

Preface

The various bureaucratic, logistical, and linguistic problems that afflicted contacts across the Iron Curtain are well-recognised by historians, and have been subjected to a number of general studies.¹ In the specifically scientific context, however, the vast majority of available investigations appear to focus upon those aspects of a particular discipline that emerged during the years of the Cold War, with communications difficulties often being a secondary matter. The purpose of the present book therefore is to provide an overview of the problems of Cold War scientific communications (principally in the academic context) in which these selfsame difficulties are the main focus. The account given here integrates (for the first time, to the best of my knowledge) the political/ideological/bureaucratic problems that afflicted East-West contacts with those of a linguistic nature. Indeed, my main theses lie at the intersection of these issues. They are, first of all, that, where conference attendance and personal correspondence were concerned, the difficulties encountered were broadly similar across the sciences, but that we begin to see a marked difference between distinct disciplines when we consider the availability of publications and the provision of translations. Second, I contend that the physical accessibility of publications from ‘the other side’ was generally much better than is commonly supposed. Finally, I argue that Western scientists were afflicted by greater linguistic difficulties than their Soviet counterparts, who do not appear to have been overly affected by the language barrier—instead, their major problems in accessing Western research were bureaucratic in nature.

The material of this book is arranged as follows. I begin in Chap. 1 by establishing a rough framework for the study of scientific communication, and also set up the conventions and terminology to be adopted throughout. In Chap. 2, I turn to a general discussion of communications between scientists in East and West from the 1920s, up to around the 1980s; the focus in Chap. 2 is upon *personal* contacts between scientists, by which I mean correspondence and face-to-face meetings, usually at conferences. The scene is set in Sect. 2.1 by a short discussion of

¹I save detailed references for the Introduction.

East-West scientific communications in the years before the First World War. Sections 2.2 and 2.3 then take the 1920s and 1930s in turn. We will see that contacts were initially quite easy, though they diminished under Stalin. Section 2.4 examines the slightly improved communications that took place during the Second World War, in the spirit of wartime cooperation, but which were then stifled in the early Cold War climate (Sect. 2.5). Following Stalin's death in 1953, contacts were opened up once again, as I discuss in Sect. 2.6, but these were not without their problems. A comprehensive account of the political difficulties afflicting Soviet scientists during this period (with particular regard to international contacts) is provided by the writings of the biologist Zh. A. Medvedev, which we examine in Sect. 2.7. Although such problems were largely a concern for *Soviet* scientists, there were nevertheless some home-grown political problems that affected Western scientists—I discuss these in Sect. 2.8. The material on personal communications is brought to a close with some concluding remarks in Sect. 2.9.

Issues surrounding physical access to publications are addressed in Chap. 3. After some general remarks in Sect. 3.1, I consider the matter of censorship (Sect. 3.2), and the tendency of Soviet scientists to publish much of their work in 'local' journals, which often did not find their way into Western libraries (Sect. 3.3). Efforts to gain broad impressions of the work of 'the other side' are dealt with next: abstracting services are the subject of Sect. 3.4, whilst Sect. 3.5 looks at the many published Western surveys of Soviet scientific advances.

In Chap. 4, we turn to linguistic matters, which I set in the context of the infamous 'foreign-language barrier' (Sect. 4.1). The specific issues considered here are the use of foreign languages (Sect. 4.2), and the appearance of foreign authors (Sect. 4.3), in Soviet journals, Russian-language ability amongst Western scientists (Sect. 4.4), and the translation of scientific works (Sect. 4.5).

Some final remarks, and points to be pursued, may be found in Chap. 5. One of my goals with this book was to achieve something approaching comprehensiveness in the resources cited throughout. It is therefore my hope that these references, in conjunction with the comments in the Conclusion, will provide the impetus for further research in this area.

The present text emerged as a much-expanded version of Chap. 2 of my book *Mathematics across the Iron Curtain: A History of the Algebraic Theory of Semigroups* (American Mathematical Society, Providence, RI, 2014). However, whereas that chapter focused on communications in *mathematics* (indeed, in many places, it did not stray very far from abstract algebra), the present text adopts a much broader point of view, taking in as many different disciplines as possible. Nevertheless, the reader might still detect a slight bias towards mathematics. Given its origins, this book contains, at its core, some research carried out between March 2010 and February 2013 at the Mathematical Institute of the University of Oxford under the auspices of research project grant number F/08 772/F from the Leverhulme Trust. Thanks must finally go to the two anonymous referees whose insightful comments have not only helped to improve this book, but have also suggested directions for future research.



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Hollings, C.D.

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