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NEWS

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Noted Russian geneticist to speak at UTHSCD on genetic aspects of aging.

DALLAS--Dr. Zhores A. Medvedev, noted Russian-born geneticist and political activist, dismisses the exaggerated claims of longevity among people of the Caucasus region of the U.S.S.R. The scientist will speak on "Molecular and genetic aspects of aging" at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas faculty seminar Nov. 2 at 4 p.m.

Dr. Medvedev has published papers refuting the age claims of a number of residents of the Caucasus region of the U.S.S.R. who have been publicized in the popular press for their ages of 150 to 160 years.

Dr. Medvedev estimates that these people are perhaps half the age they claim to be. He says there are no birth records for them, and their ages are based on oral tradition.

In addition, he says, several cultural conditions encourage people in that area to exaggerate their ages. In the U.S.S.R. old age brings high status. And in the Caucasus region of the Republic of Georgia the oldest person in the village presides over local celebrations. That person is also much sought-after for advice.

The government has contributed to the status of old age by seeking out and publicizing cases of longevity. This is to show the favorability of life in the U.S.S.R.

Joseph Stalin, born in this area, had an interest in longevity. And he was a patron of the pseudoresearch that seemed to justify these claims of old age.

Dr. Medvedev dismisses these claims, which, if true, would suggest that a special environment promotes longevity.

The geneticist has developed several theories on aging, including a theory of aging rate control by gene repetition processes. Dr. Medvedev is perhaps better known, however, for his political activities.

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In 1960 he became actively involved in the science freedom and civil rights movements in the U.S.S.R. He wrote a number of books and essays against government restrictions, including a biography, The Rise and Fall of T.D. Lysenko. In the book he attributed many problems of Soviet scientists today to Lysenko's elevation to power over the scientific community. Lysenko, a pseudoscientific geneticist, was a favorite of Stalin.

Because of his political activities, Dr. Medvedev was deprived of Soviet citizenship in 1973. He now works in London in the genetic division of the National Institute for Medical Research.

Dr. Medvedev graduated from the Faculty of Agrochemistry of Moscow Timiriasev Agricultural Academy. He received the Ph.D. equivalent from the Institute of Plant Physiology of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. In 1963 he became chief of the Laboratory of Molecular Radiobiology of the Research Institute for Medical Radiology in Obninsk. In 1970-72 he served as senior scientist at the Research Institute of Physiology and Biochemistry of Farm Animals.

He received the 1965 award of the Moscow Naturalist Society for his book Protein Biosynthesis and Problems of Heredity, Development and Aging.

He is a fellow of the American Gerontological Society and a member of The American Society for Cell Biology.

His Dallas visit is co-sponsored by the University of Texas at Dallas where he will speak to the public on "Nuclear accidents and radioactive pollution in some areas of the U.S.S.R." Nov. 2 at 8 p.m.

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NOTE: Dr. Medvedev will hold a press conference at 1:30 p.m. Nov. 2 at the Dallas Press Club.