

Building a Bridge

An Interview with Soviet Consul Vladimir Golubkov

by Kate Rogers Gessert

Vladimir Golubkov, the Soviet consul from San Francisco, visited Eugene last week to speak at a public meeting and at a University of Oregon class Joe Austin teaches. "War in the Nuclear Age." Vladimir travelled to Eugene with his wife, Regina, and with the vice consul, Sergei Aivazian, his wife, Larisa, and their small son, Yuri. They drove up from San Francisco, but since Soviets are not allowed to travel through some counties in Oregon, they turned east in Klamath Falls, drove through eastern Oregon, and took two days for the trip.

I had a chance to interview the consul while he was here. I invited all of the visiting Soviet people and Joe Austin to my house for tea. Vladimir and I worked on the interview out in the garden, while inside my kids played with Yuri, and my husband talked to Sergei and Larisa about nuclear arms control and abstract art.

Vladimir Golubkov is an intelligent-looking man, with an alert glance, tinted glasses, wavy brown hair, and a medium-tall, slight build. If I saw him walking down the street, it wouldn't occur to me that he was from another country.

I have kept this interview as much as I can in Vladimir's own words, because they say most completely what he means, and because I like the way he speaks English.

First I asked Vladimir about his job.

Vladimir: I am involved in Asian studies. I am observing the policy of the United States toward the Pacific

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Rim countries, the political, trade, and cultural policy toward Japan, China, and other countries of the Pacific Rim.

Kate: How about U.S. policy toward the Pacific Rim part of the Soviet Union?

Vladimir: No, we have another division in charge of observing Soviet-American relations. Additionally, after we have lost 13 diplomats in November, as you know, we have a lot of additional work we have to do—for example, now I am working as cultural attache, too. [The U.S. ordered many Soviet diplomats to leave the country in November, charging that they were spies; the Soviet consulate in San Francisco now has a staff of 6 consuls rather than 19.]

Kate: What do you do as cultural attache?

Vladimir: For example, three months ago in San Francisco was International Film Festival. The Soviet Union has been represented by seven films at the festival. It was a big preparation of work to help American organizers of festival to get in touch with Soviet filmmakers, to bring these films here, to organize press conference, to help make a program for

filmmakers. . . .

Just a month ago, it was a Soviet-American meeting in Los Angeles and they called it "Summit Entertainment," and the Soviet delegation, headed by Mr. Klimov—he's the head of the Soviet Union of Cinematographers—talked with American filmmakers about how to overcome stereotypes in Soviet and American films. It's not a secret, it's an open secret, that Soviets in American films look like animals or enemies, what is better? They talked, and I think very successfully, about how to overcome stereotypes. Some people from the audience proposed to send some American actors to the Soviet Union when some Soviet filmmakers will decide to do a film about the U.S., and vice versa, to send some Soviet actors to Hollywood to be in some American films about the Soviet Union. It's very helpful. That's just one idea.

They decided to create a Soviet-

American board of filmmakers to take care of joint productions of films and things like that. I was involved in this business too, I was in Los Angeles and I participated in all events and all press conferences. That's what we call cultural attache. Not only films but some exchanges of journalists, actors. . . . But my main job is Asian studies.

Kate: So how do you do that? Do you read papers and . . . ?

Vladimir: Not only that. It's a good opportunity to be in California, in San Francisco in particular, because there are a lot of scientists, universities, institutions involved in Asian studies, American trade organizations in charge of trade with the Pacific. I meet with people, I read newspapers and books and other publications, I make some observations of literature, of reports, of scientific studies, I make some assessments.

Kate: What do you do with this information?

Vladimir: I send it to our Foreign Ministry, the U.S. desk. I used to work at this desk before I have been appointed to San Francisco. We send our papers, reports, observations directly to the Foreign Ministry.

Kate: What do they use it for? Do they base various kinds of trade decisions on that information?

Vladimir: Not only trade. You know, to make some political decisions, you have to know what is going on in a lot of spheres. For example, trade and cultural relations say sometimes more than a declaration of political intention, because you could say one thing, but it's more helpful to see what is going on. If real relations are deteriorating, in parallel, it will mean that your trade relations and exchanges are going down, and vice versa, if your trade relations are going up, there should be some basis for it. The same in cultural relations, the same in student exchanges. . . . For example, the relations between the U.S. and the People's Republic of China became better after more and more Chinese students came to the U.S. to study at universities. It's only one factor, but when you have a lot of factors in a lot of spheres, you can judge more correctly about what is going on.

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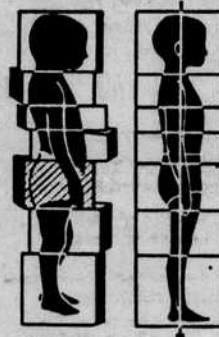
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