

## FBI head in Moscow hits organized crime, Hoover

by Edward Spannaus

FBI Director Louis Freeh spent July 3-5 in Moscow as part of a 10-day trip to eastern Europe and Russia, in which the central focus was international cooperation against organized crime. Drug trafficking, money laundering, terrorism, and trafficking in nuclear materials were the principal points of emphasis of Freeh's discussions in Moscow and elsewhere.

On July 4, Freeh officially opened an FBI office in Moscow. Contrary to the impression given by press accounts, this is not a regular FBI field office, but will be a two-man liaison office under the supervision of the U.S. ambassador. The Moscow office will be of the same type as FBI "legal attaché" posts in Bonn, Paris, London, Mexico, and other capitals, now 22 in all.

### A shared problem

In a July 4 speech given to the Academy of the Russian Federation Interior Ministry, Freeh stressed that both Russia and the United States "share an emerging and growing international organized crime problem."

"Failure to launch a lawful, massive, and coordinated law enforcement response to this menace will enable the criminal element behind it to grow and prosper in both countries," said Freeh. "That possibility would pose a direct threat to decent people everywhere."

In this context, Freeh raised the theft or diversion of radioactive materials—the issue which got the biggest play in news coverage of his trip, since it fits with the general hysteria in the air around nuclear "non-proliferation."

The likelihood that Russian organized crime groups might use their criminal networks to exploit weapons-grade radioactive materials is sufficient enough to warrant international concern and action, said Freeh. "Clearly, it is not in the best interests of the United States to allow our Russian and European counterparts to confront such a threat alone," he continued, and it should be carefully monitored by law enforcement throughout the world.

In a joint press conference with Minister of Internal Affairs Viktor Yerin the next day, Yerin denied that there had been any thefts of material from nuclear facilities. However, he said, there are about 50 cases under investigation of theft of fissionable materials used in other parts of the economy, such as in health care or in industrial applications.

### Crime: the legacy of J. Edgar Hoover

In his Moscow speech, Freeh implicitly attacked J. Edgar Hoover, who headed the FBI for almost five decades, from 1924 to 1972. "We hope that Russia can avoid the types of mistakes that American law enforcement made in responding to the gangsterism that swept through the United States in the 1920s and 1930s," said Freeh. "The failure of American law enforcement, including the FBI, to take effective measures against developing organized crime groups then, as well as during the 1940s and 1950s, permitted the expansion of a powerful, well-organized crime syndicate. That crime syndicate, known as La Cosa Nostra or the American Mafia, became notorious for its use of violence and corruption of public officials, much like the criminal enterprises that you are beginning to encounter here today.

"When fighting the emerging Russian organized crime groups," Freeh warned, "neither you nor we can afford a repetition of the dreadful law enforcement errors that were made over many decades in my country and permitted the Mafia to become such a large and powerful threat."

What were these "dreadful law enforcement errors"?

J. Edgar Hoover was notorious for his refusal to admit the existence of organized crime in the United States, a position he maintained right up to his death. In February 1993, the Public Broadcasting System's "Frontline" program presented an hour-long documentary on Hoover, showing that from about 1938 on, Hoover was being blackmailed by the mob. Hoover's gambling addiction and his homosexuality were well known to gangsters such as Meyer Lansky and Frank Costello, according to "Frontline," which added that Lansky had virtual immunity from the FBI, gained by his reported possession of photographs showing Hoover engaged in homosexual acts with his long-time assistant Clyde Tolson. The "Frontline" program only confirmed what was already known or suspected by many: that Hoover, the great blackmailer of Presidents and public officials, was himself being blackmailed by the country's most notorious mobsters.

While Freeh made no direct reference to Hoover, he has, since becoming FBI director last Sept. 1, taken a number of steps to shake up the FBI bureaucracy and to eradicate the Hoover legacy. He has done away with many mid-level positions at FBI headquarters, and sent many agents back out on the streets. Freeh's Moscow trip is not the first time he has ventured off traditional FBI "turf."

Last December, Freeh visited Italy, meeting with Italian government officials and with Pope John Paul II, to plan cooperative efforts against the Mafia in Italy and the United States. Freeh was in Italy to attend a memorial mass for murdered Italian Judge Giovanni Falcone, who had been a close friend of his. At that time, both Freeh and Italian Interior Minister Nicola Mancino put heavy emphasis on attacking international drug-trafficking and money laundering, paying particular note to emerging organized crime groups in eastern Europe and Russia.