

Congress fiddles, Soviets build up

by Susan Kokinda

Returning to Washington, D.C. on Sept. 5 following July and August recesses for the Democratic and Republican conventions, the U.S. Congress is about to consume what could be the remaining four weeks of this congressional session doing exactly what the Soviet Union wants it to do: nothing. Not only is it likely that the Congress will still be deadlocked on major spending legislation when it recesses again on Oct. 5. It will leave the defense appropriations bill subject to a legislative abomination known as a continuing resolution, and will not even have authorized, let alone funded, U.S. defense programs.

Under the stop-gap spending measure, major decisions on deployment of the MX missile, anti-satellite weapons, and acceleration of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) will be left in political limbo. Meanwhile, appropriations bills for running the other major government departments and other legislative initiatives are caught in the same morass. The bulk of federal government activity will, in all likelihood, be carried on by the continuing resolution—a single bill which continues funding for government programs at FY 1984 levels plus inflation, and thus abrogates whatever decisions Congress has made on changing or augmenting FY 1985 programs.

In short, while the Soviet Union is engaged in the most far-reaching military buildup and reorganization that the world has ever seen, its agents of influence in the U.S. Congress have mired the U.S. defense budget, and other vital programs, in mud.

Were this not enough, while Congress will *not* attend to the business of funding the U.S. military and running the U.S. government, it *will* be preoccupied with a KGB-orchestrated “re-education” effort aimed at convincing Congress that President Reagan’s beam-weapon defense initiative should be halted and that other elements of the administration’s strategic modernization program should be slowed or frozen.

- The Committee to Save the ABM Treaty (see article page 57) is planning seminars and briefing sessions for congressmen and their staff on Sept. 11 and 13, while pushing for formal hearings in the Senate Foreign Relations and House Foreign Affairs Committee.

- The Federation of American Scientists intends a major legislative initiative to reduce funding levels for the SDI to

1984 levels, while the KGB-controlled Coalition for the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space plans a Sept. 18 press conference to push for arms control negotiations concerning outer space.

Hostage to O’Neill

The key faces holding the defense bill hostage are not unfamiliar. At the top of the list is House Speaker Tip O’Neill (D-Mass.). According to Senate Armed Services Committee member Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), O’Neill “will not allow the House Armed Services Committee to agree with the Senate on a military bill. Why? He doesn’t want a bill until after the election.”

As a result, the Senate and House Armed Services committees are currently deadlocked over not only appropriations, but the Defense *Authorization* bill, the legislation which determines what kinds of defense programs the Pentagon can undertake. Congress has not even gotten to the point of marking-up a Defense Appropriations bill, which provides the money for every duly-authorized defense program.

Congress, of course, has punted on the appropriations bills many times over the past several years, shoving crucial decisions into an omnibus stop-gap spending resolution. But never, in the 22 years in which Defense Authorization bills have been required, has the Congress failed to actually authorize Pentagon programs. If no Authorization bill is in place by Sept. 30, which is the end of the fiscal year, bureaucratic chaos will ensue at the Pentagon—causing cost overruns, delays, and postponements of vital programs.

The deadlock is over both budget figures and language. The administration originally asked for an 8% increase in defense spending, while the House passed a ceiling of only 3.5%. Kissingerian moderates in the Senate, led by Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker (R-Tenn.), forced the administration to officially drop down to a 7% increase. Ever since, there has been a standoff, with Democratic point men such as Senate Minority Leader Robert Byrd and Senate Armed Services Committee ranking Democrat Sam Nunn (Ga.) blaming the impasse on President Reagan and his refusal to compromise on U.S. defenses. On Sept. 5, O’Neill and Baker met in private to try to “resolve” the deadlock.

However, Capitol Hill sources report that the real controversy is around the actual go ahead for vitally needed programs such as further production for the MX missile, acceleration of the SDI, and a testing go-ahead for anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons. In each of these cases, Soviet assets in the House of Representatives such as Rep. George Brown (D-Calif.), Les Aspin (D-Wisc.), Albert Gore (D-Tenn.), and Joe Moakley (D-Mass.), have succeeded in introducing dangerous restrictions to the programs, or in directly cutting back funding. While the Senate ameliorated some of the worst excesses of Moscow’s lobby in the House, the failure to resolve these differences before the election recess means dangerous entropy in the U.S. defense program.