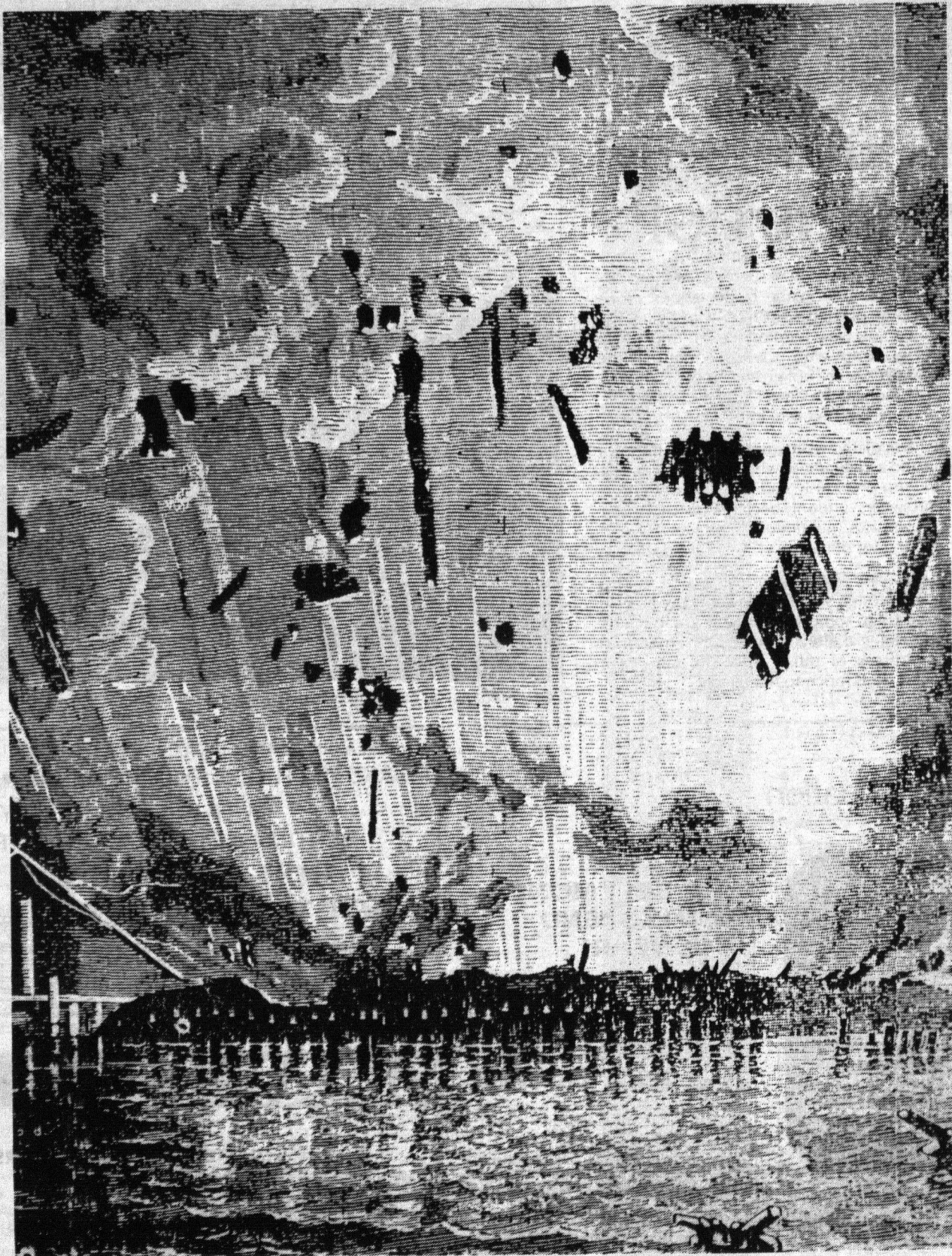


Peace: A true Soviet plot?

by Heidi Harley
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North Americans may regard the Soviet government's recent attempts to resume peace talks as a public relations aimed at improving the Soviet image in the West.

But Canadian peace activists, returning from a Soviet-sponsored trip to Russia, attribute the positive attitude towards peace to the government-sanctioned Central Peace Committee.

David Thompson, a peace activist from St. John's, Newfoundland, was one of ten Canadian delegates to take part in the peace tour, all expenses paid by the Central Peace Committee, the government-sanctioned national peace organization. Thompson was selected from the membership of the Canadian Peace Alliance, a national umbrella group that includes over 350 grassroots peace groups and their affiliates across the country.

The delegates arrived in the small town of Petrosvosk on May 9, the USSR equivalent of North American Armistice Day. The day marks the end of World War Two, known to Russians as "The Great Patriotic War".

"It wasn't anything like Armistice Day here, where one might see an ad in the newspaper (commemorating the day). It was something the whole town got involved in. There were banners everywhere reading 'PEACE - LABOUR - MAY' but nowhere did it say 'VICTORY,'" said Thompson.



Thompson said the town's small size was an asset to the Canadian delegates because it gave them an opportunity to meet the Soviet people and talk to them about their concept of peace.

"Had we been sent to Leningrad with twenty other delegates, we wouldn't have received much attention. In Petrosvosk, we were a rarity — they had never seen a peace delegation before and we were of great interest to them," said Thompson.

At a rally on a state-run farm, Thompson was surprised to see that about ten per cent of the three thousand member community turned out to hear veterans and their children talk of the horrors of past wars. Thompson doubted that a similar event in St. John's would bring out ten per cent of the population, or 10,000 people.

The rally was the first of many examples of the respect Russians paid to victims and survivors of war.

Thompson said the Russian people hold up their "self-sacrificing" war heroes "as models to emulate", as evidenced by the many shrines and museums devoted to war veterans. However, these heroes were credited with saving their local community