

Scanning the broad implications 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

regard the 1972 hockey series as the culmination. (See *International Perspectives* January-February and November-December 1972).

Despite the "upbeat" in international relations, immigration from the Soviet Union remains a mere trickle, trade is sparse. Canada is still viewed as part of the Western camp — a spokesman in world affairs for NATO and the United States. There are signs of change in all those areas, not enough yet to become excited about.

Mr. Sharp's recent visit was a most routine call, such as takes place among most nations. Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko visited Canada in 1969. Mr. Sharp was invited to return the compliment. He would have gone much sooner except for the intervention of such events as the FLQ crisis in 1970, a federal election and the emergence of a minority government. Mr. Gromyko and Mr. Sharp met at the United Nations meeting in New York and other international gatherings in the interim.

Red-carpet treatment

The Russians gave Mr. Sharp a higher class of red-carpet treatment than was expected for such a visit, and it is quite certain why. A formal call by President Nikolai Podgorny was all that was required, but Mr. Sharp was flown down to the Black Sea resort of Pitsunda for intensive talks with Premier Kosygin. The Soviet press covered every move and his arrival in Moscow the beginning of his talks with Gromyko were filmed for television.

Mr. Sharp said that the fact that he got to see both President Podgorny and Premier Kosygin was an indication that the Soviet Union attached considerable importance to good relations with Canada and that the Russians wanted to understand more about the Canadian views on a number of matters. It could indicate they realize Canada speaks for itself in world affairs and not as an echo of the United States.



Mr. Heald has been a member of The Ottawa Journal's Ottawa parliamentary bureau for five years and its foreign affairs specialist. He accompanied Mr. Sharp on his November trip to the Soviet Union, and had previously covered sessions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Brussels. He is a former city editor of the Welland, Ontario, Evening Tribune. The views expressed in this article are those of Mr. Heald.