

B.V. Gnedenko and Soviet Probability

In the period 1950–1980 any probability school in the USSR was somehow related to the name, works and personality of A.N. Kolmogorov. However, besides pure science, there always exists scientific politics initiated by some personalities. Kolmogorov, like any great scientist, did not participate much in this politics, being however an arbiter in some situations. Most political issues developed independently of his will. There were 4 main probability centers in the USSR of that time: Mathematical (Steklov) Institute in Moscow, its Leningrad and Novosibirsk branches, and the Department of Probability Theory in the Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics at the Moscow State University (mechmath for short). I do not mention the groups in the Soviet republics like Kiev, Vilnius groups etc., most of which were under strong influence of the above mentioned groups. Steklov Institute controlled the central journal in the field — “Probability theory and its applications”, and because of this its content concerned mostly several classical topics in probability, for example, sums of independent random variables. In mechmath the situation was quite different. This was a multipolar world with different and bright personalities, whose interests varied from pure and fundamental research to very applied, and who coexisted without big problems, in comfort and safety. This situation was very much due to Boris Vladimirovich who could patiently listen and accept different views on the science. Despite the occurring conflicts the atmosphere of good will prevailed in the Department of Probability Theory. B.V. Gnedenko was a wise leader and it was thanks to him that all appearing intrigues, quarrels and contradictions were quickly extinguished.

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