNIL session.

The next panel began with a presentation by William deJong-Lambert (Bronx Community College and Columbia University), describing the reasons why (i.e., his relationship with H.J. Muller) Haldane became among Lysenko's most high-profile supporters after 1948. The next panelist, Luis Campos (Drew University) also discussed Muller, focusing on how his stance at a key point in the controversy (the December 19–26, 1936 VASKhNIL debate) helped extinguish research on the effects of chromosomal variation on speciation in plants. The final panelist, Mikhail Konashev (St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute for the History of Science

and Technology), covered similar ground in his presentation by describing how relationships between U.S. and Soviet geneticists determined the cancellation of VII International Congress of Genetics in Moscow.

The next panel returned the focus to social and cultural aspects of the controversy by discussing Lysenko's influence upon Soviet biology textbooks, natural history museums and his treatment in the Soviet press. Margaret Peacock (University of Alabama) presented samples from textbooks that challenged the conventional narrative that Lysenko's theories dominated middle school biology education during the years he was in power. Next, Patricia Simpson (University of Hertfordshire) used the Darwin Museum in Moscow to show how Lysenkoism influenced the presentation of bioscience and evolutionary theory. The third panelist, Lukas Joos (University of Zurich) traced coverage of Lysenko and his work in *Pravda* to show that initial accounts were absent any of the ideological dogma that appeared in later articles. The latter were, according to Joos, more the product of the political training and scientific ignorance of Soviet reporters, than anything having to do with Lysenko himself.

The final panel of the day returned us to the topic of eugenics and featured two papers on Bulgaria. It is notable that the presentation on eugenics by Björn Felder (University of Göttingen) was followed by, ironically, the longest period of debate and discussion of the entire workshop. The discussion centered on what constitutes "eugenics" in a given context, a definitional problem not unfamiliar to Lysenko scholars. The following two presentations by Aglica Edreva (Institute of Genetics, Sofia) and Dinko Mintchev (Center for Science Studies and History of Science, Sofia), shed some much needed light on a relatively understudied region in the historiography of Lysenkoism.

The final halfday of the workshop began a bit late and was regularly interrupted by the sabbath bells of the Votivkirche just across Sigmund-Freud Park from the university. Irony was noted. A three paper panel on Czechoslovakia featuring Petr Hampl and Marco Stella (Charles University, Prague) along with Tomáš Hermann (Institute of Contemporary History, Prague) woke participants from their post-Saturday night slumber. The presenters demonstrated the extent to which Lysenko-Michurinism was indigenized in Czech culture to an extent which was (at least as far as Central Europe is concerned) relatively unique. Highlights included intriguing details on the roles of Vladimír Jan Amos Novák, Ivan Málek, Ferdinand Herčík, Antonín Klečka and Milan Hašek, as well as Lysenkoism's impact upon the practice of allotment gardening.

The workshop concluded with a discussion panel featuring Alexei Kojevnikov (University of British Columbia), Nils Roll-Hansen (University of Oslo) and Nikolai Kremontsov (University of Toronto). While there is clearly much work left to be done in terms of developing a cohesive understanding of the Lysenko phenomenon, a number of themes which date back to the first workshop remain clear. These include the problem of defining terms like "pseudoscience" and "Lysenkoism" (which are often treated as synonyms) and the question of how and why the controversy resonated so widely. The most obvious answer to the latter point seems to be that the "Lysenko affair" operated as a cultural resource which was useful to a variety of actors in support of, or opposition to, diverse agendas. A final point of agreement was the desirability of scheduling a Third International Workshop on Lysenkoism at a future date.

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