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Propaganda of T. D. Lysenko's Anti-Scientific Views on the Pages of French Periodicals of the
1930s?40s

Abstract

The article is devoted to foreign propaganda of T. D. Lysenko's views on the nature of heredity and variability. Articles from French communist periodicals are used as an example. The article's relevance is determined by understudied issue of the Lysenkoism promotion in France, although it is known that his doctrine, which was close to Lamarckism, was being implanted after 1948 in the countries of the socialist camp and criticized by the British and American biologists. The historical picture of purposeful promotion of anti-scientific views criticizing fundamental genetics has been reconstructed in materials of French periodicals and documents deposited in the T. D. Lysenko fond in the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences (fond 1521). To determine the political factors that influenced international scientific relations between Soviet and French scientists, the documents from the Political Bureau of the Central Committee fond of the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (fond 3) have been used. When describing popularization of Lysenkoism in France, an integrated approach has been chosen, as it takes into account various factors (political, ideological, cognitive) that determined penetration and reception of scientific ideas. Using newspapers and magazines as historical source have permitted to detail the phenomenon, to supplement the available information with new facts, and to revise established notions. It is shown that T.D. Lysenko's figure came into the spotlight in the French press as early as the late 1930s, when a campaign began in the Soviet Union against Mendelism-Morganism, called metaphysical-idealistic bourgeois science by the party elite. In those years, such scientists as N. I. Vavilov, G. D. Karpechenko, S. G. Levit, I. I. Agol were arrested and repressed. In 1948, with J. V. Stalin support, Lysenko organized the August session of the All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences, where representatives of classical genetics were accused of sabotage. Lysenko claimed that his experiments were aimed at increasing productivity of agricultural crops and solving food security issues. The Soviet bureaucracy saw innovation and bold struggle against old scientific dogmas in populist statements of the "People's Academician." The fight against genetics was not limited the territory of the USSR, almost all socialist countries were involved. However, the leading scientific powers (the USA and Great Britain) actively resisted penetration of the works of Soviet Lysenkoists into scientific and popular publications. The exception was France, which had long-standing scientific contacts with the Soviet Union. Information on the "victory" of Michurin Biology over genetics at the 1948 Agricultural Sciences Session was widely presented on the pages of French liberal publications. It is shown that the French scientific community was not categorically opposed to Lysenkoism for a number of reasons, among them spread of communist ideas in the country, stability of Lamarckian traditions, cooling diplomatic relations between the USSR and the USA, desire of the Soviet leadership to make France its political ally.

Keywords

Historical sources, Soviet propaganda, T. D. Lysenko, France, periodicals, genetics, Lamarckism, August session of the All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences

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