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AN EPILOG TO THE LUZIN CASE

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ABSTRACT. This is a supplement to the author's article [1].

Academician Nikolai Nikolaevich Luzin was formally rehabilitated by the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences on January 17, 2012.

The initiative of devaluation of the notorious accusations of Luzin was due to the six prominent mathematicians and physicists, mostly connected to Akademgorodok near Novosibirsk. These are Academicians A. A. Borovkov, I. A. Ibragimov, V. E. Nakoryakov, A. K. Rebrov, Yu. G. Reshetnyak, and V. E. Zakharov who wrote a relevant letter to Yu. S. Osipov, President of the Russian Academy. The idea of rehabilitation of Luzin was supported for many years by many top scientists of Russia. Among them were Academicians A. G. Aganbegyan, V. I. Arnold (1937–2010), L. D. Faddeev, R. I. Nigmatulin, Ya. G. Sinai, D. V. Shirkov, and many others.

However, there are still quite a few questions concerning the Luzin case. At least three of them deserve answers.

Question 1: *What was the role of Arnošt Kolman who almost surely authored the anti-Luzin letters in the Pravda newspaper and served as an agent of Stalin's totalitarianism in the scientific life of Russia in that epoch?*

Answer: There is no doubt that Kolman was a rascal, a vilest skunk, an author of many anonymous and signed lampoons. But Kolman was not a working mathematician, and his attempts at implanting Bolshevism in mathematics had vanished quickly and left practically no aftermaths. Kolman was not a member of the Emergency Commission of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR on the Case of Academician Luzin. He never took the floor at the meetings of the Commission, and he never wrote a word about the Luzin case in his reminiscences, which

demonstrates that he had viewed the Luzin case neither among his successes nor among his crimes. Practically no one of the younger generations has ever heard about Kolman. Some students of N. N. Luzin and P. S. Aleksandroff did flirt with Kolman, which implies nothing but the negative characterization of these students and their truculent roles in hounding Luzin. The Luzin case was a message to Stalin and his myrmidons: “We will trample anyone down—just give a sign.” The scenario of the Luzin case was clearly written in the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), while it was the students of Luzin who had instigated the case and played key roles at the meetings of the Emergency Commission.

The list of the members of the Commission is now in order: Chairman G. M. Krzhizhanovsky; Members of the Commission—A. E. Fersman, S. N. Bernstein, O. Yu. Schmidt, I. M. Vinogradov, A. N. Bakh, N. P. Gorbunov, L. G. Snirelman, S. L. Sobolev, P. S. Aleksandroff, and A. Ya. Khinchin.

QUESTION 2: *Is this true that Luzin’s students, their friends, and G.M. Krzhizhanovsky made all they could to save Luzin from death, although Luzin had pushed his students away by his misconduct, hypocrisy, plagiarism, unfair reviews of feeble papers, and so on?*

ANSWER: Completely preposterous is the suggestion that the Academy of Sciences and Luzin’s students had protected Luzin from Stalinism. The facts destroy the possibility of their noble defence of Luzin and science from Stalin. The hypothesis that Stalin stood behind the Luzin case has no documentary justifications. This hypothesis is clearly of a contrive and a posteriori nature. Luzin was made the target of the attack by some of his students—*is fecit, cui prodest*. That is exactly how the Luzin case was viewed by virtuous contemporaries. The documentary evidence of that is galore. Krzhizhanovsky’s position is completely characterized by the fact that he never eliminated the political flavor of the abominable trial.

It suffices today to read what was said by the Luzin judges at the meetings of the Commission. Also, we must never forget that the participants of the trial had kept silence during half a century. They had concealed all documents and had never spoken about any attempts of theirs at protecting their teacher from Stalinism. P. S. Aleksandroff wrote about just revenge to Luzin in 1979, while A. N. Kolmogorov had slapped the face of Luzin in 1946 and tried to justify this by Luzin’s misconduct in the 1980s. But we know nothing about any attempts of the students to apologize for their ugly deeds against Luzin. The truth about the Luzin case became known to the public contrary to the will of the participants of the trial of Luzin. Luzin’s students had elaborately concealed their participation in the Luzin case. And there were good reasons for that: Luzin was accused in servitude to the masters of “fascistoid science,” and the accusation was never disputed at the meetings of the Commission by anyone but Luzin. The Commission completely ascertained the characteristics of Luzin in the Pravda newspaper. “Completely” means that it ascertained the servitude of Luzin to the obviously foreign “masters of fascistoid science.” S. N. Bernstein was the only member of the Commission who defended Luzin.

The minutes of the meetings of the Emergency Commission are historical documents. Anything written is much stronger than any *ad hoc* hypothesis. It stands to reason to look at some excerpts from the minutes [2].

Krzhizhanovsky. N.N. said that he confesses to this, confesses to cowardice. But we see here either the absence of at least a tiny bit of Soviet patriotism and even, I would say, of the Soviet feeling—the feeling of a Soviet citizen. I would like to clarify: He is an academician, a Soviet academician who works at the highest headquarters, at the scientific headquarters of this country; and he reveals lack of courage [and cowardice] in this matter.

Krzhizhanovsky. There is no shred of a doubt that he is a boundless coward. And this boundless cowardice led him to the complete loss of any principles and to double-dealing. He is a coward not only in regard to the Soviet reality but also to the All-Slavic Congress and Lebesgue. This is a typical double-dealing for the two sides: here and there. This is proven.

Sobolev. A comment about the policy of N.N. when on the agenda was the election of corresponding members of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and similar matters. I recall for instance the elections of 1934 when N.N. implemented a very strange policy. Indeed, S[ergei] N[atanovich] [Bernstein] had presented a rather large list of serious scientists so that we treated the responsible task with due respect and had a possibility of discussing who really deserved the merit and who could be elected. The list had included the most capable young persons like A. Kolmogorov, Gelfond, and others. The list had been compiled rather objectively in my opinion. And the only thing left was to evaluate each candidate seriously in the [mathematical] group of the Academy. But N.N. used formalities like something was absent or some report that can appear the next day was not submitted in time. In other words, using some trifles exaggerated by him, he requested in a completely hysterical tone that no candidacy but he had nominated should be considered. In fact he made impossible any discussion of the candidates and put the group into the position when the sole candidate was nominated. I will not discuss whether this candidate deserves election, maybe this is so, but the fact of refusal of discussion and election of proper candidates speaks for itself. I for myself saw in this simply that N.N. was in fact utterly reluctant to have some suddenly elected representative of the youth like A.N. Kolmogorov whom N.N. had no intention to admit to the Academy. After the meeting of the group I told N.N. that this was an outrage, N.N., that what you had been doing. And he answered to me that those were the sacred traditions of the Academy of Sciences, etc.

I think that he adhered in the Academy to the policy that, by all means, caused harm to the Academy of Sciences. Maybe, he made this pursuing his private rather than political ends—this is possible. We may assume that he had thought that this would be bad for him if such and such persons were elected. But it is possible that the utter contempt to our Academy of Sciences resulted in the desire of arranging some cosy group around himself.

Aleksandroff. I agree about the first part with S[ergei] L[vovich]. I see too that N.N. was completely outrageous in all his public activities. I'll say it clearly that there is no doubt that N.N. could transform any public activity to something ridiculous. But I consider as wrong the statement of S[ergei] L[vovich] that N.N. did not respect the Academy of Sciences. I think that my meetings with him in the recent years corroborate me full and firm belief in that. On the contrary, N.N. appraises nothing under the Sun as much as the title of academician. And those who had contacted him in person got in a predicament because of that, since N.N. has demonstrated every now and then that an academician is a person of a completely different composition than any other mortal. This was so definite that it often gave a comical impression. N.N. assessed his title of academician quite highly but reflected in some crooked mirror of his.

As regard his antisocial deeds, these are many to be recalled. I view N.N., while this might be a rather rude expression, as an intriguer—a person who is always concerned

about having a surrounding group of minions who are loyal to him and stare at his mouth. And it is this that explains many of his appraisals of inappropriate applicants to various scientific degrees. For instance, the situation with Kudryavtsev. In the same spirit N.N. wrote prefaces, funny and risible, to many books. And even if N.N. had a policy, this policy was of a purely personal nature: N.N. desired to gain “popularity” among this kind of commonplace scientific workers. He would say a compliment to everyone. He wanted to have all votes in his favor irrespectively of the objective weight of a voter. It seems to me that the facts that the facts outspoken by S[ergei] L[vovich], are unquestionable, but they relate to personal intriguing rather than political sabotage.

Kolmogorov. Would you please read the clause about his article in the *Izvestiya* newspaper? (Krzhizhanovsky reads it.) I think this is a weak formulation since the article clearly contradicts facts, and we must formulate this stronger.

Aleksandroff. One of the clauses of the resolution pinpoints the contemptuous attitude of N.N. to Soviet science. I think that the mode of discussion we are having is a compelling justification of the clause since the mode cannot be qualified as anything else but demonstration of contempt to all who are present. N.N. systematically argues with sophisms obvious to anyone or with appealing to the three lines crossed out by Borel. This witnesses the fact that N.N. did not respect this assembly since otherwise he would never allow himself to give these arguments for this assembly consists of the persons experienced in such matters. And the fact that N.N. gives these feeble arguments with such persistence I qualify as contempt to the assembly.

Krzhizhanovsky. He indicates only that the result was obtained in another manner. So he ascribed a half of what is done to himself without any remorse, and in closing he points out that Novikov obtained this in another manner. This is a theft in my opinion!

Shnirelman. If we raise the question as follows: Is N.N. a man who is actively loyal to the interests of the Soviet state, then I think we will all answer unanimously that we have no grounds to think so but we have all grounds to think contrary-wise, since any man actively loyal to the Soviet state would firstly consider the interests of the cause he writes his review for, the interests of the institution he is the head of, etc. We have no facts for many years which make us possible to state that N.N. is an active Soviet citizen.

I think that this conclusion which is made with unambiguous clarity proves with utmost lucidity and in its own right that N.N. could not be trusted to deal with any public matter of the scientific community. We must formulate this exactly as it is in reality.

The second question: Is he is an active counter-revolutionary or a conscious but possibly peculiar saboteur? I think that we cannot answer this question yet since we have no data. I assume that to answer the question (which is necessary since the question is very important) we must proceed as follows: we must delegate this to the competent institution that has all data in its possession. This is exactly how the judges of Luzin defended him from Stalinism. All meetings of the Commission are common examples of the collective execution of an a priori convicted person. Finally, it seems reasonable to recall that the Resolution of the Emergency Commission has the following particular clause: “N. N. Luzin inflicted explicit damage on Soviet science.”

QUESTION 3: Is it right to qualify the Luzin case as the tragedy of mathematics in Russia for in fact this was an ordinary episode of the crimes of Stalin's

totalitarianism which did not greatly affected the development of mathematics in Russia?

ANSWER: The true initiators of hounding Luzin were some of his students who struggled for liquidation of the Luzin influence on the mathematical infrastructure of the epoch. Kolman was used by mathematicians as a weapon of the political execution of Luzin. The understanding of the filthy evil done had come with time, but the participants of the trial never repented and simply concealed the truth about their participation in hounding Luzin. It was neither Stalin nor Kolman who destroyed the official minutes of the meetings of the Emergency Commission of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, but this was done by those who were interested in concealing the truth about the Luzin case. The figure of silence of the participants of the trial of Luzin had played the role of immoral mutual cover-up.

In actuality, most but happily not all prominent students of Luzin who took the roles of scientific and moral leaders of mathematics in the USSR possessed, at least to some extent, the deficiencies of personality which they had ascribed to Luzin. The principal difference between Luzin and the students that betrayed him is as follows: Luzin never participated in any political trials against his students and never flirted with Stalin's regime. The rotten stuff produces rotten stuff, and filth brings about filth. The tragedy of mathematics in Russia consists in the fact that the skyscraper of mathematics in the USSR was erected on the political tomb of Luzin whose execution had involved his outstanding students. The virulent miasma of this foundation had fed the filth that rotten the mathematical life in the USSR: careerism, political intriguing, xenophobia, collective trials of anyone unpleasant under the banners of Soviet patriotism and hypocritical struggle for the moral dignity of the profession.

The sources of the Luzin affair are not localized in some specific totalitarian mechanisms of the Stalinist USSR of the 1930s. The standards of life in Russia have changed but there are still many who believe that Luzin got what he deserves since he was a poorer mathematician as compared with his students. Careerism, servility, making gods from bosses and teacher are common phenomena. There is little pleasure in discovering that great scientists and pious saints can be rascallions, but to conceal unpleasant facts is unobjective. On the contrary, such cases are most important for raising integrity and morality. The Bible tells a story of the sort.

The historical nihilism of these days intertwines rather tightly with nihilism in morality. "The past crimes are buried in the past. The past is absent at present. Therefore, the past crimes are absent now. So, let bygones be bygones." This sophism underlies the delusive appeal to ignore the old crimes and manifestations of subjectivism, monopolism, protectionism, and even nastier isms in view of the period of limitations.

This is ultimately ridiculous to refer to the period of limitations in regard to the matters of science and morality. No period of limitations is ever met over there. The period of limitations never eliminates any mistakes—mistakes disappear only when repaired. It is much easier to make mistakes than to repair them. It is much more difficult to repair mistakes of the past and mistakes of the others. When we manage to do this, the number of mistakes diminishes. We must separate ourselves from the mistakes of the past, destroy their sources and repair their consequences, rather than hide ourselves under the false argument of the period of limitations.

For 75 years Luzin's affair had been spoiling the academic atmosphere with lies, the concealed misdeeds of the past, the instances of willing or unwilling justification of political slander towards colleagues and competitors in order to free the lanes of promotion and the roads to top offices. Now this source of evil is closed, and science becomes a bit purer. Luzin will never recognize this, but his memory has become brighter, shedding more light on the way of young generations in science. Luzin's honor is a part of the personal honor of many scientists. The honor of science is slightly safer now, at least in Russia.

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