

Soviet Genetics: First Russian Visit Since 1930's Offers a Glimpse

The Soviet Union's four leading non-Lysenkoist geneticists have been touring research institutions in the United States this month, paying the first official visit of Russian geneticists to this country since the 1930's. The visit was arranged by the Genetics Society of America, in cooperation with the Soviet Society of Genetics and Breeding, the U.S. and the Soviet academies of science, and the U.S. State Department.

The Soviet researchers are Boris L. Astaurov, president of the Genetics and Breeding Society and director of the Institute of Developmental Biology, Academy of Science; Nikolai P. Dubinin, director of the Institute of General Genetics, Academy of Science; S. I. Alikhanyan, director of laboratories and genetics and selection of microorganisms at the Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy, Moscow; and D. K. Belayev, director of the Institute of Cytology and Genetics of the Siberian Department of the Academy of Science at Novosibirsk. The four men are members of the editorial board of *Genetika*, a Soviet journal established 2 years ago.

The politics of Russian biology remain sensitive, veiled, and somewhat arcane; but the Russians' visit has provided American observers with at least a glimpse of where matters stand almost 2½ years after the removal of Trofim D. Lysenko as director of the Institute of Genetics of the Academy of Sciences. The fact of the visit itself suggests that the period of coexistence between Lysenkoist and western-oriented genetics, which began under Khrushchev, is at least continuing and that the balance of authority may be continuing to shift away from the Lysenkoists. In recent years, Soviet delegations to the major international genetics meetings have been composed exclusively of Lysenkoists, and the current visit reportedly marks the first time that one of the Russian visitors—Dubinin—has been permitted to leave the

Soviet Union. Dubinin was a particularly outspoken critic of Lysenko; he lost his research post in 1948 when Lysenko and Lysenkoism held the exclusive favor of Stalin. The others are reported to have had some contact—said to be relatively limited—with Western researchers, both Europeans and Americans, at various meetings and through correspondence.

On the other hand, American observers believe that the situation in Soviet biology is by no means as settled as some reports have assumed. Lysenko and the Lysenkoists have lost a great deal of power but they are by no means out, and they still retain authority in a number of institutions. One American geneticist who has been a student of developments in the Soviet Union told *Science* that "Lysenko's lieutenants are still very active and the western-oriented geneticists are still in a certain amount of difficulty."

This difficulty appears to be substantive as well as political. The non-Lysenko tradition has been kept alive by men, including the four visitors, who are by no means young anymore. All are reported to be in their sixties, and of the four only one—Belayev—still plays an active teaching role. The others are involved chiefly in research and administration. One result is that, as one American researcher put it, while they are "awfully sharp" they have lost some touch with contemporary genetics. A related difficulty is that, while a large number of young people are reportedly interested in going into genetics, the Soviet Union does not have an intermediate generation able to teach them. The Russians are apparently trying to overcome this difficulty by translating American works to be used as textbooks; the trouble here is said to be that those in charge lack the criteria for judging which works are sound and end up using some material which is not considered authoritative in the West.

As for the visit itself, it appears to be something of a busman's holiday, with stops at Harvard, M.I.T., Woods Hole, Rockefeller University, the University of Rochester, the University of Wisconsin, Caltech, Berkeley, Davis, the University of Washington, and Stanford, all in about 2 weeks. (At Stanford they are attending meetings of the Genetics Society of America.) By all accounts, official protocol is being held to a minimum, and the Russians are being treated just as any other distinguished foreign scientists would be. There is some feeling among the American hosts that because of the Russians' previous troubles, the visit is of considerably more intellectual value to the Russians than to the Americans. However, the American hosts seem delighted with the Russians and are optimistic that future interchanges in the field will result in more mutually productive working relationships.

—ELINOR LANGER



Rosemary Kendrick, University of Rochester

Two of the visiting Soviet geneticists inspect a photographic processor during visit to University of Rochester. Pictured from left to right are Ernst W. Caspari, professor of biology at Rochester, and the two Russians, Boris L. Astaurov and Dimitri K. Belayev. In front of them is Mrs. Eva Eicher, a Rochester biology research associate.