

Gazette interview

Soviet prof speaks out

Victor Sergeevich Maslov is a professor of Russian language and Russian literature at Leningrad State University in the U.S.S.R. He is at Dalhousie for a period of seven months instructing a class in intensive Russian. Before coming to Dalhousie, Professor Maslov taught at universities in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Cuba, and the United States.

Jack Robinson, conducted this interview with Professor Maslov for the Gazette. Their conversation was translated from the Russian by Professor John Barnstead of the Russian Department.



Victor Sergeevich Maslov, a language professor at Leningrad University is teaching at Dalhousie for a period of seven months. He recently spoke to the Gazette about his impressions of the West and of life in the Soviet Union.

Dal Photo/Morris

Gazette: You have been in Canada during the last four months. What are your general impressions of the country and its people?

Maslov: I have been here for three and one half months and have favourable impressions of the Canadian people. In my work at the university I have experienced only a well-wishing attitude towards me. I find the students to be interested in the Soviet Union and that the Canadian people seem to be a people who like their work and feel an interest in the Soviet Union.

Gazette: You are perhaps the first professor from the Soviet Union to teach Russian at a Canadian University. What is your reason for coming to Dalhousie?

Maslov: The choice of the university at which I would be teaching was not made by me but rather by a joint committee from Canada and the Soviet Union. Other possible choices would have been either Montreal or Toronto. When I learned that Dalhousie had been chosen I did not know much about the University but had heard of Halifax and of the role it had played in the Second World War when convoys left from Halifax for Murmansk to help prosecute the war; therefore, I was very happy to come to Halifax and see what sort of people live here.

Gazette: How would you compare Dalhousie students and the university community in general to those in Leningrad?

Maslov: My contacts with the community have been rather limited but I feel that I can compare Dalhousie with those in Leningrad as I have had extensive contact with students here in the last three months. I note many similarities between here and in Leningrad: they are both young groups, full of the joy of living and like to work hard and relax. There is a common problem that faces both groups of students, that of finding a balance between work and relaxation. The solution to this problem represents the similarity and difference between students in Leningrad and those at Dalhousie.

Gazette: In general, how does the Soviet citizen regard Canada today?

Maslov: The Soviet citizen considers that today he has very friendly relations with the Canadian people. This may be due in part to the similarities between the two countries in climate and their ethnographic composition. Throughout all stages of history the Russian people have had very friendly relations with Canada.

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Gazette: Recently in the West, much attention has been focused on Dissidents in the Soviet Union and the question of Human Rights violations. What are your views on these two issues?

Maslov: On the problem of Human Rights, the West has the right to consider it along with any other questions. This is not, however, an object of attention for the common Soviet citizen who has not noticed any such violations of his rights. In my opinion, the Soviet citizen is provided with a sufficient number of rights. These include the right to work, the right to an education, the right to relaxation, the right to his own dwelling place, the right to social insurance and the right to be comfortable and well-provided for in old age. The Soviet citizen does not have the right to propagandize in favour of war or in favour of racial discrimination.

As to the question of whom the Dissidents represent, they represent only themselves. They are people who have been broken by fate and perhaps have not found their place in Soviet society; therefore, have tried to find a place for themselves in the West. They justify their transference to the West by any means possible, including slander of Soviet Union. I, myself, react negatively to the Dissidents.

Gazette: Alexander Solzhenitsyn is probably the most celebrated of Soviet Dissidents in the West. What are your feelings toward Solzhenitsyn as a writer and as a person?

Maslov: I would object to the characterization of Solzhenitsyn as a celebrated writer. I do not consider him to be a writer per se. Several of his works attained an average level of literary competence, I have in mind particularly here the story *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. In considering his work as a whole I can not consider these works of an artistic nature but rather as political works directed against the Soviet Union and the Soviet people. Several months ago I happened to read in one of the Western newspapers, I think it was the Washington Post, a very apt characterization of Solzhenitsyn made by one of the journalists in which he was characterized as "a dead political cat".

Gazette: This year the Soviet Union celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the October Revolution. Where do you feel the Soviet Union stands today in relation to the goals of that revolution?

Maslov: I believe in the sixty years since the Revolution the main purposes of the Revolution have been in large fulfilled in the Soviet Union. These were the construction in the Soviet Union of socialism and communism. This was, of course, a very complicated and difficult task due to two main factors: the economic backwardness of Russia at the time of Revolution and because of the enmity of the surrounding capitalist states. Now, however, the Soviet Union is not alone; it is accompanied by the Socialist camp of nations in each of which the goals of the Revolution are being carried out to one degree or another.

Gazette: What are the major domestic problems facing the Soviet Union today?

Maslov: I consider the main problem facing the Soviet Union to be that of further economic development, the creation of a higher standard of living and the strengthening of the economic base of the Soviet Union. The major problem is the upbringing and education of a new man who will take his place in Communist society. Both problems are complicated and difficult but I believe that the Soviet people will be able to bring these problems to a successful conclusion.

Gazette: How would you describe present day Soviet-Chinese relations?

Maslov: Naturally, the Soviet and Chinese peoples are interested in obtaining good relations between their two countries. The Soviet government made many overtures in this direction. Just recently the Soviet government sent congratulations and greetings on the founding of Chinese People's Republic which I believe took place on the first of October. This was the twenty-ninth anniversary of the Chinese People's Republic. Now I believe it is China's turn to act in a positive fashion; however, from my own observations I have not seen that China has been active in a positive sense. Rather it seems to take a negative attitude to this problem which is to be pitied.

Gazette: As I understand it, in 1976 you were a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Kansas. Now that you have visited both the United States and Canada, what are your impressions of the two societies?

Maslov: From my experience in the United States and those I have had in Canada, at least in Nova Scotia, I note many things in common between the two countries; their economic structure, their outward appearances and their way of life. However I would never agree with those people who might term Canada the fifty first state. I would say that Canadians have their own distinct traits, many of which are admirable. I especially note their calm business-like attitude and the absence of that arrogance and superciliousness which characterizes some Americans. I think that Canadians are very interested and feel a vital need for Canada's independent existence and her own independent way of development towards Canada's own best interests.

Gazette: In closing, how do you view future Canadian-Soviet relations?

Maslov: I believe that Soviet-Canadian relationships have a good opportunity to be both deepened and widened. The Soviet Union and Canada share many areas of interest; the climatic conditions in the two countries are similar, both countries are interested in developing their northern territories and both are countries of vast natural resources. I believe that the scientists of the two countries can cooperate in these areas and that there are also opportunities for cooperation in the humanities, in historical investigations, in cultural exchanges, in exchanges of artists, writers, students and tourists. I personally would wish to see the maximum development of these opportunities and will be doing all possible in my power to advance these possibilities in the Soviet Union.

Gazette: Do you have any further comments you would like to make?

Maslov: I have found it very pleasant to work at Dalhousie University and I am pleased with the friendly attitude shown to me by the administration. I believe that the students have gained some profit from their contact with me. This gives me a great deal of satisfaction. I believe that it is important to have this type of educational exchange and I certainly hope that I will not be the only Soviet professor to come to Dalhousie.