



ON THE OTHER SIDE

An interview with Soviet youth leader Maxim Sotnikov

The following interview was supplied to The Gem by the Press Office of the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa. Maxim Sotnikov is leader of the Moscow University's Komsomol organization, which has a membership of more than 24,500. Being the largest youth organization in the Soviet Union, the Komsomol unites nearly 40 million young people of the age 14 to 28.

The questions were written by the staff of the student newspaper *Manitoba* on the request of the embassy, which translated and telexed them to Sotnikov, received his answers, and translated them into English.

set up at the Faculty level to participate in decision-making affecting students' vital interests. This particularly applies to the drafting of curricula and examination schedules, the distribution of stipends (incidentally, on September 1 stipends were raised by 50 per cent for Straight-A students and by 25 per cent for all the rest), and cases of expulsion from university, etc.

The first ever election of a Dean was held recently at the Department of Law. Previously, Deans were appointed and did not have to heed student's opinions.

The policy of glasnost you have mentioned has stimulated young people's activity. Multi-candidate elections are now common practice in Komsomol organizations. New political clubs and students' disco and video clubs have sprung up. In one of these clubs, students simulated a meeting between Shevardnadze and Shultz, which resulted in a failure to reach an agreement. Fortunately, they were wrong.

Thanks to democratization, international contacts have become livelier. I mean contacts at the Student level, because co-operation at the Dean and Rector levels has been going on for a long time. This November, a group of Moscow University students are going to Yale University, USA. This year, we have received several student delegations from other countries. Next year, we are expecting to receive twice as many.

This is also the result of our becoming more financially independent. Previously, we managed our financial affairs through a bank account of a higher-up organization, whereas now we have our own bank account. We have nearly 50,000 roubles (more than 100,000 CDN dollars) on it. We have carried out a dozen operations, learning to be financiers.

QUESTION: The main role of students' unions in Canada is, to some extent, lobbyist activities in various government agencies on political issues and, to a greater extent, protection of their members' interests. What role do students' unions per-

form in your university?

ANSWER: We are also trying to tackle the social and economic problems of youth and, of course, protect their interests. Our Komsomol organization also represents the interests of students at the city level—its representatives are in the elective bodies of the city's Komsomol organization. Finally, our three students are members of a District and City Soviet (local government). Next year, we are planning to nominate our candidate for election to the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation.

QUESTION: What do Soviet students consider the main problem today?

ANSWER: We think that the main problem is to encourage people's creative energy and activity. Incidentally, this is a key problem to the policy of perestroika in all spheres of life in the USSR. A poll we had taken in the University on the EVE of the 20th



Komsomol Congress showed that the Komsomol's prestige among students was falling: first and second year students were eager to work in the Komsomol organizations, while senior students used every pretext to avoid Komsomol work. Why? Some students frankly told us that they did not believe their social activities could change anything. Yet, nearly 90% of those polled put forth constructive proposals on ways to change the style, methods and aims of Komsomol work. These proposals were later laid at the base of what journalists called "a 17-point programme for reorganizing the Komsomol." Incidentally, no youth paper in Moscow wanted to publish the results of the poll, so we sent them to the foreign press through the Novosti Press Agency.

Another priority is to protect the en-

vironment. The country's first students' Environmental Protection Council was set up at Moscow University some 10 years ago. At first, it united biology, soil and geography students. But later, students from all departments joined it. At the initiative of the Council, we sent a letter six months ago to the government, drawing its attention to the State of Kurshskaya Kosa, a sandy peninsula in the Baltic Sea, unique in its beauty, and demanded that oil production be halted there.

Several days ago, we received a reply saying that oil production has been suspended there and inviting representatives of the University's Ecological Council to participate in a fact-finding expedition that would investigate the matter and report the results of its investigation to the government.

The Ecological Council is becoming kind of co-ordinating centre of the students' ecological movement throughout the country. Similar Councils have been set up in nearly 150 institutions of higher education. Last year, the councils had their first Conference and next year they will have a second one.

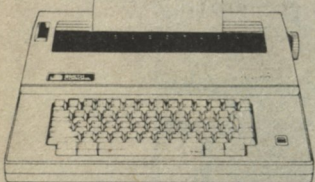
QUESTION: If you were to make an appeal to the Canadian students, what would you tell them?

ANSWER: The Canada Cup Tournament was held a while ago. I watched almost all the games, because for 10 years I had been Captain

of the University's hockey team. And though we lost, it was a wonderful experience. I want to have more such experiences, I want us to get to know better each other's views on various issues, from the problems of peace (which you mentioned in your first question) to that of self-government in student's hostels and canteens. This is essential for trust and lasting peace. In short, if I were to make an appeal to the students of Canada, my message would be that of peace and mutual understanding.

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QUESTION: How do Soviet youth evaluate the chances for progress in arms control and disarmament?

ANSWER: I think that for the first time ever, we have a situation where progress is possible. We are certainly prepared to make our contribution and, judging by the results of our Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's meeting with US Secretary of State George Shultz, the Americans are also prepared to play ball. The agreement reached at the meeting to sign before the end of the year a treaty on the elimination of two classes of nuclear missiles should be considered the most important international event since the Helsinki Conference in 1975.

QUESTION: Here in the West, we have heard about the policy of glasnost and democratization pursued by Mikhail Gorbachev. How does this policy influence the life of the Moscow University students and all Soviet students generally?

ANSWER: I'll give you a few examples. A decision was taken earlier this year to increase student representation in the bodies managing university affairs. From now on, we shall have 25 per cent of the seats in the learned Councils of Institutions of higher education. Student commissions are also being