

Preface

The book is devoted to the history of physics in the Soviet Union during the period of creation of the atomic bomb. The book narrates about the events which happened against the background of rapid developments in physics marked by several Nobel Prize awards afterwards. At that time the life and work of physicists were determined by the specific conditions of the Soviet regime.

Peculiar structure in the Russian science was formed historically and played an important role: for each of the major directions in science, the schools were created by leaders in the corresponding fields. This tradition was adopted from Germany by Peter the Great and survived in Russia since that time.

The Landau school dates back to 1932, when Landau headed the department of theoretical physics in Ukrainian Institute of Physics and Technology in Kharkov. The school flourished in the early 1940s, after Landau moved to Moscow to work in the Institute for Physical Problems directed by Kapitsa. After 1962, when Landau could not continue his scientific work due to a terrible car accident, I had to take the responsibility for the further functioning of the Landau school. Eventually, the school was formed into a separate institute, which was named after Landau. Three decades prior to the collapse of the Soviet regime, the institute accumulated the students of Landau (his contemporaries) and the students of the students of Landau and turned into a first-class center of theoretical physics. Ratings showed that it was the best among research institutes in Soviet Union.

The Landau institute originated in the years of the “thaw” in the Soviet society initiated by Nikita Khrushchev. The “thaw” was accompanied by violent bloom in culture, literature, and art. The competition between “physicists” and “lyricists” bore fruit. That is why the reader should not be surprised to see the names of physicists, writers, and theater people together in the book. The variety of names is not limited to this, however. Life is versatile, and so the names of Andropov and Pope John Paul also appear in the book. The book contains many facts which are not known even in scientific community. The author hopes that the book will be of interest both to specialists and to the general reader.

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