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An absurd way to spend money

During 15 years in this deviously wicked city I've seen a lot of "leaks" — and some screwball reactions to those leaks. But never have I seen anything as absurd as the House of Representatives blowing \$350,000 of taxpayers' money to try to find the source of a leak.

I remember Lyndon B. Johnson's peculiar obsession with leaks.

"You're just a bunch of goddamned puppy dogs, running from one fire hydrant to the next," he told a startled group of State Department officials in 1961.

Johnson figured he didn't need to hire a bunch of gumshoes to find the source of a leak. When the *New York Herald Tribune* reported that he soon would tour Southeast Asia at President Kennedy's request, Johnson snarled angrily: "That goddamn Chester Bowles leaked it. I know it. Now you just watch the *Herald Trib* for a while and you're going to see a big puff piece on Bowles. They'll pay him for that leak."

So Johnson watched the *Herald Trib*, waiting for the first praise of Bowles, which he would accept as incontrovertible proof of the source of the leak.

We could save the country \$350,000 if CBS would just let Daniel Schorr go back to work so we could

wait for him to do a puff piece on some House member, thus "identifying" that congressman as the source of the leak that supposedly has everyone upset.

I say "supposedly" because if I've learned anything in this town it is that everybody screaming about leaks isn't against them.

Johnson pitched a tantrum in Saigon in 1961. "Am I wearing glass pants?" he demanded. "Well, how the hell can that Spence Davis (of AP) write that I've got \$50 million in my pocket for President Diem?"

Pat Oliphant, whose cartoon usually appears on this page, is on vacation. His cartoon will resume Tuesday.

About an hour later I stumbled upon a cluster of U.S. newsmen in a frantic huddle on a Saigon sidewalk. I peeked inside and there was Lyndon Johnson, reading to them from a "top secret" cable that he had just received from Kennedy.

Johnson was doing what Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger and 1,000 other top officials here have done. He was engaged in a self-serving leak. Someone comes along, like Edward R. F. Sheehan, whom Kis-

singer believes is going to glorify him and his Middle East diplomacy, and suddenly that writer has access to bundles of top secret documents. A Walt Rostow wants to convince the public that the Tet offensive in Vietnam was a debacle for the Communists, so he leaks like a sieve "secret" data he thinks will sell this notion.

I remember how gumshoes once stumbled all over the State Department trying to find out who leaked to Peter Lisagor and the late Marguerite Higgins the content of a conversation between President Kennedy and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. I had leaked it — on private and specific instructions from President Kennedy.

Now, what's so different about the leak to Schorr of the Pike Committee report? In terms of the damage done to the nation, absolutely no difference that I can discover.

There is an element of embarrassment to the House, whose members apparently take seriously criticism that they are "a bunch of flap-jaws" who don't deserve access to secret information.

But I rather suspect the special problem here is that Schorr leaked his leak to

the *Village Voice*, an anti-establishment newspaper.

This has provoked a heretofore do-nothing Ethics Committee to prove its patriotism by blowing 350,000 bucks in search of a leaker.

When will they face the reality that leaks are as American as baseball, baby showers and bribes? The day we go to an absolute dictatorship will be the day we stop leaks.

Correction: I wrote a column ("Rip Van Winkle guards the CIA dirty tricksters," Feb. 25) in which I stated that Leo Cherne had been chairman of an international group to aid refugees that "indirectly got some of its money from the CIA." This report was based on a statement by Frank Weil, president of the Norman Foundation, which was a conduit for CIA funds, that in the mid-1960s he had been asked to pass along about \$15,000 in CIA funds to the International Rescue Committee.

Weil has said he had erred in saying that the Norman Foundation passed CIA money to the IRC. He said the CIA money went to four other groups and that it was the Norman Foundation's own money that it gave to the IRC. I regret having given Weil's error wider circulation and am happy to correct the record.

Weil, Frank

John
Weil, Frank
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Cherne Unit Not Tied to C.I.A. Fund

By JOHN M. CREWDSON
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 20— Frank Weil, president of the Manhattan-based Norman Foundation, said today that he erred in his assertion yesterday that the Central Intelligence Agency had passed about \$15,000 through his organization to the International Rescue Committee in the mid-1960's.

Mr. Weil said in a telephone interview that on checking the foundation's records, he had discovered that none of the \$27,000 it gave to the I.R.C. from 1961 to 1965 had been provided by the intelligence agency.

He said that the \$50,000 in C.I.A. funds passed through the foundation in that period had gone instead to four other organizations—the American Society of African Culture, the African-American Institute, the Pan American Foundation and the International Development Foundation.

Leo Cherne, one of President Ford's three appointees to a new intelligence oversight board set up to check for possible abuses of authority by the C.I.A. and other intelligence agencies, is board chairman of the I.R.C.

Mr. Cherne, a professional economist, said the I.R.C.'s work involves assistance to political refugees round the world. The I.R.C. project funded by the Norman Foundation was

a medical-service unit set up in the Belgian Congo to aid Angolan refugees and others.

Mr. Weil said today that he "misrecalled" himself yesterday in recollecting that "a mysterious gentleman" from the C.I.A. had approached him in 1963 or 1964 with a specific request to pass agency money to the Congo medical project.

He said he had also erred in recalling that the foundation had agreed to serve as a pass-through for the funds only after deciding that the I.R.C. project would have been worthy of a contribution from its own endowment.

I Was Wrong

"Let me make it very clear," he said in the interview, "I made a mistake. I was wrong."

Although he spoke to Mr. Cherne last night and again this morning, he said, Mr. Cherne "did not ask me to do anything" with respect to setting the record straight. He is amending his earlier statements because "harm has been done," he emphasized.

Mr. Cherne was appointed in 1973 to sit on the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, which The New York Times reported erroneously today was abolished by Mr. Ford this week. It was the United States Intelligence Board that was abolished by executive order on Wednesday.

The President's Intelligence

Board, created by President Eisenhower in 1956, is a group of private citizens responsible for reviewing the functions of the Federal intelligence community and reporting to the President on the conduct of those agencies.

The United States Intelligence Board was a high-level coordinating group within the intelligence community, presided over by the director of Central Intelligence. In the past it met as often as each week to coordinate intelligence data available from all members of the community.

In a related development Freedom House, an organization with which Mr. Cherne has also been closely associated for many years, asked George Bush, director of Central Intelligence, whether the C.I.A. had ever given it funds "directly or through any other entity."

The request was in a letter sent to Mr. Bush that mentioned a report, also in today's Times, that Freedom House received \$3,500 from the J. M. Kaplan Fund between 1962 and 1964.

The Times article quoted executives of the Kaplan Fund as having said that while they had passed C.I.A. money to the now-defunct Institute for International Labor Research, all the funds paid by them to Freedom House or to the I.R.C. had been their own.

Cherne, Leo
ORGI Norman Foundation
ORGI Freedom House
CLAY, O. J. M. Kaplan Fund
Institute For
INTERNATIONAL
LABOR Research

Group Led by C.I.A. Board Nominee Reportedly Got \$15,000 From Agency

P-Crewson, John
P-Cherne, Leo
Orgi Norman
FOUNDATION

By JOHN M. CREWDSON
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 19 — A private humanitarian organization headed by Leo Cherne, one of President Ford's appointees to a new committee that will investigate possible abuses of authority by the Central Intelligence Agency, reportedly received some \$15,000 of C.I.A. funds in the mid-1960's that were channeled through a New York City philanthropic organization.

Frank Weil, President of the Manhattan-based Norman Foundation, said in a telephone interview today that he was approached by "a mysterious, gentleman" from the C.I.A. in 1963 or 1964 and asked to pass about \$15,000 in Government funds to the International Rescue Committee, of which Mr. Cherne was then chairman of the board.

Mr. Weil recalled that the funds had been earmarked for a medical services project in what was then the Belgian Congo that was being supported by the rescue committee. But he said he was uncertain whether Mr. Cherne or anyone else there had been told that the money was from the C.I.A. and not from the foundation's endowment.

Mr. Cherne, reached at his New York City office, said that neither he "nor any official of the I.R.C. had the slightest knowledge that any of those funds were C.I.A. funds."

He said that the committee, which he has headed since 1951, had "never sought C.I.A. funds" and would not have "welcomed" them if they had been offered overtly.

On Previous Board

President Ford announced on Tuesday that he was naming Mr. Cherne to the newly established intelligence oversight board, set up as part of Mr. Ford's reforms of intelligence community operations to monitor the C.I.A.'s activities for possible illegalities or improprieties.

Mr. Cherne had previously been a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, which Mr. Ford abolished yesterday.

The Norman Foundation, formerly known as the Aaron E. Norman Fund, was among the institutions identified publicly in 1967 as those that had served as "conduits" for C.I.A. financing of a number of domestic organizations, principally the National Student Association.

Those disclosures prompted President Johnson to establish an investigating committee to look into the agency's relationships with domestic groups, and Mr. Johnson subsequently ordered all Federal agencies to halt their covert funding of such organizations.

Keeping Independence

Mr. Cherne, who described the committee as one of his hobbies, said that he had tried diligently over the years "to maintain the independent status" of the organization, saying that he believed that its freedom from government associations was crucial to its work abroad.

Asked why, in the wake of the 1967 disclosures, he had not asked the I.R.C. to recheck

its sources of financing to make certain that the committee had not unwittingly taken any C.I.A. money, Mr. Cherne replied that that was the " silliest question since 1945. I've ever heard."

It would have been next to impossible, he said, to cull the contribution records of an organization that raised in one neighborhood \$3 million each year to examine them for donations that might have initiated with the C.I.A. but reached the committee "two or three times removed."

Mr. Cherne, who sounded distressed at the disclosure by Mr. Weil, later spoke with Gil Jones, whom he identified as the I.R.C. fund-raise through whom the Norman money was received, and reported that Mr. Jones had not "the foggiest" idea that the Norman Foundation had not been the initial source of the money.

Mr. Cherne is an economist by profession and executive director of the Research Institute of America, which publishes newsletters and advisory pamphlets for businessmen.

He was vice chairman in 1972 of Democrats for Nixon and has been associated with such organizations as the Citizens' Committee for a Free Cuba, the Council Against Communist Aggression and the Citizens' Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, according to the records of Group Research.

One of the foundations identified in 1967 as having cooperated with the C.I.A. in covert financing efforts was the J. M. Kaplan Fund, also of New York, and which over the years has contributed not only to the rescue group but also to Freedom House, an organization that monitors and reports on the degree of freedom that exists in other countries of the world.

Mr. Cherne is chairman of Freedom House's executive committee, and has been associated with the organization since 1945.

An executive of the Kaplan Fund said today, however, that his foundation's cooperation with the intelligence agency had been limited to the underwriting of a single program in the 1960's, and that none of the \$21,500 given by it to the rescue committee or the \$3,500 given to Freedom House had been supplied by the intelligence agency.

The Kaplan Fund, according to tax records compiled by Group Research, an organization here that monitors activities of private foundations, gave the I.R.C. \$10,000 in 1953 for assistance to refugees fleeing Czechoslovakia after the Soviet invasion that August.

The committee received another \$10,000 from the fund in 1971 for assistance to Bengali refugees displaced by the Pakistani war, and \$1,000 in 1963 to aid refugees in South Vietnam.

Weil Is Disputed

Mr. Weil's recollection that the C.I.A. money given to the committee had been used to support the Belgian Congo medical program, which offered its services to Angolan refugees and others in the area, was disputed by Andrew Norman, also an officer of the Norman Foundation.

Mr. Norman said he recalled that the agency money passed through his foundation to the I.R.C. had gone to support some effort in Latin America, the details of which he said he could not remember, and that the amount involved had been a "maximum of \$15,000."

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J.M. Kaplan Fund

Freedom House
Weil, Frank