

# Anatoliy Skorokhod

Ithaca, NY

(Audio - February 20, 1992; Video - May 2004)

## Highlights

### A. Family

(Video - 0:00-1:39, 2:09-8:05)

E. D. Let's start from the very beginning. Tell us about your background. What do you know about your ancestors?

A. S. I was raised in a mixed family. My dad was Ukrainian. His mom, my grandmother Natasha, spent much time with me when I was a kid. She used to tell me in much detail about her father, her grandfather, and her great grandfather. She told me that they were proud Ukrainians, not serfs, but people of Cossack lineage.

My mom's parents belonged to the socio-economic classes of merchants and clergy. My mom's father comes from a family of merchants. Having dabbled in business for a while, he decided to quit and took part in the revolution of 1905.<sup>1</sup> He became a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party.<sup>2</sup> After the revolution was quelled he was exiled, and my grandma used to visit him in exile. In 1920s the communist authorities reminded him of his former affiliation with the SR Party and forced him to repent. Fortunately, he died a natural death before 1937.

E. D. He was not Ukrainian, was he?

A. S. He was Russian. In fact, both my parents were. My mom's family belonged to the clergy. My grandmother, my mom's mother, also defected from her socio-economic class. She was resolved to get education. This happened in 1905-07. She studied dentistry and for the rest of her life made her own living as a dentist.

My grandma on my father's side is of the same age as my maternal grandma. Her husband, my grandfather, served in the Russian navy and had quite a successful military

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolution\\_of\\_1905](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolution_of_1905)

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist\\_Revolutionary\\_Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_Revolutionary_Party)

career. Although he was not a high-ranking officer, he could afford to give my father a very good education. They lived in Sevastopol.

When the Soviets invaded the Crimea, my grandfather, being a smart man, simply changed his career and became a clerk in the village where they lived. In 1929, the Soviet government started a campaign against the so called “*kulaks*”.<sup>3</sup> My grandfather refused to take part in this campaign. As a result, he was charged with supporting the “*kulaks*”, forfeited all his property to the Soviet government, and was deported up north to the Arkhangelsk region to log trees.

Prompted by her friends, my grandmother (who couldn't read or write and didn't speak a word of Russian) decided to go to Moscow to seek justice for her husband. After all, he wasn't a “*kulak*” himself. He had no property to be considered as such. According to our family lore, she managed to get her complaint heard by Krupskaya.<sup>4</sup> Krupskaya gave her a note addressed to Kirov,<sup>5</sup> because his authority as the leader of the Leningrad branch of the Communist Party extended to Arkhangelsk. She passed Krupskaya's note to Kirov and in 1934 brought her husband back home.

E. D. Which was not at all easy even in 1934.

A. S. They were lucky. So this is the story of my grandfathers. One of them was the member of the SR, the other a “*kulak*”. My parents were intellectuals and worked as teachers all their lives.

E. D. They were not touched by the Stalin's purges of 1937, were they?

A. S. No, they knew very well that, given their parents' background, they had to be very cautious.

---

<sup>3</sup> The word *kulak* originally referred to independent farmers in the Russian Empire who emerged from the peasantry and became wealthy following the Stolypin reform, which began in 1906. The label of kulak was broadened in 1918 to include any peasant who resisted handing over their grain to detachments of the Red Army. During 1929-1933, the Stalin leadership's total campaign to collectivize the peasantry meant that "peasants with a couple of cows or five or six acres more than their neighbors were being labeled '*kulaks*'.

<sup>4</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nadezhda\\_Krupskaya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nadezhda_Krupskaya)

<sup>5</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergey\\_Kirov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergey_Kirov)

## **B. Childhood**

**(Video -9:17-14:00)**

E. D. Let's talk about your childhood. What was the main language in your family? Was it Ukrainian?

A. S. I talked Russian to my parents, and my parents spoke Russian between themselves. However, because they were at work from early in the morning till late in the evening, I spent most of the time with my grandma. She didn't speak a word of Russian. She spoke only Ukrainian. All my buddies in our neighborhood also spoke Ukrainian. When I was seven years old, I went to school. It was a Russian school. I went there because my dad worked in a Russian school. He was a teacher of mathematics. All subjects in that school, even the Russian language, were taught in Ukrainian, not because the teachers were nationalists but because Ukrainian was the only language they knew.

E. D. What about your mom?

A. S. When she married my dad, my mom was eighteen years old. When I was born she was twenty. There was a Pedagogical Institute in Nikopol, and my mom finished two years there. My dad encouraged her to start teaching math as well. Later, when I was in high school and we lived in Western Ukraine, my mother taught Ukrainian literature. She instilled in me a deep-seated appreciation of Ukrainian poetry.

## **C. First Steps in Mathematics**

**(Video - 15:53-23:06)**

E. D. When did you get interested in mathematics? How did it happen?

A. S. I always had an interest in mathematics because of my dad. At a certain point, when we lived in Western Ukraine, I began making some money privately tutoring students that my dad was sending to me. I remember that I had one student whom I tutored in all subjects because he wanted to finish high school ahead of time.

E. D. In what grade were you?

A. S. I was in grade nine. I taught this student all the material of grade eight. I also remember that at one point my dad served as a school principal and did not have enough time to prepare problems for his math classes. So he assigned them to me, and I helped him.

E. D. When did you decide to become a mathematician?

A. S. In my younger age I wanted to pursue a military career.

E. D. Did you want to become a general?

A. S. No, I didn't want to be a general. I just wanted to protect my country. When I told my parents, my dad decided to have a serious conversation with me. He said: "So, my son, do you want to become a professional murderer?" "Why murderer?" I asked, "I simply want to protect my country". "You may call that whatever you want," said he, "but you'll be a murderer nonetheless. It's up to you. You can choose whatever path you like." That was enough to change my mind. He tried to counter my teenage desire for heroism by appealing to my sense of morality. After all, it is true that many murders are justified under the pretexts of national security. But a murder remains a murder no matter how you look at it.

So I decided not to go to the military. All of my teachers, however, encouraged me to pursue a career in the subjects that each of them taught. Personally, I loved literature a lot.

E. D. Did you seriously consider it as your future profession?

A. S. No. I have always loved literature, but I thought that being a mathematician I'd be able to enjoy it just as much. The fact that mathematics allows one to be personally involved in the discovery of something new was very appealing to me. I don't know what else could have swayed me. The most important thing was that math had nothing to do with politics. As a high school student I already knew what the true nature of the Soviet regime was.

E. D. How old were you? Your parents probably knew everything but didn't want to tell you in order to protect you.

A. S. Yes, I agree. My dad was trying to protect me. He didn't allow me to apply to Lviv University. Lviv was the closest to our town. It had a great university, and most of my classmates went there. But my dad said: "No, you are not going to Lviv. You are only going to Kiev". Later on he explained that if I had gone to Lviv straight after high school I would have joined some nationalist organization and that would have been the end of my career. He was right because I hated the communist regime.

## D. Attitudes to Communist Regime and Life under German Occupation

(Video - 23:06-27:16)

E. D. It's an interesting point. You see, my family suffered from Stalin's repressions very early on. I was eleven years old when my family was deported to Kazakhstan. I went to school there. I was thirteen when my father was arrested and sentenced to "ten years without the right of correspondence", which most likely meant that he was executed on the spot.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, as a child I was an ardent supporter of the communist regime. What was even more terrible, even when faced with the evidence of the atrocities committed by the regime, I still thought that communism was a good thing at its core. Even though I was convinced that my dad was innocent, I still thought that a sacrifice of human lives was justified in order to achieve the bright future of humanity. I simply had no access to any other point of view.

When I was sixteen, I was admitted to the MSU, where I met young people who were a little bit more knowledgeable about this subject. Then I started to realize that there was an alternative, if not practical, at least a moral one. But even later for a long time I was convinced that it was all Stalin's fault. He was the true monster, not Lenin. Did you have a similar experience?

A. S. You see, because I lived for two years under occupation, my experience was a little bit different.

E. D. Like almost half of the country. You must have been a teenager.

A. S. Yes, I was. Nevertheless, during that time I got access to some important information. I learned about what exactly was going on during the great purge of 1937-38. The view on the German occupation in Ukraine was different from that in Russia. My personal experience does not match the experience of the occupation described by some Russian authors. When the Germans arrived, they opened schools. These were Ukrainian schools. The Russian language was not part of the mandatory curriculum. It was an optional class in grades nine and ten. We studied Ukrainian history and sang "*Shche ne vmerla Ukraina*".<sup>7</sup> This lasted only for three months, when suddenly the Germans realized that Ukrainian nationalists had their own agenda, not necessarily aligned to that of the

---

<sup>6</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Without\\_the\\_right\\_of\\_correspondence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Without_the_right_of_correspondence)

<sup>7</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shche\\_ne\\_vmerla\\_Ukraina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shche_ne_vmerla_Ukraina)

Germans. At this point they shut down all these schools. The school program was trimmed down to five years. Four years were free of charge. Parents had to pay for the fifth. This is why for three years I remained in the fifth grade. There were simply no other grades. At that time I was also homeschooled by my parents. They taught a few other kids as well. It was already obvious that the war would eventually end, and that kids would need education no matter what.

During the occupation we learned about what was going on in the Soviet Union in 1937-38, and we thought that once the Red Army troops were back all of us would be deported to Siberia. It seemed clear that they wouldn't just let us stay where we were. We were amazed that our fears didn't come true.

E. D. Still those who had lived under German occupation experienced some discrimination after the war.

A. S. Yes, this is true.

Rafail Khasminskii.<sup>8</sup> Why were you so convinced that you would be deported?

A. S. Because we knew what the communist regime was like.

E. D. Exactly.

A. S. You probably remember that all Red Army troops who survived German captivity were considered traitors by the Soviet government. We thought that our situation was analogous; only we were civilians.

### **E. Kiev University: Student Years**

**(Audio - 14:50-22:13)**

A. S. As an undergrad I maintained my interest in math. I had a number of good profs who stimulated my interest and showed me what math was all about. In particular, in the first year I took a class on mathematical analysis with Simon Izrailevich Zukhovitski. He was an excellent teacher. Mathematics and its applications were presented in his course as a coherent branch of science. In 1948 when I got admitted into the Kiev University there was a shortage of textbooks, but what he presented in class compensated for it.

---

<sup>8</sup> Video was recorded at Dynkin's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday workshop after a party in his house. R. Khasminskii was one of the guests. (His interview is a part of the present collection.)

A. S. In about a year Zukhovitski moved from Kiev and he was replaced with Iosif Il'ich Gikhman. At first, the department wanted to appoint somebody else, but we had a very active group of female students who complained to the dean, and they gave us Gikhman. It was already 1949.

E. D. The time when the campaign against "rootless cosmopolitans"<sup>9</sup> was at its peak.

A. S. Not quite. I'd say that it reached the peak in 1950. Gikhman's approach was different from that of Zukhovitski. He had a very lively teaching style. He wanted us to be more creative in how we approach math problems. But he was a bit sloppy. Sometimes he forgot to give a condition and had to backtrack on his solution. This never happened with Zukhovitski who was always impeccable. All of his epsilons were meticulously calculated. He would always arrive to the result that he anticipated. If he wanted to end up with epsilon, he started with epsilon divided by ten, to get at the end exactly epsilon. I came to the university from a very small town, where I didn't have a lot of opportunities to meet intellectually interesting people, with the exception of my parents and a few relatives. Even they didn't talk much about mathematics. They were more interested in politics.

E. D. Who influenced you the most at that time?

A. S. To be honest, I was more influenced by mathematics itself rather than by any particular person. At first, I got interested in analysis. When I got acquainted with the theory of functions of a complex variable my interests shifted in that direction. If Zukhovitski and Selim Krein, who had taught complex variable theory a few years earlier, remained in the department, odds are I would have stayed in Kiev and worked on this subject. But in 1950 all of them moved to Voronezh.

Another person who influenced me was Mark Alexandrovich Krasnosel'ski. I attended his topology seminar, but he also left. So I had no choice. The only people I could work with were Shilov, who was a newcomer, Polozii, who replaced Zukhovitski, and Boris Vladimirovich.<sup>10</sup> When Shilov arrived, he taught classes to younger students. Later some of them - Kostyuchenko, Borok, Zhitomirski, Zolotarev, Bass – became his graduate students at Moscow university. So I didn't have a chance to establish a good connection with Shilov.

---

<sup>9</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rootless\\_cosmopolitan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rootless_cosmopolitan)

<sup>10</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris\\_Vladimirovich\\_Gnedenko](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris_Vladimirovich_Gnedenko)

As for Gnedenko, he told me that, if I wanted to focus on the theory of complex variables, he would gladly supervise my work and assign problems.

E. D. Did he have any problems on complex variables?

A. S. Yes, problems related to stable laws. The truth is that probability theory was the only field where it made sense for me to apply my efforts. When Gnedenko departed for a long visit to Berlin, the department decided to send Mikhalevich and myself to Moscow. This is why I came to Mekhmat after only three month of graduate study in Kiev. Korolyuk was already there. He had only half a year left. For Mikhalevich it was his second year, whereas I barely started. This is how I met you in Moscow.

E. D. Kolmogorov assigned me as your supervisor and he took Mikhalevich for himself (in addition to Korolyuk who was already his student).

#### **F. Anti-Semitism in Kiev University and Problems with Grad School Admission (Video - 28:39-33:45)**

A. S. When I was admitted the Kiev University in 1948, about half of the students in the department were Jewish and the other half were Russian and Ukrainian. I had friends among both parts. But a year later the “battle against rootless cosmopolitanism” began. People were divided into “peasants and proletarians” on one hand and “rootless cosmopolitans” on the other. There was an obvious ethnic subtext in drawing this distinction. The Komsomol bureau asked me why I was friends with “cosmopolitans”.

E. D. What did they exactly mean by “cosmopolitans”?

A. S. Jews.

E. D. They used the term as a euphemism.

A. S. When I was at the end of my studies, Boris Vladimirovich endorsed my application for the graduate school. However the *party bureau* was against it because I had lived under the occupation. They said that I had to request my father to write a letter describing in detail the life of our family during the occupation. We used to have a cow, and it was widely known that the Germans confiscated cattle from almost everyone.

E. D. Obviously, this raised the suspicion that you were collaborators.

A. S. My dad wrote the letter that they asked for. But Boris Vladimirovich pulled off a smart trick. He proposed to issue a conditional endorsement and suggested that, in the



meantime, the bureau should send a request to “the First Department”<sup>11</sup> to investigate the activities of my father during the occupation. It was a smart move because the party bureau of the faculty was not the kind of organization that could tell KGB what to do or request anything from it. The whole issue disappeared. The bureau didn’t contact the KGB and did not conduct any further investigations. As time went by, Gnedenko’s conditional endorsement turned into unconditional. Then I went to Moscow and met you.

### **G. Moscow University**

**(Video - 33:53-41:33)**

E. D. Tell me more about your work in Mekhmat. I think that you brought with you ideas that you worked on and developed later.

A. S. Part of the credit goes to Boris Vladimirovich. He had an amazing scholarly intuition. I remember that he gave me a paper by Donsker where the so-called invariance principle was proved for the case of sums of independent random variables being weakly convergent to a Wiener process. He said that he was convinced that Donsker’s method could be applied in the situation when the limiting process was distributed according to a stable law. When I started looking into it, I realized that the same approach would not work because of spaces and everything else being completely different: the convergence to a discontinuous process should be considered. It was an incitement. The topology in the space of discontinuous functions should be different from that of continuous ones. The space of discontinuous functions is not separable in the uniform topology and this fact generates many technical difficulties. I realized that two trajectories should be considered as being close if their jumps are close, both, in space and time.

E. D. At this early stage were you in any way influenced by Gikhman? I am asking this because I have the impression that in some way you consider him to be your mentor.

A. S. I must say that Gikhman taught me the theory of random processes when I was in my fifth undergraduate year. Everything I know about the stochastic processes I learned from him.

---

<sup>11</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_Department](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Department)

E. D. Did you have a personal contact with him?

A. S. At that time, when I was about to leave for Moscow, I did not. We established a personal relationship later. Remember, I was still a very young kid. We became closer when he was coming to Moscow to give talks. You know the kind of person he is.

E. D. Yes, he is a wonderful person.

A. S. When I came back from Moscow, we started collaborating in earnest. Before that I wasn't mature enough. Your influence was important for my maturation.

E. D. Let's not exaggerate.

A. S. I am not saying that it was professed your goal to do that. You did it inadvertently. I never felt that I was destined to be a mathematician. But it was in your seminar that I matured as a mathematician. I had more inclination for philosophy, but I chose mathematics because I knew that way I wouldn't have to serve the regime.

You see, Gikhman had a difficult life. He spent the best years of his life in the army, fighting in WW2. There is also the issue of age. You were much closer to me in age than Gikhman. There is six year age difference between us, and twelve years between me and Gikhman. `

### **H. Dynkin's Seminar**

**(Audio 1 - 25:33-28:08; 29:00-29:30; 32:10-35:00)**

A. S. For me one of the most memorable and useful experiences in Mekhmat was your seminar on analysis, algebra, and probability theory. It served as a forum of discussion where points of view were freely expressed and debated. Students didn't feel shy to ask questions. It was a meeting ground for different approaches: algebraic, topological, probability. This seminar has provided a powerful boost for creativity in my own research. I often share this experience with my colleagues and students. Unfortunately, I have not been able to replicate this kind of environment in Kiev because, even though the person in charge plays an important role, a lot depends on the quality of the audience.

E. D. Yes, there was a fantastic audience in that seminar. But I remember that you made a particularly excellent contribution. I don't remember exactly what your presentation was about? Was it on Feller? You presented something very interesting.

A. S. Yes, exactly. Rafail Khasminskii<sup>12</sup> and I presented on Feller's application of semigroups theory to one-dimensional diffusion. We were always very proud of that, especially given the fact that you benefited from our presentation in your own research.

E. D. The opportunity to learn from one another was the whole point of the seminar.

A. S. I don't take all the credit for that. After all, it's Feller's theory, not mine.

E. D. This is beside the point.

It took some time for me to appreciate an importance of your celebrated embedding theorem. In particular, a representation of stopping times by stopping times of the Brownian motion with the same probability distributions. How you arrived at this idea?

A.S. It was a part of my doctoral dissertation and you were my official opponent.

I had an idea to develop direct probabilistic methods for deducing asymptotic expansions – a subject popular in Kiev that time. Asymptotic expansions in Kolmogorov-Smirnov criterion, in limit theorems a.o. were investigated and estimates for the residual term were obtained by purely analytical methods. And I wanted to deduce them from appropriate expansions for a random process. Keeping that end in my mind, I tried to construct a sequence of independent random variables on the same probability space as a given random process  $X$  such that their sums were close to values of  $X$ . By taking the Brownian motion for  $X$  you arrive at the result for stopping times.

New estimates that could not be obtained by analytical methods that time were obtained by this approach.

## I. Public Activities

**(Audio 1 - 35:26-to the end, Audio 2 - 00:01-14:44)**

E. D. Now tell me about your public life in Kiev. I remember that you received a *Don Quixote* statuette as a present.

A. S. I don't want to brag about it, but from a certain point of time I developed a suspicion that I would end up Siberia no matter what. Back then I used to say that I would never pay my own money to go to Siberia as a tourist because eventually the Soviet regime

---

<sup>12</sup> Interview with him is a part of this collection.

would take care of that. By the way, to this day I have never been to Siberia [*Both laugh*]. I doubt that my suspicion will ever come true because it is highly unlikely that independent Ukraine will ever send its prisoners there.

Because of this feeling I never had any fear of the authorities. But for a while I never went beyond these somewhat silly statements which had the effect of annoying the people who helped me find a job and protected me.

E. D. What year are we talking about? 1968?

A. S. Yes. At that time I started wondering to what extent the authorities are committed to their principles. Perhaps we were already allowed to do anything we wanted to, but we didn't do it because we were afraid. So I had this idea that we had to test the boundaries.

By that time my kids grew up. I was an accomplished mathematician, and my life started to get a bit boring and routine. So I thought that it was the right time to do something that might earn me a one-way ticket to Siberia paid by the government. The opportunity presented itself, when the editor of the local Komsomol newspaper at that time, certain Chornovil, was charged with leaking information from a closed trial. The trial involved a group of Ukrainian nationalists. Their "crime" consisted in publicizing the papal address to the Ukrainian people and the speech of Lyndon Johnson on the occasion of the dedication of the monument of Shevchenko<sup>13</sup> in Washington DC. Chornovil was present at the trial and took a verbatim record of the proceedings.<sup>14</sup>

As I said, this was a closed trial, despite the fact that it didn't satisfy the requirements of the Criminal Code. The Code provided for a closed trial only in cases involving disclosure of military secrets, child molestation, and some other cases. Clearly, that trial did not fall into any of these categories. He leaked the information and was himself charged with an offence. So civil rights activists started collecting signatures in support of this man, and I was among those who signed.

In a couple of days B. E. Paton [the President of the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine] invited Yu. A. Mitropolskii [Director of Institute of Mathematics], shown him the list of

---

<sup>13</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taras\\_Shevchenko](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taras_Shevchenko)

<sup>14</sup> Viacheslav Chornovil - an active member dissidents movement in 60-70 in the Ukraine. [www.yatedo.com/.../Vyacheslav+Chornovil/.../...](http://www.yatedo.com/.../Vyacheslav+Chornovil/.../)

people who signed the petition and requested: “Find yours!” Three names were found: Berezanskii, Skorokhod and Sokolov. I was upset. I was hoping that I would be invited to the KGB office for a serious conversation. Instead I was invited by our director who started shaming me. He said that in signing the petition I let down the entire Institute.

E. D. But you weren’t punished, were you?

A. S. I was prohibited from teaching and attending conferences abroad, although up until that time I went abroad only once, to Yugoslavia. I was also prohibited from supervising graduate students because supposedly a person like me was not able to provide the right guidance to young scholars.

E. D. As far as I know, not everyone got the same punishment. Some people lost their jobs, others were forgiven. We had a similar situation in Moscow at about the same time. It had to do with the petition in support of Esenin-Volpin.<sup>15</sup>

A. S. Yes, yes, there was even a special term to designate those who were signing these kinds of petitions, “the signatories”.

As a result, I learned that the regime was still strong. It was not yet ready to give in and that one could push the boundary only so far. After that, I have not been active for a while, that is until the time of Brezhnev. In the last years of his life there was a sense that everything was falling apart.

E. D. I can’t even imagine what was going. Were there any changes in comparison with the late 60s?

A. S. The situation bordered on the absurd. Brezhnev was a leader who couldn’t properly walk or speak.

E. D. And yet managed to receive a literature prize.

A. S. Yes. It seemed to us that it was the right time to challenge the system again.

At a certain point I found myself in a situation where I was compelled to join the Communist Party. The person whom I consider responsible for pushing me in that direction was my student. You probably know him.

E. D. Who is that?

A. S. Butsan<sup>16</sup>.

---

<sup>15</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander\\_Esenin-Volpin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Esenin-Volpin)

E. D. Yes, I do. He had the necessary connections to do that.

A. S. True. At that time he was a secretary of the local party organization. Because I signed the petition in support of Chornovil, my reputation was tainted. Thus, in order to allow me to join the party, he had to obtain the permission of the Central Committee. All of this took place behind my back. One day he approached me and said that he finally obtained the permission and I could join the Party. I had no choice but to join. Turning down the offer at this point would tantamount to an act of public defiance, and I would run the risk of being considered a criminal.

E. D. Some of my foreign friends told me that you simply decided that "Paris is well worth a Mass".<sup>17</sup>

A. S. The first time the question of joining the Party came up was in 1975, when I stood for election into the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. I wasn't elected at that time. Before the vote, Yuri Alekseevich<sup>18</sup> approached me and asked if I would like to join the Party. When the vote took place, the fact that I was not a member of the Party was duly noted. Opinions were voiced that not only I did not deserve to be elected into the Academy but that I belonged in jail. So Butsan got me involved in all this mess. I was at the point in my life where I was ashamed ...

E. D. You didn't want to go to Siberia at that point, did you?

A. S. By that time I had little kids for whom I was responsible, so I had to put my dream of visiting Siberia on hold [*Everyone laughs*]. Furthermore, I noticed that there were a number of fairly progressive people in our local Party organization. I could stay away from politics altogether, but, if I wanted to exert any influence, I either had to be a dissident or to join the party. The Communist Party offered opportunities and numbered

---

<sup>16</sup>The *Mathematics Genealogy Project* - George Butsan  
[www.genealogy.math.ndsu.nodak.edu/id.php?id=83844](http://www.genealogy.math.ndsu.nodak.edu/id.php?id=83844)

<sup>17</sup> The statement allegedly uttered by Henry IV as he renounced the Protestantism and converted to Catholicism.

<sup>18</sup>Mitropol'skii, Yuri (born 01/03/1917) - Soviet mathematician and engineer. Academician of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (1984) and the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR (1961). Member of Communist Party since 1945 and Hero of Socialist Labor (1987).

many liberally minded people among its ranks: Yuri Afanasyev<sup>19</sup>, for example, and a whole bunch of others.

E. D. Afanasyev contributed to *Perestroika* by a strong criticism of the Soviet system. For such criticism he could be jailed under Brezhnev.

A. S. As a member of the Party, I was able to have a say in graduate admissions and in who should be allowed to go abroad. The opportunity to play a bigger role in the decision-making at a local level was too important for me to turn down the offer.

E. D. I doubt that joining the Party had any impact on your ideological views.

A. S. I attended the meetings of the Party organization quite regularly and expressed my opinions freely.

E. D. Don't get me wrong, I am not blaming you for that decision. I am familiar with that point of view.

A. S. Brezhnev died two months after I was nominated to join the party. Andropov died soon after I formally became a full member in 1983. Then came Mikhail Sergeevich [Gorbachev]. He delivered passionate, if not always grammatically impeccable, speeches which kindled our hopes that the Communist Party itself was capable of taking charge of reforming the society. Pretty soon it became clear that Gorbachev was just a talker and nothing else.

E. D. Don't forget, he introduced *Glasnost'*, a very progressive policy.

A. S. Yes, I agree. He introduced *Glasnost'* but it got out of control and he couldn't reign it in. He opened the Pandora's box that he couldn't close.

\* \* \*

A. S. Originally, *Rukh*<sup>20</sup> was not a political movement. It was a movement designed to help people to get rid of their pathological fear of the authorities, be it government, KGB or any other representative of the communist regime. *Rukh* wanted to make them citizens in the true sense of the word.

---

<sup>19</sup>[Voices of Glasnost: Interviews With Gorbachev's Reformers - Page 97 - Google Books Result](https://books.google.com/books?isbn=0393307352)

<sup>20</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s\\_Movement\\_of\\_Ukraine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Movement_of_Ukraine)

E. D. But you were not the first in this endeavor. Similar movements already existed in the Baltic republics.

A. S. True, but they pursued their nationalist agendas. This wasn't the case with *Rukh*. There were some attempts by the Ukrainian nationalists to hijack the movement for their purposes but they were not successful. The Ukrainian Jews supported the movement, even though initially they feared that the movement might end up leaning towards anti-Semitism. It didn't happen. We even managed to find common ground with the Poles, although it was very difficult. The Russians proved to be the most difficult to convince. But even so, after a while some Russian supported *Rukh* too. So the first from among ethnic minorities to join *Rukh* were the Jews, then the Poles, and finally the Armenians.

E. D. Tell us in more detail about how you organized this movement. Who played the most important role? Was it Drach?<sup>21</sup>

A. S. No, there was a group of people. Drach was elected as the president of *Rukh* later. There were other important figures before him. There were about ninety people in attendance at our first meeting.

E. D. When did it happen?

A. S. It was fall of 1988. At the meeting we held a discussion and then elected a director for the region of Kiev. At the same meeting Drach proposed to make me one of the leaders of the movement who would represent the scientific community.

After that I attended a few meetings and stopped. It became clear to me that they were trying to parrot what was going on in Russia, more specifically the newly created Russian Parliament. I lost all interest and never attended again. By way of exception, I only attended some of their public events.

---

<sup>21</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan\\_Drach](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_Drach)