

What is happening to us?

What is happening to us? Kruglyakov E P
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The reader of *Uspekhi Fizicheskikh Nauk* needs no explanation of what pseudo-science is, for example, astrology, designs of *perpetuum mobile* (even if masked in some way or another), information transfer at a speed faster than light, mythical ‘torsion generators’, and so on. In Soviet times, some pseudo-scientific ‘theories’ were proclaimed and propagated openly (the most striking example is Lysenko and his supporters) while others flourished under the aegis of dialectic materialism or a veil of complete secrecy, and the possibilities for scientific criticism and appraisal were for some reason obstructed.

In spite of the exceedingly important achievement of the post-Soviet epoch of freedom of speech, but to some extent because of the misuse of this freedom, the propaganda of pseudo-science is unfortunately still blossoming today. Suffice it to mention the appearance of astrological forecasts in newspapers and on television. To oppose this disaster is a necessary but very difficult task. What is there to say when even the government newspaper *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, which is issued in half a million copies, published a number of articles in 1997 and 1998 advocating the fraudulent ‘research’ on torsion technologies. Before the disintegration of the USSR, the authors of these ‘research works’ received impressive sums of money under the cover of secrecy, and now they try to revive their activity employing ignorant and unscrupulous journalists. Being exasperated by such pseudo-scientific activity, E P Kruglyakov, an actively working physicist from Novosibirsk, succeeded in publishing the article “On the Other Side of Science” in *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* on May 19, 1998. In the same edition, mud was flung on him by A Valentinov, head of the newspaper’s Science Department.

In our attempts to protect E P Kruglyakov and, which is even more important, to clarify the distinction between science and pseudo-science, E B Aleksandrov and I failed to have our corresponding paper published in *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* or in any other newspaper. We had to place our note “About Pseudo-Science and its Propagandists” in the *Vestnik RAN* (the Journal of the Russian Academy of Sciences issued in a limited number of copies) No. 3, 1999. Such is the present-day situation in Russia and we cannot tolerate it.

Here, in the small book in question, the author sets an example to all of us of how to counteract the pseudo-science and ignorance that have also been thriving in some government’s highest echelons. The book is a compilation of twelve papers, one of which (“Does *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* Understand Freedom of the Press Correctly?”) is devoted to the above-mentioned attempts by E P Kruglyakov, E B Aleksandrov and me to interact with *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*.

In the other papers and the interview “The Sleep of Thought Gives Birth to Pseudo-Scientists”, which he gave to a correspondent of a Novosibirsk newspaper, the author cites a lot of striking precedents caused by ignorance and disgraceful goings-on that now take place in various organizations up to Presidents’s Security Service and one of the Committees of the State Duma. The author reminds us quite justly of the necessity of examining all kinds of projects and suggestions rendered to government bodies, which is often neglected. In this connection he pertinently quotes (p. 37) the words of Peter the Great: “All projects should be very correct lest the treasury be badly ravaged and the motherland be caused damage. Those who will devise projects carelessly will be deprived of rank and whipped — to teach the progeny a lesson”.

As we know, the progeny did not learn the lesson.

The wide circles of physicists do of course distinguish between science and pseudo-science and charlatanism, but they are not active enough in working against these phenomena because of the natural feeling of disgust experienced by sewage disposal men, as well as tiredness under the exhausting conditions of life when it is very difficult to find the truth (suffice it to say that the newspapers merely ignore protests as a rule). Such a standpoint can of course be understood but not justified. One should not keep silence but oppose the enemies of science and progress. The efforts made by the Russian Academy of Science in this direction are insufficient. Some of the so-called Public Academies have become breeders or, at any rate, a sanctuary for pseudo-science. Now, a special committee to combat pseudo-science has at last been set up in the Russian Academy of Science and has already done something, but it will not make much progress without the support of wide scientific circles. E P Kruglyakov demonstrates that one should not remain indifferent to a pseudo-scientific attack and how one should (and can) fight against it. It is therefore not out of place to draw the reader’s attention to the book by E P Kruglyakov and to remind him of the duty to protect science. Do not pass by!

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