



Closing Bell

Time To 'Out' Russia?

By John Harpole

We heard the whispers and speculation for months. Anti-fracking groups in the U.S. were receiving support from sources that were difficult to identify with any certainty. But the picture became a lot clearer with the publication of a story in *The New York Times* at the end of November, asserting that Russia's Gazprom was funding much of the activity in opposition of hydraulic fracturing on an international level, specifically Romania.

Consider the obvious follow-up question and everything seems to fall into place: Are the Russians conducting similar activities in U.S. territory?

A little background: In *The New York Times* article, according to a mayor in Romania, Chevron was run out of town after anti-fracking protesters showed up out of nowhere. "I was really shocked. We never had protestors here and suddenly they were everywhere," he said.

Romanian opposition

Also in the article, Iulian Iancu, chairman of the Romanian Parliament's industry committee, said, "It is crucial for Russia to keep this energy dependence. It is playing a dirty game." Iancu believes that Gazprom has spent about \$100 million to fund anti-fracking activities across Europe.

Former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen backs up the Romanian claim. He said in London recently, "Russia, as part of their sophisticated information and disinformation operations, engaged actively with so-called nongovernmental organizations—environmental organizations working against shale gas—to maintain [Europe's] dependence on imported Russian gas."

Perhaps CNBC can help crystalize the answer on Russia's meddling in the U.S. In the spring of 2014, Eamon Javers penned a CNBC article headlined, "Who's on Putin's American Payroll?" According to an analysis of the Foreign Agents Registration Act, Vladimir Putin's Gazprom presses its influence through the U.S. public relations firm Ketchum Inc.

Federal disclosure forms that Ketchum must file list a number of activities that the New York-based firm undertakes for its Russian client, Gazprom, one of which is "correspondence with Tribeca Film Festival on future sponsorship options."

In the spring of 2013, the Tribeca Film Festival hosted a premiere screening of Josh Fox's documentary "Gasland Part II." It was the sequel to Josh Fox's "Gasland" that helped kick-start the U.S. anti-fracking campaign.

You may recall reports that Tribeca Film Festival organizers ejected protestors at the "Gasland Part II" premiere. According to Dave Iitzkoff with *ArtsBeat*, the ousted group included "20 farmers

and laborers from Pennsylvania and upstate New York, as well as Phelim McAleer, a journalist and documentarian whose work includes 'FrackNation,' a film that disputes the findings of 'Gasland.'" McAleer just wanted to ask Fox some tough questions.

Nyet was the answer and they were given the boot.

Despite the fact that the Hollywood crowd leans toward the left on the issue of fracking, there exists no McCarthy era-like blacklist of artists supportive of the Communist Party—sorry, Russia—at least not in the U.S.

Cozy bedfellows aren't they: Putin, Hollywood and environmental groups?

It is not a startling association to make. Any opposition to fracking outside of Russia plays into a conveniently coincidental grand strategy that enriches and emboldens Putin's Gazprom.

Not McCarthyism

This is not a 21st century version of McCarthyism. Belief in the age-old dictum that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" evidently holds true here. The outbreak of anti-fracking efforts in the U.S. seems not accidental.

U.S. "fractivists" have enjoyed an entitled childhood. Perhaps it is time to kick those children out of the house.

We should ask a number of individuals and groups such as Josh Fox, Greenpeace and the Sierra Club to pledge publicly that they have not and will not accept money/donations/funding from any entity associated with or acting on behalf of Russia's Gazprom or Vladimir Putin and his band of oligarchs.

Let's see how willing they would be to participate in such transparency.

And then, is there anyone in the industry willing to reserve some ad space in *The New York Times* to thank those groups that have agreed to be on a "Red, White and Blue List?"

Fair warning, though: That ad in New York's Gray Lady may only show the preamble inviting environmentalists to the commitment with no actual names to follow. That would certainly be an indictment, wouldn't it?

The next time you experience anti-fracking propaganda here in the U.S., ask yourself, "Where did their financial support come from?" Are they in fact, comrades in arms with Putin and Gazprom? ■

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