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Can citizens solve what leaders could not?

At about the time President Ronald Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev were talking in Iceland, other talk about Soviet-American relations was taking place closer to home.

On Thursdays at 7 p.m., Paul Roley, a history professor at Western Washington University, gives lectures on the Soviet Union at the social hall in the Cornwall Park Church of God, 3210 Meridian St. Last Thursday about 60 people attended.

On Saturday, about 100 people gathered at a home in Bellevue where the headquarters for the Center for Soviet-American Dialogue is located. They dined and chatted with four visitors from the Soviet Union, a government official, a cancer researcher, an educator and a film director.

Little more seems to have been accomplished in Iceland than was accomplished at the Church of God or at the reception in Bellevue. Maybe less. Even so, the network brass seemed to think it worthy of bulletins that interrupted telecasts of football and baseball games.

People who telephoned networks to complain about the interruptions have priorities that are askew. But so do the network brass. They decided it was important to telecast bulletins when nothing much happened, and to act as if those bulletins were urgent.

Maybe it had to do with how much had been invested. Only 160 people attended Roley's lecture and the reception in Bellevue. Many more re-

Perspective

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porters than that covered the summit in Iceland, and it cost more, lots more.

That's probably why reporters decided the summit was historic, even though nothing much happened. If that much money and effort was expended covering the summit, it must have been historic.

President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev were trying to agree on ways that the number of nuclear weapons each country has pointed at the other might be reduced.

In many ways, that's what the people at the reception in Bellevue and who attended Roley's lecture are trying to do.

The Center for Soviet-American Dialogue has been formed by a group of people who have decided government officials such as Reagan and Gorbachev and other diplomats aren't doing as much as they should to mitigate tensions and end the proliferation of nuclear arms. So maybe "citizen diplomats" — ordinary citizens who want to try to get along and eliminate the need for nuclear arse-

nals — can do better.

Roley said he is conducting his weekly lectures as an "antidote" to "citizen diplomacy." His first lecture dealt with Russian history. Last Thursday he lectured on Marxism and Leninism. This week he will lecture on the communist revolution that took place in 1917 in the Soviet Union. The self-proclaimed "citizen diplomats," Roley suggested, are pie-in-the-sky idealists who are ignoring the reality of Soviet intentions. They are, he contends, determined to conquer capitalism, and will stop at nothing to succeed.

The Soviet officials who were at the reception in Bellevue Saturday seemed to disagree.

"Why can't we try to get along, even though there are differences between us?" asked Valerie Zhikharev, an official in the international relations department of the Soviet Peace Committee.

He asked the question during a conversation before dinner.

During the program after dinner, Stanislav Rostotskii, a 64-year-old film director who works at the Moscow Central Studio for Youth and Children and is vice president of the Soviet Peace Committee, told of being a 19-year-old sergeant in the Soviet army when the Soviets entered World War II in 1941.

"I was born in 1922," he said. "Of Soviet people born in 1922, only three out of 100 are still living."

The impact of World War II on his generation, Rostotskii said, has

made him aware of how much war can cost.

Some Americans might be skeptical about whether the Soviets designate "citizen diplomats" as emissaries to this country or to host "citizen diplomats" from the United States who visit the Soviet Union.

On the ride back to Bellingham Saturday night, most of us agreed that the people we had met probably were members of the communist party, and not "ordinary citizens."

I understand why some people scoff at "citizen diplomats" as being, at best, naive.

But I cannot be convinced that Rostotskii, member of the Communist Party though he may be, is not sincere about the emotions he has been left with because of what World War II did to his generation. Or that Zhikharev, member of the Communist Party though he may be, is so cynical that he believes "citizen diplomacy" is a way to help erode capitalism and overthrow the United States.

Maybe that's naive, but I cannot be convinced that if enough people reach out to enough other people there isn't a chance that some good might come from it.

There's as much of a chance that good might come from it as there is that it's likely to come from the summit at Iceland, or has come from "summits" world leaders and diplomats have held down through the centuries.

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