

# INTRODUCTION

## Incident Report

One of the first stories (perhaps the very first) which I heard at the Ioffe was the following. A fireman on duty, during graveyard shift, was inspecting the premises entrusted to him. Opening all the doors with his own key, he discovered in one of the rooms a Senior Researcher and a Laboratory Assistant in a situation that might be called rather delicate. The brave fireman took the trouble to draw up an INCIDENT REPORT that according to the regulations was presented to the deputy director of the Institute.

In those days, the SENIOR RESEARCHER was considered to be “persona grate”, a kind of an “embryo of fame” and the deputy director did not dare punish the guilty man on his own authority. So, the INCIDENT REPORT was deferred to the desk of the ACADEMICIAN, the Director of the Institute.

The latter drew his famous resolution that he wrote in the top left corner, slantwise:

*“Adultery at one’s spare time offers no threat to fire safety.  
To the archive”.*

The case was buried in oblivion.

## The Grad-student, the Supervisor and the Mounting

The next incident took place within my memory, almost in front of my eyes.

For a year and a half a grad-student was assembling a set-up. He was laboring 10–12 hours a day, day by day, 6 days per week. He had to deal with glass blowers, and mechanics, with plumbers, electricians, and welders. He procured and elicited, he stole details

of machines, and he cut, screwed, blew, cleaned, adjusted, and checked up, he remade and refitted over and over...

At long last, the final tests showed that the set-up was ready. It was operational! Now one could grow samples, measure them, give them to others... One could make conclusions, write articles, and... you can never tell, but why not?! One might even present and defend one's Thesis on time! It was clear as day, that this historic moment was to be celebrated. And the grad-student did!

When three days later he came to the laboratory, the Group Supervisor informed the grad-student: "Your further work at this set up is INEXPEDIENT. Another grad-student will work at it. And you start mounting another set up at which you will "make your thesis".

The grad-student set up a howl and rushed off to the Head of the Laboratory. The latter had reached that age and position when one takes close to heart only one's own troubles. In such cases the subordinates must know better than bother the boss. Their know-how to manage that is considered to be their best virtue, just like writing good articles, so that their boss might give his name as a co-author without even taking the trouble to read them.

"My dear", said the Head of the Lab, "I've known your Group Supervisor for quite a few years. He is a conscientious and responsible person who always acts sensibly, so it is always possible to come to an agreement with him in an amicable way. I am sure you will come to some agreement. By the way, your second year here is coming to the end, and you have not published anything yet".

"But I have been assembling the set-up, haven't I?! Provided I am given an opportunity to work at it, there are to be publications and I hope I'll be able to present my Thesis..."

"Oh, yes, my dear, arrange it with your Group Supervisor. And do not forget about your publications, the attestation is not far off".

The grad-student whimpered and trudged to the Group Supervisor.

"How dare you to complain about me?! You, SOB! Consider yourself fired! We are having the attestation in two months and I'll give you all hell!"

The Group Supervisor usually came to his office by 11 a.m. On that day the grad-student was there by 8 a.m. When the Group Supervisor entered the room where the set-up had been the day before, he found the grad-student taking a break, sitting on the frame. There was not a single glass vessel, a single piece of quartz larger than a dime in the room. The dust of glass and quartz — the remnants of the setup — evenly covered the floor. Not only that! There was not a single whole union, or a single pipe that had not been bent, or a single piece of wire longer than 5 cm, or a single cutting that had not be disfigured. Everything, that hard work, good health, fury, and the feeling that one is right could unleash and destroy in 3 hours was unleashed and destroyed.

The Supervisor howled and rushed to the Head of the Laboratory. However, from the heights the latter has achieved, the misfortunes of the Supervisor did not seem to him to be more important than those of the grad-student.

“My dear”, the Head of the Laboratory said, “You have been working with the grad-student for a year and a half. More than once I’ve heard from you that he is a conscientious and responsible person who always acts sensibly, so it is always possible to come to an agreement with him in an amicable way. He got heated of course, that’s certain. But, to prosecute? Oh, no, for pity’s sake! Just think what a stain it would be on the Laboratory and on the Group, too... I am sure everything will somehow work out...”

And indeed, it was. The grad-student changed jobs. He went to work at the neighboring enterprise and a few years later returned to the Ioffe.

He defended his Thesis and even became the recipient of one of the most honorary scientific prizes.

I can’t help recalling Alexey K. Tolstoy’s words:

Fellow of the Council he became,  
So very soon, so very soon.  
A good example for us to take!  
But luck comes once in a blue moon.

## Historic Roots

...Mikhaylo Lomonosov,\* who was enrolled in 1742 as grad-student at this Academy, and during all this time behaved improperly, had not justified hopes laid on him by the Professors. He often drank hard, kicked up rows and fights, and in September of 1742 was taken to the police station. Besides, while a special commission was working at the Academy, the above Mikhaylo Lomonosov displayed absolute disrespect to his Professors, humiliating and insulting them. Since such awful behavior could never be allowed at any academy, on February 21, a special decision was made that Lomonosov should not be allowed to attend any Conferences at the Academy.

On April 26, 1743, before noon, Lomonosov, heavily drunk, insolently appeared in the chamber where Conferences were usually held. There was no one there at that time, only Professor Vitzgeim and some clerks working there. Lomonosov, without greeting anyone and without taking off his hat, walked past them to the department of geography, and while passing by the Professor's table, he stopped and made a most disgracing gesture with his hand before their faces. He let forth a stream of threats. He cursed loudly, using very bad language and threatened Professor Vitzgeim to "set right" his teeth, and calling Councilor Shumakher a thief. He mocked them, he repeated those insinuations many times, and demanded that all those curses should be registered.

(May 11, 1743)

### Materials for the History of Russian Academy of Sciences

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\* Mikhail V. Lomonosov is considered to be "the founder of Russian science". His name is but little known in the West, but in Russia every pupil knows him. As usual in such cases, the school-texts depict Lomonosov as a personification of virtue, a mine of information, and a knight in shining armour.