

# Russia voyage is latest Windsor fiasco

by Mark Burdman

The visit of Queen Elizabeth II and Royal Consort Prince Philip to Russia during Oct. 17-20 was supposed to have been a historic occasion, the first-ever visit of a British monarch since the murders of the Romanov czar and his family by the Bolsheviks. Top figures in the powerful "Privy Council" of royal advisers were speaking privately of a new era of Anglo-Russian strategic cooperation around the globe. But things are not working out according to their designs.

On the eve of departure, the Oct. 16 London *Sunday Times* published the latest set of reminiscences from Prince Charles, in the form of extracts from a soon-to-be-published book. Authorized by Charles personally and authored by leading media figure Jonathan Dimbleby, the book contains further details of his bizarre marriage to Princess Diana, including the revelation that he had been forced against his will, by "authoritarian" father Prince Philip, to marry Diana in the first place. This means that the massively promoted 1981 "fairy tale"-like betrothal, witnessed by hundreds of millions of people around the world, was a fraud.

Britain was suddenly rife with discussion that a divorce was in the offing, thereby raising thorny questions about Charles's ability to accede to the throne, given the historical precedent forbidding a divorced man to be king. Intense debates are ongoing in Conservative Party circles about whether Prime Minister John Major should push for a divorce. In the House of Commons, Labour Party MP Paul Flynn scored the monarchy as "discredited and dying."

Then, on Oct. 18, the second book about Diana by her friend Andrew Morton, entitled *Diana: Her New Life*, was previewed in the French magazine *Voici*. Morton quotes Diana about her loveless marriage: "I am the biggest prostitute in the world. They exploited me. They abused me. For years, I was a prisoner of the royal family." Italy's *Corriere della Sera* spoke of a "Diana-Shock" hitting the Windsors; Holland's well-informed *De Telegraaf* spoke of the "nadir of the House of Windsor."

British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd told a British radio interviewer on Oct. 16: "I am worried about the way in which chattering people concerned with headlines and mass circulation do chip away at our institutions in this country, of which the monarchy is perhaps the most important and, in a way, the most vulnerable. . . . I don't believe all this nonsense about a republic knocking on the door or the House of Windsor being besieged like the Romanovs." But, he

added, "I am worried about a sort of knock, knock, knock which has helped to undermine in this country, though not abroad, many of the institutions of this country. We have to stop that."

## A series of no-shows

When the royals arrived in Russia, things only got worse. Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev refused to return to Moscow for the queen's visit. Kozyrev stated that he was angered by the "extremely negative reaction" of Douglas Hurd, who is accompanying the queen, to Kozyrev's diplomatic mediation efforts in the Persian Gulf. Kozyrev chose to stay in New York, to confer with U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher on the Iraqi matter.

Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin was absent both from the Russian delegation meeting the queen at the airport, and from the official banquet at the Kremlin on Oct. 18. Chernomyrdin stayed at his holiday resort in Sochi. On Oct. 18, a Russian media conduit close to the Yeltsin entourage put out a story that Chernomyrdin would be resigning. President Boris Yeltsin personally, as well as his press spokesman, along with Chernomyrdin, denied this.

One expert on Russia said he found the events around Chernomyrdin to be "very weird and disturbing." He said that the impending crisis would be much more on the minds of the Russians than the queen's visit, and many leading Russians would be angry that Her Majesty "had been thrust upon them." Both Britain and Russia were going through parallel processes, in which it was being manifest that "the system doesn't work" in either country.

Another no-show was writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, recently returned from exile, who was too busy "building his dacha" to show up for a reception for dignitaries.

On Oct. 18, Her Majesty and the Royal Consort were scheduled to walk down Red Square. The original plan was that she would mill through cheering crowds. When she arrived, and got out of her limousine, nobody was in sight, except for representatives of the same press whom the Windsors scorn as the "royal rat pack," which has been publicizing the scandals. Then, only a few tourists with foreign passports, mainly from Great Britain, were allowed into the square by security guards. The British press snidely remarked Oct. 19 that at least there was one stray dog in the square, busily sniffing at Lenin's Tomb. As for the rest, a massive security cordon prevented ordinary Russians from entering the square. Russian officials let it be known that the order for the massive security cordon had come from Yeltsin himself.

A forlorn British diplomat told the London *Guardian*: "The arrangements were all finalized. The Duke [of Edinburgh] and Mrs. Yeltsin were to walk down one side, and the queen and Boris down the other. The only problem is there is no one there for her to meet." The *Daily Telegraph* reported that Palace aides "could barely conceal their anger." The London *Independent* labeled it "the Potemkin Walkabout."