

# The Scientific Council on Problems of the Physiological Theory of Academician I. P. Pavlov: A Study in Control

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**E**VEN IN THE SOVIET UNION it is one thing to decree the ideological line for the several sciences, and another thing to implement, interpret, and enforce it. Falling into the Party line is not an automatic affair and poses, moreover, difficulties even for the scientist who wants to conform: He is never quite sure whether he is following the line as intended or as will be intended—whether he is underadhering or overadhering. The many publicized instances of displeasure feed and justify his apprehensions. But he continues to try to operate within the limitations imposed from above and to salvage what he can—that is, unless he has abused himself to the equivalent of a Party hack. There are very, very many of these.<sup>1</sup>

The scientific council, which the presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences set up to act as a watchdog over physiological and related research, provides through its published decrees some insight into the manner of holding scientists to adopted lines. From these decrees, with their sometimes inquisitorial language, one surmises also the private drama of those persons unfortunate enough to have been singled out as symbols for public ire, as well as the drabber problems of the routine, pedestrian researcher.

This council, known in full as the Scientific Council on Problems of the Physiological Theory of Academician I. P. Pavlov (Affiliated with the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences), was established in 1950 under charge by the joint assemblage of the USSR Academy of Sciences and the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences to facilitate and guarantee the Pavlovianization of physiology and related disciplines. Its chairman is the same Bykov who, along with Ivanov-Smolenskii, had come to head the newly formed Pavlovian front (1).

Since its inception, according to the available literature, the Scientific Council has been called into session at least six times. Its activities, although little publicized, are nevertheless clearly reflected in its decrees, some of which are documents of considerable human interest.

The first meeting of the Scientific Council took place in Moscow, October 13–14, 1950. A variety of questions was taken up for discussion: Bykov spoke

of the “principal tasks of the Council;” a second edition of the complete works of Pavlov was proposed; and so forth. But the chief items on the council’s agenda were the research plans submitted by Airapet’iants, Asratian, and others for the year 1951. Although these plans were the subject of detailed discussion, there was never really much doubt that the official seal of approval would be theirs—Airapet’iants and Asratian had long been playing pro-Pavlovian roles of some prominence, and Airapet’iants was, moreover, secretary of the Scientific Council (2).

The second meeting took place December 25–27, 1950. Bykov detailed the progress that had been made toward “realization of the decrees of the joint session of the USSR Academy of Sciences and the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences.” Kupalov presented his plans for the organization of a “scientific session” to commemorate the anniversary of Pavlov’s death. Ivanov-Smolenskii discussed what went into readying for publication the new journal—*Zhurnal Vyssheĭ Nерvnoĭ Deiatel’nosti Imeni I. P. Pavlova* (*The Pavlov Journal of Higher Nervous Activity*)—decreed to be established by the “joint session” of six months before, and scheduled for first issue in January 1951. The research plans of Speranskii, Kupalov, and others were presented and discussed. Finally, Asratian was unanimously voted honorary lecturer for the “Pavlovian Readings” of 1951, with Kiev designated as the place of the next lecture (3, 4).

The calm and matter-of-fact reporting of the first two meetings of the Scientific Council creates an impression of harmonious concurrence among Pavlovians—the old and the new—which the third and fourth meetings sharply belie. On keeping to slogans and verbal stereotypes, it is true, all manage to be properly Pavlovian. On getting down to the real business of theory and experiment, however, the oneness of scientific faith may be seen for the false façade that it is. Orbeli and Beritov, for example, may affirm day after day their Pavlovian orthodoxy, but they seem always somehow to stay out of step, no matter how hard they try to go along (5, 6). As a matter of fact, just this discrepancy between actual practice and outer appearance is the *raison d’être* of the Scientific Council itself. The council is an agency of control both to give direction and to correct any erroneous course.

<sup>1</sup>Two sources contribute to this interpretation: the literature of the Soviet scientific and public press itself, and the interviews conducted both here and in Germany by the Harvard Refugee Interview Project (now termed Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System), of which the writer is a member.

# Scientific Session On The Physiological Teachings

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