

und Rap Around Rap Around Rap Around Rap The Who, Why, and What of Russia

By JOAN M. SMITH

Russia, whether under the rule of grand princes, czars or dictators has always been a secretive, frightening enigma. It has only been through the recent detente that the western world has been given an insight into its peoples, cultures and its government but the view is still murky.

RapAround will be spending Easter vacation in the U.S.S.R. and before departing decided to visit high school Russian classes to find out what the students would like to know about the Soviet Union.

One thing was certain if the Bishop Kearney, Cardinal Mooney and Nazareth Academy students had their way and could make the trip Russia would be stripped of its secrets. Even the country's expert secret police (KGB) would have their hands full keeping up with the young adults as they burrowed into every corner of Russian society, political, religious, educational, social and domestic.

Both Tom Rizzo's BK class and Brother John Davies' Cardinal Mooney group are in the process of dissecting the complexity of modern Russia's political roots by studying Karl Marx.

Politically curious, the students wanted to know, as does BK senior Brian Conheady, "If everyone is equal like they say, or if it's just propaganda."

Kathi Curnick wondered about the degree of political suppression, and Janet Wallace declared, "I would like to know the woman's position in Russia. Are they going through phases of women's liberation?"

Teacher Tom Rizzo was interested in finding out if the average Soviet citizen really knows about detente, and John Kinney wanted to know if the people are afraid of their government or if they feel close to it and feel it's theirs.

The BK students also were curious about the environmental situation. Does Russia have pollution problems like ours?

How the Russians view Americans interested Cardinal Mooney students. Gary Knight was curious to know what the average Russian thinks about the United States and if they know what we're really like.

The Soviet educational system interested Paul Moriarty as it did

Richard Orlando. Dick wondered if Russia has an exchange student program where Soviet youths can travel abroad to study.

Both Brother John and senior Jim Knight wondered if the western world uses the term Communist too freely. It was pointed out that communism is the ultimate level of government after the abolition of the capitalistic order, and in the meantime there is a transitional period the Russians are now passing through — the proletariat. The class pointed out that it is important to recognize the Russians call it socialism and not communism, and that the republics which form the Soviet Union are designated the Union of Soviet Socialist (not Communist) Republics.

From Cardinal Mooney, RapAround went to visit Sister Joan McDowell's Russian Cultures class at Nazareth Academy. They are in the midst of learning Russia's historical background and have become acquainted with such personages as Ivan the Terrible and Peter and Catherine the Great.

Asked why they chose this particular course Marlene DeConinck replied, "I have an aunt who is Russian Orthodox."

Janice Thape's reason was, "I like history and it was the only history left for me to study."

According to Jean Havens, history is her favorite subject and she wanted to find out more about communism. As she said, "All we knew about Russia was that it was a big country across the sea."

All the girls agreed, however, that since taking Sister Joan's course many of the myths surrounding Russia have been clarified and they have gained a better understanding of Soviet Society.

While Jean was interested in Moscow because "I would want to see the places where all the different events happened," Sister Joan was curious about Kiev. This city was devastated during World War II and Sister wondered if it was rebuilt in keeping with the Russian past, or if they accepted the contemporary and rebuilt it along modern lines.

The girls were also interested in knowing if the competition between the Soviet Union and the United States is really strong, and if the growing number of American tourists to Russia has had any influence on the Russian people.



Photo by Ben Susso

It was a delightful experience visiting Russian History classes like the one at Bishop Kearney where there was a break in the discussions when the students were jokingly reminded that because of the politically loaded questions they wanted answered, RapAround might well become a permanent citizen of the Soviet Union!

These were just a few of the subjects which the young adults wanted investigated, and though the sessions were to find out what they wanted to know, by listening to their questions and viewpoints, RapAround came away with a greater understanding of the land it will be visiting.



Photo by Susan McKinney

Cardinal Mooney senior Paul Moriarty wants to know if Soviet youth can have jobs to earn extra money.



Photo by Ben Susso

Nazareth Russian Culture student Mary Rosse Stevenson traces on map RapAround's route which will include Moscow, Kiev, Leningrad and Yalta on the Crimea Peninsula.

BK's Tom Rizzo is curious to know what the average Russian viewpoint is of his government, and if he is really aware of detente and what it means.



Photos by Ben Susso

Sister Joan McDowell's class visited the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches here in Rochester as background for their Russian Cultural studies.

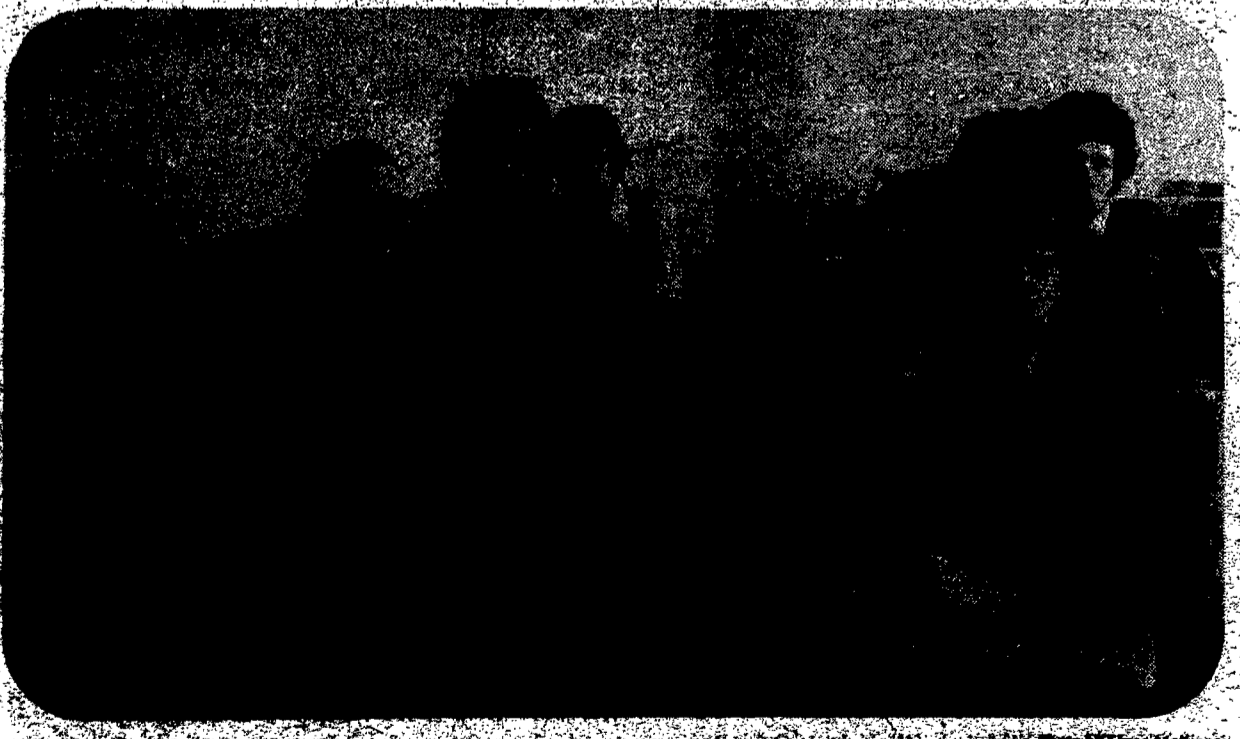


Photo by Susan McKinney

It was a change of pace for Brother John Davies as he graciously turned over to RapAround his Russian History class, and then joined his students Jim Knight, John Foon, Joanne Ryck, Jim Graff, Kathy Curnick, Jan Blawie and Paul Yarrow in determining which areas of Soviet life they would like a first hand report on.