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An Annoyance for the KGB

A KGB alert to Soviet agents around the world has confirmed the cautious hopes of an odd couple—AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland and conservative Republican Sen. Orrin Hatch—that they are getting under the Kremlin's skin.

Kirkland and Hatch disagree about nearly everything, particularly the merits of Ronald Reagan. But on April 6 here, they were observed in affable conversation emerging from a board meeting of the six-month-old National Endowment for Democracy. They and other members of the board are among the very few Americans aware that the creation of the new organization marks belated U.S. financing of open ideological combat with Soviet communism by private U.S. institutions.

The Endowment for Democracy is intended to promote democracy in general, and free labor unions in particular, throughout the world. Private institutions, not the CIA or Pentagon, will use government money. But neither the odd couple nor the Reagan administration anticipated the Kremlin's angry response after Congress established the endowment last November.

The flash-alert late last year to KGB agents coincided with a harsh attack on the Reagan administration and Kirkland by Tass, the official Soviet news agency. That betrays deep Soviet vulnerability and suggests the contour of a new Cold War, offering better prospects for the United States than are found today in Central America or the Mideast.

Tass branded Kirkland as part of the "corrupt top crust of the AFL-CIO"—words conceivable for Hatch himself to throw at Kirkland if the context were domestic. But in the ideological war between Moscow and Washington, Hatch and many of his conservative Republican allies are one with Kirkland.

The AFL-CIO's foreign operations department, headed by Irving Brown, for years has been the only nongovernmental American attempt at ideological warfare against the Soviet system. After operating on the thinnest shoestring for decades, Brown now has \$11 million as a first installment in endowment funds from Congress. Thanks to Hatch and Democratic Rep. Dante Fascell, the other congressional member of the endowment's board, there's a lot more for Kirkland where that came from.

Uncle Sam's funding big labor worries the Kremlin, where memories remain vivid of Kirkland's bold effort to help Solidarity leader Lech Walesa and safeguard Poland's budding free labor union in 1980. Walesa and Solidarity's still potent underground remnant are at the top of the Kirkland-Brown-Hatch-Fascell list for immediate assistance: transistor radios, printing presses, other tools needed for underground struggle. While ruling out support for "violent" change or the use of any U.S. "intelligence activity," the endowment's bylaws put no restraints on efforts to build and protect free labor unions.

Congress has voted \$18 million for the current fiscal year to finance such nongovernmental intrusions into ideological battlegrounds, with the funding going to \$32 million next year. Besides Poland, targets eyed by the endowment include the Philippines, to shore up opposition parties before dictatorial President Ferdinand Marcos' reelection campaign; Guatemala, to strengthen a system of free political parties to stand up against extremism of both the right and left, and Chile, where authoritarian President Augusto Pinochet is driving labor leaders into the Communist Party.

But Moscow is the real target, and the Kremlin knows it. Concern is centered in the International Department of the Central Committee's Secretariat, headed by Boris Ponomarev. One of Ponomarev's key functions is guidance for Soviet agents and propagandists abroad on the U.S.-Soviet balance—military, economic, political and in what he calls "social movements."

The only U.S. "social movement" worthy of Ponomarev's attention has been Irving Brown's worldwide but money-short operations at the AFL-CIO. Thus, U.S. intelligence agencies, analyzing Soviet internal rhetoric, say privately that the Kremlin views all this as Ronald Reagan's "devilish scheme"—a new, bigger ideological offensive based on Brown's record of success.

When Reagan made his memorable House of Commons speech in June 1982, predicting that Marxism would wind up on "the ash heap of history," the Endowment for Democracy was not even a gleam. It has now racked up two improbable achievements: it brought together Kirkland and Hatch, who was targeted for a purge in 1982 by the AFL-CIO, and—more notably—it has frightened the Kremlin.

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