

Soviets benefit from Belgian terror wave

by P. Marnix

During October, Belgium was rocked by an explosion of terrorist incidents. Five bombs went off early in the month, ripping through the offices of international corporations with various NATO contracts, and the offices of two conservative Belgian parties, the Liberals and the Christian Democrats. The bombs, containing 10 to 22 pounds of explosives, exploded at the Brussels headquarters of Honeywell, Litton, and the West German MAN-Trucks corporation. On Oct. 15, the Centre Paul Hymans, a Brussels think tank associated with the Liberal Party, was bombed, followed a few days later by the Christian Democratic party office in Ghent.

The incidents coincided with the Oct. 12 attempt in Brighton, England, to blow up the entire British Cabinet, and with the growing instability in West Germany, as gains by the fascist Green Party raised the specter of a new German government under Soviet domination. Belgium too is in a period of great political uncertainty, with new elections expected during the first half of 1985, and "D-Day" approaching for the deployment of 48 American cruise missiles.

This political-strategic context, plus the fact that the bombings were aimed at targets directly or indirectly related to NATO and other military interests, suggest that the current developments are a trial run for a full-scale spetsnaz (Soviet special commando force) operation for the terrorist destruction of military targets and NATO facilities in Brussels.

Action Directe in Belgium

The bombings were all claimed by the Cellules Communistes Combattantes (CCC—Fighting Communist Cells), known to enjoy the support of the Belgian logistical networks of the French terrorist organization Action Directe. For a decade, Action Directe has had safehouses and weapons-supply routes in Belgium, a joint venture with the group around former Algerian head of state Ahmed Ben Bella, and a product of the merging of Islamic fundamentalism and the leftovers of the Communist and Third Worldist "Tricontinental."

The Belgian government has launched a large-scale operation, code-named "Mammouth," directed at the leftist circles which have traditionally sponsored terrorism. No fewer than 120 interrogations were carried out on Oct. 19,

including of members of the "Committee for the Defense of West German Political Prisoners," the printing houses associated with various ultra-left grouplets ("Pour," "Mouvement du 22 Mars"), as well as the printing house of Action Directe. Among those interrogated were the head of the Action Directe printing shop, several anti-nuclear environmentalists belonging to the "Zeebrugge Group," members of the violent Maoist organization Amada ("All the Power to the Workers"), and Ronald Augustin, a former member of the German Red Army Fraction (Baader-Meinhof gang). Searches were also carried out at the Charleroi home of Socialist Senator Yves de Wasseige.

Belgium's political crisis

Facilities are more or less completed for the deployment of U.S. cruise missiles at the Air Force base of Andennes, in southern Belgium. But Belgium's official agreement for the deployment still has to be confirmed by Parliament, and there is a growing uncertainty about that, particularly because of the coming elections, which will lead to the formation of a new government.

In Belgium there are three major national political parties, the Liberals (PVV-PRL), the Christian-Democrats (CVP-PSC), and the Socialists (PSB-SPB), all of which are in turn divided into Walloon (French-speaking) and Flemish (Dutch-speaking) sections. To these must be added the "linguistic parties"—those committed to defend the interests of one specific language or geographical community. This makes for many possible coalition arrangements. The three French-speaking sections of the national parties are in favor of the cruise deployment, but the Dutch-speaking parts are much more influenced by the Dutch and German peace movements. Thus, the neutralist Flemish Socialist Party (SPB) is adamantly opposed to the cruise deployment, and intends to make this a major issue in the next legislative election. The SPB's role is not unrelated, some observers say, to the fact that party chairman Van Miert is married to an East German citizen, and travels frequently in Eastern Europe. The Flemish Christian Democrats, although supposedly conservative, are ideologically vulnerable to "peace movement" influence. The Belgian peace movement, while weaker than its Dutch and West German counterparts, is considerably stronger than in southern European Catholic countries.

The future of the cruise missile deployment is cast into doubt by a recent conflict with the United States, known as the Pegard Affair. The U.S. administration had demanded cancellation of the sale to the Soviet Union of two Belgian machine tools which could have been used on missile-launching sites. Foreign Minister Leo Tindemans, who defended the American view, got the support of the Belgian cabinet only with great difficulty. Defense Minister Vevren is now under fire, since he had assured the House of Representatives that the U.S. government would bail Belgium out for the losses incurred by the cancellation of the sale. Socialist Party spokesmen are now challenging the truth of that statement.