

Northern Flank by A. Borealis

Olof Palme on a Russian leash

Soviet arrogance—and Prime Minister Palme's acquiescence—infuriates even the usually docile Swedish opposition.

The arrogance displayed by the Kremlin in response to rather mild Swedish complaints over a blatant Soviet violation of Swedish air space on Aug. 9 has led to growing demands from Premier Olof Palme's opposition that Sweden's relations to Moscow be cooled and defense spending increased. Not only did the Soviets flatly deny the well-documented incursion into Swedish air space, but a Soviet foreign ministry official point-blank instructed the Swedes to shut up, or else.

Ironically, this threat was issued at a Moscow press conference on Sept. 6, held on the occasion of the reopening of the farcical Stockholm conference on confidence-building measures. Turning to Swedish protests against the Soviet air incursion, which Palme had unsuccessfully attempted to keep secret from the public, Soviet foreign ministry spokesman Vladimir Lomeiko intoned:

"Unfortunately, many speculations have been published on this issue in the Swedish press, speculations which have been used to foment a campaign that does not help the creation of an atmosphere of trust. On this issue, all parties should now behave such that a maximum of confidence can be obtained and so that you thereby avoid that such unreflected incidents [i.e., the Swedish complaints] occur again in the future and are exploited in the way which is now happening."

This Soviet warning to Palme that he'd better keep the press and the op-

position under tight control followed only two days after the official Soviet response to the Swedish government's initial complaint. On Sept. 4, the Soviet chargé d'affaires in Stockholm, Yevgenii Rymko, had been ordered by Moscow to tell the Swedish foreign ministry that "it has not been confirmed" whether any Soviet aircraft was in Swedish air space on the date of the incursion.

However, the Swedish Defense Staff has clear proof of the deliberate Soviet violation of Swedish air space.

Among the technical material documenting the Aug. 9 incursion, there are films of the radar screens at two different Swedish radar stations showing that the intruder aircraft, a Sukhoi-15 guided-missiles fighter, trailed a Swedish civilian airliner carrying 274 passengers 20 miles into Swedish air space. The Soviet combat plane, of the same type that shot down the Korean airliner one year ago, came from a base in Latvia, and after the violation returned to the same base.

Detailed documentation of this, including photographs of the radar screens, had been prepared by the Defense Staff and was to be released to the public at a Sept. 7 press conference in Stockholm. However, after the unambiguous instructions issued the day before in Moscow by Soviet foreign ministry official Lomeiko, Palme decided at the last minute to veto the release of the photographic evidence.

However, at a meeting that same day of the Swedish Foreign Policy Board, a secretive, consensus-pro-

ducing body chaired by the Swedish king and composed of the leaders of the parties represented in the Swedish parliament, Olof Palme's non-socialist opposition compelled the government to issue a renewed, sharper diplomatic protest against the Soviet air incursion.

At the same time, the opposition parties demanded that the Palme regime go further and cancel all scheduled official visits to the Soviet Union, including an October visit to Moscow of Sweden's Minister of Communications Curt Boström, and another visit in November of a prominent Swedish parliamentary delegation. In addition, one member of parliament, Sven Erik Nordin of the Center Party, demanded an official censure of the government for trying to keep the whole incident secret, and called for an investigation to determine whether there have been other such incursions of which the public was not informed. "This is no good for the confidence of the public in the government," Nordin said.

One week before the renewed Swedish protest, the Swedish Defense Staff had already announced that it will henceforth base interceptor aircraft and anti-aircraft missiles on the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea, the site of the Aug. 9 incursion. Although there are airfields on Gotland, which lies only some 120 miles away from the Soviet Union, there have been no permanently based Air Force units there. At the time of the incursion, Swedish fighters had to fly all the way from the southern Swedish mainland—200 miles—to try to intercept the Soviet intruder, which by the time the Swedish planes arrived had already turned back.

The Swedish Air Force also announced the stationing of an additional squadron of "Viggen" fighter planes at its northernmost F21 airbase.