Scanning the broad implication of Sharp's trip to Soviet Union

By Henry F. Heald

Canada and the Soviet Union operate under two very different economic and political systems. Therefore exchange visits at high ministerial level are necessary not to exchange pleasantries about areas of agreement but to discuss seriously the areas of disagreement in the hope of better understanding each other's point of view.

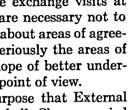
That was the purpose that External Affairs Minister Mitchell Sharp carried with him on his visit to the Soviet Union from November 18 to 24 - his first visit to that country in 18 years and his first as a member of the Cabinet.

Mr. Sharp first visited Moscow in 1955, when he was Deputy Minister of Trade. He accompanied the then Secretary of State for External Affairs, Lester B. Pearson. The result of that meeting was the first Canada-Soviet trade agreement, signed in 1956.

Progress in international relations is measured in inches - an exchange agreement here, a protocol there, a wheat sale, a hockey tournament, a prime ministerial visit. Add them all together since 1956 and, while they represent a substantial change in Canada-Soviet relations, they can hardly be called a breakthrough. The Soviet Union remains a great, brooding, militarized giant under totalitarian rule.

This article will not attempt to review the increasing tempo of contacts between Canada and the Soviet Union over the last few years, culminating in the visit to Canada of Premier Alexei Kosygin and the visit of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to the U.S.S.R. in 1971. Some may prefer to

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regard the 1972 hockey series as the mination. (See International Perspect January-February and November-Dec ber 1972).

Despite the "upbeat" in inter tions, immigration from the Soviet Un remains a mere trickle, trade is sparse Canada is still viewed as part of the W ern camp – a spokesman in world af for NATO and the United States. The are signs of change in all those areas, not enough yet to become excited aborcretar

Mr. Sharp's recent visit was a moditchel less routine call, such as takes place aminister most nations. Soviet Foreign Ministerleir for drei Gromyko visited Canada in 1969, loscow Mr. Sharp was invited to return the oviet' pliment. He would have gone much so 73. A except for the intervention of such evanada as the FLQ crisis in 1970, a federal elec and the emergence of a minority gov ment. Mr. Gromyko and Mr. Sharp ime in met at the United Nations meeting remlin New York and other international gaterman ów ext ings in the interim.

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Red-carpet treatment

The Russians gave Mr. Sharp a slighter to higher class of red-carpet treatment ination was expected for such a visit, and no out a is quite certain why. A formal call President Nikolai Podgorny was all discus protocol required, but Mr. Sharp was ation flown down to the Black Sea resortessed Pitsunda for intensive talks with Preduals Kosygin. The Soviet press covered ent or every move and his arrival in Moscowincern the beginning of his talks with id its Gromyko were filmed for television. ith the

Mr. Sharp said that the fact hear th got to see both President Podgor y ace-k Premier Kosygin was an indication a me the Soviet Union attached consider a rep importance to good relations with Japoc. A and that the Russians wanted to wharp t stand more about the Canadian vie ws. me to number of matters. It could indicate to hat they realize Canada speaks for itse same world affairs and not as an echo of ing United States.

