

October 25, 1944

**Letter No. 373 from L.D. Wilgress, Canadian
Embassy, Moscow, to the Secretary of State for
External Affairs, W.L. Mackenzie King**

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SECRETMoscow,
October 25th 1944No. 373

Sir,

With further reference to my despatch No. 340 of September 30th I have the honour to report that I have received another visit from Mr. Foo Ping-Sheung, the Chinese Ambassador, who called at the Embassy on October 21st. I took advantage of this opportunity to ask him further questions about the removal from Sinkiang of General Sheng Shih-tsai, the former Chairman of the Provincial Government of Sinkiang and Commissioner of the Sinkiang Frontier Defence.

2. I introduced the subject by asking Mr. Foo if he could give me the reasons why the Soviet Government had been so much opposed to Governor Sheng. He replied by stating it was due chiefly to his arbitrary and high-handed methods. He had been brusque with Soviet consuls and other Soviet representatives and in general had given the Soviet Government the impression that he was ill-disposed towards the Soviet Union. They also concluded that the Central Government of China was unable to control the actions of Governor Sheng and this was having a very bad effect on Sino-Soviet relations. The series of incidents culminated with the moving by Governor Sheng of his troops up to the borders of Outer Mongolia, when they commenced to round up Kazakhs and were attacked by a Soviet aeroplane (see my telegram No. 108 of April 8th and paragraph 10 of my despatch No. 180 of May 31st).

3. Soviet complaints about the actions of the Governor of Sinkiang became so frequent that in July Mr. Foo recommended to his government that Sheng should be removed. In the meantime the Central Government had moved one army corps of three divisions into Sinkiang. General Chu, the general in command, had been senior to Sheng in Manchuria. For this reason he knew how to deal with him. Sheng did his best to have General Chu move his troops into Urumchi, but the latter was wise enough to keep them stationed outside of the city. The Central Government at all costs wanted to avoid civil war so they still did not feel strong enough to act. However, on August 11th Sheng precipitated matters by arresting a hundred representatives of the Central Government, including the commissioners of education and of public health, and the secretary of Kuomintang Party Provincial headquarters. Fortunately Mr. Chaucer Wu at that time was in Chungking. This compelled the Central Government to act and they moved another army corps of three divisions into Sinkiang, whereupon Sheng agreed to relinquish the governorship and come to Chungking to assume the position of Minister of Agriculture.

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The Right Honourable,
The Secretary of State
for External Affairs,
OTTAWA, Canada

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4. I asked Mr. Foo if Sheng Shih-tsai is regarded as a political figure of importance. He replied that he had a large following in Sinkiang and this was probably the reason why the Generalissimo had given him a ministerial appointment in Chungking. Before going to Sinkiang he had been an officer in the Manchurian army and while he had had a distinguished military career, he only assumed political importance after his appointment as Governor of Sinkiang.

5. The Chinese Ambassador used this incident to illustrate the difficulties facing the Central Government in the war with Japan. He said they were often criticised for keeping inactive a large force of well-equipped troops as a check to the Communists. This force, however, was for the purpose of keeping in check not only the Communists but also a number of war-lords, whose continued support of the Central Government was contingent upon a constant show of strength. Sheng had felt strong enough to disregard the Central Government and this had made it necessary in the midst of renewed activity by the Japanese to move two army corps to Sinkiang to remove the recalcitrant governor and the threat which he involved to harmonious relations with the Soviet Union.

6. Mr. Foo said that the removal of Governor Sheng had greatly pleased the Soviet Government. Only a few days previously they had expressed to him their gratification of the improvement in the Sinkiang situation and had said they felt confident this would bring about satisfactory relations between China and the Soviet Union, the governments of both of the two countries having shown their desire for such satisfactory relations. From the way he spoke I could see that Mr. Foo was feeling very pleased at this lifting of one of his major sources of worry.

7. The Chinese Ambassador was also feeling very elated over the Allied landing in the Philippines which had just been announced. He said it should not be many months now before there was a landing on the South coast of China. When this took place he was sure the Japanese would withdraw all of the forces they could extricate first of all to a line along the Yangtze River and then to the Yellow River line, where they would endeavour to make a determined stand to retain their hold of North China. It was then that the Allies would be able to supply the Chinese armies with the equipment they needed and at last full advantage could be taken of Chinese man-power. Continuing to speak in the optimistic frame of mind his good spirits had engendered, Mr. Foo prophesied that the end of the war would find China with a large army, splendidly equipped with modern weapons by the Allies. This would make China a real power and a force to be reckoned with. He was sure this was an additional reason why the Soviet Union desired satisfactory relations with China. With their long lines of communication to the Far East they would not wish to have the risk of a conflict with China when that country had a large well-equipped army.

I have the honour
to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,

ldw/ef

(Sgd.) L.D. Wilgress

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Canadian Embassy,
Moscow,
October 28th, 1944.

Dear Mr. Robertson:

You may be interested to know that Alexis Tolstoi, one of the leading Soviet authors at the present time, has written a drama entitled "Ivan Grozny", which was given its first performance at the Moscow Little Theatre on the 18th instant. Alexis Tolstoi is a collateral descendant of the Great Leo Tolstoi. I have met Alexis Tolstoi on several occasions and he was kind enough to send me an invitation to attend the presentation of his new play. He also sent me an analysis of it, together with an "historical foreward" about which I find it worth reporting.

"Ivan Grozny" is the Russian name for Ivan the Terrible, who acceded to the throne in 1534. Historians of the past represented him as both a hero and a monster. A hero he was during the first part of his reign, when his conquest of Kazan and Astrakhan ensured the safety of Russia against the Moslems and the Tatars. A monster he was said to have become as a result of his difficulties with the feudal boyars. Until recently, Russian historians portrayed the second part of his reign as that of a mentally abnormal man, cruel for cruelty's sake.

The thesis of Alexis Tolstoi is that the Russian masses considered Ivan Grozny not as a harsh despot but as a great and austere sovereign. Incidentally, Tolstoi says, the epithet of Grozny, which really means the Formidable, or the Dread, was erroneously translated as the Terrible. And he adds: "The latest investigations of research in Russian historiography prove Ivan IV to have been gifted with surpassing statesmanship, a man of education, of purposeful will, a man dominated by the idea of absolutions which, for that period of history, was a progressive idea."

Art, like everything else, is kept under strict government control in the U.S.S.R, and Alexis Tolstoi could not have resuscitated Ivan IV without the consent, not to say the benediction of the authorities. Another play on "Peter the Great" has also been offered to Soviet audiences recently. Mr. Mayrand, who has a liking for old French books about Russia, has recently found, in government stores, a number of works which might be taken for propaganda for the Tsars. The reason, on the one hand, is that the Soviet authorities do not find this literature as dangerous as before; whereas, on the other hand, the study of great Russian personalities of the past stimulates the nationalism of the masses. This shows the distance which has been covered since the time when everything concerned with the former regime was deemed to be bad and, consequently, condemned.

Yours sincerely,

(signed) L. D. Wilgress

The Right Honourable,
The Secretary of State
for External Affairs,
OTTAWA, Canada.

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