

S. I. Zuchovitsky's recollection on M. F. Kravchuk

Jerusalem, February 12, 1992

Dear friends,

Your invitation to participate in the conference in memory of M. F. Kravchuk made me glad and emotional. It stirred the past with all its forgotten sentiments and personal relationships. Many of us are gone already, and many who are alive today were too young then, and they can not understand the tragedy of our generation.

To my regret I can not attend the conference: old age has its restrictions. But I am sending a few of my hastily written recollections about Michail Filippovich. Memories of our absolutely unselfish friendship that bring some light on this many-sided and beautiful human being. Ukraine has to be proud of her extraordinary son, excellent Scientist and extraordinary Man, Member of the Ukrainian Academy Kravchuk, who perished in the bloody torture chambers of Stalin's regime in the prime of his scientific and public life.

Handsome, with the face of Christ and with very intelligent eyes, M. F. passionately loved his motherland Ukraine, her people, the language of her people which sounded like a song on his lips. In our conversations with him I always was bound by the "language problem": I wanted to talk to him in Ukrainian, but it seemed to me almost a desecration of the wonderful soft language that he used (in his lectures and also at home). But to talk in Russian seemed to be disrespectful to his faith in the many-sidedness and the flexibility of the Ukrainian language, his belief that it is not only the language of simple people but also the language of the intelligentsia.

Fate brought us together in 1926. After my unsuccessful attempt to enter the Leningrad University (I was not accepted because of my "not so impeccable social origin") I came to Kiev to see Akhiezer, who offered his help if I would like to study mathematics (he was then a Ph.D. student). It was already too late to enter the Kiev University, and, to tell the truth, the university did not exist then, instead there was organized the Institute of the People Education. For the former university students who did not graduate there was formed the External Studies Department. I was allowed to take math exams with them. And then M. F. put together the program – the list of courses that I had to pass. It was an act of deep compassion on his part, because I had to pass the exams in accelerated order, there was no other choice.

In 1929, after graduation from the "Phys-Chem-Math" (this was the name of the former Kiev University then), I started to teach in the technical school, and later in the Technological Institute. But I continued to be in touch with M. F. All kinds of anonymous reports on him already existed. He was accused of everything – but the main accusation against him was his nationalism. Still it did not break him, and he continued his good deeds. I will give just one example. In 1937 I submitted my Ph.D. dissertation to the Kiev University. After the date of defense was already announced one of my opponents "became capricious" and said that he needed several extra months to finish the report. M. F. got so upset that he took the dissertation home and in one day wrote the report. It should be noted that at the time he was preparing to go to Moscow to try to dismiss the accusations of his slanderers whose ring was tightening around him. He found the time and the energy to help.

After his arrest M. F.'s wife asked several mathematicians, M. F.'s friends working at the Institute of Mathematics of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences (I. B. Pogrebyssky was the head of this group, I also was there), to collect articles about M. F.'s works from different mathematical review journals – she was petitioning his release from the prison. After we assembled his works we were stunned by the sheer volume and the diversity of his scientific interests and results. But, of course, all this was in vain. He perished.

What to say? He was a genuine Man and a genuine Scientist.