

Report from Paris by Katherine Kanter and Sophie Tanapura

Security for whom?

Interior Minister Gaston Defferre exploits a police action against the state's security forces.

The discovery of an arms-smuggling network has been splashed throughout the national press, accompanied by a rumor campaign about the "danger of extreme right-wing subversion of the state."

At the beginning of October, the police apprehended two or three smugglers in the act of transporting around 50 revolvers from Belgium into France. Their customers included gun collectors, extreme right-wing circles, and gangsters alike.

The police had followed the trail leading to Rouen, Bordeaux, and Nice, and arrested a former mercenary, Olivier Danet, in Rouen. He and two others, Thierry Tcheng-Tchung and Patrick Letessier, were long-time associates of Bob Denard, one of France's best-known mercenaries, made famous after a 1977 raid on Benin and the overthrow of the Indian Ocean Comoros government in 1978.

The Belgian police—although they have little chance of seizing the ring's leadership—have at least dismantled the immediate operating network.

These three former mercenaries had recently recycled themselves into Agence Century, a firm that specialized in providing security for election campaigns. Its services were hired, for example, for part of Giscard's presidential campaign.

The Sixth Section of the Central Office of the Judiciary, which is in charge of preventing attempts

against the security of the state and subversive activities, is conducting the investigation.

And the Interior Ministry leaked—discreetly, but deliberately—that the arms-smugglers are "very probably equipping a fighting structure able to launch, some day, an armed resistance against the Socialist regime."

The Interior Ministry also alleges that Agence Century "could be or could become the core of a new parallel police."

The Service d'Action Civique (SAC), the paramilitary organization tied to the Gaullist party, had been chosen earlier this year as a special target by the new Interior Minister.

Such a campaign from the government naturally suggests that Interior Minister Gaston Defferre hopes to build up pretexts under which to contain and silence the Giscardian opposition.

But more indicative of his policy is the information released by the Defense Ministry, that Capt. Paul Barril, the number-two man in the very skilled anti-terrorist commando capability called the Groupe d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale (GIGN), was involved in the smuggling ring.

In fact, there is no indication that Barril had had any link with any arms smuggling, but only that he had supplied a friend, Philippe Leonard—who happens to be an avid gun collector—with some det-

onators used for excavations. Since Leonard, as a customer, is connected to the affair, it seems that the opportunity was seized upon by the government to impugn the GIGN, which had been an important element in the Giscard government's uncompromising anti-terrorist policy.

The GIGN, a well-trained military group, allowed the government to resist terrorist blackmail: it successfully performed 200 missions, among them 36 operations to free hostages. This group has worked especially closely with Saudi Arabian security personnel and succeeded in defeating the Muslim fundamentalists who took hostages at the Mecca Mosque in November 1979. GIGN's operational capability has been a key contribution to the political stability of the Saudi Arabian regime.

Will Gaston Defferre, who invokes the danger of "extreme right-wing subversion" as often as he can, attempt to discredit and dismantle this anti-terrorist section of the gendarmerie?

Who knows, since—after all—if we must talk about subversion of the French state, it was Defferre who released from jail all the leaders and members of the Action Directe, the French equivalent of the Italian Red Brigades or the West German Baader-Meinhof Gang.

He also eliminated the Cour de Sécurité de l'Etat, or State Security Court, which had devoted itself to trying the numerous terrorists and autonomist grouplets that had, in fact, been subverting the French state for some time. It was also Gaston Defferre who, adding insult to injury, called the entire French police force "racists and anti-Semites" shortly after he took office.