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Sergei S. Demidov; Boris V. Lëvshin (Editors). *The Case of Academician Nikolai Nikolaevich Luzin*. Translated by **Roger Cooke**. (History of Mathematics, 43.) xxix + 375 pp., illus., indexes. Providence, R.I.: American Mathematical Society, 2016. \$59 (cloth).

The flourishing of mathematics in the Soviet Union is often explained by portraying this field as allegedly isolated from ideological and political influences and therefore attractive to thinkers striving for intellectual autonomy. This book is a very powerful statement to the contrary. In July 1936 a group of talented young mathematicians, former members of “Luzitania,” an informal creative mathematical circle led by the charismatic Nikolai Luzin, viciously attacked their own teacher, falsely accusing him of all sorts of misdeeds—from academic misconduct to anti-Soviet activity. *The Case of Academician Nikolai Nikolaevich Luzin* gives voice to all participants—both the accusers and Luzin himself—and presents overwhelming documentary evidence to conclude that mathematicians themselves, not an outside political force, drove the charges against Luzin, in pursuit of their own political and administrative gains.

The bulk of the book is made up of the translated minutes of five sessions of the Soviet Academy of Sciences Special Commission appointed in July 1936 to investigate the accusations against Luzin. Introductory articles put the events in a broader historical context, and a richly detailed commentary provides ample evidence to evaluate the validity of the charges.

The accusers, among them the future leaders of Soviet mathematics Pavel Aleksandrov, Sergei Sobolev, and Andrei Kolmogorov, showed remarkable political adroitness and drew on the vast repertoire of Soviet ideological clichés to attack Luzin. The variety of charges reflected the diverse agendas of the different accusing parties. While committed ideologues labeled Luzin a reactionary proponent of fascist ideas, more practical, career-minded mathematicians were accusing him of holding up the promotions of younger scholars in the academy. While some accusers focused solely on the allegations of plagiarism, others brought forward the heavy political charges of deliberate concealment of problems with mathematical education and denounced him as an enemy of the Soviet state, which could potentially lead to Luzin’s expulsion from the Academy of Sciences and his possible arrest and execution.

The higher political authorities, however, including Stalin himself, did not seem to be interested in the petty fights over priority or administrative rivalry. They showed concern about only one issue—Luzin’s close ties with French mathematicians and his habit of publishing much of his work abroad. Luzin was apparently considered for the role of whipping boy in a public ideological campaign aimed at reaffirming scientists’ commitment to the goals and values of the Soviet state. A series of meetings condemning “Luzinism” swept through the scientific community, extracting pledges from scientists to publish their work first and foremost in Soviet academic journals. The choice of Luzin as a target in this particular campaign, however, did not prove wise, as most leading Soviet mathematicians, including many of his accusers, were similarly publishing their work abroad, for the simple reasons of wider reach and speed of publication; indeed, Luzin was probably not the worst offender. Eventually the higher authorities decided to leave Luzin alone, and the Academy of Sciences Special Commission had to back down and downgrade the accusations. Luzin lost his position of authority but remained a full member of the Soviet academy.

The outcome of the Luzin affair was a decisive shift of administrative power from the older generation of mathematicians to a younger cohort. A similar generational conflict played out at about the same time in France between the old guard (René-Louis Baire, Arnaud Denjoy, and Henri Lebesgue—all connected to Luzin) and the Young Turks (e.g., André Weil, who had links to Luzin’s accusers). The young generation fought their fights with the resources available to them, and in the Soviet context such resources in-

cluded ideological charges and political accusations. A significant change in research focus accompanied this power shift—from Luzin’s somewhat old-fashioned interests in descriptive set theory and mathematical analysis to his students’ trendy research on topology and group theory. Ironically, the hierarchical Soviet system of organization of research, which concentrated decision-making power in the hands of several authoritative figures, made those individuals natural targets of attacks by those desiring change.

Roger Cooke’s superb translation of the Special Commission’s minutes conveys the gloomy and fascinating stylistic mix of mathematicians’ careful professional wording, Soviet bureaucratic clichés, and the inflammatory language of political accusations. This is not an easy read; nor should it be, given the heavy emotional load of the proceedings. Yet this is a must-read for any historian of science under an authoritarian regime and for historians of twentieth-century mathematics.

The Luzin case left a deep scar in the collective memory of the Soviet mathematics community. Luzin’s accusers preferred to remain silent about the whole affair. Some of them lavished posthumous praise on their teacher, masking their role in the notorious campaign. Most original documents were destroyed (this publication is based on a recent accidental find of barely legible bottom carbon copies). Yet, through word of mouth, talk of the ethical failures of Luzin’s students continued to spread, blackening their reputations and poisoning the moral atmosphere in the community. This publication (the Russian original came out in 1999) is a difficult post-Soviet effort to come to terms with the Stalinist past. Ironically, the English translation arrives at a moment when political attitudes in Russia have taken a turn toward renewed nationalism and scholars are once again publicly castigated for their lack of “patriotism” and dubious connections with the West. History repeats its tragedies, but not necessarily as farce. If forgotten, it repeats itself as another tragedy.

Slava Gerovitch

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Recent

Axel Jansen; Andreas Franzmann; Peter Münte (Editors). *Legitimizing Science: National and Global Publics (1800–2010)*. 331 pp., figs. Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2015. €45 (paper).

Ever since Big Science lost its energy from the Space Race, and the rising costs of cutting-edge medical research resulted in politicians questioning the necessity of state involvement in them, science has been under heavy fire. It is not surprising that historians, philosophers, and sociologists of science incessantly propose and discuss models of politics-science relations and entanglements. *Legitimizing Science*, the result of a 2013 workshop in Tübingen, Germany, is another recent publication asking how the science-policy nexus functions and how scientists garner the “legitimacy that science itself cannot provide” (p. 11).

The introductory essay by the editors, Andreas Franzmann, Axel Jansen, and Peter Münte, discusses the modes of interaction between science and elites, the latter described as having a “key role in shielding the experimental sciences from religious or cultural attacks and in supporting and transferring authority to them” (p. 12). This quotation, however generalizing it might be, gives a good sense of the general outline of the topics in which scientists stay on one side and politics—research policies, grant agencies, or even professional politicians—stays on the other. The second introductory essay, by Rudolf Stichweh, takes the *longue durée* perspective and asks how we can understand science-society and science-politics couplings