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Curbing the C.I.A.

When so sophisticated a fighter for political and intellectual freedom as Norman Thomas finds himself a dupe of the Central Intelligence Agency, it becomes plain that no one can be sure what the outer limits of C.I.A. penetration have been—or, indeed, whether there were any outer limits.

Mr. Thomas headed an institute designed to foster left-wing democracy in Latin America; many members of its faculty were openly critical of United States policy. Yet, with no awareness by Mr. Thomas or his associates, most of the money to finance their activities was coming from C.I.A. through one of its foundation fronts.

From all indications, the agency never insinuated itself into the institute's operational structure; but it maintained no such detachment in other cases that have come to light. The most conspicuous was the revelation that the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees had, in effect, turned its International Affairs Department over to the C.I.A. in 1962 and 1963 to use as a base for strikes and other activities aimed at overthrowing Dr. Cheddi Jagan's Marxist regime in British Guinea.

The union's present president, Jerry Wurf, severed the C.I.A. tie soon after he took office in 1964. Mr. Wurf is an uncompromising anti-Communist, but he recognized the need for an unblurred line between his union and any imprint of Government domination. The A.F.L.-C.I.O., which ridiculed earlier reports of links between its overseas operations and the Intelligence Agency, has now decided it had better examine how separate the two really were.

All these developments make it essential that the report soon to be issued by President Johnson's Special Review Committee establish a clear and enforceable cut-off of clandestine C.I.A. support for nongovernmental organizations in education, labor, publishing and other fields. As long ago as 1960 a study group headed by former Assistant Secretary of Defense Mansfield D. Sprague recommended liquidation of such programs, with no affirmative response at the White House level.

The break should be conclusive now. The C.I.A. has many vital jobs to perform, but subverting domestic institutions is not one of them.

Consular Groundswell

A celebration would still be premature, but it is undeniable that prospects for Senate ratification of the Soviet-American consular convention have suddenly and dramatically improved. In retrospect, it seems likely that the key event may have been Senator Dirksen's action in letting it be known that he was leaning toward approval. Now former Senator Barry M. Goldwater has in effect asked his supporters to stop opposing the agreement, while the A.F.L.-C.I.O. Executive Council has given surprisingly strong endorsement to its ratification.

These developments are particularly heartening because more than the matter of giving American visitors to the Soviet Union greater protection is at stake in the debate over the consular convention. The real target of the bitter struggle that right-wing extremists have waged against the agreement is the Johnson Administration's entire policy of trying to improve relations with Moscow.

Fortunately the tide in favor of better Soviet-American relations has been building for a long time. President Eisenhower can properly claim to have started it when he met Soviet leaders in Geneva in 1955 and invited Nikita Khrushchev to this country in 1959. The late President Kennedy contributed in his eloquent and historic American University speech of 1963, which laid the groundwork for the limited nuclear test ban treaty that year. President Johnson's campaign to build bridges to the East has been the logical continuation of these earlier efforts.

Behind all these efforts of three successive American Presidents has been a steadily widening appreciation that in the thermonuclear age the common survival interests of the United States and the Soviet Union are more powerful than the factors that still divide them. Peking has made its contribution, too, by exposing so plainly its hostility to Russians and Americans alike. It is this history and these powerful forces that help explain the growing support for the consular convention. Even in the midst of the Vietnam War it is likely that the Senate will note this groundswell. By ratifying this measure, it will contribute to a Soviet-American rapprochement.