A history of attempts to publish

Ludwik Kowalski, a physics teacher and nuclear physics researcher from Montclair State University, USA.

My cold fusion paper was rejected by five editors who ignored the peer review process.

- **1) Physics Today, USA**
- **2) American Scientist, USA**
- **3) Nature, UK**
- **4) New Scientist, UK**
- **5) The Physics Teacher, USA**

“All articles on Cold Fusion will be rejected without reading. I know better than referees.”

The title of my 2004 paper was:

“Recent cold fusion claims: are they valid?”

I wrote that paper after spending the entire sabbatical 2002/2003 year gathering and digesting information about cold fusion. The motivation was to share what I discovered.

My paper can seen as a poster outside this room.

A longer version of this story of rejections is in item #153 at my website at:

http://blake.montclair.edu/~kowalskil/cf/

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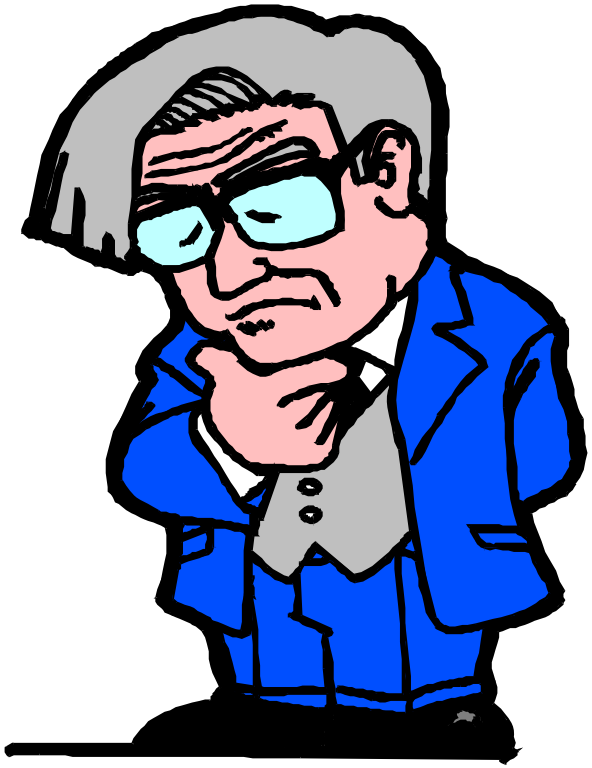
What else is at that website?

You will find lot of items about cold fusion topics. It is my “diary” of learning that I started in the Fall of 2002. At that time I was very surprised to discover that research in the area of cold fusion is not dead.

Is cold fusion real or not?



- I do not know.
- My website explains the dilemma.

Enough advertising !

My unbiased paper was rejected by the editors of five scientific journals without being sent to expert referees.

“All articles on Cold Fusion will be rejected for political reasons. Editors know better than referees.”

This reminds me of something.

1) “This cannot be right because Aristotle did not say so.”

2) “Our biologist, Lysenko, is right; American geneticists are wrong. Genetics is pseudoscience.”

3) “What is cybernetics? It is a bourgeois pseudoscience at the service of American imperialism.”

But that is another topic. How many of you remember the above dogmatic statements? Probably not too many.

Here is the rejection letter from Physics Today:

Dear Dr. Kowalski: We received your article submission titled, "Recent Cold Fusion Claims: Are They Valid?," and appreciate your sending it to Physics Today. After reviewing it, however, we have concluded that it does not meet our editorial needs. Thank you for your interest in Physics Today. Sincerely, Stephen G. Benka Editor-in-Chief."

They do not need expert referees for this topic.

In the accompanying letter I wrote:

It is not a paper defending cold fusion claims; it is a paper describing them, no matter what one is inclined to think. Scientifically literate readers are likely to appreciate my short summary of recent claims made by cold fusion researchers.

I was writing about things known since 1990's.

I also wrote:

Some of these claims, such as turning Sr into Mo, without stellar temperatures, are even more extraordinary than the claims made by Pons and Fleischmann. The strange thing is that authors of such reports seem to be reputable scientists associated with prestigious universities and laboratories. **Is it a matter of fraud? Is it a matter of self-deception, or incompetence?**

Is it a matter of progressive degeneration due to the isolation of the field from mainstream science? My article does not try to answer these questions; its purpose is to present a summary of what has been recently reported **without taking sides.** The subject is interesting no matter what the final verdict will be.

Why did Physics Today reject an unbiased article?

The rejecting letter did not have a single word about the content of the article. How can the phrase “does not meet our editorial needs” be interpreted? **Why was the article not sent to referees?**

Was I writing about astrology, sociology, poetry, business or something else unconnected to physics? **Are recent cold fusion claims described in the article already widely known to most physicists? Was my description of these claims erroneous?** Was the article rejected because of its style, limited scope, or disregard for ethical standards?

And here is the rejection letter from American Scientist:

. . . In the case of this submission, I'm unsure. We publish feature-length articles and commentaries based on original published research. The authors of American Scientist articles are the people who have done the work and therefore are in a position to survey their own field. I don't actually have evidence that you have done original research on the topic you propose to write about.

If you would like to publish a short commentary, we do have a department with different criteria, called "Macroscope." . . . If you would like us to consider publishing your piece in a short form, please let me know, and I'll share it with my colleagues and let you know the response. Sincerely, Rosalind Reid Editor, American Scientist

In responding **I suggested that they ask a recognized authority** (instead of me) **to review the field.** Five names were sent together with addresses. Did they ask any of them to write a review? Not as far I know.

But I did send a short piece, as suggested by Dr. Reid for their consideration. So far nothing has come out of this.

The short piece that I sent immediately, hoping it would be published, was entitled **“Seek not the golden egg; seek the goose.”** It was a set of six scientific questions about cold fusion for the DOE panel to consider.

I suggested that the panel focus on science rather than on application. “**Promising too much, and too early, was one of the mistakes made fifteen years ago**.”

Here are my six questions:

1) Are unexpected neutrons, protons, tritons and alpha particles emitted (at low rates) in some CF experiments?

2) Is generation of heat, in some CF experiments, linearly correlated with the accumulation of ^{4}He at the rate of 24 MeV per atom of ^{4}He?

3) Have highly unusual isotopic ratios been observed among the elements found in some CF systems?

4) Have radioactive isotopes been produced in some CF systems?

5) Has transmutation of elements occurred in some CF setups?

6) Are the ways of validating scientific findings in the areas of CF research consistent with accepted methodologies in other areas of science?

Why didn't they publish them?

And here is how my paper was rejected by Scientific American:

“Dr. Kowalski: Thank you for your offer to contribute to SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN. After much consideration, I regret to say that the piece you propose is not suited to our somewhat limited editorial needs. We appreciate your interest in SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN. Regards, Jacob Lasky Editorial Administrator.”

They also do not need expert referees.

In letters accompanying submissions I wrote:

"I deliberately avoided references to social aspects, which are interesting but highly controversial."

But I am aware that the social aspects are important and interesting.
Who is promoting the ongoing feud? Why is it being promoted? Who controls editors? I do not know.

After giving up on Scientific American I tried to publish my paper in **Nature**.The reply was short and clear: "Thank you for your inquiry about submitting your paper entitled 'Cold fusion 15 years later' to Nature. I regret that the paper that you describe seems unlikely to prove suitable for publication in Nature, and **we accordingly suggest that you pursue publication elsewhere**. I am sorry that we cannot respond more positively on this occasion. Yours sincerely Dr Karen Southwell, Senior Editor."

Frustrated that my timely review of the Cold Fusion field was being delayed I decided to send it to another UK journal, **New Scientist**. **But they never responded**.

After waiting about a month the article was submitted to **The Physics Teacher**, a journal in which several of my teacher-oriented review papers were published in the past. In submitting the article I wrote:

. . . I am still undecided about validity of cold fusion claims but I think that they should be known to physics teachers. Unfortunately, most of them are not familiar with experimental data gathered in the last ten years. **The pending evaluation of the field by the DOE is likely to be publicized in the media; this will lead to student interest and questions. Hopefully, my paper will help teachers deal with the renewed interest in the "forbidden field."**

Here is part of the rejection letter:

. . . While a paper in TPT on this subject may be warranted, we do not believe there is any great urgency to publish one immediately. After all, according to the Physics Today piece, DOE Deputy Director Decker says that their "review of cold fusion will begin in the next month or so [that was back in April]" and it "won't take a long time –- it's a matter of weeks or months." We believe that it would be premature to publish a cold fusion paper in TPT before the results of the DOE review are announced.

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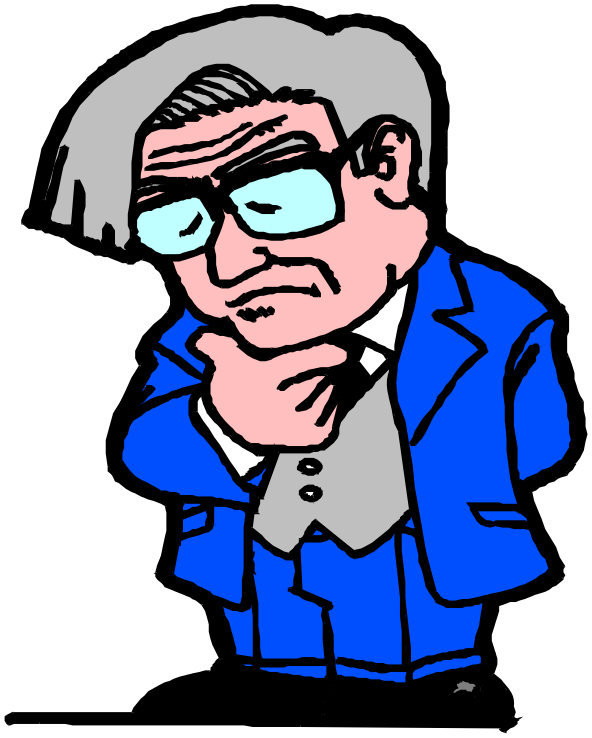

- Why don’t they allow me ask this question in public? Who are they defending? What motivates them?

Read my rejected paper; it can be seen as a poster outside this room.

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THANKS FOR LISTENING