

# History of Stalinist Science in the texts of Samizdat, Tamizdat, and Western Broadcasts (1950s-1980s)

**Final Report: Open Society Archives Visegrad Scholarship  
April 27 – May 27 2013**

**Anna Eremeeva, International Visegrad Fund Grantee at OSA**

## **Research Aims**

The Stalinist science is defined by specialist as a huge, centralized, isolated and strictly controlled system that was formed in 1930s. Soviet leadership placed the support of science at the center of the state purposes. Stalin believed that science provided the key to updating and industrializing the economy<sup>1</sup>. At the same time there were cruel repressions against scientists. Stalin's *Sharashkas* (secret research and development laboratories in the Soviet Gulag labor camp system) united prisoners - scientists and engineers. They had to work on scientific and technological problems for the state<sup>2</sup>.

During the Second World War Soviet scientists found themselves relatively free from Party control. There was also the opportunity for Soviet scholars to participate in "world science". But the beginning of the Cold War interrupted the process of integration of Soviet and Western (British, American, etc.) science which could already be seen in wartime. Contacts between Soviet and foreign scientists were artificially limited. Even quotation of Western authors could be regarded as a "devotion to the West". Between the end of the War and Stalin's death six academic disciplines become the focus of Party-sponsored debate. All so called "scientific discussions" (philosophical, biological, etc.) had anti-West intentions.

The impact of Stalinism on science and technology was one of the most popular themes of the post-Stalin period. Articles were published in Soviet media and abroad. Many texts were disseminated through underground channels –

---

<sup>1</sup> Pollock, Ethan *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars*. Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 2006. P. 3.

<sup>2</sup> See Solzhenitsyn A. *The First Circle*. Translated from the Russian by Thomas P. Whitney. NY, 1968; Kerber, L. (G. Ozerov) *Tupolevskaya sharaga*. Frankfurt/Main, 1973.

samizdat, tamizdat as well as through the Western radios, including Radio Liberty. The oral transmission in the mother tongue reached the listening people in a far more immediate way than any written text did.

Within the project “History of Stalinist Science in the texts of Samizdat, Tamizdat, and Western Broadcasts (1950s-1980s)” I planned to research archival materials at OSA with the focus on several issues:

- Stalin’s repressions against scientists;
- “scientific discussions” in the late Stalin era;
- anti-cosmopolitan campaign in science;
- symbiosis between the state and scientific community;
- isolation of the Soviet science;

Moreover, and what's is the most important I tried to locate and analyse how these facts were commented by the western media, including press and broadcasts, and also by samizdat and *emigre* authors (tamizdat).

### **Resources Used**

During the Visegrad Scholarship period, I collected data from the several series of *Soviet Red Archives (HU OSA 300-80)*:

- *Series 1: Old Code Subject Files*: 99 (Биология), 17-18 (Академия наук СССР), 35-42 (Антисемитизм), 120 (ВАСХНИЛ). 183 (Всемирная федерация научных работников), 185 (Всесоюзное общество “Знание”), 205-206 (Генетика, геологические науки), 241-242 (Десталинизация), 293-295 (Инакомыслящие), 308-309 (Интеллигенция), 323 (История: историография), 435 (Реабилитация), 602-605 (Наука), 909 (Сельское хозяйство: наука), 946—953 (Сталин и сталинизм).
- *Series 2: New Code Subject Files*. Boxes 29-33 (Science)
- *Series 7: USSR Biographical Files* Boxes 43 (Браиловский В.Л.), 151 (Каверин В.А.), 154 (Канторович Л.В.), 155 (Капица П.Л.),

189 (Ландау Л.Д.), 194 (Леонтович М.А.), 215 (Медведев ЖА.),  
216 (Медведев Р.А.), etc.

Within *Samizdat Archives* (HU OSA 300-85) I have used *Series 9* (*Published Samizdat*), *Series 13, Boxes 41, 128, 175, Series 48, Boxes 3, 10, 28, 29, 41.*

Majority of archival documents reflects the history of Stalinist Science in the context of de-Stalinization or re-Stalinization. In this case Radio Liberty texts are the most interesting (for example “Impotence of the Supporters of Michurin Biology”(1964), “The Dogmatists are losing the long struggle in Biology”, “Liberation of Biology from dogmatism” (1964) “Two fates – Vavilov and Michurin” (1965) by M. Mondich<sup>3</sup>, “Opravdanie zla” (“Justification of evil”) (1976) by O. Yahont<sup>4</sup>, etc.) The authors tried to describe the mechanism and driving forces in the 1930-s-1950-s processes and show how events of today (the fall of T. Lysenko, justification of Stalin in N. Dubinin’s memoirs, etc.) can illuminate facts from the past.

American and West-European mass media announced and reviewed new Samizdat and Tamizdat books. OSA collections include many such press clippings from newspapers and scientific journals (“New York Herald Tribune”, “New York Times”, “Problems of Communism”, etc.). The books of Zhores Medvedev<sup>5</sup> caused a great number of responses<sup>6</sup>.

*Reviews of the Soviet fiction about Stalinist science* are very important source<sup>7</sup>. Famous novels by V. Kaverin, D. Granin, Yu. Bondarev, V. Dudintsev,

---

<sup>3</sup> OSA 300-80-1-99

<sup>4</sup> OSA 300-80-1-205

<sup>5</sup> Medvedev, Zh. A. *The Rise and Fall of T.D. Lysenko*. Translated by I. Michael Lerner, with the editorial assistance of Lucy G. Lawrence. NY and London: Columbia Univ. Press, 1969; Medvedev, Zh. A. *Fruitful Meetings between the Scientists of the World* (London: MacMillan St. Martins Press, 1971). Medvedev, Zh. A. *Soviet Science*. NY: W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 1978.

<sup>6</sup> See, OSA 300-80-1-99; 300-80-7-215, 216

<sup>7</sup> A cult of science peaked in the Soviet Union during the time after Stalin’s death. Since the official press and most non-fiction works on science and technology published in the USSR stressed the scientific achievements, fiction possesses some limited value as alternative source of

Yu. Trifinov provoked hot discussions. Reviews were published both in the Soviet and in the foreign media. There are a lot of such texts in the OSA. Radio Liberty paid special attention to liberal editorial policy of certain Russian literary journals in non-Russian republics published unorthodox prose containing outspoken criticism of Lysenko and Stalin.

All these documents will be the basis for future work. But their efficient analysis is impossible without a “dialogue” with other sources which I had collected before Visegrad fellowship<sup>8</sup>.

The work at the OSA was successfully added by constant visits to the Central European University library.

My research work would not be possible without the help of all the OSA staff. I would like to give special thanks to Olga Zaslavskaya and Kati Gadaros.

---

information about the real history and sociology of science (see: March, R. Soviet fiction since Stalin : science, politics, and literature. London : Croom Helm, 1986)

<sup>8</sup> As a result of the research in libraries, archives, and museums I have assembled a wide database of documents of Communist party leadership (central and local), international departments of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, universities and scientific-research institutions, private correspondence, visual materials, and also oral history interviews (which were collected within the project “Method of Oral History in the Investigation of Regional Scientific Community”, sponsored by Russian Humanitarian Scientific Fund in 2006-2008).