

Soviet Physicists during the War: Jealousy, Discord and the Ideological Dispute*

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Abstract

Around the beginning of “the Cold War,” a series of philosophical “discussions” began in various fields of science in the Soviet Union. An intense dispute arose also in the field of physics. We must not, however, exaggerate the ideological aspect of this issue. Using the newly declassified documents, the author tries to shed a new light on the material and emotional factors behind the ideological guise of this dispute. During the war the majority of the institutes of the Academy of Sciences continued scientific research mainly for military purposes. Significant results were achieved in various fields of science. At the same time, the wartime experience deepened “rift” between scientists inside and outside of the Academy. Particularly the wartime evacuation of the scientific research institutes and the institutions of higher education to the different places resulted in strengthening the tendency of the functional separation between the Academy of Sciences and universities. The initiation of this assumingly ideologically-motivated campaign in the field of physics rekindled jealousy and hatred accumulated on the side of university professors and lecturers towards some of their “colleagues” with a record of splendid academic and scientific achievements.

Key words: Soviet Physicists, Soviet Ideology, the Academy of Sciences, Moscow State University, Wartime Research, Wartime Evacuation

1. Introduction

Taking the opportunity of an ideologically charged campaign under the guise of a series of academic “discussions” in various fields of science in the Postwar Soviet Union initiated first in the field of philosophy in 1947, Vladimir N. Kessenikh (1903–1970), Vasilii F. Nozdryov (1913–1995) and several other professors and teachers in the Faculty of Physics (Fizicheskii fakul'tet: Fizfak) of the Moscow State University (MSU), who later called themselves “patriotic and materialistic physicists,” launched an attack on

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