

Who Planted the Bombs in Moscow?

How the FBI Aids Russia's War

At the very start of its "anti terror" campaign in the Caucasus, the Russian government reached out for solace and assistance to a sympathetic ally — FBI Director Louis Freeh and the FBI. Along with its savage military onslaught with bombs and shells, Moscow has been waging an internet war to shut down web sites maintained by their foes in the North Caucasus.

In September, Russian Interior Minister Vladimir Rushaylo announced that he had told Freeh that "funding by Osama Bin Laden of the Chechnya-based rebels had increased significantly". Freeh, who has long cherished his relationship with the Moscow interior ministry (whose troops are in the forefront of the present extermination campaign in Chechnya) immediately offered to help by supplying "technical experts" to assist in shutting down web sites inimical to Moscow. A British team has reportedly also been dispatched with the same mission.

But the Russians have in the past demonstrated a high level of technical expertise in this area (examples include successful invasions of Pentagon computer systems) and need no help from the FBI or anyone else in disrupting the offending sites. So the wily Muscovites may well have a different goal in mind. By engaging outsiders—in this instance the Americans and the British—to assist in the war in the Caucasus, they are making them complicit in the crimes presently being committed.

"President Bill Clinton has in effect supported the activities of the Russian authorities in Chechnya", reported the anchorman for ORT, Russia's largest television network, shortly after Clinton finished his speech to the European security conference in Istanbul on November 17. During his speech, Clinton said Russia had a right to defend itself from "terrorists", which has been the position of most Western leaders.

While the Yeltsin clique shrugs off accompanying protests from Clinton and his team (Talbot has called for the Russians to restrict themselves to "minimal" civilian casualties) they are relishing what they see as positive signals from the camp of George W. Bush. Russian diplomats in

Washington are spreading word that George W's foreign policy adviser, Condoleezza Rice (currently at Stanford, having worked at the NSC in the G.H. Bush era), recently assured the Russian ambassador that the Caucasus and Transcaucasus region (i.e., countries such as Chechnya, Georgia and Azerbaijan) are "not part of America's vital interests" and that therefore a Bush Administration would reduce military contacts with these countries. This implied abandonment of the Georgians and Azerbaijanis, not to mention the Chechens, stands in signal contrast to George W's public denunciations of the Russian campaign in Chechnya.

All this notwithstanding, Russia's war, which human rights campaigner Sergei Kovalev aptly characterises as employing

before the blast.

"The Chechens have never demonstrated the ability to operate outside their own area", observes a Friend of CounterPunch with unrivaled contacts and experience as a senior US diplomat stationed for many years in Moscow, "certainly not this degree of professionalism. You can however find these skills in the Russian security and military services. I find it quite easy to believe that someone in the FSB or the GRU [respectively, Russian secret police and military intelligence] organized this. But the evidence will be very hard to find. This was a mass contract killing and usually the people who carry out such contracts do not live very long themselves. I find it telling that the authorities have made no real effort to investigate.

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"the methods of Nato in pursuit of Milosevic's ends" is a huge embarrassment for the Clinton administration. And even if the White House and State Department accept Russia's rationale for the onslaught in the Caucasus at face value, there are certainly others in government service who know better.

Whoever ordered the September bombings that provided the Kremlin with its justification for the present war, it was almost certainly not the Chechens. The explosions, which killed 300 people, were the work of experts with access not only to an extremely powerful and generally unavailable explosive but also to construction plans for the apartment buildings that were demolished in the blasts. Carried out across a two-week period, the four bombings (three in Moscow and one in the provincial city of Volgograd) all bore the same "signature" both in terms of the explosive used (in each case a quarter-ton of hexogen, manufactured specifically for Russian artillery shells in a single Urals plant) and in the professional manner in which the points were positioned to cause maximum damage. In one case the site of the bomb had been searched by police only three hours

"In Moscow at the moment there are more and more people who are saying to me in private—and these are well informed people, not nuts—that 'forty percent of me thinks the Kremlin did this'. A month ago none of them were saying that, and they wouldn't dare say it in public now. You have to remember that there were bombings on Moscow subways and buses that killed two people just before the 1996 election, and I have been told by friends who were very, very close to the Yeltsin campaign that Korshakov's people did it." (Alexander Korshakov was Yeltsin's personal security chief, fired just after the election.)

Historians should note that employment of provocateurs directed from the highest levels is a rich tradition in Russia. Evno Azef, a secret police agent who rose to head the Social Revolutionary Party's terror squad, organized the assassination of the Minister of the Interior in 1904 and followed up with the killing of the Tsar's uncle the following year. As a former denizen of the CIA observes: "George Tenet has enough career survival instincts to know that he should never carry over such intelligence to the White House." CP

Hoffa Jr.'s Big Test

The Overnite Strike

Teamster president James P. Hoffa is in the process of waging the union's biggest strike since UPS, against one of the country's biggest non-union shipping companies, Overnite Transportation. As such this is the most significant "Right to Organize" strike since the AFL changed hands and made that its slogan. When it's finally over, the strike will almost certainly be more significant for what it says about Hoffa Power than anything else.

Overnite ships goods for such heavy-traffic retail outfits as Home Depot. During the Carey years, 37 of its 166 terminals were organized and voted to join the union. That was five years ago. The company ignored the vote; Carey let the workers, and the organizing drive, languish, while Overnite racked up one labor-law violation after the other. More than 1,000 such charges have been filed by the union with the National Labor Relations Board. It is remarkable that the striking workers at Overnite have stayed together all these years, with no guarantees, no benefits, no contract.

When he was running for union president Hoffa had to belittle the Teamsters 1997 victory over UPS (a strike he opposed until it looked like a sure winner); his Bring Back the Pride, Bring Back the Power rhetoric would have sounded tinny otherwise. But there aren't too many people who think Overnite's fanatically anti-union owners will crumble and begin negotiating with the 3,600 workers—less than half of Overnite's workforce—who have voted to join the union. The guess is that maybe the company chiefs will lose so much money they'll be forced to sell, or perhaps they'll be driven out of business. In the latter case, 8,200 drivers and loading-dock workers would be out of jobs, but the message would be clear, "Don't fuck with Jimmy Hoffa".

Whatever his actual instincts on the matter, Hoffa had to take on Overnite: it's in freight, the division of his deified father and his own largest constituency; and, with only 20 percent of the nation's truck drivers unionized, it's hard to make an argument for others to join up if some of those who already have can't show anything but grief for it.

So Hoffa made Overnite a major cam-

paign issue. Then, in his post-election purge of anyone who might have the scent of Carey, he fired 100 organizers who had the best relationships with the rank and file.

When Hoffa says the union can't lose "market share", it's true enough, since a defeat would pass the ammunition to employers everywhere, but the idiom of the business pages meshes seamlessly with his own style, his substance too. Only 600 to 800 of the workers are receiving strike benefits, and very few have scabbed. That could be because most of them have other jobs, jobs arranged for them through deals Hoffa made with Overnite's competitors. Of course, unions have to protect workers during a strike, if only because scabbing spells weakness. But the picket lines at Overnite are not the overwhelming shows of energy and tensed courage—its own special expression of power—that marked the UPS strike. And unlike Carey, Hoffa is not out front, on the lines, with the workers; he's the CEO.

Teamster locals unconnected to this fight are often nonchalant or disinterested in the fates of these striking Overnite workers. The line goes something like this: they don't pay dues, they're not real Teamsters, and, anyway, "local autonomy" was Hoffa's biggest campaign promise. Every local gets to operate as its own fiefdom. Many of them don't belong to the Central Labor Councils in their cities. Many have never heard of Jobs With Justice, which across the country has been visiting Overnite's customers, organizing rallies, walking the picket lines.

When the union launches a major national fight, maybe these sit-on-their-hands locals come in and maybe they won't. Maybe they won't even return phonecalls—as has been happening all over the country even when Teamsters HQ is on the other end of the line. With such response from Teamster locals, it's been

hard work to get a lot of enthusiasm going among other unions. As one Jobs with Justice activist in the Northeast puts it, "Solidarity doesn't click with them".

Absent a majority of Overnite's workers on strike, the Teamsters have never aimed to shut down the company's day-to-day operations; they've focussed instead on its customers, scaring them into shifting their business elsewhere, cutting into Overnite's market share at the busiest season of the year. The news from some of its biggest terminals is that very little is moving; from Memphis comes word that shipments are down by two-thirds; from Atlanta that days go by where the loading dock is still. The union reports that nationwide Overnite's business is down by 30 percent. The company says 3 percent. Whatever the truth, the union had expected the strike to last three weeks. It is now in its fifth week and no one talks as if it will be resolved before Christmas.

The Teamsters' agenda here is way beyond Overnite. If Overnite can undercut wages, violate workers' rights, then so can every other freight company. The Teamsters have done no successful, large-scale organizing in freight since 1980. But, in a way, these Overnite workers are expendable. Hoffa can afford to lose the fight for a contract and still win if he drives the company to ruin or destroys its value and massages a new buyer. That win would be measured in fear—no mean weapon in the contest with capital. (Though as we've seen with Coastal Berry in the very different strawberry campaign, deals with new buyers can be poison.) As for the workers, though, the Teamsters' boss will have to count on the Hoffa mythology, the get-tough, proud-to-be-a-Teamster rhetoric, to get workers to risk their jobs and security for the union. He told a whooping, stomping crowd at a recent fundraising dinner in New York for Labor Research Associates (roost of his well-paid consultant, postCommunist hustler and Number 1 Leftist for Hoffa, Greg Tarpinian) that under his leadership "the Teamsters are marching lock-step into the future". That is one kind of strength. Somehow it doesn't quite have the ring of "An injury to one is an injury to all." CP

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