

Boris Abramovich Trakhtenbrot, October 18, 1981, Ithaca, New York

E.D. Please tell how the events in Novosibirsk unfolded since the last time we saw each other almost thirteen years ago, in 1968.

B. T. I think that around that time, in 1968, a liberal spirit in the town reached its climax, and soon after began to decline, much like in the whole country. Prior to '72 to '73, the Institute was undergoing gradual changes. Personally, to me and my friends, these changes acquired a significant level¹ after '72, '73. I find it convenient to tie them chronologically with Levin's defense. Perhaps you know that Levin had difficulties in Moscow. Andrei Nikolaevich Kolmogorov asked me to arrange his defense in Novosibirsk. His work was brilliant, and I considered this as an honor. Then in '72, that same day, when the defense was going to take place, a telegram from Steklovka² had arrived. They were withdrawing their evaluation of his thesis. As a result, the defense could not take place. That very day, at our seminar, Lenya Levin presented his new work on the NP-completeness theorem³. That same result, independently of him, perhaps even a little earlier, was obtained by Cook, who is at present in Toronto, Canada. Thus, Cook, Levin and Karp, who recently became a member of the Academy of Sciences in the United States, shared the honor of this great discovery. The second meeting of the Scientific Council⁴ devoted to Levin's thesis took place several months later. The thesis did not pass, as you may already know. But the same day it became clear to many people that a new era had opened. The same day, a man who I practically raised and invited to work in Novosibirsk, had betrayed me. Having changed sides to Yablonsky's camp, he continued his career. Soon after, a so called "reorganization" had begun. I was removed from the position of the department's chair.

E.D. Under what pretense?

B.T. Due to reduction of personnel, although my department was, in fact, retained, but not as a structural unit. I continued the same work, but wasn't paid for it. Soon I was removed from the Scientific Council. In essence, when forming the new Council, I wasn't included, under pretext that, possibly, classified information would be disseminated there, and I did not get security clearance.

¹ Leonid Levin was a Ph. D. student of Kolmogorov. Since 1980 he is a Professor at Boston University (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonid_Levin). His interview is a part of the present Collection.

² Steklov Mathematical Institute, Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

³ NP-completeness theorem, often called the Cook-Levin Theorem, was a breakthrough in computer science and is the foundation of computational complexity.

⁴ This corresponds to a Faculty meeting in the USA. However members of the Council in the USSR were selected by the administration) from the entire staff and many leading members of Faculty were not included. This is still the case in the post-Soviet Russia.