

ER: a case of academic lynching

M. Apostol

Department of Theoretical Physics, Institute of Atomic Physics,
Magurele-Bucharest MG-6, POBox MG-35, Romania
email: apoma@theory.nipne.ro

To: the Director General of IFIN-HH, Scientific Council of IFIN-HH, Board of Directors of IFIN-HH, etc.

I was not officially asked to make this Report, yet people say it would be a good thing to write and submit it. My opinions are not endorsed by the Institute's managers but they have turned me down so many times that another one makes twice the fun. Most likely, agitated friends pose a problem to the Institute's managers and these ones wish to counter-oppose another opinion, for example mine.

According to my knowledge, dr. ER got a doctorate in the USA in the field of theory of critical phenomena, in 2002 took a contest for senior researcher rank III and was employed in IFIN-HH, in the Department of Theoretical Physics. Since then, some democratically elected people and authorities of IFIN-HH keep reproaching him that he has not published anything and threaten to eliminate him from the institute. As far as I remember, a similar discussion took place in 2010 (or 2009) and now, this problem is broached again.

My first observation is that a position of senior researcher rank III involves a permanent work contract and not a temporary one. Probably, in this case, an error has been made and it must be corrected. Dr. ER can be remunerated from the Core Program, like many other employees of IFIN-HH who occupied their positions through contest. Not everyone is blessed with a research funding project, the research has not yet become a private affair, private in the state institutions. That is why, compared with other general, ordinary, important problems of the Institute, I do not see this problem to be a real one.

My second observation is that dr. ER possesses solid knowledge in a very narrow, specialized scientific field in which Romania has no expertise. Accordingly, he should work alone (which is quite impossible) or should seek around here a collaborator in another field (which he did but couldn't find one) or should quit the research for good or should go to other countries (but this is precisely why he returned to Romania so that he never leaves). Such problems should be carefully evaluated by the Commission that awarded him the title of senior researcher III. I remember that in former times no young researcher was accepted into the Institute until he was professionally endorsed by at least one of the senior members. The latter had the responsibility, sometimes extended for many years, to ensure the beginner's engagement in the scientific research activity; the mentoring institution exists and operates even now in the world, except for Liberated Romania where we have abolished it because it was "communist".

Rumors go that, after awarding him the title of senior researcher III, the Contest Commission would have muttered in an undertone and under its breath that dr. ER did not deserve it. Since the members of this Commission are, I'm convinced, persons of high moral probity and

of an accomplished level of professionalism, it is not unlikely that they lent themselves to such despicable deeds which honor the profession of intellectual researcher. And since we live in an eminently ridiculous world, the Institute's Board of Directors is compelled to solve this "problem" too.

About 2008 or 2009, following discussions with dr. ER, I considered him a valuable scientific element and formally accepted him in my so-called "group". I maintain my opinion even now (at present, I have neither a group nor even PhD students, I have no responsibilities for anyone; my only responsibility that I took rather voluntarily, out of a professional deformation, is for a science of quality). At my insistence, dr. E. Radescu start to capitalize on his own researches by publishing them so that now I can send You herewith one of his scientific paper (in collaboration with another author, not myself) relatively recently finalized and which is underway for publication.

I am asking you, with all collegiality, to read this scientific paper and notice the enormous amount of work included in it (for 5 years), the scientific rigour, the highly developed mathematical apparatus and the relevance of the results on this subject compared to other publications. All the aforementioned elements are of a very high scientific level and I honestly congratulate dr. ER (and his co-author) for these outstanding and remarkable results.

In particular, I would like to emphasize that renowned professors have recently and incontinently published erroneous results on this subject while the paper of ER encounters difficulties in publication, probably, just because it is correct and of high scientific quality. The journal J. Phys. A that published the above-mentioned faulty results, declined its competence in evaluating dr. ER's paper, considering it as being too "professional".

It happened, in the history of this case, that various responsables tasked with science activism reproached ER his poor participation in the activity of the Department of Theoretical Physics and insistently invited him to attend the next seminar of the Department. ER complied to their request and at the end of the seminar, he made an extremely mannered, very pertinent, very correct criticism (I read it prior to its delivery) but also very damaging for the scientific value (however, a zilch) of the person who held it. Therefore, he was suggested that it would be preferable to no longer attend seminars.

In conclusion, I highly recommend that dr. ER be maintained in the Institute, on a permanent basis, considering his high qualification, the signs of improvement in his recent publishing activity and most of all his high professional consciousness. Let us admit that there are some who work for history not only sybarites working for filling their own pockets and for the glory of the day. Let us remember that numerous are solely the pseudo-scientific, counterfeit publications (like alcohol and money, being in high demand, scientific publications can also be counterfeit), let us remember that we are in a research institute to obtain scientific results and not to publish them, let us remember that we have old age pensioners, who are still employees of the institute and of course, still productive (they have produced their entire life, the whole science is rife with their productions), let us remember that we have "redeemed" people who stood up against the communists from positions of high communist cadres, that we remunerate personalities who do not work in the institute (of course they are helping us from the edge), let us remember that, along the time, we systematically removed from our institutes too many exceptional professionals (the truth is they were somewhat encumbering us), let us also remember that those who make reproaches to dr. ER do not excel in the quality of the scientific research they perform and let us remember as well that, perhaps, it is the case that my opinion should prevail against the opinion of many others.

Within the Department of Theoretical Physics of IFIN-HH it began to take shape, following a long and careful selection of cadres, a band of abusive people: some of them fervent church-goers,

others simply lunatics, slightly violent fools with empty stares, all of them deeply confused, daring to judge others in their official capacity of persons tasked with scientific activities. These are the people who raise their voices against dr. ER. Since they managed, through improper means, to get accepted into the Department, they developed a strong belief that they are the titulars of the Theoretical Physics which they can parcel out hither and thither, as they please. These zealous militants fantasizing that they are the owners of Theoretical Physics encouraged by all of us, by our kind collegial tolerance, created and create “the problem ER”. As if we do not have other problems!

One of this fervent scatterbrains, in his unleashed imperialism to gather a “group” of acolytes whom to take out for a walk through the Heaven’s garden, approached ER one time, considering him not only a novice but also a potential “slave labor” for his “plantation”. ER gratefully accepted the helping hand stretched out to him but realized that he has serious objections to the science performed by this agent of spreading the scientific research in Romania. This determined the zealous recruiter, in his official capacity of informer slobbering on the authorities’ ear, provider of opinions and beliefs and creator of problems, to initiate, to generate, to create, to maintain and to amplify a “problem ER”. This is where it all started, all his and our trouble.

The Department of Theoretical Physics of our Institute was set up around 1955 with about 5 blue-sky theoreticians. Shortly after, its head, S. Titeica, realizing that he is not very fond of doing scientific research, preferred to withdraw in the position of Scientific Director of the Institute and leave the management of this Department to A. Corciovei. It is Corciovei who founded the Theoretical Physics in Romania. He made an extremely careful selection of cadres, with no concessions whatsoever (he selected only the graduate students specializing in theoretical physics who were toppers in their batch); thus, he gathered around 10-15 of real professionals who distinguished themselves along the time and brought, through their devoted work, glory and honor to Romania and Romanian science. In 1977, unfortunate political circumstances delivered a hard blow to the Department of Theoretical Physics: some 25 invaders with absolutely no training in theoretical physics (not even a formal one) became, through political dictate, members of the Department. They grabbed the political power and developed an anti-scientific and anti-professional activity. Since then the decline of this Department has started, the traces left by these zealous barbarians are painfully evident even now and regrettably, they are indelible.

The liberation brought by the ‘90s completely destroyed the Department of Theoretical Physics of our Institute. All that has left of it is its name; even the memory of its short-lived glorious past (the name of Corciovei is systematically avoided) sank into oblivion. Since then, scientific quality, moral probity, abnegation in work have definitely, programmatically, explicitly been discarded in favor of quantity, production and money made through projects.

I admit that I am the last survivor.

(Translated from Romanian apr177 by Iulia Negoitza).