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Report on Radio Free Europe

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Summary:

Observations of BBC managers two months after the start of RFE broadcasting from Munich on May 1, 1951. It includes their analysis of the Czechoslovak Service broadcasts on May 26th, 1951, and of the network of field bureaus to gather information from refugees. They lauded the enthusiasm of RFE broadcasters but criticized their programs for mixing opinion with fact in newscast.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

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Report on Radio Free Europe by C. Eurs, H.C. Eurs, A/H.E. Eurs

We spent three days in Munich (3rd - 5th July) visiting the administrative and editorial offices of Radio Free Europe and the medium wave transmitter at Holzkirchen.

Inf Germany R.F.E.

The National Committee - General

Radio Free Europe is a derivative of the National Committee for a Free Europe whose headquarters are in the United States. The Chairman of the National Committee's Board is Joseph C. Grew, a former Ambassador to Tokyo, the President is C.D. Jackson, an official of the American Psychological Warfare Department in the last war, and among the distinguished Board of twelve governing Directors is Lucius D. Clay. "Members" include Francis Biddle, Cecil B. DeMille, General Eisenhower and Henry Luce. The Committee has two "programmes of action", concerned with helping, using and activating refugees from the East European satellite states. One programme deals with asylum and co-operation, mainly in the United States; the other endeavours to link them with their homelands, using Radio Free Europe as the main instrument. Finance is collected on a voluntary basis from individual Americans and private firms.

✓ 4/UK Cabel 12/27/UK

Radio Free Europe began operations on 4th July (American Independence Day) 1950 from a short wave transmitter near Mannheim. By the end of 1950 transmission time amounted to seven and a half hours daily in Bulgarian, Hungarian, Polish, Rumanian and Czech. All these programmes originated in the United States.

The Operation in Europe

Radio Free Europe became an important broadcasting force on 1st May of this year when a powerful medium wave transmitter came on the air fifteen miles outside Munich for eleven and a half hours daily. The wavelength had previously been shared by Lisbon and Graz-Klagenfurt, but although formal protests were registered by these tenants, their acquiescence had been secured by various means, including the use at Munich of a "directional antenna". From the Czech point of view, the scale and proximity of the operation amounted

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to competition on roughly equal terms with the Home Services of Prague and Bratislava. The National Committee's latest printed publicity suggests that this is only the first stage of a "freedom network" which "will include individual transmitters for each of the Iron Curtain countries." When we inspected the transmitter site fifteen miles outside Munich we were impressed by the modernity of the 135 kilowatt transmitter built by a Swiss firm under the general supervision of an American engineer. The valves were air-cooled and the directional beam was secured by the American system of four radiating masts operated in a phase system. The modulations are delivered by Post Office landline from Munich with an alternative VHF radio link.

We had no means of directly judging the strength of the signal in Czechoslovakia. Only the first twenty-four hours on 1st May had been free of jamming, and we were told that this was seriously damaging in Prague, but that reception was generally good, especially in Moravia where the hotels were over-booked by Czechs who wanted to hear the programmes in the best conditions. (In more general terms a reliable informant who left Prague at the end of June has confirmed the existence of a very big audience outside Prague.) One estimate given to us by a member of Radio Free Europe was that the audience was larger than that of the Czech Home Service. When we listened on a set in Munich the signal was strong and only interfered with by a high-pitched whistle attributed to Klagenfurt.

Offices in Munich

The editorial staff is at present scattered in various offices in Munich, but is this month moving into a single building, large enough to accommodate 800, in the park in Munich known as the Englische Garten. The present accommodation is cramped in the extreme. There are two studio suites in the Siebertstrasse, where all output is recorded or broadcast live. A room in a separate building is used for supplementary rehearsal, but there are no

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recording facilities there, and bookings did not appear to be popular. Side by side with the studios in the Siebertstrasse were two news rooms with a Reuter teleprinter, a tape library, a recorded music library, offices for the programme staff and the joint heads of Czech output, a control room installed in a kitchen, and numerous passages which were partially occupied by editorial workers.

The new building seemed to us very impressive. It has been built in five months, and is ample and attractive without being pretentious. We were told by the head of the Munich operation that it would have cost four times as much if it had been built by American labour. There are a dozen studios, one of them intended for a full symphony orchestra. Originally for a staff of four hundred, the building has been extended while under construction to house double the number. The control room is situated prominently above the main entrance.

Intelligence had its own offices elsewhere in Munich, and here there seemed to be more adequate space both for working and for the present needs of the filing system. Monitoring, which is regarded as an extremely important sub-division of the Information Department, is being arranged from a disused air-strip about eight miles outside Munich. The object will in large part be to record programmes for subsequent playing back with destructive comment in the output of Radio Free Europe. It appears that the planners are reluctant to give monitors the responsibility which they have at Caversham, and a telephone system is being installed to a central point which will both pick out the signal of the station to be monitored and record it when advisable.

Policy

Stress in published statements is put on the fact that Radio Free Europe is a "weapon". It is contrasted with official broadcasting stations linked with governments. "Over RFE, people speak to people. RFE is private and informal. Unhampered by

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diplomatic considerations it hits hard. Through information, exposure and ridicule, RFE sows disintegration and confusion among the enemy."

In informal conversation too, a good deal of importance was put on this concept "people (i.e. individuals) speak to people" which is felt by their senior staff to do more than offset the advantages of government intelligence and a policy responsive to national opinion and interests. Isolation from the State Department is said to be no less absolute than was declared in the American reply to the Czech Government's protest of last June. The RFE Intelligence Department, for instance, complained that it was impossible to get any information with regard to jamming from U.S. Embassy sources in Prague. We found it difficult to believe that there is no liaison with the State Department at a high level, but in Munich there was no evidence of it other than the existence of a "Policy Advisor", Mr. William E. Griffith, whose function appeared to be to ensure at least negatively that there was no major clash with American interests.

The policy of "individuals speaking to individuals" appeared to result in a large measure of freedom for the programme staff to attack Communism by any means they felt suitable, and analysis of a day's programme output indicates that the means are not closely co-ordinated between separate parts of the output, which are apt to contradict one another in their implications. There were certain restraining principles. We were told that no attempt is made to promote the defection of members of the armed forces, nor is any hope held out of early release from Communist tyranny; but we came across instances of programmes which ignored these restraints, and there were indications that the style of delivery and presentation takes no account of them. A senior official told us how an entire village after listening to Radio Free Europe had gone to the local Communist official and asked when he was going to surrender; the

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population had later been deported. The European Director of RFE, Mr. Condon, who was present when this was said, queried whether the incident had in fact been directly traceable to Radio Free Europe, but the official who had first mentioned it insisted enthusiastically that there was no doubt. A script recorded by a Hungarian officer for use in the event of war was broadcast at the end of June, when its opening sentence, "The grave events of the past week", was made to refer to the trial of Archbishop Groesz.

We were at first bewildered by the enthusiasm of the staff for incidents of the above kind until it became clear that success in broadcasting had acquired a special meaning for them. Accuracy and the importance of keeping faith with the listener had given way to the desirability of making the greatest short-term impact. Because finance was dependent on individual American subscription, the impact made in the American press by a given programme was no less important than the impact in the target area. Great ingenuity is shown in working out programmes which will be startling to both. Collaborators with the Communists are denounced by name and a daily fifteen minute programme of operational messages is broadcast to individuals, families and organisations from refugees and others. As there were rarely sufficient messages of this kind to occupy fifteen minutes daily in a single language service of the BBC in wartime, it is not surprising that Radio Free Europe is hard put to it in filling their space. The balance is made up by imaginary messages addressed to imaginary individuals. Similarly we were not satisfied that all those denounced for collaboration were condemned on sufficient evidence. But considerations of this kind are largely ousted by the importance of the impression made on the majority. The Program Director of the European Division expressed his concern that in spite of these and other devices they might still be failing to get down sufficiently to the level of the mass.

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News and Programmes

We did not give close attention to Radio Free Europe's news service. It was described to us as being primarily "bait" and goes out ten times a day simply in the form of a headline summary at the hour, except for one summary broadcast at 24.40 at dictation speed immediately before the sign-off at 01.00. This technique of hourly headlines may have a certain dramatic appeal to the listener who gets the impression that major events are expected. There are also two full bulletins of fifteen minutes each, in which fact and comment are intermingled. Routers and an embryo Monitoring Service are available, but as yet RFE makes little use of special correspondents of its own. A specimen bulletin is examined in the attached analysis of a day's output.

The total programme output of eleven and a half hours is divided into ~~two~~ three main bursts, one in the early morning, one at midday, and the last ~~and the other~~ beginning in the late afternoon and continuing into the early hours. Somewhat less than half consists of music, and repeat periods amount to about a quarter of the total. The Spoken Word content is very various, including plays, commentaries, analysis of the Czech press, sporting and cultural news from the West, quiz programmes and so on. The appearance and titling of the day's Programme Sheet is American, but a great deal of initiative is left to the individual Czech programme assistants among whom the time is farmed out. There is no rigid scheme governing how much material a programme assistants originates himself, commissions from outside or takes from the common stock of material originating in the U.S. and the RFE Intelligence Department. Much of the finished product never undergoes translation in extenso, but is summarised in reports. There was very little knowledge indeed among the Americans of the languages in which they were working and we formed an impression that they were not aware in detail of the content of all the programmes or even of their tone. Certain key scripts are however

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accepted textually from the United States. "International Commentary" is the main one of these. Frankly propagandist in tone, it tends to deal with a single aspect of the news. On 10th June, for instance, "International Commentary" dealt with the provincial Italian elections then in progress. The summarised report continued:

> "Although these elections are not yet completely over, the trend is clear: Italy is moving as decisively to clear out the Communists in local government as she moved three years ago to defeat their bid for national power. Probably the outstanding conclusion to be drawn from the election returns is the striking proof they give of the victories that can be obtained when anti-Communist democratic forces present a united front. It is by this same strategy of the union of forces that the free nations will succeed in crushing Stalinist oppression on a world-wide scale."

The more difficult tasks of propaganda to Eastern Europe are not shirked. Thus a script broadcast on 9th July dealt with the theme "There is no Europe without Czechs and no Czech spiritual life without Europe." The theme was illustrated by the inter-marriage of Czech and West European royal families in the Middle Ages, and readings from Czech poetry were included.

Whatever misgivings certain aspects of Radio Free Europe's programme policy might arouse, there was no mistaking the energy and enthusiasm of the staff. The makeshift nature of the accommodation and the pressure of work both seemed to heighten the atmosphere of creative bustle. There was pride in the ability to achieve a great deal with inadequate tools. Among the senior staff it was striking how convinced they were of the short life ahead of them. The majority seemed to believe that the outbreak of war or the end of the cold war would relieve them of their jobs in the near future.

Intelligence and Research

It is clear that in an operation of this nature which intervenes extensively and in detail in the internal affairs of a neighbouring country, a great deal depends on the quality of the Information Department. Radio Free Europe seems to have realised this belatedly, and the Information Department has only had a few

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months in which to organise the heavy flow of material for which the programme staff has an insatiable appetite. Many aspects of the job seemed to us remarkable: the speed at which a skeleton information system had been improvised, the efficient breakdown of the filing system under sensible headings, the wealth of large-scale maps, the ingenuity by which newspapers were obtained in spite of the unhelpfulness of the U.S. Embassies.

Besides being extracted from newspapers, monitoring and other documentation, information is collected from a network of whole-time correspondents placed in twelve key cities where refugees abound. Istanbul, Paris and Western Germany are among these sources. The correspondent when once appointed is left largely to his own devices. It is his duty to forward to Munich as much information about the target area as he can gather. The material is assessed by the "Evaluators" of the Information Department (although scarcely any of it is susceptible to cross-checking) and is then distributed to programme assistants to use as they please. An evaluation of reliability is given at the foot by a marking system which runs from A to D and from 1 to 5. It is left to the programme staff to accept or refuse responsibility for broadcasting. (By a curious arrangement designed to foster the independence of the Information Department, programme staff cannot apply to it directly for research. The "programing" of research work is decided by the daily meeting at which programme staff are represented.)

Our disquiet at this system governing material which might involve loss of life or deportation was not lessened by the general attitude to intelligence problems. A senior official who was interested in information from Bulgaria said that it would not be possible for Radio Free Europe to send anyone to Yugoslavia to interview the Bulgarian refugees at Nish because RFE was anti-Communist, which included Tito. He added that they would be most grateful for any information we could procure from there or anywhere else

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behind the Curtain, since their desire was unlimited. He recognised that we were conservative in checking because we could not afford to be wrong. "But we don't mind being wrong," he said, "so long as it achcives something. We are wrong a lot of the time, but that doesn't matter." He offered to broadcast anything which we might wish to broadcast in order to see what the reaction might be.

Officials

Among officials interviewed were the following:

Richard J. Condon, European Director;

Byron T. Collins, Program Director, European Division;

William E. Griffith, on temporary duty in Munich as Policy Advisor to the European Director;

Harry T. Sperling, Director of Information, European Division;

John Wiggin, Special Assistant to Program Director;

Paul Tigrid, Chief, Czech Desk, Program Department;

Jan Strensky, Associate Chief, Czech Desk, Program Department.

Both Mr. C.D. Jackson, President of the National Committee, and Mr. Robert E. Lang, Director of Radio Free Europe, were in the United States at the time of our visit.

Conclusions

We concluded from our visit that while we could give Radio Free Europe technical assistance whenever practicable as to an ally using different weapons in a war which is in part our war, we should avoid any form of association in public as scrupulously as we have in the past avoided association with "black" stations.

TANGYE LEAN

GREGORY MACDONALD

16th July 1951 GEORGE GRETTON

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Analysis of 5 hours' broadcasting
on 26th May 1951
by Radio Free Europe to Czechoslovakia

Considering all the difficulties which must have had to be overcome in creating this broadcasting service, the impression which it gives on the whole is better than might have been expected.

One of the main impressions, and an unexpected one, made by the play-back, was that the broadcasts were as concerned to attack German Nazism as they were to attack Communism.

Continuity was in many cases completely lacking and in others inadequate, giving the output as a whole the effect of a series of disconnected items.

Roughly speaking the broadcasts were divided as follows: one third news, talks and commentaries; one third serious music and features; one third light entertainment.

During the BBC's peak broadcast in Czech from 2130 - 2200 BST, Radio Free Europe was broadcasting talks in what is evidently a series, and was announced as "Talks to the Homeland". We were unable to hear the output from 2000 - 2100 BST, which would cover the BBC's other evening transmission from 2000 - 2015 BST. But as RFE broadcast a 5 minute news summary on every hour, we presume that the same happened at 2000. If this is so it would coincide with the BBC's Slovak news summary at the same time.

Presentation

The reading was usually rather fast and the voices, with very few exceptions, not very pleasant. Although the service is Czechoslovak, the Slovak language did not make very frequent appearances. We first heard a Slovak voice during the second hour of the transmission.

News

The news bulletins seemed to be of two kinds: the first being short news (news in brief) which are expanded summaries without (in most cases) sources of information; in addition there are longer news bulletins - 15 minutes - which are a little more explicit as

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to the sources of information. The general characteristic of the news service appears to be that it sets out to please the listener rather than to inform him. This may be the reason that comment is often mixed freely with facts, and it suggests that the staff are probably not only inexperienced as broadcasters, but also as journalists.

Talks and Comments

In the broadcasting under consideration, the talks and comments dealt predominantly with Czechoslovak home affairs, and the speakers were mostly exiled politicians. One of the commentators is a regular member of the staff of Free Europe; in other cases the names of the commentators were given. The one comment put out by an American subject was conspicuous for its statement of foreign policy, although the speaker emphasised at the beginning of his talk that he was speaking individually and not in the name of the American Government. But he added that he believed that the majority of the American nation were behind him.

Feature Programmes

The feature programme which we heard dealt exclusively with Czechoslovak affairs.

There was a so-called satirical play, but in the opinion of those listening, neither the satire nor the comedy entirely came off.

Another feature under this heading was one in which individuals were denounced by name for co-operation with the regime, and messages were sent to friends and relatives disguised under assumed names or in code.

Light Programmes

These were very light indeed. For instance, one programme, purporting to show the American way of life, described a pair of lovers walking hand-in-hand through Central Park and apparently visiting a number of night clubs where famous bands were playing; these visits were taken as an opportunity to introduce records of American crooners and dance bands.

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Miscellaneous

There was one curious feature throughout the period of broadcasting to which we listened. This was that without previous notice or comment, an announcer read extracts from speeches by well-known political personalities. On this particular day those quoted were Hitler (several times), Molotov (twice), and Mr. Zdenek Nejedly (Minister of Education). These interpolations, coming so unexpectedly, gave an odd and sometimes ludicrous impression.