

New Zealand moves toward Soviets

by Allen Douglas

From Nov. 11-17 New Zealand Justice Minister Geoffrey Palmer is visiting the Soviet Union, the highest ranking New Zealand government official in 28 years to do so. Palmer will discuss trade deals with the Soviets, including joint ventures in developing Soviet natural gas deposits, expanded agricultural exports (New Zealand butter sales soared from 11,400 tons to the entire East bloc last year to 60,000 tons to the Soviets alone so far this year), and a greater Soviet fishing presence in New Zealand waters. Though trade is on the agenda, politics comes first, Palmer stressed before he left home. "We have improved our trade relationship in recent years," said Palmer, "and the New Zealand government would like to get the political relationship onto a similar business-like basis."

The Soviets are rolling out the red carpet for Palmer. After Moscow, he will tour the Soviet Far East, including the port of Vladivostok, home of the Soviet Pacific Fleet and a rare stop in Russia for foreigners. But Mr. Palmer is no ordinary guest. He is a Soviet sympathizer on many issues, particularly in his support for the Soviets' African National Congress (ANC) terrorist band in South Africa. In New Zealand, Palmer is widely viewed as a devout Marxist, and although his visit will certainly focus on "political matters," there is a more immediate, and more sinister, content to his talks.

There is one overriding issue on Palmer's Moscow agenda: a dramatic expansion of the Soviet Pacific fishing fleet's presence in New Zealand waters. New Zealand corporations have been in intensive talks with the Soviets for months, on maintenance contracts for the Soviet fleet. One firm, the Technic Group, has negotiated a preliminary agreement with the Soviets for such maintenance. And at the same time Palmer is in Moscow, a consortium including the Christchurch Airport Co. and the Lyttleton Port Co. will be there, also lobbying for contracts.

The Soviets have been keen for several years to extend their fishing activities around New Zealand, but now they intend to extract maximum satisfaction from their friends in New Zealand's Labour government. It is widely known, and has been discussed in the Cabinet, that the Soviets will not

condescend to expand their fishing presence, without having one other crucial demand granted—that the Soviet airline Aeroflot have landing rights in New Zealand, ostensibly to fly replacement fishing crews in and out of the country.

Fishing for what?

The concessions Mr. Palmer is now negotiating with the Soviets have virtually nothing to do with "fishing," but are almost entirely military-strategic. As one New Zealand fisherman put it, during an earlier phase of discussion of Soviet "fishing rights": "The Russians are bloody useless fishermen. They're the worst in the world. Their figures here are an absolute joke. They're ridiculous. A proper commercial operation would not survive on their ability to catch fish." He also pointed out that while a normal New Zealand or Japanese fishing vessel might carry a crew of 35, their Soviet counterparts often have 80, of which a dozen or so might be radio operators. So, if the Soviets are not "fishing" in New Zealand's waters, what are they doing?

Since the Labour government destroyed the ANZUS defense pact among Australia, New Zealand, and the United States in 1985, by banning the visits of U.S. nuclear-armed ships to its ports, there have been frequent sightings of Soviet submarines in New Zealand waters, often immediately off the coast. This correspondent was shocked, during a mid-August visit to the country, to hear how very common such "visits" have become.

Aside from the generalized intelligence oversight it provides on sensitive U.S. and French military installations in the South Pacific (U.S. installations in Australia and New Zealand, and the French nuclear testing ground in New Caledonia northwest of New Zealand), there are two major purposes to the density of Soviet sub traffic around New Zealand.

The first is the more obvious one. For some years now, anthropologists and radical priests have been building an insurgency among the small fraction of New Zealand's indigenous Maori population whom they have managed to radicalize. Specific evidence has repeatedly been turned into the police, the New Zealand government, and the Security Intelligence Service, about arms—mainly AK-47s—being brought ashore to these radicals. Eyewitnesses have reported evidence of training camps in remote parts of the country. Urban gangs who have established links with the Maori radicals are also being armed. One well-informed source reported, "One policeman I know is a gang liaison officer. He has had reprimands directed at him for investigating the arming of the gangs. There are obviously training camps where the radicals are engaged in guerilla training, in addition to those trained in Cuba, Moscow, and Libya."

A bloody insurgency is being prepared. In irregular warfare, standard estimates are that it takes 10 regular army troops to deal with one "irregular warfare" troop. New Zealand's army, allowed to atrophy by Labour, now has only

5,700 troops. Thus, as few as several hundred trained irregulars pose an almost out-of-control situation.

That prospect is grim enough, but there is another reason for the extensive Soviet submarine activity, beyond dead-of-night off-loading of AK-47s: mapping the ocean floor for Soviet submarine traffic. This includes preparations for either nuclear war or nuclear blackmail against the Western alliance.

Submarines move along the ocean bottom by emitting sonar signals to determine the terrain through which they must move. However, by emitting sonar signals, they expose their own position and are therefore vulnerable to anti-submarine measures. What the Soviets are clearly doing in the South Pacific in general, and around New Zealand in particular, is developing a "road map" of the ocean floor, so as to be able to move under pre-war or wartime conditions, without countermeasures being taken against them. In addition, by having established a fixed profile of the ocean as background, the Soviets are also able to detect U.S. submarine presence, as anything unusual which stands out against the known map.

Specialists in submarine warfare point out that, besides evasion and attack procedures for enemy submarines, the Soviets would also be mapping the ocean bottom to establish "beacons" to position Soviet nuclear-missile-carrying subs, to fire their missiles. Since, under conditions of full-scale nuclear war, electromagnetic communications through the atmosphere become very difficult—if not impossible—submarine firing positions must be established ahead of time, through the sort of "peacetime" mapping the Soviets are doing.

In addition to the numerous clandestine Soviet subs visiting New Zealand for mapping purposes (reports of which have been systematically quashed by the government), there is an astonishing range of Soviet "scientific," "touristic," and "commercial" ventures which also involve this sort of preparation. Typical is the recent New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs approval for a three-week "scientific research project" involving 65 Soviet scientists and the 6,000-ton "research vessel" *Academik Mstislav Keldysh*, for early next year

of the North Island. The alleged purpose of this Soviet expedition, part of a Pacific-wide effort, is to look for deep-sea volcanoes and thermal vents. According to reports in the *New Zealand Herald* of Oct. 14, "Submersible craft would be used to look at some of the features revealed by sophisticated sonar scans of the bay in June which had produced the first pictorial images of the New Zealand seabed." Are such "submersible craft" in fact Soviet minisubs, which have been found crawling Sweden's harbors, and which have reportedly been sighted near the mouth of one New Zealand river? "Maintenance" vessels sighted off New Zealand have been identified by experts as submarine support ships!

One of the most notorious incidents in recent New Zealand history, which almost certainly involved such mapping,

was the sinking of the Soviet "cruise ship," the *Mikhail Lermontov*, in New Zealand waters in February 1986. Under mysterious circumstances, the *Mikhail Lermontov* sank in fair weather off the northern tip of the South Island. The Cabinet minister responsible for the investigation, Richard Prebble, first violated all standing procedures during the preliminary inquiry, and then decided, in the face of numerous unanswered questions, that no full investigation was called for.

For over one full year, until April 1987, the entire area was sealed off by the New Zealand government, ostensibly because of an "oil slick" produced by the shipwreck. For much of that time, however, the *Lermontov* was emitting signals of the nature needed for very long-wave mapping of the ocean floor. According to experts, the sunken ship would have been one of the three fixed points needed for triangulation mapping. Extraordinary secrecy and disinformation still surrounds all aspects of the *Lermontov* affair.

The New Yalta deal

Such Soviet activity offshore presumes the compliance of powerful circles in New Zealand. The acquiescence of the Labour government is not surprising, riddled as it is with pro-Soviet figures such as Prime Minister David Lange, who began his legal career with defense work for the Moscow-funded Socialist Unity Party, ANC supporters Palmer and Foreign Minister Russell Marshall, and Minister of Overseas Trade Mike Moore, who was elected to Parliament with the help of a clique of Trotskyists.

But this activity also presumes the acquiescence of the business circles who put the Lange government in power, led by Sir Ron Trotter, chairman of the Business Roundtable and of one of the two largest corporations in New Zealand, Fletcher Challenge. In 1979, Fletcher Challenge, which had no ships of its own, entered into joint "fishing" agreements with the Soviets, the agreements which are now to be greatly expanded.

Also curious is the lack of alarm on the part of the United States. When New Zealand newspapers contacted the U.S. embassy in New Zealand, the public response was "no comment." Privately, which "private" assessment was publicly printed, embassy people noted that they had no objection to the proposed Aeroflot landing rights, even though Aeroflot would be landing right next to a sensitive U.S. installation for work in Antarctica, the Deep Freeze base. One could infer, as *EIR* did over two years ago (*EIR*, Sept. 5, 1986) that New Zealand was being ceded to the Soviets as part of a "New Yalta" redrawing of the world's map, between the Soviets and the liberal Establishments of the West. The fact that Justice Minister Palmer, who is notorious for his statements that "there is no place in New Zealand for the private ownership of land," is visiting Washington for a week before his Moscow junket, would do nothing to dampen that surmise.