

Statement by D.B. Fuchs:

Thinking about Israel Moiseevich Gelfand, I recall an episode in which his human qualities manifested themselves, I think, in their purest form.

February 1968 was difficult for us all. 99 Moscow mathematicians have signed a letter in defense of Esenin-Volpin, taken to a mental hospital. The authorities frowned, and some people have taken this for a signal to the defeat of mathematics, perhaps even of the scale of Lysenko's destruction of biology. Main target of this defeat was to be the head of the rebellion, the instigator, and it was impossible to imagine a better candidate for this role than I. M. Gel'fand. Indeed: he was among the signatories of the letter, the majority of signatures were collected in his seminar, a Jew, a man with a very wide range of collaborators, students and simply acquaintances. The rumor about the leading role Gelfand was very skillfully put into operation. There were stories about how Ira Christi (who actually collected signatures, and whom Israel Motseevich hardly knew) called him up, coordinating every step, and how he determined who should be given the letter for signing, and who should not, etc. . But this was not enough: it was good to provoke Israel Moiseyevich to some action which would have vilified him in the eyes of infinitely naive mathematical community.

At this moment the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR received a letter from the president of one of the American Academies, I think, his name was Davis. With reference to the New York Times, members of the American have expressed their concern about the fate of their Russian colleague Esenin-Volpin. An adequate response to this outrageous request was written, and many members of the Soviet Academy were willing to sign it. But that was not sufficiently strong: what if the letter of rebuke were signed by Gelfand! The letter was delivered to Gelfand. He read it. The first phrase: your newspapers lied to you. A naive question: where is the lie? Answer: Well, why does it matter? They always lie! Sign! Having a firm refusal, academic emissaries have tried to find a compromise. Well, if you do not want to sign a letter together with someone who is among the signatories, say, we will get rid of any signature. Gelfand, however, had his proposal for a compromise. He offered his version of the letter. "Dear Colleagues. I am pleased to inform you that A. S. Esenin-Volpin is currently in an academic hospital, and there is no more danger to his health. He is visited by friends and colleagues. The doctors say that he would soon be able to return home." (Not a word of untruth.) No, the phrase about the lying newspapers is mandatory. Various threats followed. To the admiration of friends, Israel Moiseevich behaved exceptionally strong. He had high blood pressure, he was lying in bed, pale and unshaven. Friends did not leave him. I remember how Yuri Markovich Vasiliev, his chief collaborator in Cell Biology, told him: "Shave: only those who shaved were able to survive in labor camps." Gelfand smiled in response. The phone rang, Zorya Yakovlevna answered the calls. She was begged to persuade Israel Moiseyevich not be so stubborn. Zorya Yakovlevna answered with a sigh that Israel Moiseevich was already at an age when people think about saving souls. And he was 55 years old. No, apparently he never stopped thinking of the salvation of the soul. He consulted with his children, saying that they also will have troubles. He said to Volodya: "They will take you to the army." - "And what of that?" - "You will not be able to work in biology." - "And what of that?" Zorya Yakovlevna consoled him: "Well, they will evict us from Moscow -

we will go to live in Yerevan.” Gelfand answered in his manner. “I’m smarter than you, you do not understand. They will arrest me.” However, this did not happen. For one reason or another, perhaps because of Gelfand’s resistance, authorities decided to drop the case on the brakes. Somebody said that even odious Grishin conveyed through common acquaintances apologize: “I’m not involved in the persecution of you”. And next week Gelfand reigned in his seminar and, as usual, yelled at the speakers to the displeasure of the latters and the rapture of the audience.