

# Mittens and munitions across the ice cap

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Last Post News Service

MONTREAL — This is the rambling, behind-the-scenes story of how hands-across-the-ocean diplomacy has become mittens across the ice cap.

Or perhaps, hands around the nitecap.

It tells of the great vodka crisis; the escape from Fortress Montreal; demonstrators and the demonstration factory — and how Ivan the Terrible wore scarlet (but no one can tell me Sally Ann wasn't a KGB agent).

Our story begins aboard the Air Canada DC-9 charter lugging 88 members of the world press from Edmonton to Toronto for another look at Alexei Kosygin through the window of his bullet-proof limousine. The captain has just told us he knows we are very tired, have worked very hard, but he is sure the public appreciates our fine coverage very much.

The captain, obviously a man of rare judgement, was given a rousing ovation. But the suspicion still lurked that he was just being a nice guy because of the crisis.

The Great Vodka Crisis was precipitated by a state of ap-

prehended sleep. When one is covering a story with the truncheon tension of the Kosygin tour, to sleep is to conspire against one's newspaper. Sleepers become Trotskyite revisionists.

Anyway, after Kosygin's visit with the mayor of Montreal and the tumultuous reception he got from crowds of Montreal Police, Quebec Provincial Police, the RCMP and the Army, it was time to slip out of the city unobtrusively.

A 37-car motorcade (give or take 100) escorted by all the Harley-Davidson motorcycles produced in the last 17 years, was provided for the occasion. And, to throw everyone off the scent, a helicopter flew overhead.

At the airport, the Soviet leader boarded Canada's answer to Air Force One. It's for our own President — a Canadian Forces 707, a great white bird of power, sleek with red lines swirling down its fuselage, appointed with restrained elegance inside and equipped with the latest in communications equipment.

The press sleepwalked to their DC-9. Into the air and soon the tinkle of ice cubes sounded the arrival of breakfast.

To say that the press followed take-off instructions precisely would be to sensationalize, but everyone gave it the old college try, putting their cigarettes in an upright position and extinguishing their belts.

Many belts were extinguished before the bar trolley was halfway up the aisle. In mid-air and halfway up the aisle, the vodka ran out and the bar trolley hadn't even reached the Soviet journalists.

This was a calamitous affront. A major international crisis was in the offing. So, in an unparalleled show of solidarity with their Soviet comrades, a petition was drawn up by a group of Canadians. ("Solidarity damned," grumped a Canuck later, "I was thirsty.")

The petition came like a voice from the Siberian tundra, denouncing the government and its state capitalistic airline as tools (yea, trowels) of the Bay Street Establishment. We made the ultimate threat — to go CP Air and failing that, Aeroflot.

Word soon flashed to the Air Canada public relations man, Hugh (Running Dog) Riopelle and the bark was heard all the way to

Winnipeg. The refuelling stop brought enough Vodka aboard to float the Alexandre Pushkin.

Before landing in Vancouver, Hugh (Comrade) Riopelle was given an ovation. Flushed with victorious spirits, he was last seen caroling the Air Canada jingle to the tune of the Internationale.

The Vancouver newspapers trumpeted that the heaviest security ever to be laid on for a visiting dignitary was waiting in the wings. (The heaviest security, in fact, since the last Grey Cup game.)

So, when two writers strolled through the lobby of the Hotel Vancouver, they could not be fooled.

Obviously the two grey-haired little old ladies wearing the uniforms of the Salvation Army were KGB agents (admittedly cleverly disguised). Craftily, they denied it.

But there was no mistaking Ivan the Terrible. Ivan was the nickname given to a skyscraper of an agent who was constantly breathing down Premier Kosygin's back. He stood six-six with black eyebrows and mean eyes and the look of a James Bond agent oozing from every pore.

That should have been a dead giveaway. "Meet," someone said later, introducing the agent, "Sauve

of the Royal Mounted..."

Vancouver is a strange city: "Kosygin praises capitalists" was the banner headline in the Sunday Sun. It turned out that the premier had made a favorable comment on the efficiency of the MacMillan-Bloedel operation.

Vancouver demonstrators are like no other. Perhaps they were expecting another Gastown riot and wanted to ensure the press would be there. Anyway, when several hundred gathered in the courthouse square to wail about Alexei and rejoice the coming of Zion, they set up a press table, complete with a big cardboard sign that said: "Press".

Later, when journalists into their 18th straight hour of coverage, retired inside the hotel for a drink in the Highlogger Bar, the demonstrators came right along. While Scotch tinkled on the rocks in the bar and RCMP plainclothesmen relaxed in leather chesterfields around the lobby, some 150 demonstrators did their thing on the deep green carpet.

Often through the tour, journalists wondered aloud where all the demonstrators came from. (Journalists often wonder aloud).

The answer came in wonderful Edmonton, a city that at first glance seems to be a cross between Vancouver and Inuvik. "Now we're going to visit," said the PR man at Sherritt Industries, "Our demonstration factory."

In Toronto, the only item missing at the Inn On The Park Hotel where the Premier stayed was a moat. And when the Bell operators walked out as part of a strike in eastern Canada, Metro police constables were slapped on the switchboard.

"I'm glad you know what you're doing," said one constable after a reporter had rhymed off the information for a long-distance call, "because I sure as hell don't..."

The farewell scene at Toronto International Airport was touching, especially for two Moscow photographers. As Kosygin's Iluyshin jet gunned its engines in the farewell roar and lifted off for Cuba, the two swept onto the tarmac aboard an Army staff car.

It seems there had been much vodka the night before.

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