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Research and Freedom

The *Sun*, Baltimore, had some pertinent remarks to make about the description a group of American physicists brought back from their visit to the U.S.S.R. this last spring. On 14 June the *Sun* remarked editorially:

"The reports of various members of this group on what they saw of Russian science are fascinating, and disconcerting. They are disconcerting for two reasons.

"First, they report that Russian science is flourishing, that the laboratories are beautifully equipped, that first quality personnel is abundant, that work of fundamental importance is being done, and that the Russians are not only bent on making Moscow the headquarters of the world so far as physics is concerned but may well succeed.

"That is disconcerting for obvious reasons. Still more disconcerting is the paradox which these reports expose. . . . In this country it is commonly stated by men of science and others that freedom is essential to a healthy scientific climate. The point has been made repeatedly in connection with criticisms of various Government security arrangements. And yet we learn now from well qualified American physicists that Russian science, which has surely had to put up with security arrangements more stringent than the American, is in a flourishing condition and that members of the Russian scientific community show evidence of the highest morale in their personal and scientific life.

"How is this to be explained? Oddly enough, the reports of these American scientific visitors to Russia have included no explanation. Is the maximum of freedom important to the health of science, or isn't it? Have we been wrong in supposing that Russian science is less free than American science? These travelers lately returned from Moscow owe the public a clear answer."

The editor of the *Sun* followed this up by asking Freeman Dyson of the Institute of Advanced Studies at Princeton to prepare an article about working conditions of scientists in the U.S.S.R., an article that we reprint in this issue (page 432). In the same issue of the *Sun* in which this appeared (26 June), the *Sun* had other editorial comments to make, from which we take the following excerpts:

"We welcome [Dyson's] article for several reasons. Not the least of these is the way he puts the Soviet achievements in science into perspective. Russian physics is good, he says, but not yet as good as American physics. And he attributes the Russian progress to the existence in the post-Stalin Russia of 'a reasonable scientific freedom. . . .'

"Yet Dr. Dyson goes on to say that security provisions in Russia 'are similar to ours, perhaps slightly stricter.' And he emphasizes that 'political freedom . . . does not exist in Russia.' Thus the paradox of scientific progress in an unfree society still wants an explanation.

"Men raised in the western tradition will hesitate to conclude that full intellectual freedom is perhaps a less urgent precondition of scientific progress than has been argued. On this point other scientists may wish to be heard. Surely the question is of compelling importance as the scientific race between free and totalitarian worlds gathers speed."

We agree that the questions the *Sun* raises editorially are of the first importance and we present them here for consideration by the scientific public.