

Gorbachov meets with the Trust in Canada

by Matthew Guice

With his popularity at an all-time low—only 15% approval in recent polls, lower than any sitting postwar prime minister—Brian Mulroney hosted Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov from May 27-28. The *Ottawa Sun* editorialized that “Gorby is closer to being his country’s Brian Mulroney,” but other than such mild jibes, the Canadian news media tried to maintain the myth of the “beleaguered democratizer” Gorbachov, focusing on the public agenda of his 29-hour visit: pollution in the Arctic, the changes in NATO, disarmament, German reunification, and Canadian wheat sales to Russia.

Coming on the two days prior to his summit with Bush, this was Gorbachov’s second visit to Canada, but his first since his rise to head of state. Back in 1983, as a new Politburo member, Gorbachov led a delegation from the Supreme Soviet, visiting with then-Agriculture Minister Eugene Whelan, making splashy headlines, speaking to a parliamentary committee, and fielding questions on Afghanistan. That first trip was important for building Gorbachov’s image as a “new breed” Soviet politician. It was also on this trip that Gorbachov met Aleksander Yakovlev, who was then finishing a term as ambassador to Canada. Yakovlev now heads the Soviet Communist Party’s propaganda department.

Why Canada?

Writing in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* on May 29, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s Soviet watcher Leonid Maximenkov noted, “Soviet leaders have never stopped off to visit someone else en route to a session with a U.S. leader,” and raised the question of why this time it should be different. Maximenkov postulated that “Canada is something of a lucky talisman in Soviet foreign policy,” and cited Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s 1982 visit to Moscow a year prior to Richard Nixon’s, and other Canadian friendship connections. Other explanations offered by press pundits, such as “so that Gorbachov can get over jet lag before meeting Bush,” were just as thin.

Canada’s important role in the Anglo-Soviet Trust explains better. Minister of External Affairs Joe Clark is busily promoting the policy of including Russia in the Houston summit of the Group of Seven this July, if only as an observer. He has also been downplaying continued Soviet Nuclear Testing in the Arctic by emphasizing the “environmental issues in that shared region,” while expending greater energy

pushing for changes in NATO. “Security must become cooperative, rather than competitive,” he said recently. “Even more than in the past, NATO must embrace security through arms control with as much vigor as it has pursued security through armament.”

One television commentator went so far as to interpret the remarks of Prime Minister Mulroney on Gorbachov’s departure as an effort “to make NATO a more and more political organization which could satisfy the security interests of the Soviets.”

Other Soviet interests were catered to as well. Over the past 15 years Canada has been Russia’s largest grain supplier, averaging 16 million metric tons per year: 26.8% of Soviet imports, and 75% of Canada’s exports. No figures have been released yet, but in order to compete with European and U.S. grain sales it was expected that more favorable terms of trade would be offered to get Gorbachov to renew the five-year contract, at whatever cost to Canadian farmers or taxpayers. Other deals have been pushed, including some 34 joint ventures between Russia and Canadian firms and the Reichmann family’s office tower in Moscow, recently personally endorsed by Gorbachov.

Under the cover of a visit to Ray Hnatyshyn, Canada’s governor-general, Gorbachov requested private meetings with Eugene Whelan and Pierre Trudeau, the content of which are still unknown.

Anti-bolshevik resistance in the streets

As Gorbachov was meeting with Mulroney and with Trudeau, over 1,000 demonstrators from the Baltic States, Vietnam, Poland, and Ukraine (the latter with a banner reading “Gorbachov Beware: Ukraine Is Rising!”), gathered on the nearby streets, passing around leaflets containing U.S. political prisoner Lyndon LaRouche’s call to recognize Lithuania. Another leaflet attacked Mr. Trust himself, Armand Hammer, for polluting Lithuania and raping its environment with his Occidental Petroleum. When Gorbachov entered his limousine to leave for the airport, none seemed inclined to kiss the hem of his garment, and Gorbachov left rapidly, skipping the opportunity to “press the flesh” in a fashion rather different from that he’d exhibited for the cameras in a carefully stage-managed romp the day before.

Arriving at the airport, Gorbachov’s joint press conference with Mulroney was marked mainly by a question regarding Lithuania. Mulroney—with comparisons to the possible secession of Quebec hanging over his head—ducked the question by refusing to comment on a matter internal to the Soviet Union. Gorbachov launched into a hardline tirade with his fabled smile only marginally in place, calling the Lithuanian government’s actions “thief-like,” and the Lithuanians “political adventurers” who “made use of national feelings . . . in order to realize their—as yet unrealized—political ambitions.” Gorbachov hinted that he was under pressure to “apply some very, very hard measures.”