

Botanists in Lithuania during the Michurinist Campaign

Aurika Ričkienė

Nature Research Center, Akademijos 2, LT-08412 Vilnius, Lithuania

The meeting of the Lenin All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences (VASKhNIL) that occurred from July 31 to August 7, 1948, declared Michurinism to be the only “correct theory” of biology in the Soviet Union. As of that moment, Michurinist biology officially took center stage in Soviet scientific institutions, and it was further developed over the next fifteen years. Scientists from all of the former Soviet Republics participated in the Michurinist campaign. In Lithuania, this campaign started in the autumn of 1948. From 1948 until 1963, the Department of Michurinist Biology was active at Vilnius University. Studies in this field were performed at Lithuanian scientific institutions, and scientists were engaged with this theory. This essay illustrates the realization of the Michurinist campaign in Lithuania using details from botany. It describes the investigations of plant genetics in Lithuania before World War II, depicts the general situation of scientists in Lithuania during the first years of the Soviet occupation, explores the involvement of botanists in propagating Michurinist biology, and in summary, reveals the peculiarities of this campaign in Lithuania.

Introduction

After the authorities of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) supported the agronomist Trofim Lysenko’s general announcement during the session of the Lenin All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences (VASKhNIL) that occurred from July 31 to August 7, 1948, Michurinism was declared the only “correct theory” of biology in the Soviet Union. The term “Michurinism” came from the work of Ivan Vladimirovich Michurin (Fig. 1), a selective breeder who died in 1935. Lysenko (Fig. 2) developed Michurinism—also called Soviet Creative Darwinism—in the mid-1930s. Michurinism, in Lysenko’s hands, came to mean breeding grafted plants, vegetative hybridization, improving plants by grafting (which Michurin called the “mentor method”), the inheritance of acquired characteristics, the rapid conversion of one species into another, and “corrections” of Darwin’s statements about evolutionary theory.

Many publications in political, social, and economic contexts analyze the Lysenko affair and the controversy

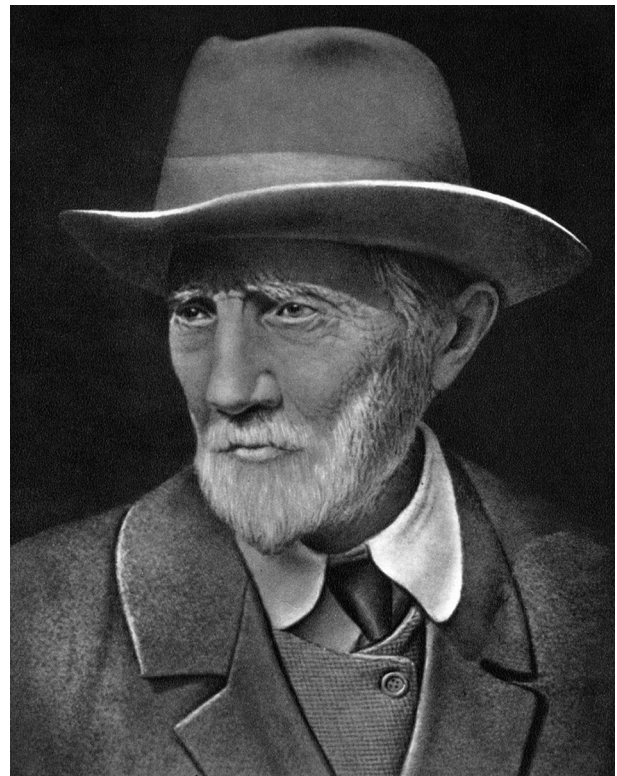


Fig. 1. Ivan Michurin. Photograph from Vvedenskij B. (ed.) *Bolshaja sovetskaja enciklopedija*, tom 27. (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatelstvo Bolshaja sovetskaja enciklopedija, 1954).

related to it.¹ The spread of the Michurinist campaign throughout the Academies of Sciences and educational

¹ According to William deJong-Lambert, “The term ‘Lysenko affair’ refers almost exclusively to events following the 1948 VASKhNIL conference up until Lysenko’s formal denouncement in 1965.” *The Cold War Politics of Genetic Research: An Introduction to the Lysenko Affair* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014). For additional work on Lysenkoism, see: David Joravsky, *The Lysenko Affair* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1986); Nils Roll-Hansen, *The Lysenko Effect: The Politics of Science* (New York: Humanity Books, 2005); V. N. Soifer, *Vlast’ i nauka. Razgrom kommunistami genetiki v SSSR [The Communist Regime and Science: The Crushing of Genetics in the USSR by Communists]* (Moscow: CheRo, 2002); Pollock Ethan *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Dominique Lecourt, *Proletarian Science? The Case of Lysenko* (London: NLB Humanities Press, 1977). Kirill O. Rossianov, “Editing Nature. Joseph Stalin and the ‘New’ Soviet Biology,” *Isis* 84 no. 4 (1993): 728–45; Nikolai Kremmentsov, *Stalinist Science: The Crushing of Genetics in the International Dimension of the Lysenko Controversy, 1944–1947*, *Journal of the History of Biology* 29, no. 2 (1996): 229–50; deJong-Lambert and Kremmentsov, “On Labels and Issues: The Lysenko Controversy and the Cold War,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 45, no. 3 (2012): 373–88.

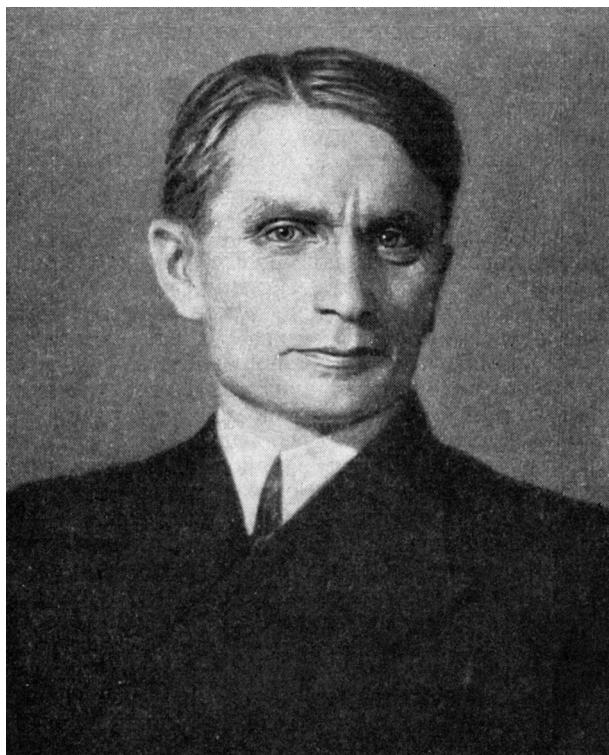


Fig. 2. Trofim Lysenko. Photograph from Vvedenskij B. (ed.) *Bolshaja sovetskaja enciklopedija*, tom 25. (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatelstvo Bolshaja sovetskaja enciklopedija, 1954).

institutions in the Soviet Union are examined by Nikolai Kremontsov and William deJong-Lambert,² and an exhaustive overview of the Michurinist campaign in communist bloc countries is presented by DeJong-Lambert, Rudolf Hagemann, Kremontsov, Piotr Köhler, and Lawrence Schneider.³ Francesco Cassata, Oren Solomon Harman, Diane B. Paul, and Eva Schandevyl outline the campaign in non-communist bloc countries.⁴ This campaign spread throughout the world through the efforts of local communist parties. Scientists from different countries were involved, consciously or unconsciously and in agreement or opposition. The case of the Michurinist campaign in Lithuania and other Soviet Republics has not been studied thoroughly, although all scientists from

the former Soviet Republics engaged in these political campaigns.

In the summer of 1940, the Soviet Union forcibly annexed Lithuania only to lose control of the territory to the Nazis the following year. By the summer of 1944, the Soviet Union reoccupied Lithuania and quickly re-imposed the Soviet political system. The massive collectivization of farms began in 1947. Soviet authorities subjected Lithuanians to waves of deportation that lasted until 1953. The Soviet reorganizations of all spheres of social life were at their peak when, from September, 20–22, 1948, a congress was organized in Lithuania to discuss the decisions of the VASKhNIL session.⁵ During this session, decisions were adopted to initiate and organize a Michurinist campaign in Lithuania. These resolutions were carried out quickly. Throughout the following month, Michurinism was propagated at all scientific institutions, such as Vilnius University (VU), Vilnius State Pedagogical Institute (VSPi), the Academy of Agriculture (LAA), and the Institute of Biology of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences (LAS). Studies built on Michurinist biology were organized, special departments were founded and studies by Lysenko were propagated. Further, Michurinist biology textbooks were prepared and published. The results of this session immediately had an effect to the careers of a number of scientists. Zoologist Pranciškus Šivickis (Fig. 3), who had the courage to officially refuse to condemn genetics, lost his job and was expelled from Vilnius University (VU) and the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences botanist Jonas Dagys (Fig. 4) was expelled from his post as the Head of the Department of Plant Anatomy and Physiology of VU. New figures in high-ranking positions without academic qualification appeared. This campaign in Lithuania was of long duration, continuing until an order from Moscow ended it in 1963. Only a few papers have been published about the Lithuanian VASKhNIL session,⁶ Lithuanian historian Danutė Blažytė-Baužienė described the case of the Academy of Agriculture,⁷ and some biographical episodes for the individuals in the Michurinist campaign can also be found in biographical outlines of scientists or in memoirs.⁸

This paper portrays the realization of this campaign, illustrating it using details from botany. The case of botanists from VU is apt for several reasons. First, botany was a well-developed field and occupied a significant place

² DeJong-Lambert, *The Cold War Politics of Genetic Research* (ref. 1); Nikolai Kremontsov, *Lysenkoism in Europe: Export-Import of the Soviet Model*, in *Academia Upheaval: Origins, Transfers, and Transformations of the Communist Academic Regime in Russia and East Central Europe*, ed. Michael David-Fox and Gyorgy Peteri (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 2000), 179–203.

³ William deJong-Lambert, "Lysenkoism in Poland," *Journal of the History of Biology* 45 (2012): 499–524; Rudolf Hagemann, "How Did East German Genetics Avoid Lysenkoism?," *Trends in Genetics* 18, no. 6 (2002): 320–24; Kremontsov, *Lysenkoism in Europe* (ref. 2); Piotr Köhler, "Lysenko Affair and Polish Botany," *Journal of the History of Biology* 44, no. 2 (2011): 305–43; Köhler, "Casual Study of Lysenkoism in Polish Botany," *Folia Mendeliana* 46, no. 1–2 (2010): 41–53; Laurence Schneider, "Michurinist Biology in the People's Republic of China, 1948–1956," *Journal of the History of Biology* 45, no. 3 (2012): 525–56.

⁴ Francesco Cassata, "The Italian Communist Party and the 'Lysenko Affair' (1948–1955)," *Journal of the History of Biology* 45, no. 3 (2012): 469–98; Oren Solomon Harman, "C.D. Darlington and the British and American Reaction to Lysenko and the Soviet Conception of Science," *Journal of the History of Biology* 36, no. 2 (2003): 309–52; Diane B. Paul, "A War on Two Fronts: J.B.S. Haldane and the Response to Lysenkoism in Britain," *Journal of the History of Biology* 16, no. 1 (1983): 1–37; Eva Shandevyl, *Soviet Biology, Scientific Ethos and Political Engagement: Belgian University Professors and the Lysenko Case*, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 19, no. 2 (2003): 93–107.

⁵ Similar conferences were organized in other Baltic Republics In Estonia in October 1948 (Hans-Voldemar Trass, "Corruption of Genetics into a Lysenkoist Pseudo-Science," in *The White Book: Losses Inflicted on the Estonian Nation by Occupation Regimes 1941–1991*, ed. Vello Salo (Tallinn: Multiprint Ltd., 2005), 105–8) and in Latvia in September 1948 (J.J. Magone, "The Report of the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of Latvian SSR for the Period 1946–1950," *Latvijas PSR Zinatnu Akademijas Vestis* 7, no. 36 (1950): 179–83).

⁶ J. Matulis and A. Merkys, "Ar biologai buvo kalti? [Were the Biologists Guilty?]," pts. 1 and 2, *Mokslas ir gyvenimas [Science and Life]* 1 (1989): 13–15; 2 (1989): 10–11; V. Rantelis, "Genetics in Lithuania and the Lithuanian Society for Genetics and Breeding," *Biologija* 2 (1996): 5–10.

⁷ Danutė Blažytė-Baužienė, "Lysenkizmas ir Lietuva: kampanijos įtaka aukštojo mokslo sovietizavimui [Lysenkoism and Lithuania: The Influence of Campaign for the Sovietization of Science]" *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis* 2010, no. 2 (2011): 131–55.

⁸ Laima Petrauskienė and Jadvyga Olechnovičienė, "The Fame of Scientists: Does It Reflect Their Real Contribution to Science?," *Baltic Journal of European Studies* 1, no. 9 (2011): 181–95; Marija Natkevičaitė Ivanauskienė, *Tiesa skins kelią sau. [The Truth Is Paving the Way for Itself]* (Kaunas: Lutute, 2008); A. Merkys, *Prof. S. Jundzilo ir prof. J. Dagio gyvenimas ir veikla. [Life and Activity of Professor S. Jundzill and Professor J. Dagys]* (Vilnius: VULeidykla; 1995).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5130234>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5130234>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)