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Review by **Simo Mikkonen**, University of Jyväskylä (Finland)

In “The Making of a Myth,” Benjamin Tromly tackles lesser known pages of Cold War politics, intrigue, and intelligence. With the collapse of its wartime alliance with the Soviet Union, the United States was actively seeking allies that could help it to catch up to the Soviet lead in intelligence and propaganda. One important group that U.S. officials approached was Russian émigrés, refugees of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, joined by tens of thousands of new refugees who had managed to escape Soviet repatriation efforts in the aftermath of World War Two. While the great majority of Russian émigrés were tired of politics and shunned political organizations, there were numerous groups ranging from social democrats to royalists to fascists who were not. Tromly has chosen to shed light on one of the most secretive and curious political groups, the National Labour Alliance (NTS), which was established in Yugoslavia in the early 1930s, imitating Italian fascists and mixing in elements of Russian imperial conservatism and anti-semitism. After the war, NTS made itself appealing by claiming to be a world-wide anti-Communist organization with thousands of fighters behind the Iron Curtain (80).

Tromly begins by quoting Konstantin Boldyrev, the head of NTS, at a press conference in which he boasted about his organization’s ability to topple the current leadership of the Soviet Union if only it were supported financially. (80-81) While Boldyrev was hardly alone in trying to benefit from the situation of the early Cold War, the case of the NTS is particularly interesting in that the organization

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was not only secretive, but its size and clout were strongly exaggerated by the NTS, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and possibly even the Soviet Committee for State Security (KGB).

The aim of the article is to describe the complex network in which the NTS operated. Tromly successfully describes how NTS, an organization that had rubbed shoulders first with fascism, and then with Nazi Germany, managed to bring itself into the attention of U.S. officials and the CIA after the war by using media attention and the Soviet scare in the U.S. as its main tools. Claims of NTS of having an extensive network of underground agents and revolutionary subjects within the Soviet Union were practically lies, even if some members of the NTS might have believed them. The most interesting part of Tromly's article begins when the CIA, despite realizing that the NTS did not have real means to influence public opinion in the Soviet Union, decided to continue and even increase its support of the NTS. (100)

It does not become fully clear whether Tromly believes that the CIA ever really had faith in the NTS's ability to influence public opinion in the Soviet Union, or whether it was merely exploiting NTS as a front organization from the beginning. Based on the evidence presented by Tromly, it would seem as if the CIA had at least some faith in the NTS and its ability to penetrate the Iron Curtain before mid-1950s, even if it seemed to suffer from Soviet infiltration efforts. After mid-1950s, the relationship apparently changed and the NTS seems to have become a mere tool for the CIA. (102-104)

Archival sources used for the article mostly consist of CIA files located at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), combined with the Viktor Baidalakov (Victor Baydalakoff, former head of NTS) collection at Georgetown University Archives and Special Collections. Apart from few references, Soviet archival materials have not been used, which reflects the choice of focusing on NTS-CIA-relations rather than on real actions or influence in the Soviet Union. Against this background some of the claims made in the article about the Soviet responses are not fully convincing. Tromly's arguments about the scale of the Soviet response to the presumed threat posed by the NTS are not based on a very convincing body of evidence. He uses, for example, CIA reports stating that "'virtually every defector' from the Soviet armed forces in East Germany - - had 'been aware of the existence' of the NTS...." (109). The fact that soldiers stationed in East Germany were aware of subversive Russian emigre organizations operating from West Germany should hardly be a surprise in the post-1953 context. Since radio propaganda by NTS was audible in East Germany and there was a chance that Soviet subjects would be subjected to printed propaganda by the NTS, Soviet counter-intelligence and propaganda officers were sure to brief their soldiers about such organizations and their propaganda measures. According to the logic of Soviet propaganda, counter measures were more effective if they took place in advance. Furthermore, all possible provocations were always answered. Thus, a Soviet defector from the Soviet Army stationed in East Germany was far from representative of an average Soviet citizen.

Furthermore, there is no clear evidence of NTS having had much influence within the Soviet Union. Even if Tromly has a report by a KGB officer about the amount of NTS leaflets gathered in 1956, this cannot be considered to be symptomatic of the extensive reach of the NTS in the Soviet Union. (109) The KGB was certainly interested in the NTS - as it was in any potentially subversive foreign organization -, and at certain times it might even have been anxious about it, but the KGB was in many ways a paranoid organization that was playing several different games at once. While it is probable that the KGB considered NTS a threat, it is even more likely, that it was inflating different

threats to prove to party leaders its importance. The star of the KGB was waning in 1956 and its powers had already been significantly curbed. The KGB had to prove that it was needed to stop internal and external threats.

Summing up, Tromly's article is well-written and based on sound scholarship about the role of Russian émigrés and intelligence in early Cold War. The relationship of the NTS and the CIA, as described by Tromly, makes compelling and enlightening reading. This is an area in which there is currently too little scholarship. The article splendidly supplements the picture of the CIA's role in Cold-War politics and political warfare described by Hugh Wilford,^[1] and more precisely the use of Russian émigrés as outlined by Peter Grose.^[2]

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Notes

[1] Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

[2] Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback: America's Secret War behind the Iron Curtain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).