

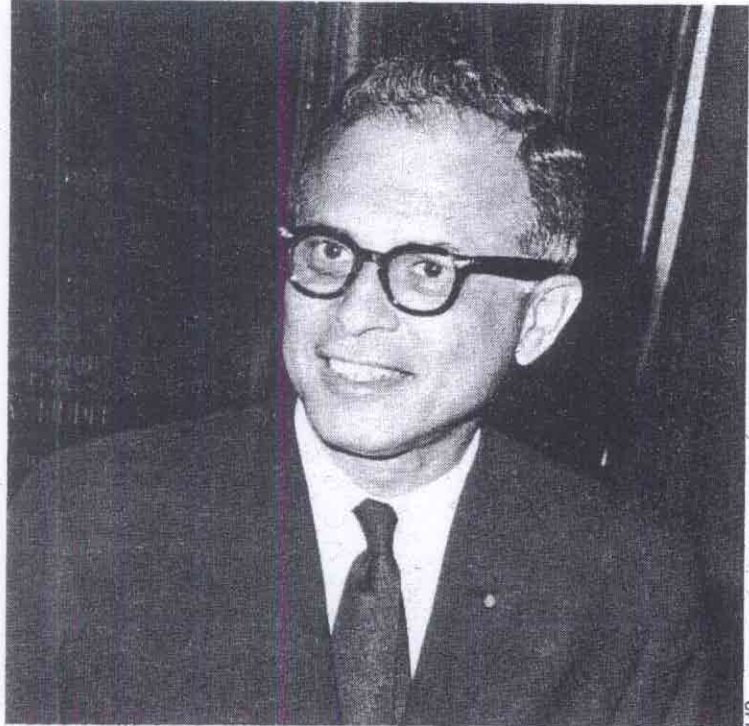
Leo Cherne: Taking a look at

By Jim Kostman and Bob Katz

Last year, the Rockefeller Commission investigated allegations of illegal domestic spying by the CIA. Composed largely of men with previous ties to the US intelligence community, the Commission concluded that some abuses had occurred and made limited recommendations to prevent future ones. President Ford's recently announced plans for dealing with this problem include the formation of a three-man Intelligence Advisory Board. It too is composed of men long associated with covert politics.

Most interesting of these is Leo Cherne, described in press accounts as a professional economist and head of the Research Institute of America. For some 25 years, Cherne has been chairman of the International Rescue

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Leo Cherne: Expert?

a CIA-watcher

Committee (IRC), a strongly anti-communist organization with the ostensible purpose of setting up relief operations in foreign countries and assisting refugees from areas which have come under communist control.

With this brief background in mind, it is noteworthy that in January, 1962, a young American former Marine named Lee Harvey Oswald, who had defected to the Soviet Union in 1959, wrote to the IRC asking for financial aid for his intended return to the United States. In December, 1961, Oswald had informed the American embassy in Moscow that he wished to return to the USA. The State Department then contacted the IRC and a Texas chapter of the Red Cross about helping Oswald. At the suggestion of the embassy, Oswald wrote twice to the IRC, initially requesting \$800, then upping it to \$1000. "After all this time our visas have finally been granted, thank

God," Oswald wrote the IRC on Jan. 26, 1962, "but our troubles are not financial, only if your organization steps in."

The IRC never stepped in. They informed the State Department that "as a strongly anti-communist organization, we would hardly be the appropriate agency for an American who went to Russia to live there." The IRC never even replied to Oswald, but the State Department eventually came through with \$435, apparently the sum Oswald required to sail to New York.

The Warren Commission Report states only that Oswald attempted between Feb. 6 and May 1 to procure aid from the IRC. But this account is in conflict with the evidence contained in the 26 volumes of hearings and exhibits published by the Commission. These documents show that Oswald contacted the IRC long before Feb.

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6, and Oswald's letters from the spring of 1962, prior to May 1, reveal that he had already been assured of the State Dept. money. If Oswald continued to correspond with the IRC until May 1, there is no record of it.

There are many curious aspects of Oswald's attempt to get help from the IRC. In the early stages of his attempt to get aid, Oswald wrote to his mother and got her, with the help of the Red Cross, to contact the IRC. When the IRC wrote back to the Red Cross, they said that the State Dept. had already been in touch with them about the Oswald case. The whole affair, including the fact that the State Dept. wound up financing the return of this one-time defector, is one reason why many people suspect that Oswald went to Russia as an agent of the U.S. government. In fact, when Mrs. Marguerite Oswald alleged that her son was a government agent, she cited the IRC/State Dept. episode.

A few days after Cherne's appointment, the IRC's possible connections to the CIA was the subject of a *New York Times* article by John Crewdson. Crewdson's story suggested that at least some of the three million dollars raised annually by the IRC comes at least indirectly from the CIA. The article quoted Frank Weil of the Norman Foundation as saying he was approached in 1963 or 1964 by a "mysterious man" and asked to pass about \$15,000 to the IRC for a medical service project in the Belgian Congo. Andrew Norman, an officer of the Norman Foundation, also recalled the incident but said the money was ear-marked for an unspecified Latin American effort.

The *Times* noted that the Norman Foundation was one of many institutions identified in 1967 disclosures as a conduit for CIA funds. The *Times* reported that the J.M. Kaplan Fund, also identified as a CIA conduit, has given money to both the IRC and Freedom House, an organization which publishes information on the alleged surpres-

sion of freedom in socialist countries, and of which Cherne is chairman of the executive committee.

Crewdson's report, if true, would have established the first definite link between the CIA and the IRC. But the next day, Crewdson reported that Weil had retracted the original story, saying that he had "misremembered" the crucial episode. Freedom House, apparently made nervous by the publicity, wrote the CIA and asked if they had ever been a direct or indirect recipient of CIA funds. CIA director George Bush assured Freedom House they were clean. When Cherne was asked by the *Times* why he never checked the Norman Foundation grants to the IRC for possible CIA influence, he replied, "That's the silliest question I've ever heard."

Cherne is still chairman of the IRC. Robert D. Murphy, Ford's appointment to be chairman of the Intelligence Oversight Board, is currently on the IRC's Board of Directors. The board is a mixed bag: noted liberals like Jacob Javits and Bayard Rustin serving with former I.T.T. President Harold Geneen, who schemed with the CIA to prevent the election of Salvador Allende in Chile. A published allegation that the IRC is CIA appears in R. Harris Smith's *O.S.S.*, where it is said that the IRC grew out of the Emergency Rescue Committee, a front for *O.S.S.*, the World War II intelli-

gence organization that preceded the CIA.

But we don't want to make too much of this. Cherne himself has said that the IRC is just a hobby. Men entrusted with keeping tabs on the spy agencies should be evaluated for impartiality on the basis of all their past endeavors — like the Citizen's Committee for a Free Cuba. Founded in the spring of 1963, its membership included Cherne, Clare Booth Luce, General S.L.A. Marshall, Christopher Emmet, also of the IRC and head of the American Friends of the Captive Nations, as well as Jay Lovestone and Irving Brown, of the American Institute for Free Labor Development, which has served as a CIA front for manipulating foreign labor unions. In a report published by Cherne's Freedom

House, the new committee called for a new national policy to liberate Cuba "by all means necessary." This meant encouragement of hit-and-run raids on Cuba rather than direct US military intervention. The report suggested that these raids would not endanger world peace if carried out from bases outside US territory. The report also called for assistance to the antiCastro Cuban underground in Cuba "through every possible channel."

Cherne has also been involved with the Council Against Communist Aggression, as well as the American Friends of Vietnam, which was more or less an IRC front with the purpose of supporting President Diem in the mid-1950's. (In 1957, while on a visit to the US, Diem was given an award for humanitarianism by the IRC, to which he had contributed \$100,000). During this period, Cherne actively campaigned for increased American support to the anti-communist forces in Vietnam, publishing articles to this point in *Look* (Jan. 25, 1955) and the *New York Times Magazine* (April 9, 1961).

We reached Cherne by phone at the Research Institute of America, which publishes advisory pamphlets for businessmen, including Cherne's own book, "How to Adapt Your Business to War." Asked whether the IRC or Freedom House ever received CIA money, Cherne replied, "Never. Directly or indirectly, never." He portrayed his political activities as "anti-totalitarian, both anti-Communist and anti-Fascist," and noted his opposition to Sen. Joseph McCarthy. Cherne criticized the IRC's accusers for disrupting its humanitarian services. He cited charges by the "communist party press" in Calcutta in 1970-71 that the IRC was a CIA tool as being a tactic to "paralyze" the IRC's refugee-aid operations.

It is, of course, important to avoid unfounded accusations and analogies. But some conclusions are unavoidable. The Rockefeller Commission, composed of men long associated with secret politics and the spy agencies — like Lane Kirkland, secretary-treasurer of AFL-CIO, and Rockefeller himself — managed to overlook in their

final report virtually all of the abuses they were charged with investigating.

Ford's three-person intelligence oversight board seems no different. Its chairman, Robert Murphy, is a career diplomat who, in his capacity as Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs under Eisenhower sat on a CIA oversight committee during the planning of the Bay of Pigs and the US intervention in the Congo. Steven Ailes is a former Army Secretary under Johnson. Cherne, as we have seen, wears many hats. Once again, it is going to be hard to tell the investigators from those being investigated.