

Myckola Yabluchansky

WHO IS



HERE

Kharkiv 2000

Myckola Yabluchansky

Who Is the Leper Here?

Our world beggars description by a single truth

Ilya Prigogine

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My Motives

A little about my motives in writing this book.

“Exasperated?”

“Not really.”

“Then what, er, made you put pen to paper?”

“Educational reasons.”

“?”

“A lesson of democracy.”

This is how I imagined my conversation with the Bureaucrat (not necessarily a character of this book).

Nature is stingy with its laws. I mean, its applicable laws. In this sense, my book is a good textbook for the author himself. Not that I think too highly of the author... and yet I hope the Reader will leaf through it with interest. The situation it describes has standard didactic value: it's all about the human-bureaucrat interface (face-to-face) and what it can produce if there's a conflict of interests and the tricks being used stink of the good old U of SSR, excuse my French.

So much for my first motive. As you may have guessed, it's about furthering the democratization of this sorely undemocratic society.

My second motive is to make a positive impact on the average Ukrainian – a person just like myself. Everything is not so bad on the imperial shambles. Wherever you look... oh, that you may live in times of change. But our times of change are about not only destruction. They are about creation, too. Even though they could be less difficult, to be sure. So, as you can see, this book was born of the author's own experience.

My third motive is to commit to memory (my own memory, to start with) the remarkable story of rebirth of one of the finest traditions there is. It's the story of rebirth of classical medical education in Ukraine. And it is set in the University I went to in my day. The Kharkiv National University named after Vasyl Nazarovych Karazin. It's a story that seems absolutely incredible in the destroyed Empire which never cared a fig about International Experience. Because that Empire lives on in our brains, bidding us to “raze the old world to the ground”, as *The Internationale* goes.

I'm proud of my University. And its Department of Medicine. And my Mission, which is no piece of cake.

I invite you to read this book. You won't regret it. Believe me, I've done my very best.

June 20, 2000

The Author

The Beginning

It was really the beginning of the whole thing, and this is how it all started.

I came home from a business trip (I worked at one research institute at the time). The first thing my wife told me was that Professor N had called from the University.

I could not put the face to the name for a time. Then I recalled. He had once been to our research institute. Our director said he was a scientist of world renown.

“Renown my foot,” I remember saying to myself. “If there are so many of them in this country, why is its science up the proverbial creek?”

My scientific interests did not cross his in any way, so I couldn’t figure out why he had called. And I forgot all about him.

The next Saturday he called again.

“I have to pass you an offer from the Rector. The University is opening a school of fundamental medicine. To function as a part of the Department of Biology. The faculty will have the right to practice. The Rector proposes to discuss the possibility of your assuming – “

“I have to think it over.”

“Will a week do?”

So I got to thinking. Talked with my teachers, colleagues and friends. The local Establishment, too, to be sure. “A most interesting and important thing,” everybody said with one voice. “You have to.”

A week after he called again.

“Are you ready to discuss our proposal?”

“I am.”

“Four o’clock tomorrow.”

“I’ll be there.”

My pride soared as I approached the University. A long time ago I attended the evening classes of its department of mechanics and mathematics, and I had never even seen the rector. And the very fact that I was being invited to my alma mater...

We got down to discussion. The subject was revival of classical medical education. Bright vistas. Great prospects.

We agreed I would work part-time and then we would see.

The decision seemed to suit all parties. The Rector poured me some Napoleon brandy. It went down good, on an empty stomach. Warmth radiated throughout my body. My head swam.

I did not even notice him slip that piece of paper under my hand. The next thing I knew he was dictating an application to me. It was an application for a full-time job, with an official transfer from previous place of employment. As if we hadn’t agreed that it would be like a trial for starters.

I felt a bit uneasy in my new role as I went to the University the next day. Too abrupt a change. But what can you do?

So I headed straight for the department of biology to try on my new clothes.

The beginning. What would it be like?

I introduced myself to the medical students and talked with them. Late March, and they had not even gotten around to medicine. They were still into the ABC’s of biology. Almost a year down the drain...

I regrouped the column on the march, changing the plan completely. And we took on the ABC’s of medicine.

Problems galore. But we got a lot of help, too.

Textbooks were the number one problem. Where could I get them?

I asked our neighbors at the Medical Institute. They said sorry.

Then I turned to my people at the research institute. They helped me out, may God bless them.

The city medical library also helped us a lot. We used its services for a long time after. A magic wand of tested quality.

Things developed at a breakneck speed.

Then the summer examinations set in. And the “production practice”. And the holidays.

The holidays were for the students. For the faculty, it was a month of preparations for the new academic year.

Our first priority was the kids – the students we had gotten from the Department of Biology. There was no enrollment for the school of medicine. We had selected a number of biology students based on the results of the winter exams.

We got the cream of the crop. I mean it.

It was with them that we started out. They became the beginning. They wrote the first lines into the annals of the rebirth of classical medical education.

A whole new vista opened before us.

The perestroika, the Ukrainian independence and the democratic process bolstered our bold plans. The inebriating wind of change went to our heads. We painted ourselves a rosy picture of our prospects.

Nothing betokened struggle. Hard struggle. No holds barred. Struggle for the life of our baby. And the Constitutional right (endorsed by a whole string of laws and acts) of the revival of classical medical education.

The new academic year began. We had barely got under way when the Ministry sent a commission to check on our progress. We had only been working two months (without the summer exams), and they sent a commission!

It was the beginning of a bitter confrontation. An artificial, absurd confrontation engineered by the MOH Bureaucrat.

But I did not know it right then. I didn’t know that it was the beginning of something like a lingering skin disease that makes people steer clear of you.

The Physician-cum-Researcher Dream

The University had introduced the medical school with the intent to train physician-cum-researchers for the nation. The same kind of physicians as those the MOH trains within its education system. The same career opportunities. The same rights. But different, too. Different in that they would have a medical education based on a solid classical university foundation – something that other universities cannot deliver no matter what they call themselves.

This is what we had been striving for, popping out of our skins.

Everything would not turn out as I expected. And yet we did well.

We trained them to be physicians-*cum*-researchers. Physicians in the first place.

The researcher part was OK with the MOH Bureaucrat. The other part was not.

“You can’t have it. I’ll tell you why.”

Medicine had been re-introduced in the University shortly after the Independent States had come into being. It was when the heady spirit of freedom seemed to whisper: “Just make your wish, and it will come true.”

But the dream remained a dream. The dream of bringing the medical education home – getting it back into the higher education system. The way it had once been in the Russian Empire, out of which we too have emerged, whether we like it or not.

Alright, alright. Let’s leave the Russian Empire alone (lest somebody ascribe politically incorrect ideas to me) and say, *The way it is in the civilized world of today*. Let our physicians’ qualifications keep up with the state of the world. A world in which education and health care are two different things. No conflict of interests. Highest quality results.

I am confident that the reason why we have fallen behind almost for good and will hardly ever overtake the West is precisely this conflict of interests: medical education in the health care instead of the education sector.

Dreams beget action.

A whole series of conferences on the organization of MD training in universities was held in Russia back when there were no pseudo-universities. The establishments of higher learning that were called universities in those days now have to add the word “classical” to their names.

Yes, and one such conference took place in Leningrad University. It was attended by all the Russian academic beau monde, complete with the luminaries from the Academy of Medical Sciences of Russia. Or the USSR? No matter.

One report hit me where it lives. The subject was experience of the then Second Medical Institute of Moscow. Its department of medicine slash biology trained physicians, and its graduates were thought very highly of and were high in demand throughout the former Soviet Union. I heard it from a number of internationally recognized academics whom I personally value very highly, too. Somebody may not care a damn about my evaluation, but it has value for me. Within my own set of values.

The problem that came in the limelight was a serious one. Graduates of the med-slash-bio department had better qualifications than their counterparts from “purely” medical departments but had no access to patients. They were more like physicians assistants.

“Can you imagine an assistant who is stronger than you? This is sheer discrimination.”

It was that series of conferences that formulated the approach I can only dream of introducing: physicians-cum-researchers with the right to practice. The brightest of the graduates would go into research, to be sure. But in all event, they all should have the same rights and duties.

To avoid problems, we may follow the example of the Lomonosov University in Moscow and write “physician, physician-cum-researcher” in their diplomas.

Twice a physician. To eliminate all suspicions.

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We write “physician” in our graduates’ diplomas. Not that we want to. This is an outcome of numerous commissions. It suits me for this transition period, though. Just so it’s not a problem with the Bureaucrat. Some day – soon enough, I hope – we will be able to put them down as “physicians, physicians cum researchers” in their diplomas. The kids we are teaching deserve that.

Dreams tend to come true, if they’re for real. This is what my chief dream is about: Physician cum researcher.

If We Don’t Close You Down, We’ll See

And then the first MOH commission arrived. It had a serious task to perform. In fact, it had been initiated by both MOH and the Ministry of Education, so the tasks were several. One was to close down my school. The other was to keep it.

It was not an easy time. The early stage of perestroika. On the one hand, everybody painted themselves a rosy picture. On the other, we all were still up to our necks in the totalitarian system. That meant that the Bureaucrat’s opinion carried a lot of weight with us.

For me, it was a doubly difficult time. The school had only been in existence for six months when a new Rector came to the University. As any newcomer, he needed experience. And, like so many of us, he was a graduate of the old system. He supported me all right, but

he was also afraid of the MOH Bureaucrat. On his part, the Bureaucrat felt all too well that he was feared.

In all times, the Bureaucrat's main trick of the trade has been to put the fear of God into you and keep you in fear as long as possible. If you fail to do something prescribed by their rules, Fear comes back and things get completely out of hand. I remember one instance when one of them tried to use that trick on me and I thought I saw a cloud of Fear sailing my way.

"You are not afraid," he told me after a while.

I was not. Nor am I. That is, I can feel fear just like the next man. But not in situations like those.

Was the time suitable for a commission in the first place? The school had just been born and was three months old – two months in the spring and one in the fall. A newborn baby, you could say. We had just been allocated some space. The University had about as much money as the national government (there were no contractual students at the time). In fact, a lot of things at the University looked as appalling as in the country at large. At first, my heart bled to see it. Then I saw that other universities fared much worse.

But all the same, I will never get used to that.

The commission consisted of two inspectors. One was a Friend, the other a Foe, even though it pains me to say that. The merit went to the MOH Bureaucrat.

Even as the first commission was working, we could feel that the seeds of hostility toward "classical university education" had been planted. The situation could have become even clearer if not for a bit of good luck: for reasons of state importance, the MOH Bureaucrat could not attend in person. So everything went off fairly well.

And yet not well enough. Later I heard that the MOH inspector had signed the protocol but painted the Bureaucrat an altogether different picture.

Luckily, a spoken word cannot be filed. What is said is said, what is written is written. I still keep a copy of that protocol for the School's annals.

In a timid attempt to establish contact, I rushed to the MOH. The appointment was for two o'clock. I sat waiting in the reception. In came the Bureaucrat, tall, lean and straight as a ramrod. I could almost see him feed on the fear of his subordinates.

Someone was ahead of me in the lineup, and I felt genuinely glad. In the hope that he would have less Fear left for me.

I went in. Said hello.

He fired a broadside right off. Could not keep it in anymore, the poor thing.

"Let him talk it away," I thought to myself. "Maybe he'll soften up."

I can't say how long his monologue was. Not less than forty minutes, I think.

Then he stopped in the middle of a sentence and there was nothing to talk about. *If we don't close you down, we'll see.* That was all I read in his eyes as an answer to my quizzical look.

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They did not close us down. The School is eight years old now and is accredited until 2009. We still have time so they could see. Time is the best eye doctor.

Straitjackets

An ugly, vulgar little world left over from the "Iron Curtain". The rules of the little world (directions for use) included. The Bureaucrat will tell you how to play. His is not to change the rules. No-no, his is to oversee compliance.

Their rules are like little hooks. Designed to catch, hold and punish. What can you do? Man has to eat.

The rules of their little world are a noose.

When you feel it around your neck, you obey. As soon as you show signs of not feeling it, the Noose tightens. A remote-controlled life on a thinning diet. Or you won't obey and respect the Noose-holder.

"Boy, does it take a lot of patience!"

The Noose is the main reason why our higher medical education will always lag behind the Big World.

In principle, the School's curricula and syllabi coincided with the standard ones prescribed by the MOH. But there were some digressions we thought necessary for the New Millenium Physician.

The standard curriculum had many disputable points, to be sure. It had since long fallen behind life. It could be adjusted, of course. Brought into compliance with the requirements of society, so to speak. But the Bureaucrat did not have enough leverage.

Remember perestroika and how it opened our eyes on who we all had been? Little cogwheels of the system. Robots. Not even cyborgs.

The standard plan is designed to make more cogwheels for the system.

And Hi-Ed Industries keep churning them out! Not thinking that there is no place to put them any longer.

Abruptly, there was a cavalcade of commissions. Each demanded that we show our curriculum. Each disagreed with this or that. You could almost feel their desire to close us down "because of non-compliance with conditions of the license."

"What are you afraid of? You suspect we're not training cogwheels? You're damn right."

They made us adjust our curricula. We adjusted them. Changed a lot of things that should not have been changed. Left a lot intact, too. Just because they had not noticed.

The standard curriculum had a large budget for anatomy, for example – so large you wanted to pinch off a bit for other, New Millenium subjects. Do we need that much anatomy? I am sure not. Every student needs an outline of sorts, and then each medical profession requires its own selected chapters in accordance with its specialization.

For example, there is no topographic anatomy in the West any longer. I remember the proposal to strike it from the curriculum being put forth back when I was a beginning professor at the Medical Institute. But what will topographic anatomy teachers do for a living? There are always living people to think of, you know...

"OK, what about students? They are not living people? Or they don't count?"

Then we all lived by the rules of the little world. This is why topographic anatomy was never struck from the curriculum.

But even today, we still have it on our curriculum. If we didn't, we wouldn't "comply with the conditions of the license."

Another example. Pathological anatomy and pathological anatomy are General Pathology broken up in two. We wanted them to be one course just like all over the world. One of the commissions said it was all right if we wanted it that way but students still had to take two exams. Why? Three guesses...

I could continue for ages. To put it in a nutshell, the curriculum is appallingly outdated, especially in the clinical disciplines section. The syllabus of therapy, my favorite subject, is a simply a mess.

And, surely enough, the curriculum has few subjects without which a real physician can't be in the computer/Internet age.

Mind you, I haven't even touched on the recent radical changes in our understanding of the world, Man and the nature of human health and illnesses. Today, you just can't build the structure of professional medical knowledge on the groundwork of secondary school education. School knowledge is confined to an idealized linear world. The world we live in is nonlinear. Chaos and order cohabit in it. It's a world of determinist chaos, you could say.

"Are you with me, my dear colleague from the Medical Institute? You say you have tough luck with fundamental subjects?"

The Bureaucrat puts straightjackets not only on curricula.

"What is your full-time to part-time employees ratio?"

Foul play. The department of medicine is a small one. There are many special subjects about fifty academic hours long. Sure enough, a lot of our professors work part time.

But the conditions of the license demand that the ratio be maintained on a prescribed level. If you have more part-time teachers than you can, you're on the hook.

"Don't worry, boys, our ratio is OK."

The University helps us out in this case. Thanks to the basic disciplines taught at both the University at large and the School, the ratio is tiptop. Every law has a loophole... We found one, and everything was all right again.

"Don't waste your time running over the personnel department with a pencil. Our ratio is calculated for the entire university. We won't let you count it for the School only. It's the university that teaches a student. The School is a specific thing, a superstructure over the fundamental university education."

Clearly, you just can't get the right ratio if you count only the clinical disciplines. We have part-time professors enough and to spare.

The question of the ratio was raised by a commission which had arrived in the very middle of the crisis, when full-time employment in MOH colleges got you one fourth of the standard salary.

"You should be ashamed."

Nobody can live on one fourth of a college professor's standard full-time salary. Nor do they any hopes on it, to tell you the truth. The real main place of employment with many people is where they earn a living. But if it is in the cash economy...

"I hope you understand that I have private practice in mind."

With us, it's a bit different. It's all right if a course is a short one. Just the opposite, we can invite the best practicing physicians in town. It's an honor for them, because they teach at the University. It's an honor for us, because we can have the best specialists in town. A double hit.

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The quality of medical education shows in the outcome. The teaching process is successful wherever society accepts its result.

So it's time to stop putting moth-eaten straitjackets made in the Little World on medical education.

No Love Lost

I understand a public servant caters to State interests in the first place.

He has the right to have his own, to be sure. But he signs a piece of paper when he enters public service. It is just a piece of paper because he never reads it carefully.

If he did, not only this chapter but this entire book would not be.

It all began when a new Bureaucrat took his chair in the MOH. New boss, new hopes.

New hopes are as short-lived as any other.

I sent a congratulatory letter to the New Bureaucrat on the occasion of his taking office and so on. The letter said a few words on the educational role of the University in health care and the way we train our physicians, giving them a more solid background in natural sciences. It also confirmed our readiness for cooperation.

The reply did not tarry. Stop playing games, it said, and close down your school. Your students may go over to the Medical Institute.

Just like that. They at the top get a better picture.

But the University was of a different opinion.

I as the school dean rushed to the Press for help. My articles appeared in *The Ukrainian Medical Journal*, *Mirror Weekly*, *Governmental Courier* and other respected newspapers. After a time, I felt I had touched it on the raw.

I could cite many examples.

I was sitting in the Rector's office. There was an issue I had to call the MOH Bureaucrat on. But his is the Rector's rank, not mine. So the Rector had to oblige.

Good luck! The Bureaucrat was in and his secretary was kind enough to put us through to him.

"Sorry to disturb you. I'm Rector... We have a proposal."

The Bureaucrat interrupted him in the middle of a phrase to start on a long harangue. Standing right next to the Rector, I could hear every word. It was like pricking a boil. The Bureaucrat had forgotten he was a high-rank public servant and we were discussing a business question. Did he fly off the handle!

"Your what's his name," he said speaking about me, "wouldn't be able to hold my office even a goddamn day."

"What does he mean?" I asked myself. "He sounds like a betrayed lover."

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Love thy neighbor, and your love will be returned to you in kind.

Whims

Well, they showed their ugly face once again. For all their face-lifting and powdering, they would never change. Their cabinet reshuffles were a catch for beginners like me.

The New Bureaucrat. I thought – or rather hoped – he would initiate some changes. But he didn't. Instead, he added some metal to the MOH policy.

Overall, it remained the same. Same old tricks made in the good old U of SSR. Beating around the bush. Acting on the sly. Using hearsay and innuendo. Quoting people without their consent. Taking their words out of the context and citing them in a national conference as if to say, *See, he himself said that*. As if there is no Constitution or it doesn't have a Guarantor.

But every bureaucratic action produces counteraction – in strict compliance with the laws of Nature. An open fight is not the best method. Don't know who said that a bad peace is better than a good war, but he was a great guy.

So I kept my defense and looking for peace at the same time. Sometimes I thought that peace was in, but it turned out just another dirty trick. "Let them relax, then hit them where it lives." Well, I learned the hard way.

The School had to survive. Sometimes it was difficult. But it was never easy. The most complex environment was the medical community. Medical education is its sorest spot.

This is why it's always a bit of problem to find your way to a medical forum if you are a champion of classical university medical education.

One autumn, there was a Health Partners workshop in Kiev. One of the organizers, an old friend of mine, invited me to take part. I gladly accepted the invitation. Such an opportunity to present my arguments and talk with the Bureaucrat without ties! In search of peace, so to speak...

"You're an incorrigible dreamer, my dear friend."

The conference shed light on the problem right away. The problem was the Bureaucrat's attitude. An international conference called Efficiency of Health Care Reform, and the Bureaucrat demands that the organizers exclude classical universities from the list of participants!

"Exclude? But how is that possible? Now that the conference is steaming full ahead... An international conference to boot. Isn't this a democratic country?"

Hesitation. Consternation. One of the organizers felt unwell. Thunder struck. Pandemonium broke loose. Everybody was in a panic. Then they saw that there was no way out but to stick to the program.

"But why is he against us participating? It's such an opportunity to show everybody that those classical university good-for-nothings are a bunch of schmucks!"

So the conference on health care reform began without the Bureaucrat. A personal offense, what do you want...

A whim is something you shouldn't indulge every time. The conference continued. I made my report on medical education in classical universities, its largely artificial problems and its prospects. How the audience took it is a different pair of shoes. But it left no one indifferent, that's for sure.

During the lunch break of the first day the Bureaucrat made his condescending appearance. I asked a colleague to introduce me, but he started away from as though I was a leper. Well, I got the picture. There is still a long way to peace and a civilized dialog.

Was it a whim on his part? I can't find a different word for it.

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It's a good thing when a person remains a child well after forty. In a way, I'm like that, too. But there are things that don't become an adult, particularly a public servant. One such thing is acting on a whim.

Making Myself Clear

I feel that if I don't put the picture into perspective for you, dear Reader, you'll throw this little book away. I want you to read it to the end. I spared no effort to locate abscesses on the still tender body of our pubescent society so that we might lance them together.

From times of old, you lance an abscess where there is the most pus.

Fear

I had never thought I would meet one on one with Fear some day. I just didn't think it was possible in our time.

We were entertaining a MOH commission. We had stopped counting them. This time, however, we had initiated it. The School was preparing for the graduation of its first class, so we had to have it accredited if only because the graduates had to obtain valid diplomas.

As with many things in this country, accreditation is a simple procedure if you are in the system. Professional Council is the first step.

It is never about patting you on the head only. But criticism is to the point and in good measure. A showcase for the centrally planned system still going strong. The Bureaucrat has a quota for everything: how many and what kind of comments, and when to make a few critical remarks for good balance. And he always knows what to expect afterwards: a light buffet with brandy or a full-blown dinner.

But this was not our case. We were from “a different system”. It transpired the Council would be presided over by the Bureaucrat himself. The no-love-lost one.

A side pass. Somebody in the upper echelon advised the Bureaucrat to include yours truly in the Council. The Bureaucrat got panicky and refused to cooperate. The upper echelon wavered and gave in to the Bureaucrat. They should have known better.

Now the Council sent their own commission. Not that I expected a lot of good from it - just mere decency. Isn't this a democratic country? More, I knew its chairman pretty well from many episodes in the past. I had never counted him among my colleagues. Nor had we ever been friends. On the contrary, I had a very distinct aftertaste from our professional contacts.

I remember one instance particularly well. I was a deputy director of one prestigious research institute at the time. No, I'd better stop at that. Deep in my heart, I try to follow the Biblical principle: Judge not lest ye be judged.

I tried to get in touch with the man. The situation was quite clear to me. He worked under the Bureaucrat and was totally in his control. But still I thought I had at least to meet him at the train station and show some formal hospitality. Even if it would never be appreciated.

I found out his phone number and called.

“Hello, this is I know you head the ministerial commission. I'd like to meet you at the train station. I could also help book the hotel for you.”

“Please don't bother. I'll do it myself.”

“Oh, it's not to -- . I understand the situation. I only want to create appropriate working conditions for you.”

“No!”

Did I get nervous? I did. Not because of *what* he said, but rather because of the Fear that had emanated from the receiver.

Fear is a destructive element. Fear hath a hundred eyes. A man in Fear is like a wolf at bay.

And yet I had anticipated his reaction with both fear and joy. Fear is better than fake friendliness.

The Commission arrived. As the Chairman was introducing its members to our Rector, his pent-up tension electrified the atmosphere. Prior to that, he had had a close briefing with the Commission members. Now they sat there like so many zombies.

Fortunately, not all of them had succumbed to Fear. When he was not around, they expressed their sympathy and regretted their thankless mission.

We knew that many of them were not to blame, and really tried to support them with our understanding. Some of them slavishly obeyed the Chairman. Others behaved like normal human beings. Many thanks to them for their good human qualities. As our national anthem goes, *Ukraine is not yet dead...*

“What has he brought all this canned Fear for? Does he think he can drive out all the circumstances that prove your compliance with the license?”

In our business, noncompliance with a license is suicidal.

“I wonder if they understand this at all?”

Something that had never happened before: the Chairman did not like the room we had given him for the commission's work. "Let him go fly a kite," the Rector said to that. Good boy.

The Chairman simply needed a pretext to work out of the Medical Institute. After all, our neighbors are answerable direct to the MOH.

Like the Medical Institute, our School has "training bases" all over the city.

I don't know if he had felt like passing me some of his Fear, but as soon as we had left the Rector's office, the Chairman said he wanted to inspect our training bases.

"Why are you driving in circuitous ways?" he demanded as I was driving them across the entire city.

"He's driving down the right road," someone from the commission at the back seat countered, unable to check his resentment.

Thanks to him, too. Just for the fact that he had supported me, perhaps without even knowing it. For me, his remark was like an arrow shot at the Chairman by his own men.

I wish there had been more such arrows...

The Commission would alternately come and go. Everything was enveloped in a mist of mystery and suspicion. Like a mania. In a word, Fear at its best.

"You are to blame just because I'm hungry!" as the Wolf said to the Lamb in the well-known fable.

One day, the Chairman popped up at the School. He was even more stern than ever. Was the Judgment Day coming?

"Would you care for a cup of tea?"

"No thank you."

OK. I did not insist. But when I offered to give him a lift to the University's main building and he agreed, I was struck numb. It's only five minutes' drive from the School to the University, but I was on cloud nine. At last I had a chance to talk to him in private!

"Why are you like this? Do you think we'll beg you for a good report? The situation's quite clear as it is. Our condition is complete objectivity. This is why we want to help you. You see, there are many peculiarities to our situation, and if you go on without us, you may inadvertently make mistakes. The risk of misinterpreting facts, you know."

The main thing is to create the right atmosphere. He opened up right away. True, I knew all he had to say. He confessed he was mesmerized by Fear. The Bureaucrat's hypnotic seances had turned him into a rabbit.

"What did I need this commission for? I couldn't sleep at night. I tried to refuse it. But I've got to work. Others can find themselves a job. I couldn't."

"I can't envy your situation, to be sure. But what about human dignity and human feelings..."

"It's easy for you to judge."

In short, he wouldn't listen to me. The orgy went on. I felt sorry for that man. I still do.

"What has the MOH done to him and many others like him? When will it stop? X marks the spot... Our School is only one example."

The goings-on outside our walls continued. Rumors snowballed. Our neighbors had a finger in the pie, too, even though supposedly they were not on the Commission. But they wanted a negative report.

On the other hand, it was good that they were working outside the University. What kind of a fact-finding mission was it, working out of another institute? They were bound to make a few blunders.

Their blunders filled me with joy. I even developed a temporary hobby – counting their mistakes.

An important aspect of any commission's work is the evaluation of students' academic achievement. Something may be wrong. Professors or programs may be inadequate. But what if for all that the entire class is straight-A students? What then? Maybe something is wrong with the Commission?

The conclusion was: Under any circumstances, the students had to show a minimum of knowledge.

I think the fifth- and the sixth-year students took those tests - can't remember now.

The fifth year showed very poor results. The Commission checked their papers and passed the verdict, Very bad.

I went running to our professors. "What did you teach them?"

The professors were aghast. Take the test papers from them, they asked me, so we could see what's what. And then the margins of the papers began to fill with notes. In a good many cases, there had been mistakes either in the assignments or in the evaluations. Every law has a loophole...

Things went from bad to worse. Another day, and shit would hit the fan.

The Chairman called me on the phone.

"Call it off and return the papers!" he bellowed.

All right, we returned the papers to the Commission.

The sixth year produced a lot of D's, too.

"Look, how should you rig the results so that even the sixth year would get so many D's! They've never had anything less than B's!"

Rigged? Doctored? And how! Now I know it for sure.

To begin with, the sixth year students were our first graduation class, all very capable academically. I don't think we'll ever have another class like them. Second, they had been schooled and trained by all those MOH commissions like no other year. A couple of checks a year is no joke! Any one of them could have put an end to their medical education, so the guys tried as hard as they could.

My thanks to them, too. It was they, too, who wrote the success story of our School.

Can the Bureaucrat ever understand this?

Third, even we were stunned by the control tests. All the graduate students had average academic performance well over B. This is why the results – as shown in the report to the Professional Council – could not be but doctored.

Fourth, the world is not without good people. Even then, three years ago, some members of the Commission told both me and our neighbor colleagues that the report had been falsified, and how they had checked the test papers...

Fifth,...

Fear! A devilish motive force. One of my teachers used to say, "Fear and personal interests rule the world."

Fear was behind the falsification, too. Or the orders from on high would not have been fulfilled. And demotions would have ensued.

But... Even the longest day has an end. The Commission's work was coming to its end, too.

According to the regulations, a commission should present its findings at the university's academic council.

How filled with Fear they must have been that they wouldn't show me that filthy report until five minutes to the Academic Council!

How they wanted to take us aback!

They did not. It just didn't work out their way.

Our graduates turned out at the Council in full strength. Even the parents of some of them sat in on the meeting. There was no way the Commission could keep them out: whatever you might say, it was the time of *glasnost*.

The Chairman took the floor, the Report in his hand. "The terms of the license are not being complied with," he began to say in a threatening tone of voice. "As an exception, however," he went on to say to calm the graduates, "your fate –"

How they love to do something as an exception in this country! It's as if laws exist only so that exceptions could be made.

I spoke after the Chairman. Then members of the Academic Council took the floor. And then some of the students' parents. The Fear he had tried to strike into their hearts boomeranged at him. The Commission's errors were clear as day. And they had failed to catch us unawares, no matter how they tried. I didn't even attempt to explain ourselves away or ask for anything. My speech was an accusation. I said the Commission had shown gross incompetence and produced false conclusions. Everybody has their shortcomings. He is lifeless who is faultless. However, the esteemed Chairman laid it on a bit too thick this time. And he just wouldn't have it his way.

I am grateful to the Council. They gave battle to the Commission and won on all points. And they taught an important lesson to the students – a lesson from the university of life.

It was a victory. Neither the first nor the last one. By far not the last one.

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Fear. An important topic. Fear is a good yardstick. It can be applied to anything. For example, the maturity of society and its institutions. Its bureaucrats, too. It's like an acid test. Or rather a test for having lice – excuse my medical humor.

An Excerpt from a Conversation

"I can't get one thing."

"What is it?"

"Who is the leper here?"

"?"

"What are you making of yourself in this book of yours?"

"You didn't understand?"

"Think anybody can understand your double-talk at all?"

"OK, I'll try to explain it to you. But it's a rather ambiguous thing, you know."

"No, wait. Is it you or not?"

"Have you heard me deny it?"

"But you're not stating it, either."

"How can I state anything, in the first place?"

Telephone Law

No sooner had Operation Fear been over when we were in for another surprise.

We were preparing for our first graduation examinations. The first graduation class in our School. No joke.

The standing procedure seemed to cover every possible aspect of the examinations. It was much more involved than the one from the Ministry of Education. We followed it to the letter.

The Bureaucrat got in a sweat. After the flop with Operation Fear and the University's appeals against the Commission, there was every indication that the finals and graduation would take place. For the Bureaucrat, that bode no good. His reasoning was clear: They must be stopped at whatever cost.

We received his letter instructing us to allow our MedIn neighbors onto the examination board. We said OK, our pleasure. His next letter required us to use MedIn examination questions, too. We said OK again, even though we couldn't see what that was for. On the other hand, we had a ready set of exam questions that way and wouldn't have to invent anything.

The next instruction said to execute orders and report execution.

Sure thing, he felt that those measures would not be enough.

So he called the rector of the college from which the chairman of our examination board was and told him to find any violations of procedure that might enable the MOH to ban the examinations.

I am grateful to the Chairman. He excused himself from chairing the examination board on account of illness but remained a member. Later he even took part in one or two exams.

The new chairman was from the Academy of Sciences. The MOH called around frantically, trying to find out whose man he was. When they did, they must have been in shock. Their arms were not long enough to put pressure on an Academy member.

So things assumed their due course. The finals took place. The students scored very good results. Even though our neighbors examined them "under a microscope".

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There was a time when "telephone law" reigned supreme. When a phone call from on high could mean a death sentence for your career. What do you want - bureaucratic machinations. I almost said "devilish machinations".

Times do change. In our case, they have changed for the better. And yet, "telephone law" remains a powerful instrument in this country. Remember that!

It's Not the Places That Grace the Men?

It is. No matter what folk wisdom may tell you about it.

I was appointed adviser to Health Minister. Sure enough, I popped out of my skin to fulfill my duties as best I could.

The question arises: How could I use my new position to promote the affairs of my School?

Honestly, I never tried to put it to good use. That is, I did, but to an extent that never provoked any conflict of interests.

And then an opportunity presented itself. Another academic year was drawing to a close. The next step was the finals and job placement. Involving internships, to be sure. Which meant that we had to obtain the MOH's license to send our graduates to hospitals for internship.

It was no problem, of course, no matter how you look at it. We were OK in every aspect imaginable: teaching licenses, accreditation certificate, the works. Normally, the University would only have to write a letter to the MOH to receive their official approval.

In our life, however, that would be something out of this world. In reality, there's always the Bureaucrat, whose interests are often higher than... oh, come on, don't blush. Higher than interests of the State.

That was why we never got a reply from the Ministry. I as an adviser could go to the Minister and tell him there was something wrong with one of his subordinates... But I didn't.

Why didn't I? I think the reason is that I got my education (including the school of hard knocks) in the old Soviet system. Instead, I called the Bureaucrat and said, My colleague will be seeing you on one matter that's perfectly legal and needs your assistance. Could you please help?

I called the acting dean right away. He went to the MOH on an official business trip. The Bureaucrat did receive him, of course, but not right off, either. First he kept him waiting in the reception room then started to moralize. He kept a stern look on his face but his eyes were shifty as he said, Just don't put anything down. The acting dean did, though. Then the Bureaucrat said he had to step out for a moment. And he locked his visitor in! To put a scare in him or just so his guest wouldn't escape? I don't really know. A bureaucrat of considerable experience, I'd say. But my acting dean wasn't easily duped, either. He asked the secretary to let him out to the bathroom and called me on my cell phone. Believe it or not, he said, I'm sitting here under lock and key as if it was a goddamn clink!

I got so hot under the collar I called my Boss, my voice trembling with indignation. What's the problem, he asked. I'm afraid one of your subordinates is getting carried away, said I.

The problem was solved in no time.

Later, the Bureaucrat told me in secret, almost whispering so I couldn't tape his words if I had a Dictaphone on me by any chance, that he had outlived more than one minister and would outlive this one, too.

He turned out to be right.

This is what struck me then: The places grace the men, especially if those men hold government offices.

When I saw the light, I even liked what I saw.

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Then I finished this chapter and fell to thinking. Perhaps I was the wrong man in the right place at the wrong time altogether? If no one needs this reform, then maybe we need a different set of values?

The Matrix

Whatever we may say about them, bureaucrats, capitalized or not, will outlive us all. Even leaders of the nation come and go, but the apparatus lives forever.

Do you remember what I told you a minute ago? That he has survived more than one minister and will survive this one, too?

The apparatus is a matrix. The matrix of the System.

The apparatus provides stability, the stability of the matrix. And a bureaucrat is its prop and stay.

We need a new bureaucrat. A new apparatus. And a new matrix.

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The old one, made in the U of SSR, is in-com-patible with the civilized democratic country we are trying to be.

A Whistle Stop

Operation Fear was just an additional stroke to the portrait of the old matrix and the system that has nurtured the likes of the Bureaucrat and his Commission.

Remember the Commission and its report to the Professional Council? We at the University couldn't care less about it, to be sure, but...

The Council decided to put the issue on the agenda of its next meeting.

Among the attendees were the University pro-rector and yours truly.

There were two more issues on the agenda, but ours was at the top of the list. The reasons for that could be several. They could be showing their respect for us in that way, or, just the other way around, telling us to get out of the way as soon as possible. Or else we might begin to compare their attitude to us and to somebody else...

We were only better off that way. We knew we would have to appeal against the Council's decision, anyway. The Professional Council was just a midway stepping stone without which we wouldn't be able to make it to the State Accreditation Committee.

According to the procedure, the Professional Council considers an issue in the following manner. The Chairman makes an introduction and presents the Report. The educational establishment in question voices its opinion on the Report known. A discussion ensues. The Professional Council makes its decision.

How deeply must Fear be ingrained in them that they should have violated the procedure so! First thing, they gave the floor to the University. Then they said the agenda would be complied with.

Blab as much as you want, they seemed to be saying, we don't care a damn...

We appealed against the Council's decision to the SAC. Another commission came, this time from the SAC. A different commission, different conclusions.

But even still, the SAC didn't have it in them to make an unequivocal decision. They gave us an accreditation for a year only.

The MOH was in raptures. An accreditation for a year? They thought they'd done us in.

For us, it was a welcome breather. And a hope that the accreditation would be prolonged in a year.

Actually, it was about accrediting the University rather than our School alone. The University was re-accredited for a much longer term. Technically, we had nothing to fear.

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Never despair. Never relax. A whistle stop is just a breather. And a chance to strengthen your positions. To survive and outlive them all.

You Are Not Alone

I was sitting in an old re-upholstered East German-made armchair at home. Not so old, really. It's just that it had been re-upholstered not too well.

The arm chair was not the only irritant. Electricity disconnection was much more serious. Each time it happened, it was like the end of the world.

That night, however, the electricity was still on and I was still sitting there typing on my notebook when the phone rang. It rang as if from a distance – I didn't even react to it right away. In fact, I didn't come around until the answering machine switched on.

"Hello..."

"Speaking."

"The dean of the fundamental medicine department of the Moscow University called and asked to call back. They have some kind of conference out there. Dedicated to the presidential election or something. He asks you to take part."

Good news. I hadn't been to Moscow for a long time. In the Soviet times, not a month passed that there wasn't a business trip to Moscow. Now that we were an independent country and had our own capital, Moscow had receded into the background. All the more so that the past year, all MOH activity in one way or another connected with our School perceptibly subsided.

Moscow was of special interest to me because they had a department just like ours at the Moscow University. How were they for classical medical education out there? We in Ukraine had only four such departments. They were said to have at least a score.

We had problems with the MOH Bureaucrat. Both medical education and medical research were under him. In a word, the country's medical elite had to conceal their sympathy with our cause lest they should fall out of favor at the Ministry. And some people simply fawned upon the Bureaucrat just like in the good old Soviet times.

"I wonder what the situation is like in Moscow?"

I was on tenterhooks till morning – couldn't wait to get to the office and find my Moscow colleague's business card on my desk. I had never been a disciplinarian with my pocket organizer. Its memory had been a blank since the batteries had gone low the last time. I had never had the time to copy all the addresses and phone numbers to my notebook.

"So you say a conference dedicated to the presidential election? What could it be about – election technologies?"

Well, it turned out that the conference was keynoted for the election, but it had a different purpose – to attract the attention of presidential candidates to problems of education on the expanses of Eurasia. The fact that our university had found fresh points of contact with MGU (Moscow State University) was a good thing, too. MGU was still Number One in the former Soviet Union, no matter how you might look at it.

Not to go into further detail about the conference proper, I will only mention three remarkable things.

First, there were many participants like me. Same problems, I mean. The urgency of opening a section of medical departments at the Eurasian Universities Association was obvious to us all. If it was opened, it would be a plus for my business trip. But first I had to do my best so that we in Ukraine would set up a branch.

Second, I got acquainted with MGU's Department of Medicine. I got green with envy, in a good sort of way. There was every reason for that: an entire building to themselves, recently renovated to Western standards, a multi-media lecture hall, two computer classes, an enormous virtual library, computer labs, teaching in Russian and English... I couldn't say we had absolutely nothing of that kind in Kharkiv, but not on the same scale, to be sure. Still, my impressions charged me with positive energy and I was sure to introduce some of their ideas into life at home.

I spent quite some time talking with my counterpart – the dean of the medical department – in his office. We talked old times and discussed our current problems. He was quite straightforward about achievements and bottlenecks alike. Most of the latter were of the

same artificial character as ours, and also engineered by bureaucrats. The medical education system in Russia is demonopolized to a greater extent, but its problems were the same and as many. An interesting detail: once their MOH wanted to send a commission to check academic performance. The dean gladly agreed. But he put forth a counterproposal. Let the commission also visit the medical institutes directly subordinate to the Ministry. MOH at once lost all interest in the check, and the topic never resurfaced.

Third, I got a personal invite to an international conference on web technologies that he was going to organize not long after.

The Moscow conference was a representative one. You can seldom find anything of that caliber within the former Soviet borders. A multimedia projector, access to the Internet right from the conference hall, the works. What could I say... I was sitting at the conference in Moscow but had the feeling I was in my own office at home. I was in on-line contact with my staff all day long, feeding them all the info I could get at the conference. Virtual reality. Taking part in the conference were colleagues from the States, Germany, Switzerland and many former Soviet republics. Moscow, too, but mostly technical colleges and institutes. Of the medical community, there were only people from MGU. I didn't see any other Moscow participants. I thought they would be willing to attend if not for Fear. Even in Moscow, it was the same old scheme of things - the Bureaucrat controlling his subjects through an Orwellian Omnipresent Eye. By God, the road to democratic society is not a simple one.

The conference gave a lot to those who attended it. Those who didn't, lost a lot.

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The Polish mathematician Gugo Steinhaus said that in his field of science, the distance between the leaders and the crowd increased. In medicine, there is no beaten track, either. You can't make discoveries following "important instructions" from a ministry. This is why the revival of classical university medical education has no alternative.

Things Old and New

In a book by the outstanding Russian scientist Moiseyev, I once found this thought: New ideas find recognition not because they defeat old ideas, but rather because the upholders of old ideas die out.

To jettison slavish habits and post-Soviet totalitarianism at large is a painful process.

I understand it may be an individual social phenomenon of the transition period when society has to cleanse itself. An individual slave may find it difficult to liberate himself single-handedly.

He may even think he is no longer a slave. Wishful thinking. He still is one.

We talked with my Rector about it on the night train. A long road is conducive to opening your soul and philosophizing.

Time and again, we would get back to the main subject: Classical university medical education.

"This conflict of interests will persist as long as the MOH keeps its hand on medical education," said the Rector.

I supported him, to be sure. I had known that for a long time.

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The new and the old. The world is inexorably changing for the better. It is improving, perfecting itself. The new comes to replace the old.

So it does in medical education. Not always does the Mosaic mechanism work. Then you are in for some pain. But what do we value without pain, anyway?

Paranoia

“Just tell me that you refuse. Then with persistence worth of being put to better use...”

No doubt, struggle wins respect. When it’s honest struggle.

There is a lot at stake. My hero has a lot to struggle for, too. Education for the generations to come, for example.

This is exactly how the President announced the reform of the executive would be carried out: along functional lines.

A very good decision. It should rule out a conflict of interests and further the country’s development. Or anybody will be able to say our name is mud.

Reform is a good thing. But when personal interests interfere...

This is why my hero is carrying on his struggle.

I feel sorry for him because his tricks smell not so good. And the persistence he uses them over and over again smack of paranoia. He doesn’t stop at anything. He even quotes you as saying things you would never think of saying in public and which are in conflict with all existing laws.

Persistence is his middle name. He knows his onions.

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Paranoia is a grave disease. You should feel sympathy for a paranoid patient. Good doctors do. But to take their underhanded hints as directions for action is a bit much. That is what I call a mass psychosis.

My Kids

This chapter is about dreams. Dreams that come true and those that don’t. Dreams as the two sides of a coin, meaning that while one is bound to come true, the other usually turns out not so lucky.

Also, dreams are like envy. Just like you can be envious in a good sort of way and bad sort of way, you can have light dreams and dark dreams.

It was very early in the morning. I was sitting in the office of the pro-rector of the Medical Institute. We had gathered there for a very important occasion. My students and their MedIn counterparts were taking a joint examination that day. And not just any examination, either: they were to be issued licenses on the basis of its results. Both sides wanted to show what they were worth and take a good look at the other. You know things by comparing them. Needless to say, my greatest desire (mixed with a degree of anxiety) was to show that a classical university was ideal for medicine.

Everybody had gathered except one bigwig from the MedIn administration. In waiting for him, both faculty and students (MedIn and ours) seemed to be discussing only one topic: medicine in our University.

“You know,” a colleague from the MedIn told me, “we have recently taken all students from one medical institute that failed and called them N kids after their former rector. Can we expect Yabluchansky kids one of these days?”

“Not on your life,” said I.

We have a lot of problems. Year in, year out, they keep crawling on us out of the wings of this bizarre stage... The people that create them always act on the sly. You have to have courage to be open about everything that you do. Confidence, too. You have to know that you’re doing the right thing in the eyes of the Law and Society.

My dream is to see Yabluchansky kids in my own University. This dream is coming true. My University has become a cradle of medical education in my city.

Dreams are different from ambitions. And yet I would still like to see the day when all education in my country is under the auspices of the Ministry of Education just like it is all over the civilized world. Then there will be no conflict of interests but every reason to expect our doctors to come out as knowledgeable and worthy of confidence as they did in Chekhov’s days.

Our School has grown into a department and had three graduations. Our graduates are quite recognizable in the medical community. They are spoken about in a good vein. And we have a good enrollment every year. A numerically solid one, I’d say.

Look at that licensing exam that our students took. Not at home, mind you, but at our neighbor-competitors’. Their work was examined “under a microscope” and found exemplary. And it won’t be a mistake to say that I am envied.

I can feel the advantages of classical education very well. They are a real strength.

I wish you could picture this. My students are on a first name basis – just like colleagues and partners should be. That is what I call Partnership in Education. Their partner relations are for their own good in the first place. The good of the New Medical Community. The New Millennium Medical Community. And perfectly in consonance with the pace of life.

What else? Next year, some of the graduates will receive two diplomas – one of a physician, the other of a health care manager. They are receiving an education in management at the University’s Department of Economics.

And the latest project that we have launched is informatics as a second education for medical students. They will attend that course at the Department of Mechanics and Mathematics.

“And this is only the beginning,” I say to myself.

.....

Yabluchansky kids... Believe me, I myself wouldn’t even think of that. On the other hand, what’s so bad about it? It’s my University, my department, my colleagues and my students. Just like all of us are alumni, workers or future graduates of the National Classical University named after Vasyl Karazin.

Dreams are a delicate matter. So much in our lives is pinned on them. “Light dreams” tend to come true. My chief dream is that “Yabluchansky kids” would come out of the University walls full-fledged doctors in the finest European tradition.

The Rake

My country is in a process of transition from totalitarianism to democracy. We can feel it on our own skin that this process is not an easy one. Every step you take you step on a rake. As the popular phrase has it, “The intentions were good, the result – as usual.”

Speaking about steps. I remember how the MOH Testing Center held its second all-Ukrainian integrated licensing examination in therapy for graduates of medical departments. Its name was Step Two.

I did not take part in Step One. I worked as an adviser to the Minister at the time. I wrote about my ministerial experience in my book *Fantasy on the Theme of Being an Adviser* (Kharkiv, Osnova Publishers, 2000). So the second step was all the same as the first one for me.

In principle, a licensing examination in medicine is a good thing. If you turn to the web site of the US Medical Licensing Examination, its purpose is not to discriminate against a doctor but rather to protect the interests of a patient. In other words, it sees to it that only a doctor of adequate qualifications and skills could get the right to work with a patient. It's easy to see what the Americans mean under the licensing exam. Suffice it to go to their web site www.usmle.org.

Seeing as our examination is a copy of the Western original, the question arises: "How's the copy?" Is it good enough? Are there any problems? Or "the intentions were good"?

The Ukrainian version has a lot of snags. Most of them are quite obvious. Unlike in the West, our licensing examination is conducted by the same ministry which is responsible for training. Hence the conflict of interests. Very simple.

All right, so what is the all-Ukrainian medical licensing examination like and how to support it if it's worthwhile supporting?

Practice is the criterion of truth. The problem should be considered in the light of the examination we went through. So, I worked in Kiev when the deputy dean called me: "The Testing Center suggests that our graduates take the exam together with MedIn graduates in the MedIn."

"It couldn't be better," I replied. "A clean experiment indeed."

We agreed to our students taking the exam on MedIn ground. But then somebody at MedIn forgot to make proper arrangements, and our kids and MedIn kids found themselves in different classrooms. So much the better! Now it was an even cleaner experiment.

I won't go into detail regarding our neighbors' results. They lived up to the expectations. It's natural for a teacher to want to help his pupil, especially within their own walls. I'm not saying this to offend our neighbors, but rather for the sake of analyzing the examination as a phenomenon. It's not that we didn't feel the same way about it, right? It's just that the circumstances were different, and in all honesty, we were only glad. We had a clean experiment and gave an ideal case study to the Testing Center – I don't think it had one like that before us.

What can you do for students, their teachers and the institute to make sure that a student count only on his or her own self at an examination? A lot. If you think out the procedure well enough and adapt Western experience in a good number of key aspects.

In the West, the MLE is taken in a Testing Center. These centers have no relation to any institutions of medical learning, and certainly none to the one from which the examinee has graduated. The smallest violation of procedure on the part of the examinee, and he's out. He can only try again the next year. In other words, it's not the institution of higher education but a doctor-to-be that sits for the examination, and not the Testing Center but an applicant for medical licensure that initiates it. Say, what if he or she is not going to practice at all after graduation? If they want to do research, what do they need a license for? Just to lose time and money? It doesn't stand to reason.

Regarding money. In the West, an individual sits for the examination and the payment is his or her problem. They will think twice if they are ready for the exam before paying for it. In this country, the Testing Center has made smart arrangements for itself. It collects money from colleges and universities. As if they and not a prospective doctor need a license.

Tests are also an important topic. The Testing Center has done its best. But even a cursory look at them shows that they are far from ideal. If a test is administered incorrectly, a

part or even all variants of the answer may turn out right or wrong. Which does the Center choose as the right answer?

The chairman of our State Examination Board wanted to make a random check and hit precisely one of such tests. All the answers could be considered correct. Very convenient for the Center!

A number of the tests are hopelessly outdated, especially those which have to do social medicine. The reason is obvious: our health care is undergoing a thorough reform, so its principles are changing fast. For example, an examinee has to indicate how long in-patient treatment can be administered. The new philosophy of social medicine provides for outpatient treatment only. Such examples are many.

Another built-in snag is that the tests are prepared by the professors of the colleges and universities the examinees are from. In this context, it's only natural that the mechanism of self-preservation is at work. In other words, simpler tests are selected. In the West, practicing doctors – members of all kinds of medical associations – prepare and select tests. Every year they raise their standards to maintain their own reputation and that of their association, too. As a result, tests become increasingly complex and the licensing examination more difficult to pass. Which is good for patients.

And yet another concern that I have. After Step Two, we had a State Examination. At first, its first results coincided with those of Step Two all right. So far, so good. Then one of the board members, a specialist in children's infections, noticed that four examinees had given the same wrong answer to one of the questions. When a fifth did the same, the board talked to him and found out that the students had learnt the wrong answer by rote from the Step Two list of answers!

The fact that this year's licensing examination took place in all colleges and universities on the same day is good news. But the fundamental problem was never solved. The examinations were held in the very colleges and universities the examinees belonged to. This had set the interests of the Testing Center and institutions of learning on a collision course. The TC tried to keep the exam as "clean" as possible, the faculty tried to help their students. I don't blame them. You can't get away from the basic instinct. Colleagues from five or seven institutes confessed to me that they had helped their students. The TC keeps improving its mechanisms of protection, the colleges and universities continue to develop more sophisticated means of cracking those mechanisms. As long as the Rake Syndrome persists...

When we had received examination results on our and other students, we found them quite interesting. The performance of one college was so outstanding that by rights, the TC should have annulled them. Our own results suited us perfectly. Given the "cleanness" of the examination, we were quite satisfied to find ourselves in the "golden mean". The stronger students confirmed their strength. The weaker ones remained weak. Overall, the examination proved that it was a practical means to evaluate the level of students' knowledge. But whether it qualifies for a licensing examination still remains a big question. I don't think it does, at least not in its present form. And the main reason is the Rake Syndrome.

Another "mistake" of the TC that I want to be known is how it processed our results. Our average consolidated grade turned out precisely one point lower than that of our neighbors. On two categories, the TC calculated the grade using the results of the weakest student as a basis. If it had calculated it the right way, our grade would have been exactly one point higher. How can it be that for all the letters and phone calls rightfully demanding a review, the TC stubbornly continues to publicize these results and only promises to correct the mistake? Promises are made to be broken. I know we will make them admit their mistake in the long run, but the question remains: If things like this are happening, then somebody must profit from it? Is it not the same old conflict of interests?

So, do we need the all-Ukrainian MLE and the Testing Center?

I'm sure we do. But we first have to get it straight how we want to call them, what they should be like, what they should do and who they will be subordinate to. The most important proposal is to preclude all possible conflicts of interest. To that end, the examination cannot be held in the college or university that has trained the examinees. For the transition period, when all reforms of the health care sector are limited to presidential decrees and medical associations are yet to be formed, the Testing Center should be put in special conditions. It should be made subject personally to Chairman of the State Accreditation Committee. That way, it will be protected from outside pressures. At any rate, the way it is now it can be used as an accreditation/attestation examination but not as a licensing one. Or we will keep stepping on the rake over and over again.

The Rake For Ever?

I published my article called *The Rake* in the *Weekly Mirror* (Zerkalo nedeli) newspaper, # 26 (299), 2000. It so happened that the newspaper carried it in the issue which appeared on newsstands right on the eve of a conference organized by the MOH Testing Center to publicize its mission. A press conference was to be held on the results of the main event.

I found myself among the participants almost by accident – now we belonged to a different ministry and could not hope to see our names on the invitees list. As I called around seeking to eliminate the evaluation mistake, I learned about the conference and got a personal invite from the TC director. I gladly accepted it.

Many of the participants came to the conference with a copy of *The Weekly Mirror*. The article in itself was a good means of keeping them awake at the conference. My motion to make changes to the rules of the conference was another. The agenda provided for reports and questions, but not for discussion. My proposal was accepted. A discussion took place. Nothing much – the three speakers that were given the floor, including myself, might have saved their breath. Our proposals were not even included in the minutes. In fact, there was no resolution – a most convenient end of the conference for the organizers. How can you prove that such and such proposals were put forward, and if they were declined, then for what reason?

So much for the conference. I will only say that I once again became convinced of the importance of my cause. I can't but say a few kind words about the director of the Testing Center. This outwardly fragile yet strong-willed woman managed to do something that few men would be able to shoulder. Neither at the conference nor at the press conference did she say a word about how much effort it had taken her to set up the Center. To my shame, I did not know that the Center had almost been reduced to an auxiliary function not so long before. Somebody had wanted to make it into a purely organizational arm of the MOH, a waiter on ministerial bureaucracy. The director told me she had to defend the Center "at the highest level of the Government." I hope to God that she did wrest a guarantee of independence for her baby for a while. A slender hope, though...

More impressions. At the press conference, a young and good-looking reporter for the *Weekly Mirror* found me in the audience and said she wanted to ask the organizers a few questions regarding my article. She even told me what kind of questions.

A charged gun is bound to fire. As I opened Issue 28 (301) of the *Weekly Mirror* two weeks after, I saw the intriguing headline: "Got A License, Doc?" I'm not going to find faults with a colleague (considering the number of my publications in the media, I think I can be called a journalist in a modest sort of way), but still I have some points to make.

I am not at all certain that my colleagues declined my proposal regarding tests. According to the reporter, my article was wrong on that point, too. She correctly quotes a good friend of mine from one medical institute as saying that “the present-day bank of situation games is a fortune.” But, as far as I understood, many supported me also in that it would be good if medical associations managed the bank. So that the examination would be as “pure and unadulterated” as can be. After all, it’s a licensing examination. Also, I don’t quite get why curricula and examinations should differ in their levels of difficulty. My understanding is that you ask an examinee something you were supposed to teach him.

"Look, don't you think these are trifles not worth all this ado?"

One more thing, though: I was surprised (were you, my esteemed colleague from *The Mirror*?) that the TC director, who should by rights have been in the limelight, was all but forgotten at the press conference.

I also wonder why the reporter was not interested in my article in earnest? I asked her to read it closely. Either she did not see the forest for the trees or she feared the author was trying to use a “smoke screen” of “trifles” to railroad his conception?

[illegible]

The Right to Sue

It has been eight years since I became dean of the Department of Medicine.

It's not an easy job to build on ruins. Especially if you are hard up for funds and human resources.

Everybody is having a hard time. So is my department.

Seeing himself as the last instance and Law incarnate, the Bureaucrat rules with a high hand...

It is an honor to restore what was ruined by the Bolsheviks. Ruined by the trash of the earth, excuse my language. Even today...

You, ---, have stolen our best years from my University, my Department and Myself.

You, ---, have done irreparable moral damage to my University, my Department and Me personally.

I have the right and I am suing you for all you have done. This will teach you a lesson you'll never forget.

.....

Totalitarianism is the law of force.

Democracy is the force of law.

The force of law is stronger than the law of force.

From the Professional Council to SAC and into the New Millennium

SAC is the acronym for the State Accreditation Committee. This is the highest authority for licensing, accrediting and attesting educational establishments irrespective of their departmental subordination and legal status.

The Professional Council acts like a filtering device for SAC. Prior to considering a case at SAC, it is submitted to the Professional Council. As a rule, SAC accepts the Council's verdict.

In the vast majority of cases, there is no conflict of interests because both the Professional Council and the educational establishments to be licensed, etc. belong to the system of education. Minor problems are easily solved.

A conflict of interests is imminent when a college or university applying for licensure, etc. is from a different system.

Mine is a special case. Every time it is like a reminder to the Council: "Attention! Keep Out! Danger Zone."

The danger comes from the fact that, unlike in the civilized world, medical education belongs to the health care system rather than that of education. It's quite clear how the conflict of interests can be solved. But...

We have to give the alarm today. Everything seems to indicate that it is the right direction. First the IMF sends a memorandum prescribing that all higher education establishments be incorporated in the education system before the end of March 2000, then some of the Presidential Decrees in the sphere of administrative reform "hang in midair" because of the stalemate in Ukrainian education...

The year 2000 marks a great divide. It's clear that classical universities and, most importantly, our Ministry are sick and tired of this endless fault-finding. Public opinion too is shifting in the right direction. Quiet water washes away a dam.

All this spells danger for the bureaucracy. When the conditions are ripe, everything written in the Presidential Decrees and IMF recommendations will come true at one fell swoop.

This is why the Council has begun to act. People close to government sources tell me that it motioned a proposal to SAC to close down departments of medicine in classical

universities and transfer their students to medical colleges. As always, it was done under the counter. They didn't even warn anybody in the Ministry of Education.

Rumor has it that this clandestine decision evoked indignation in the higher echelons of power. It serves the Council right, I think – everyone should know their own place at the roost.

Soon after this incident a summing-up meeting of the SAC Board (the turn of a new millennium!) took place and the Council moved with their proposal again. I hear they got this answer: Sit back and relax, boys – we're working on this in accordance with the requirements of the situation.

SAC at the whistle stop and SAC at the turn of the new millennium are two different things.

.....

Hopefully, we will enter the New Millennium with a new SAC. And New Thinking. Or, better yet, New Thinking Translated Into Life – it is long overdue.

The Arrow of Time

It's not true that you can travel in Time.

Ilya Prigogine, the Nobel Prizewinner, has proved that the ancient philosophers were right – you really can't go into the same river twice.

For me, elimination of the conflict of interests in education is a decided matter. My Department is the center of crystallization in the revival of classical university medical education in this country.

Ilya Prigogine expressed his idea of irreversibility of Time with an "Arrow of Time".

My Department is a point of departure, if you will, for the arrow of time in medical education.

What Gives Me Strength

What gives me strength? Dogged persistence of my adversaries. Their no-holds-barred tricks. Their desire to make a leper out of me.

Their methods hark back to the Dark Kingdom.

My timid attempts in the sphere of classical university medical education are an open and straightforward policy. So are my publicist efforts. Openness gives strength.

"What else gives you strength?"

"You haven't seen?"

"?"

"My belief in that I have chosen the right path."

The monumental truth of the idea of all education (medical education is simply an individual case) belonging to the system of education has been proved by Time. And Time *is* the last instance.

My taking part in the restoration of historical justice is the inexhaustible source of my strength.

The MOH Saga

“What actually is MOH?”
 “It’s a collective personage.”
 “Any relation to...?”
 “Some.”
 “How’s that?”
 “Some of its traits have really been taken from... But – ”
 “But?”
 “Yes, the Big But.”
 “How do mean?”
 “Well, what do you think it does?”
 “Hem...”
 “You can’t see?”
 “It’s marking time.”
 “That’s right. What do you think it should do?”
 “Get under way?”
 “Yes, and fast.”
 “In what direction?”
 “Toward a better life. Something we all have deserved.”

Things to Remember

Some points to remember – the highlights of the history of our newly democratic country:

1. Painfully and slowly, our society is becoming a democracy; it becomes increasingly difficult for diehard old fogies to use old methods. Law and other legal institutions are becoming the main points of reference.
2. The key instrument in attaining positive results is open action. Old methods don’t feel at home where windows are wide open. More light means more power for the Law as opposed to the law of force.
3. New ideas find recognition not because they defeat old ideas, but rather because the upholders of old ideas die out. This is Biblically true. Also, it gives you a helpful hint: Don’t believe their promises, they will deceive you anyway. Maintain only official relations with them.
4. Make them pay every time they violate the law.
5. The law is an invincible weapon. Let us learn not only to wield it but to respect it, too.
6. The story of my Department is a worthy demonstration lesson, and not for this writer alone.
7. Do no evil, and it will not come back to you.

Double Prologue

The Department is seven. Ukraine is nine. It's sure quite little. The tale is only beginning.

The prologue.

The troubles are many, those in management.

The reason, one of the possible, I hope, I have pointed out. It's been on the surface for long, we've been sick and tired of it. Its roots are the old "Matrix", where in "blood" is the conflict of interests.

This reason is neither last nor least. In it is viscosity. This is because of

it that "the isles of hope get covered with duckweed".
Its ID's are idols and lepers. Out of totalitarianism. Very dangerous.
Contagious. And destructive.
The remedy is in "Knots". In our civic position.
And if something with the prologue does not work very well, it means this
position probably lacks.
Ask yourselves, "Who IS the Leper?" Get yourselves to think and act the real
way. Like citizens.
Together, we all are an actual creative force. And what we need is just a
little thing - to start believing in our own abilities, everyone and for
sure.
Listen to yourself. You, my Reader, have been Selected. You, just like me,
are absolutely lucky to be born and get a chance to build yourself in this
extremely important time of the doubtless changes for the better! Don't miss
your chance! Let us not miss OUR chance!
.....
As my country occupies only the "prologue" level in the democracy building progress, this
book is only the prologue for my future work. Double prologue.