

1963

## Macalester at Home and Abroad, Reel 3

Yahya Armajani

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**Macalester College Archives**

**Audio Reel #13**

**Minnesota Private College Hour: “Macalester at Home and Abroad, Part 3”**

[00:00]

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[01:30]

[church bells ringing]

This is the Minnesota Private College Hour. [orchestral music plays]

Tonight, the Minnesota Private College Council, representing the fifteen private liberal arts colleges in our state, welcomes you again to a half hour of television for the discriminating viewer. [singing]

Macalester College in Saint Paul presents Macalester At Home and Abroad, in this series Dr. Yahya Armajani visits with faculty, students, and campus guests participating in Macalester's extensive program of international studies. Dr. Armajani.

YA: Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I want to welcome you to this program on Macalester At Home and Abroad. This evening my guest is again Dr. G. Theodore Mitau, Chairman of the Political Science Department at Macalester College, and member of the staff of the Area Study of the Soviet Union, which we teach here in Saint Paul, in cooperation with College of Saint Catherine, Saint Thomas, and Hamline University. Dr. Mitau, because of the fact that he is a member of the staff, took a trip to the Soviet Union last summer, and he is here a second time with us this evening, to discuss some of his observations. And I think it is a coincidence that tonight we are talking about Soviet Union and all our minds and our hearts are full of the situation in the world and what the Soviet Union is going to do and what the United Nations is going to do. So I think this is very [unclear] the time to talk, we are going to have to get to know these people in the Soviet Union a little better.

Now Dr. Mitau you discussed with us last week some of your experiences in different aspects of the life of Russia, now tonight we—you said that you were going to start talking about standard

of living in Russia. First of all may I ask the question, you think the people in Russia are as much interested in the standard of living as we are here? Or are the people in Western Europe?

TM: Oh I don't think there is any doubt about it, everywhere that we went the discussion involved how much did you pay for this, and how much is a suit of clothes, and how much is a pair of shoes, and what—how many rooms do you have and how much do you make. I think the preoccupation with, you might say standard of living is all around you, the Russians are keenly aware of the fact that their standard of living is lower than that of western Europe and certainly lower than that of the United States.

YA: Did you happen to go into any of the homes?

TM: No, as you know it is very difficult to get into a Russian home, and I think to a large extent this is due to the embarrassment as you all know. The—it is quite customary for two or three families to share one bathroom and one kitchen and it is only in the new apartments which are going up all around the big cities that a family can have its own kitchen and its own bathroom. And these are some of the embarrassments and pressures on living standards.

YA: Now I know and I'm sure many of our viewers know that Russians are building apartments, houses, did you go to any of them?

TM: Yes we made a point of walking right up to them and I may have said this last time but the construction of the apartment buildings was amazingly inadequate, and cruel. You saw women on the scaffolding doing the job, the blocks, building the, filling in with blocks and you have a feeling that the apartments are going to need repair very very quickly.

YA: Yeah, now we can guess now since we can't go to the home we can estimate that the standard of living is, as far as housing is concerned, is very difficult except the lucky ones which are so few.

TM: And not even housing but even such things as refrigerators, for instance, I was in Kiev and there were refrigerators that it takes a year, it still takes a year to get a refrigerator.

YA: Alright now, let's see some more. Did you see any television?

TM: There was a great deal of television, even in the rural areas, even in the [unclear], collective farms, cooperative collective farms, we saw a number of television antennas, and actually sets. They're very small sets, they were [unclear] sets, but they are there. The Russians [unclear].

YA: Yes, can we, in your opinion, your observation, approach and get some idea of their standard of living through the clothing they wear and the prices and so on.

TM: Yes, the kind of suit that you're wearing now, that's approximately 250 dollars, 250-300 dollars, the pair of shoes that you wear would come in the neighborhood of 60, 70, 80 dollars. Now you look at the white shirt, we went to GUM, the big department store in Moscow, and some of us were interested in buying a white shirt. And it just wasn't, they were yellowish; wanted a white shirt, but there just weren't any white shirts.

YA: Yeah, now let's translate this into, because when you said a pair of shoes is 60 dollars, that's right, that's what we found out that way, but what does 60 dollars mean? Did you find out the—what is the income of, let us say a laborer in Russia.

TM: Well, that varies a great deal, from semi-skilled, skilled, professional work and so on. Well some of them go down as low as 80 rubles a month certainly, and they would go all the way up to, well all the way up to in terms of numbers, 150, 200 rubles approximately.

YA: Well, let's say when a person who gets as high as 200 rubles a month—

TM: Which is pretty good pay.

YA: Which is good pay, he pays 60 rubles to buy a pair of shoes—

TM: That's right, and 250 rubles—

YA: Yeah, 250 rubles.

TM: However, however, it must be said that there are cheaper shoes as you well know, and cheaper clothes, which are very poor quality however.

YA: In my, I've had experience only once that a couple of Russians actually bent down and felt my shoes...

TM: And for us you know what was embarrassing for us was at GUM, you know...

YA: Yes

TM: Right in front of GUM, which is across from the Kremlin, some young men were walking up to us and getting hold of all our [unclear], wanting to buy our coats, in the grey market and we were a little wondering, you know, we were self-conscious with people walking up to you trying to offer you money for your coat and your jacket.

YA: Now, did you—about food, I mean again I'm talking about standard of living, could you have any idea about food?

TM: Well food is frankly expensive, better quality of food. I mean there are potatoes and bread which is relatively inexpensive and plentiful. But when you get into the more expensive types of

food and calorie and vitamin count-type of food, you will find that they are expensive, they are hard to get a hold of, there are still these stands in Russia on the streets for fresh vegetables and tomatoes. You see people going to the airplanes with their nets of cucumbers and lettuce and moving there bring them out from the country to Moscow, and no refrigeration units means frequent buying of small quantities. Climbing four flights of stairs after a day's work, and constantly standing in line every night after work and buying these rare tomatoes, lettuce, and this kind of food.

YA: Now one can wonder, how long can the Russians, that is the government of the Soviet Union channel the income of the country to war material or missiles or even going on the moon...

TM: going to Cuba.

YA: [laughs] Yeah, they're going to Cuba, rather than some of these standards of living, that's always a puzzle, yeah.

TM: A very difficult question as you know, it depends on the, well, the propaganda effort can persuade or force the Soviets to accept this set of priorities. Frankly their priorities on military efforts, on scientific efforts, on space exploration, on missile expansion, and they tell their people this, and they say, this is our primary emphasis at this point, and well, butter and bread is not as important as having materials for Russian survival. This is what they are telling their people.



YA: Don't you think then we should also consider the fact, or don't you think it is a fact, that the standard of living, low as it is now, is better than it was when the Czars were...

TM: There's no way, there's no question that in the great mess of Russians, and anyone who has certainly studied this will tell you, that it has certainly improved. However, it must also be said that [it's] still far below not just American standards of living with food, but European standards of living, and the contrast between Helsinki for instance in Finland, when you cross over to Leningrad, is a shocking kind of comparison.

YA: I made this point to show that is one reason there is not too much crumbling and so on because they're better off than they used to be, there is crumbling but not so much...

TM: And you see you know the Russians like to walk on Gorky Street in Moscow towards the Kremlin, and in the evening you'd see literally thousands of people passing past GUM and standing and looking and appraising [laughs]. And they have window shopping in GUM and they have a few down in Gorky Street now, and some of them are very sophisticated. And they just stand ten—ten deep and watch and wonder when they're going to afford some of these things.

YA: Alright now let's go to some subject that I've been waiting to get—for us to get to because that is really your line, your specialty, and that is government and political science. What

observation, I'm sure [you] went to study this especially the legal situation, but before you talk about the law aspect of Russia, tell us about the government of Russia.

TM: Well, in very brief outline just a minute or two...

YA: Yeah I think it's good for us to know.

TM: The thing that is unique about the Soviet government that needs to be stressed is the fact that the power, the real power of society lies in the hands of the Communist Party. And that the governmental apparatus really is merely an administrative machinery to implement the wishes and the policies that the Party lays down. In terms of structure you have two parallel pyramids, you might say. One is the governmental machinery, and next to it is the party machinery. And the party will instruct each layer of governmental apparatus in what ought to be the key policies, the measures, that this layer of government is to carry into execution. So you have for instance on the governmental layer you have local Soviets, that's sort of a term Soviet Union, so it's a council, local councils, city Soviets, what we would call county Soviets, you might say state Soviets, and then the Union Soviet of the Soviet of nationality which is a bicameral structure, the soviet nationality, and the soviet of the Union. This is one hierarchy, the governmental machinery. Next to it, which is now, as I said a moment ago, the key, power center is the Party hierarchy. Because on every level corresponding to the government machinery you have party cells, party organizational units, you have a cell in the local plants, cell in the local apartment building. You have a cell, a city organization, city party organization, the district party

organization, the autonomous republic party organization, the union republic party organization, and at this point it might be emphasized again the Soviet Union is made up of 16 union republics, sort of a technically a federal union, but in effect the key decision—the key decisions in economics, the key decision on foreign policy, on military policy, on internal security, on justice, in the field of education, science, the key decisions are all made from the center, from Moscow, and emanate from Moscow and it's a difficult circle out into the union republics, 16 union republics and the autonomous republics, international regions and districts. The power as I said lay in the—lies, from the beginning of the stage, lay in the hands of the Communist Party, [a] small group, 7 and a half, 8 million people, but highly committed, disciplined, devoted, carefully watched, and carefully watching party functionaries, to whom the party is a way of life. Who are convinced that communism as pronounced in its modern day by Khrushchev is the way in which their society can transform their way of life into what they consider to be the ideal state in which government eventually would disappear...

YA: Now, may I ask a question that may be puzzling to some of our viewers because some of my students have asked me this, sometimes Mr. Khrushchev is called Chairman Khrushchev and sometimes he is called Premier Khrushchev, now could you delineate these things for us?

TM: Well, as you know the chairman of the presidium of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and in that capacity he is—this is really his key policy making function because the central committee, this is where the power resides, not only the central committee but the executive committee of the central committee which is called a presidium, so he is chairman of

the presidium of the central committee of the Communist party of the Soviet Union, is the final authority on that of public policy. In the western world, it is the premier, the prime minister, who sets policy. In Russia, it is the premier, it is the presiding officer of the presidium who sets policy. And this is where you get...

YA: In the person of Krushchev you have the...

TM: You have two functions, really.

YA: Yeah the way you explained that the party is here, government is here, Khrushchev is also chairman of the party and premier of the government.

TM: And to confuse us a little further, each pyramid, at the top, has a presidium. There's a presidium of the Communist party of which Khrushchev is chairman, there's a presidium of the Soviet Union to speak of which Khrushchev is premier.

YA: The other one we call cabinet here.

TM: We would call cabinet but the power, the cabinet is the implementing agency. In Russia the government is the implement agency, policies are made by the party.

YA: Now, ask another question about government: in these Soviets, that is different...

TM: Very little [unclear].

YA: No no I mean the federal union, they have also presidium of their own, no?

TM: They have presidiums, they have the same kind of hierarchy of governmental pyramids and party pyramids corresponding and incidentally these pyramids involve thousands of people and there's very little doubt that one of the objectives of Soviets on every level of governmental organization and the corresponding party council on every level of governmental organization are designed to give a great many of people a sense of involvement. In reality most of them sit there and ratify the decisions which come from the higher level down. As a matter of fact they are really instructed by the higher level to carry out the policies that the higher level has handed down from the [unclear] committee down the hierarchy.

YA: All right I don't want to spend any more time on this but I thought it would be important for us to get the picture. Now we go to the subject for which you really were interested to go to Soviet Union. I know that you made preparations to see if you could get into any of the courts and study some of the legal system, now what was the benefit of your observation in that?

TM: The courts, it is very different to attend a trial in the Soviet Union. The reasons are complex, part of them I don't know that they feel that the foreigners or outsiders should not participate in this process. But finally after a lot of arrangements I was able to get into a trial.

It's an interesting story as you know, the Soviets are very proud of the fact that their crime, so their peoples tell us [unclear] in a media of communication tell us, that crime has largely disappeared in the Soviet Union and western world, what do you mean is questioning that crime has disappeared here in the rest of the world crime seems to be on the increase, why should crime be on a decrease in the Soviet Union?

Well, this is an ideological point, that of basic political thought. The Soviets have interpreted crime to be a characteristic or consequence of the social order. In other words, a capitalistic system is the cause of crime in a large sense. Capitalism causes crime. All right, capitalism having disappeared in the Soviet Union, socialism having arrived, then crime must disappear, because crime, having been explained in terms of the capitalistic motivation.

But now, this isn't quite as simple. To give you an illustration of how Soviet statistics don't always reflect the reality. Let me tell you the one little trial I attended. I asked for the court and on the calendar was the charge of hooliganism. Well, I thought hooliganism may have been a man picked up a rock and threw it through the window or assaulted somebody or pushed somebody or maybe vandalism this is what hooliganism means in the general sense. And well we went to the trial and the accused was defending himself on the charge and he had just some items of the charge, oh, he assaulted a woman, he threatened her, he blackmailed her, he assaulted another woman, he broke every window in her apartment, he, oh there were a number of other things, and the whole thing was called hooliganism. Well, in an Anglo-American court the woman would have had half a dozen charges against her—I mean the man would have had a half a dozen charges against him. Now the interesting thing is I asked my guide and interpreter, "Where is the prosecutor?" We could see the people's judge sitting in front, there were the

assessor, two assessors, one to the right, one to the left, and they must vote by a majority decision, 2 out of 3, and in fact it's always 3 out of 3. There was the defense council, and no prosecutor! So she turned around to one of the accompanying judges, one of the judges from the municipal court was accompanying us, and he said, "Oh", he said, "these charges are not important enough for the prosecutor to appear." So here was a man accused of assault and battery and blackmail and a few other little things, and the prosecutor didn't think it was important enough. In effect what happened was, that the accu—that the women who were assaulted and who became the plaintiffs in the case, and it became a civil suit, in effect the public, not participating in the suit in the United States to use a comparison, the district attorney would be the prosecuting attorney, for the crime that the man was charged with a crime of the people versus [unclear]. But in this case it was Yurikov versus [unclear], and the public, the USSR, got into the prosecuting position. Now on the [unclear] as you would say, on the statistics of this particular day's court, this was a charge of hooliganism, hooliganism was not a crime, so you don't carry this as a criminal charge. As a matter of fact, the sentence discretion is enormous in the Russian judge. It goes, I asked the judge afterwards, I said now, how do you sentence a man like this? Well, he said, we have a code and he went to the door and a drawer—I mean desk, and he pulled out the drawer and there was a little blue book. This was the code.

YA: That was [unknown].

TM: That was his library. As a matter of fact I asked him, where is your library, and my guide tried to interpret this, the library, we had an awful time trying to—what do you need a library

for? In a courtroom or in a judge's chamber, you see this is a code country rather than a common law country, so he turned to the page until he found hooliganism. 30 days to 6 years. And he then applied and then the judge is given discretion to handle this particular kind of case as he sees fit. And I asked him about penal procedures, a penal procedure is very quick in Russia, it takes only a week or two weeks to have a penal procedure. Well one of the reasons is that there is no permanent complete record taken of the trial, only a few remarks are taken down. The folder is very thin. The judgement, the judges do not write an opinion. The judges fill out a form, so because of the filling out of the form, no formal word by word record taken, a very informal procedure in the courtroom, the whole folder is very quickly transferrable to the next court and an appeal can be held. When in American law there would be many deaths considering the procedural informalities which characterize the trial.

YA: Now, let me ask you a question. Were the women present there, in the court?

TM: Oh yes, the women were the plaintiffs.

YA: Did this man have a lawyer?

TM: Oh yes, he had a lawyer and the lawyer was participating. As a matter of fact everybody participated at the same time for a while and got a little informal there and the judge had to bang his gavel and establish order, and all this was a very [unclear].



YA: All right, well there was no jury.

TM: No jury. The two assessors serve as a sort of a—the people's conscience, along with a judge. You see this is a compromise in the system.

YA: Now were the judges in any robe...

TM: No they wore business suits. The judge was a former tool and die maker who took evening courses in judicial procedure. He was injured during the war, and he took courses in judicial procedure. The assessors had a six week course in jurisprudence, and that was their total legal education, it's all that [they] had, six weeks course. And the two, plus the judge, had enormous discretion, because the court in which I happen to find myself, a court, a people's court, can handle sentences, and the crimes up to life. And so this is the district court, so to speak, of the Soviet Union, enormous power.

YA: Yeah, and now we have about three and a half minutes, so I'd like you to tell us something about education, did you have any chance to observe...

TM: Well, you know I was there during the summer, the year was not in session, so we went to the University, we talked to some of the admissions, education is their pride. Since we have little time and we want to get to some other things, I just want to say this: every Russian goes to some kind of a school. Day school, evening school, summer institute, special institute, correspondence

courses, they all go to school. They have an enormous quest for knowledge. If there's one impression I had in the Soviet Union, education is king. Most of it [is] however vocational education, specialized skill training, rather than what we would call liberal arts education. Not philosophical education, just precise education, for a particular vocation.

YA: All right, do you have any odds and ends, interesting experiences?

TM: Oh, I have one experience that I'd love to tell you. We were at Leningrad and when you go to Russia you have to see operettas and plays and those of the sort. We went to Leningrad and we saw *Silvia*, which was a beautiful operetta, beautifully done, and we sat in the first row, and I'll never forget this. Next to me sat a Russian lady, a very heavy Russian lady, 5 by 5 or something like this, and she was just fascinated by it. She had a babushka on, you know, she had a brown, kind of a dirty brown wrapping, you know there isn't much packaging in Russia that's the problem, a dirty brown bag. And she pulled a plum out of that dirty brown bag, and she was chewing on that plum in the one hand, in the other hand she had operetta glasses, I mean the glass to watch the operetta. And it was—she was all absorbed between chewing and watching, and I thought to myself this is really proletarian culture. Ten years ago the lady would probably never have gotten even close to the place, and here [she] is chewing the plum and she had an enormously wonderful time, and I frankly I was watching her more than I was watching *Silvia*.

YA: I think that's very interesting that the culture is for everyone.

TM: Oh yes. Oh there's one other thing that I want to tell you and that's the bus story. I—this has little to do with the law, too. One day I was riding the bus, and you know how they operate, put your money in, there's no conductor, the conductor is driving only not a driver and conductor, so you put your money in, you sit down. Well one day when I was on the bus, suddenly a lady comes up, an inspector, uniform, big lady, comes up to one of the men, young men, he didn't have a ticket. She stood in front of the man, and gave him a terrible tongue-lashing. I've never heard—I don't speak Russian fluently but I tell you I really heard something there. The whole bus started looking at this poor guy, everybody looking at him. I kind of felt sorry for him, she took his passport and a fifty [unclear] penalty, but that was not all! I found out subsequently from my guide, his picture will be taken, his picture will be displayed in his place of work, and underneath will be said, "This young man cheated the public transportation system."

YA: Yeah that's very interesting, I'm sorry our time is up, and we want to thank you. Next week we shall be—I shall have another guest, Dr. Fia Zyep [sp?] , and we shall be talking about the Middle East. So we shall see you then, next week. Until then, good night.

[singing]

Radio announcer: Tonight's guest on Macalester at Home and Abroad was Dr. G. Theodore Mitau. Next Wednesday at 8:30, Dr. Yahya Armajani will present another view of the Macalester program of International Studies.

[orchestral music]

Tomorrow night at 8:30 the Private College Hour returns. Carleton College in Northfield will present the celebrated collegian string quartet, under the direction of Dr. Harry Nordstrom, and at 7:30 tomorrow evening the Private College Hour presents Area Study of the Far East, with Dr. G.W.C. Ross of the College of St. Thomas, discussing China through the 18th century.