

June 4, 2010

Levin, Leonid Commentary to Interview II

The last graduation classes formed by honest admission exams were our class 1970, and the next 1971. (The large fraction was Jewish. After the 1967 Israeli-Arab war admissions were quite *Judenfrei*; there is abundant literature about the techniques to this end.) Consequently, students were preoccupied with math and there was almost no political activity.

This drew attention, and the class Komsomol leadership was charged with punishing several neglectful students. A result was an uproarious Komsomol meeting, which kicked out all leadership and elected me and my three roommates to be a majority in the new Bureau. I, of course, had no intention to actually come to its meetings, but was shamed (by Volodya Gelfand: here is the culprit of all my troubles :-)) into taking control.

We blocked all Komsomol activity in our class. At times it took much creativity. Here is an example. There came complaints that in some groups in our class the attendance of political courses was very low. (It was low in all our groups, but some group leaders did not bother to register this.) To avoid crackdown, I called a meeting of all group leaders and declared that some of them are failing their responsibility to indoctrinate their groups in importance of Marxism studies. If they do not straighten their act, there will be consequences. After that, the recorded attendance in political classes was 100%. (The actual one was a fraction of that but nobody cared about this.)

At first, departmental Komsomol leaders challenged our evasive ways. But they soon learned that to keep their political careers trouble-free, it is best not to pay much attention to this particular class. It came to extremes. As Lenin's 1970 centennial approached, the whole country was in a form of hysteria called "Lenin's exam (Leninsky Zachiot)". All except our class. I was called to discuss why are we so dormant. I said, on the contrary, all students in our class work hard on Lenin's articles and are engaged in all sorts of other such activities. Asked why then none of this is visible, I had a nerve to say that visibility does pose a problem to me. Our Communist Party is known for changing policies from time to time and I do not want to be later accused of promoting personality cult. This statement was so outrageous that the departmental Komsomol leaders talking to me thought it safer to forget about this and focus on other things.

I was not a dissident, or any such thing. I only wanted to assure our class is left alone to study their math. However, I was a perfectionist and having set such a goal, I failed to know where to stop. It is such stories that then made (false) political accusations easy to believe. This background may make it easier to understand the troubles described in my interview (that I kept focused on a single direct thread).