

Red Army defector speaks at York

By DONOVAN VINCENT

A defector from the Soviet Red Army in Afghanistan condemned Soviet aggression and appealed to Canadians to offer sanctuary to defectors still trapped in Afghanistan in a talk held at York last Wednesday.

Mykola Movchan, speaking by means of a translator told the small audience in Curtis Lecture Hall G that he was drafted into the Red Army on March 22, 1982, at age 19, and upon completing his military training was posted in Afghanistan.

Movchan said that upon entering the Red Army he knew very little about Russia's war with Afghanistan because Soviet press coverage of the war had been sparse and misleading. He added that initially he was under the impression that the reason the Soviets were in Afghanistan was to "protect the Afghans against external aggression from China, Pakistan and the United States."

While serving with the Red Army in Afghanistan Movchan said he

witnessed cases of "drug abuse, poor morale and bad relations between senior enlisted men and the younger Red Army recruits." Movchan added that he believed these incidents were caused by the fact that many Red Army soldiers felt that Russia's war with Afghanistan was "unjust." "Even the higher ranking Soviet officers questioned the reasons for Soviet presence in Afghanistan" Movchan said.

Movchan told observers of how he was harbored by an Afghan villager who helped him get to the Afghan Partisans, the guerilla fighters who oppose the Soviet Red Army. During his 13 month stay with the Partisans Movchan did not partake in the war, but he saw the "devastation of agriculture and industry and the slaughter of countless Afghan people." Movchan showed slides documenting this devastation. One slide depicted a young Afghan who had lost both his hands from the explosion of a Soviet-made bomb.

After his stay with the Partisans Movchan was able to gain passage to

North America, landing in New York City in July 1984. Movchan is one of the chosen few Red Army defectors who have been given passage to the West from Afghanistan. There are at present 700 Red Army defectors being held in Afghanistan and according to Movchan "only 10 have been permitted passage to the West. Western governments seem

reluctant to accept Soviet Red Army defectors from Afghanistan." He pointed out that three attempts have been made to get Red Army defectors into Canada and they have all failed. Movchan also said that Western press coverage of the Soviet-Afghanistan war has been inadequate. "The problem of Afghanistan should be of concern to people all around the world" he said, "Afghanistan is not the first victim of Soviet aggression, and it won't be the last."

Movchan is conducting a tour of Southern Ontario during the week of March 9-16. Wednesday's talk was organized by the Ukrainian Canadian Students Union.



Mykola Movchan (right) speaks through a translator to a York audience. Movchan defected from the Soviet Red Army in Afghanistan.

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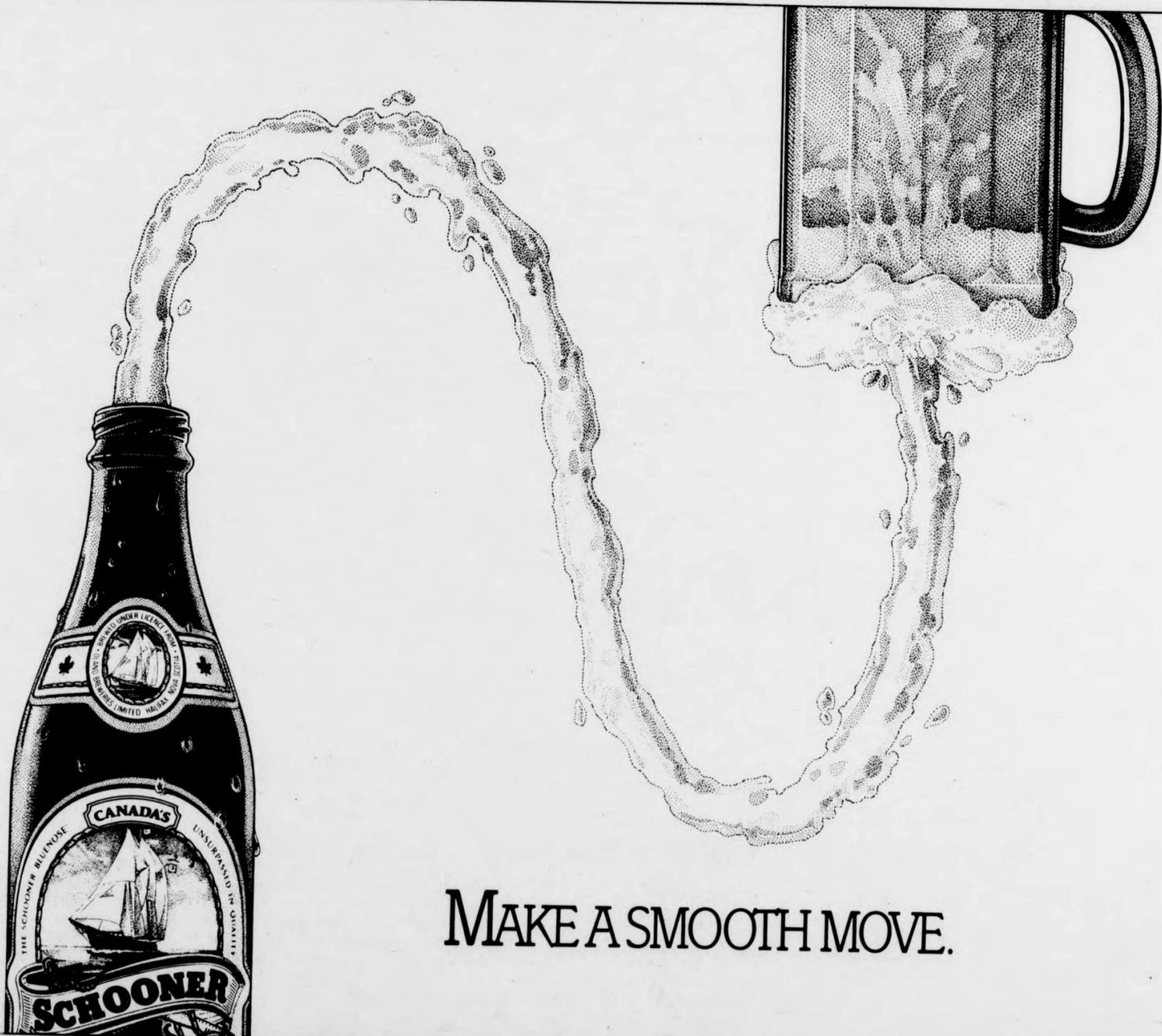
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