

APPENDIX III: ENVIRONMENTAL LYSENKOISM: REFLECTIONS FROM A SCIENTIST

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Andrei Sakharov, the father of the Russian hydrogen bomb, later justly revered for his work on human rights, describes the following incident at "the object," Russia's nuclear weapons laboratory Arzamas-16:

In the middle of the year 1950 a committee arrived at the object, perhaps from the Principal Administration, or maybe from somewhere else, to check out the leading scientific cadres. We were called one by one to the committee. They asked me several questions, which I can't remember; afterwards there was the following question:

'What is your assessment of the chromosome theory of inheritance?'

(This was after the 1948 session of the Lenin All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences, when Stalin sanctioned Lysenko's destruction of genetics. Consequently, the question was a loyalty test.) I answered that I considered the chromosome theory scientifically correct. The members of the commission exchanged glances but said nothing. No organizational changes of my position followed. Evidently, my position and role at the object were already sufficiently strong, that it was possible to ignore sins of this nature.⁵⁷⁹

Sakharov's endorsement of modern genetics directly contradicted an alternative Soviet theory, Lysenkoism, which held that acquired traits could be passed on from generation to generation. Lysenkoism had no scientific standing, but Joseph Stalin officially endorsed it. In the Soviet Union, affirming Lysenkoism had become, as Sakharov put it, a "loyalty test."

A few weeks after Sakharov was questioned, a colleague, Altshuler, another distinguished nuclear physicist, came under questioning as well:

A couple weeks later, Zeldovich came to me and said that we had to help out Altshuler.... It turns out that Altshuler was given the same question that the committee had given me, and with his characteristic straightforwardness, he answered just as I had, but unlike me, he was threatened with dismissal.⁵⁸⁰

After Sakharov pleaded for Altshuler, the secret police deputy at Arzamas-16 told him:

579 Andrei Sakharov, *Vospominaia* (Memoirs), New York: Chekhov Publishing House, 1990, pg. 181. Translation by William Happer.

580 *Ibid.*

*Yes, I already heard about the hooligan-like outburst of Altshuler. You say that he has done a lot for the object and will be useful for further work. Right now we won't make any organizational changes; we will see how he behaves in the future.*⁵⁸¹

Nine years earlier, in 1941, Nikolai Vavilov, a world-renowned biologist, had been sentenced to death for maintaining that chromosomes had something to do with inheritance. But by 1950, the Soviet leadership, most notably Stalin and Beria, was so desperate to break the USA's monopoly on nuclear weapons that they reluctantly forgave Sakharov's heresy. After all, he had invented the Soviet hydrogen bomb, a very successful design, better in some ways than the rival American design. Who knew what he might invent next? But scientists without this unusual protection continued to be at high risk of losing their jobs, or worse, if they expressed any support for the imperialist myth of genes and chromosomes.

Lysenko was a poorly-educated agricultural extension agent from Ukraine, but in the turbulent early years of the Soviet Union he managed to convince the political leadership that Mendelian genetics and hybrid vigor were an evil imperialistic fiction. He maintained that living organisms could inherit acquired characteristics, and that with the right proletarian science the Soviet Union could enormously increase agricultural yields. Lysenko violently opposed the introduction of hybrid corn to the Soviet Union, ostensibly because it was a fairy tale invented to enrich capitalist seed companies. (Today we hear much the same propaganda about genetically modified crops from Greenpeace, and from many European governments.) Despite the fact that none of his theories were ever validated by experiments, Lysenko flourished in the Soviet Union, starting in the early 1930s under Stalin, until he shared in Krushchev's downfall in 1964. Lysenko orchestrated a 40-year reign of terror from which Russian study of biology has not fully recovered to this day.

Lysenko laid out his theory in a report canonized during the infamous 1948 session of the Lenin All-Union Academy of Agricultural Science. His final words there indicate the deep link between Soviet science and politics:

*In one of the notes I am asked, what is the attitude of the Central Committee of the party to my report? I answer: the Central Committee of the Party has looked over my report and approved it.*⁵⁸²

After this the stenographer's notes record: "Stormy applause growing to a standing ovation."⁵⁸³

Reminiscing about the 1948 report that destroyed the careers of so many honest scientists, Lysenko

581 *Ibid.*

582 Valerie Soifer, *Vlast' I Nauka* (Power and Science), Tenafly NJ: Hermitage, 1989, pg. 410. Translation by William Happer.

583 *Ibid.*

wrote a short obituary note in the Russian Communist newspaper *Pravda* following Stalin's death:

*Stalin, the Guiding Light of Science: Stalin ... directly edited a draft of the report, About the Situation in Biological Science. He explained in detail his corrections, gave me hints on how to present various parts of the report. Comrade Stalin attentively followed the results of the work of the session...*⁵⁸⁴

Many Soviet citizens, philosophers, journalists, and those eager to be admitted to the Communist party joined the Lysenko bandwagon.

Surely something like Lysenkoism cannot happen in the United States or the West? Alas, it has already happened. Fanatical environmentalism has adopted many of the methods of Lysenkoism. Being sentenced to death for scientific heresy has been out of fashion in the West for a few centuries. But that has not stopped calls to execute "deniers" who question the dogma that CO₂ from the combustion of fossil fuels will cause catastrophic global warming. The very word "denier" is cynically used to evoke the image of a Holocaust denier, a neo-Nazi. During a 2014 campaign speech in California, President Obama sneered, "So unfortunately, inside of Washington we've still got some climate deniers who shout loud, but they're wasting everybody's time on a settled debate." Just as Stalin considered himself an expert on biology, there are lots of people, including President Obama, who consider themselves experts on climate science, despite their lack of formal training.

Woe to that American scientist today who suggests that neither basic theory nor observations support the politically-correct dogma that more CO₂ in the atmosphere will bring on the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Pestilential tropical diseases will spread toward the poles; nations will go to War over the remaining resources of a world blighted by the demon gas, CO₂. Famine and Death will pick up the pieces. Even mild disagreement with these absurd claims can ruin an academic career.

Especially alarming has been the complicity of academia with environmental extremists. There are many egregious examples. A case in point is the treatment of two climate scientists at the University of Virginia at Charlottesville: Dr. Patrick Michaels, a global warming skeptic, and Dr. Michael Mann, who created the celebrated, and much-disputed, "hockey-stick" temperature graph for the past 1000 years.

After Dr. Michaels left the University of Virginia to join the conservative Cato Institute, Greenpeace demanded copies of Dr. Michael's e-mails. The university fell over itself to comply with Greenpeace. University policies stipulate that e-mails are to be destroyed 30 days after an employee's last pay check. But not only were Dr. Michaels' files not destroyed, as required, but the university was eager to use the

584 *Ibid.*

illegally retained files to help Greenpeace smear its former employee.

After Michael Mann left the University of Virginia to accept a professorship at Pennsylvania State University, the University of Virginia received an analogous freedom of information request from a Virginia state legislator to inspect Dr. Mann's e-mails. The university responded that since Dr. Mann was no longer an employee, the e-mails had been destroyed. The university squealed indignantly that they and their politically-correct former employer were the victims of a witch hunt.

Dr. David Legates had a very similar experience at the University of Delaware, where the university administration went out of its way to honor a Greenpeace demand to see all of his e-mails related to global climate change and similar topics. Requests from the Competitive Enterprise Institute to see e-mails of another University of Delaware professor, whose views supported global warming alarmism, were curtly dismissed by the university's General Counsel. Disturbing details of this incident can be found in Professor Legates' testimony to the Public Works Committee of the United States Senate on 3 June, 2014.⁵⁸⁵ Dr. Willie Soon of the Harvard Smithsonian Observatory and Dr. George Taylor of Oregon State University are just a few of the many other honest and innovative scholars who have suffered for opposing the demonization of carbon dioxide, just as Lysenko's victims suffered for opposing the demonization of Mendelian genetics. While Michaels, Legates and many others are persecuted, their politically-correct colleagues are showered with research grants, academic prizes, elections to scientific academies, and other rewards. Much the same thing happened in the Lysenko area of the Soviet Union. The irony is that more CO₂ is probably going to be good for the planet. Observations show clearly that the warming potential of more CO₂ has been grossly exaggerated. The modest warming from doubling or tripling current CO₂ concentrations, along with the enormous benefits to agriculture from this life-giving, essential molecule, will be a benefit to the planet and to humanity.

Most people are instinctive, sensible environmentalists. They want to protect the beautiful world we live in. But they want to be permitted to live decent lives themselves. But the only way for humans to have no impact on the environment is for them to disappear from planet Earth. In its influential 1991 report, *The First Global Revolution*, the Club of Rome wrote,

In searching for a common enemy against whom we can unite, we came up with the idea that pollution, the threat of global warming, water shortages, famine and the like would fit the bill. In their totality and their interactions these phenomena do constitute a common threat which must be confronted by everyone together. But in designating these dangers as the enemy, we fall into

585 David R. Legates, "Statement to the Environment and Public Works Committee of the United States Senate," United States Senate, Environment and Public Works Committee, June 3, 2014. http://www.epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Files.View&FileStore_id=aa8f25be-f093-47b1-bb26-1eb4c4a23de2

*the trap which we have already warned readers about, namely mistaking symptoms for causes. All these dangers are caused by human intervention in natural processes, and it is only through changed attitudes and behavior that they can be overcome. The real enemy is then humanity itself.*⁵⁸⁶

But the real danger to environmental scholarship is the dearth of scientists like Michaels, Legates and others who follow the evidence rather than the politics, and the overwhelming pressure for researchers to conform to an ideology. Environmental Lysenkoism not only threatens the soundness of public policy. It assaults the trustworthiness of science itself.

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586 Alexander King and Bertrand Schneider, *The First Global Revolution*, Council of the Club of Rome, Orient Longman, 1991, pg. 75.