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QUOTE FOR THE DAY:

**“There was a great Marxist called Lenin
Who did two or three million men in;
That’s a lot to have done in
But where he did one in
That grand Marxist Stalin did ten in.”
Robert Conquest; collected poems.**

**WITH YOUR TEA- CREAM, SUGAR OR
POLONIUM -210?**

**Yes, Lenin and Stalin are long gone, but their
acolyte, former KGB officer, Vladimir Putin, is
still p’od at Gorbachev for giving up the cause.**

**Never one to forgive and forget, arresting and
bringing to trial enemies of today’s Russia is
just not part of Putin’s playbook. Poison is his**

long preferred modus operandi for dealing with Russia's malcontents.

Last Thursday, Aleksei Navalny, a long time Putin detractor became violently ill on a flight after drinking tea which seems to be a beverage of choice for Putin's assassins. He is barely alive and has been flown to Germany for further treatment. Poisoning people who are flying is a favored tactic, the thinking being that it allows additional time for traces of the drug to dissipate.

"Poison has been a favored tool of Russian intelligence agencies for more than a century. The Soviet Union operated a secret research laboratory to research tasteless and untraceable poisons that were tested on condemned gulag prisoners."

Short of this very serious attempt to kill him, and, it still may, Navalny was given a severe warning in 2017 in the form of a face full of Triarylmethane dye, permanently damaging one of his eyes and turning him temporarily green.

Putin has only been running the show in Russia since 2012, but from his KGB days must have early on become a fan of poison as option number one.

In 2004, another critic Anna Politkovskaya was poisoned by tea on an Aeroflot flight. Not quite potent enough, she survived the poisoning only to be shot dead in her hallway two years later.

Also in 2006, defector, Aleksandr Litvenenko, a former intelligence officer died in a London Hospital after drinking (yep, polonium laced) tea.

Then in 2015- no time to develop intricate poisoning schemes, just had to move quickly on Dissenter Boris Nemtsov- shot to death on a Moscow bridge. Also, in 2015, opposition activist, Vladimir Kara-Murza, fell into a week-long coma after being poisoned on an Aeroflot flight. He wasn't finished with his nine lives and survived yet a second poisoning in 2017.

Rounding out the list are two 2018 incidences, the poisoning of Pyotr Verzilov (tea followed

by coma), but, he survived, as did former intelligence officer who had defected to England, Sergei Skripal, who was nearly killed by a nerve agent.

Of all these assassination attempts, only Litvenenko died from poisoning. Nemtsov and Politkovskaya were shot.

In all these specific individual situations, Putin and company are absolute in their denial of any involvement by the Russian government. Putin can look you right in the eye and tell you white is black without blinking, and the problem is, the world either believes him or, if not, takes no action against him.

While Putin is steadfast in his implausible deniability of these individual cases, his views on traitors and opponents of the government were well articulated in a film clip dating to 2010 in which he said, "Traitors will kick the bucket believe me. Those folks betrayed their friends, their brothers in arms. Whatever they got for it, those thirty pieces of silver they were given, they will choke on them."

Of course poisoning is not a Russian invention of merely 100 years ago, it's been a favored tool since medieval times throughout the world. But, arguably, the most fascinating case also took place in Russia- pre revolution Russia.

Rasputin first met Tsar Nicholas and the Tsarina, Alexandra in 1905. Rasputin had gained a reputation in St Petersburg as a mystic and faith healer. In 1906 he was first asked to pray for Alexei, Alexandra and Nicholas' son who suffered from hemophilia. A critical event occurred in the spring of 1907 when Alexei suffered an internal hemorrhage. Rasputin prayed for him that night and Alexei recovered the next morning.

Then in 1912 Alexei developed a hemorrhage in his thigh and groin and appeared close to death. The Tsarina sent a telegram to Rasputin who was in Siberia. Rasputin wrote back, "God has seen your tears and heard your prayers. Do not grieve. The Little one will not die. Do not let the doctors bother him too much." Miraculously, Alexei survived and the Tsarina

came to believe that Rasputin was essential to Alexei's survival.

As a result, Rasputin gained great favor in the Royal Court and had frequent access to the Tsar and Tsarina. He soon became the object of jealousy, with his enemies accusing him of religious heresy and rape. "He was suspected of exerting undue influence over the Tsar, and was even rumored to be having an affair with the Tsarina."

Over the next several years, as Rasputin's influence over the family continued to grow, so did the list of his enemies. In 1914 he survived a serious knife attack. Then, in 1916 a group of nobles, led by Prince Felix Yusupov, decided that Rasputin had become a threat to the Empire. In December he was lured to a meeting at the Prince's palace.

"Yusupov offered Rasputin tea and cakes which had been laced with cyanide. Rasputin initially refused the cakes, but then began to eat them and to Yusupov's surprise, he did not appear to be affected by the poison. Rasputin then asked for some Madeira wine which had

also been poisoned and drank three glasses, but still showed no signs of distress.”

Seeming immune to the multiple opportunities afforded by the poisons to kill him, Yusupov went to another room, came back with a gun and shot Rasputin in the chest.

Leaving Rasputin for dead, Yusupov went upstairs to rejoin his fellow conspirators. At some point later in the night, Yusupov went back downstairs. Far from dead, Rasputin, leapt to his feet and a huge fight ensued. Rasputin was finally shot and killed in the courtyard by one of the other conspirators.

It would appear from the case of the almost indestructible Rasputin and the recent Russian poisoning attempts, that consideration should be given to reformulating poisons used in Russia, or to reverting to bullets as the method of choice. The Rasputin story and that of the Tsar’s family has been recounted in many books – fascinating reading- suggested, “The Life and Death of Gregori Rasputin” by Andrew Cook (2005).

So, what's with this side trip to affairs most Russian? Simply, to give our readers a break from the pandemic and "peaceful protestors"(not), rioting throughout the U.S.. Don't worry we'll be back to that soon. Having learned a few years back that I am part Russian, I have a rekindled interest in a great country and a problematic leadership.

THE FALL- WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT:

If you thought the last six months have been hard, wait til you see what's coming. Two greatly feared words, "cold weather". So, we've been outdoor dining, walking in the park - it's almost like normal, except for the masks. Then, the cold weather comes in- heat lamps can only do so much. The normal Fall rituals of sports bars, many friends at home, or in person attendance at the multitude of football games - gone. We now step into the huge vacuum created by the destruction of our typical Fall activities - a lot of disquieting days ahead. Be brave- be well.

**Your faithful scribe,
PB**

