

From the Field

MEETING AN OLD TOLSTOYAN LEADER IN SIBERIA

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More than half a century of silence has finally been broken in the Soviet press about the fate of Leo Tolstoy's followers since the October Revolution. In September 1988 Novyj mir published nearly fifty pages of memoirs written by Boris Mazurin, the leader of the largest and most successful Tolstoyan agricultural colony in Soviet history. The remarkably vigorous 89-year-old Mazurin still lives in western Siberia not far from the site of the "Life and Labor Commune" that he led until his arrest in 1936 and imprisonment for ten years in labor camps.

Through a series of coincidences too improbable to accept in a work of fiction, I spent three days in Siberia at the end of July 1990 as the guest of a family in Novokuznetsk, who each day took me in their car out to the village of Tal'zhino for conversations with Boris Vasil'evich. His memoirs, along with those of six other Tolstoyans, are included in the 500-page book Vospominanija krest'jan-tolstovtsev, which came out in Moscow in November 1989 and is to be published by the Indiana University Press in my English translation. In preparation for writing the introduction I was naturally eager for a chance to talk with Mazurin about his experiences and outlook on life. Space does not permit describing here the hours we spent in long, leisurely conversation, sitting on sturdy benches of his own handiwork in the yard beside his little house, or around the table inside over a bountiful country dinner that his daughter and daughter-in-law prepared for us each day from fresh vegetables out of the Mazurins' garden. There is room here only to tell how the Zherlitsyn family in Novokuznetsk made these interviews possible. Some time ago their daughter, Ol'ga Miloshunas, who works at Pushkinskij Dom in Leningrad, came across a book of remarkable poems, V tsarstve zhizni, Poëticheskij dnevnik, published in Moscow in 1926 by a poet whose name was unfamiliar to her. Fifteen of his poems have since been published in Moscow by Gennadij Ajgi with a highly laudatory introduction under the heading "Russkij poëticheskij avangard," in the journal V mire knig, no. 3 (1989), pp. 16-18.

When Ol'ga Miloshunas read Mazurin's memoirs in Novyj mir, she found that he lived in a village not far from her own home town, and that the author of the book of poems she had discovered was his father,

Vasilij Petrovich Mazurin (1872-1936), who had known Tolstoy personally and had corresponded with Romain Rolland. She returned home in March 1989 to meet Boris Vasil'evich, and with his cooperation she is now preparing for publication a new and enlarged edition of his father's poems. During that visit he gave her my address; and when she learned through our correspondence of my interest in getting personally acquainted with him, her parents made it possible, to my surprise and delight, by inviting me to be their house guest in Novokuznetsk.

NEH SUMMER SEMINAR ON RUSSIAN LITERATURE: A CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

An NEH Summer Seminar for college teachers, directed by Gary Saul Morson, will be held this summer at Northwestern University, June 24 to August 16, 1991. Entitled "The Counter-Tradition of Russian Literature," the seminar will first explore Bakhtin's literary theories and then examine major works by Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov. The basic idea will be to understand Russian literature as a tradition of formally anomalous works and to develop a poetics--more accurately, a "prosaics"--of Russian literature. Also, the seminar will consider the prosaic values of many Russian thinkers, especially Tolstoy. Approximately one-third of the seminar will be devoted to Anna Karenina.

Participants receive a stipend of \$3,750 each. A friendly group atmosphere--discussions among colleagues--characterizes the seminar. Specialists in Russian literature and in other fields (history, English, other foreign languages) are welcome. Knowledge of Russian is not necessary. For further information, write: Gary Saul Morson, Director, NEH Summer Seminars, Department of Slavic Languages, Kresge Hall, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL 60208-2206.