

## Report from Bonn by George Gregory

### Sonic booms over West Berlin

*The Warsaw Pact is habitually violating West Berlin air space in an expansion of military maneuvers.*

**T**he United States, France, and Britain, which are co-responsible for Berlin with the U.S.S.R. under agreements dating from World War II and the 1972 Four-Power Agreement, protested April 4 against the disruption of civilian air traffic to and from West Berlin by Soviet and East German air maneuvers in the three East-West air corridors.

The increased frequency of such maneuvers since December 1983 has reached the point that civilian airliners have been forced to divert their courses. Western military observers are concerned; both Soviet and East German fighters and long-range Soviet bombers usually stationed in the Soviet Union, have been deployed on the maneuvers, which are increasingly difficult to tell from the "real thing."

The Soviet government's response to Western protests last week was that such maneuvers are "perfectly normal." Since they have become "normal," the Soviets blandly declared, the U.S.S.R. could no longer guarantee the safety of civilian airliners using the customary and agreed-upon flight altitude of 3,000 meters in the designated air corridors.

Recent violations of Berlin air-space have extended to creating sonic booms over residential districts of West Berlin. On April 6, about 10 MiG fighter planes broke many windows and caused other damage to housing when they broke the sound barrier. Protests from the population have to

date failed to generate action by the authorities against the Soviets.

The day before, a Pan American airliner was pursued and attacked by a Soviet jet fighter in a strictly military manner, though no shots were fired.

Western experts who have been watching these "maneuvers" for about two weeks recall the incidents preceding past Berlin crises. In 1948, shortly before the famous Berlin Blockade, a British civilian airliner was smashed, and 15 passengers killed. In 1952, an Air France airliner was shot at, four passengers injured, and in 1953, a British military plane with six aboard was shot down.

The most recent incidents of this sort occurred in February 1981, when a British military transport plane had to land because of a Soviet bullet fired into its tank, and in the early summer of 1983, a French civilian airliner was fired at, several weeks before the Korean airliner was shot down.

Another Soviet challenge to the rights of the allied powers in Berlin occurred earlier in the week, when a French soldier on patrol in the East German sector was murdered. At the same time, Soviet General Romanov, chief of staff of the Soviet Air Defense Forces, declared that the Soviet Union's policy is to shoot down any civilian aircraft which mistakenly violates Soviet or allied air space, as it did last September with the shooting down of the KAL 007 on its flight toward South Korea.

Little noticed at the time, Warsaw pact military aircraft had forced an Air France civilian airliner to land in East Berlin about a week before the KAL 007 atrocity.

Since the Soviet pilot who shot down the KAL 007 reportedly received a medal of honor for the act, it is by no means far-fetched to ask whether some Soviet pilot may not be on the hunt for his own medal of honor in the access corridors to Berlin.

It was the French government, not West Germany's, which issued an unequivocal statement that the responsibilities of the Western powers for control of the air corridors under the Four-Power Agreement are "non-negotiable." The Soviet Union is aiming new forms of military blackmail at Germany, with deployments on land and in the air, parallel to its colossal naval maneuvers.

The Bonn government has kept silent about the Berlin incidents because the Federal Republic has no official responsibility for the corridors of air transportation, but only for land transport regulated between East Germany and the Federal Republic—so the argument goes. But some suspect that this argument is only being used to set the stage for a round of "negotiations" between East and West Germany, under which control of the air corridors by the Four Powers would be replaced by German-German control.

A proxy for West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Free Democrat Wolfgang Mischnik, picked this occasion to say in an interview that the Federal Republic should drop its objections to the recognition of an "East German citizenship." This is the kind of appeasement that continues to increase while the Soviets attempt to compel the United States, France, and Britain to abandon their commitment to defend West Berlin.