

CAS President's Report, 2008

19 May 2008

Dear Colleagues:

After four years at the helm of the of the Canadian Association of Slavists, I've discovered that I still don't know where the tiller of this ship is. Perhaps that's for the best. The ship is very well served by the officers who do the really important and difficult work. Oleh Ilnytzyk continues to manage our journal with great skill. Megan Swift and Bozena Karwowska have organized an excellent annual meeting. Svitlana Krysa capably manages the CAS/CSP office and assists with the journal. Elena Baraban has produced the newsletter for us this year. To these and all the other officers and volunteers who have helped keep our ship afloat and on course, my sincere thanks. We are all better off for their efforts.

I am happy to announce the results of our 2007 essay prize competition. This year, the graduate essays submitted for the competition were strong, but the jury, consisting of Olga Mladenova, Alison Rowley, and me decided that none of them was strong enough to deserve the prize. Thus we made no award for the best graduate essay. The award for the best undergraduate essay was given to Alex Souchen, a student at the University of Ottawa, for his essay entitled "The Czechoslovak Legion in Russia." Mr. Souchen wrote the essay in Prof. Mark Stolarik's 3rd-year history course HIS 3357, "The Rise and Fall of Czechoslovakia" in the winter of 2007. Congratulations to both Alex and Mark.

There has been little formal business for the President to attend to, which is very good, since I was on sabbatical this year and eager to pursue my own research. But the free time afforded me an opportunity to think about our organization. As most of you know, I'm happy to let the currents carry our ship in the right direction without unnecessary meddling at the helm. But a few issues have been creeping up over the years and perhaps they deserve our collective attention.


Our profession has, to some extent, recovered from the very lean times we experienced just a few years back. Without concrete data I can't be very precise, but I think we all generally feel that there are more students in our courses, more opportunities for our graduates, more interest in our scholarship, and more resources for our needs than there were ten years ago. While I personally feel that grants and professional appointments in our field, both here in Canada and elsewhere where our members compete, have not always adhered to recognized standards of quality and competence, these matters are not within our direct control and on the whole, the state of our profession is good.

Organizationally, one particular problem stands out very clearly. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, international connections for Slavists have been in flux. In step with these developments, our own organization's international affiliations and memberships have gradually eroded to the point where we don't really know where we stand. Should CAS be a member of international organizations? Ukrainianists have

removed CAS from the International Association of Ukrainian Studies, but MAPRIAL is asking for membership dues and ICSEES wants our participation. Our constitution mandates a committee for international relations that should deal with these matters. It's time we re-animated this committee and elected a Chair who will take an active role in maintaining our international links. But in order to do that, we need to hear the voices of our Association's members on this question.

Another organizational matter that needs attention is our graduate student membership. Our association enjoys a very healthy influx of graduate student members and our constitution gives them a voice on our executive. But to no great surprise, graduate students, many of whom consider their membership in CAS to be temporary, are seldom able or willing to take up the challenge of representing their colleagues in our organization. We need to give this matter some thought and attention with a view to changing the methods and perhaps the rules by which graduate students are given a voice in our Association.

Finally, there is, as always, the matter of finances. Although we are actually very small, our Association has two separate financial systems: the association itself and the journal. This has been true for at least twenty years. It is not something that should be tampered with carelessly, since the system in place more or less works. But it would certainly be better if the finances of our association were unified to reflect more clearly the priorities of our Association. The changing landscape of support for scholarly associations in Canada has undermined the stability of our dual system. The treasurer has no source of income from which to pay the Association's bills. The Association should not be financed by a tariff on the journal. CAS needs to begin considering its financial structure with a view toward a more rational distribution of responsibilities. This is not a question of raising more money, but of finding a structure that will allow for efficiency, transparency, and control. I have great hopes that our very capable treasurer, Bohdan Nebesio, who has now had a year's experience to familiarize himself with our financial structure, will initiate a consultative process that will propose a simplification of our current operations. CAS is a small but effective scholarly association. It does not require enormous effort to keep it running, but it is worth our while to fine tune it every so often, to maintain that sleek and trim condition that allows this ship to sail the scholarly currents without a firm hand on the tiller, wherever it is.



Maxim Tarnawsky
President