

January 10, 1957

**Memorandum from the CIA Librarian to the Chief of
the International Organizations Division, 'Personal
Comments on RFE Broadcasting to Hungary, 24
October-4 November 1956' [Approved for Release,
March 2007]**

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Summary:

A CIA official reviews Hungarian RFE broadcasts.

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10 January 1957

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, International Organizations Division

SUBJECT: Personal Comments on RFE Broadcasting to Hungary, 24 October -
4 November 1956

1. One cannot listen to Hungarian broadcasts for about four weeks without forming personal impressions which go beyond the questions which you asked me specifically to answer. I cannot judge whether mine will be of any value to you, but for what they are worth here they are.

2. Religious broadcasts and role of religion. I do not believe the religious commentary on RFE is impartial. In the first place, religion is mentioned almost exclusively in connection with the release of Cardinal Mindszenty. If my memory serves correctly, the Catholic-Protestant ratio in Hungary is about 65-35. Certainly if RFE is to be impartial, it should cover minorities as well as the majority. Yet there were broadcasts of entire religious Masses, occupying a whole hour, with no similar broadcast of either Protestant or Jewish services. True, once or twice during the time I listened, there were reports of news items concerning Protestant leaders, but these were few. One of the outstanding religious leaders in Hungary, for example, has been Bishop Ladislaus Ravasz of the Reformed Church, who as a matter of fact, received an honorary Doctor of Divinity from and delivered an important series of lectures at the Theological Seminary in Lancaster, Pa. around 1930. It is reasonable to assume that he and other Protestant leaders were also active during these momentous days.

As a corollary, the role of the church in the villages has not been emphasized adequately in RFE broadcasts, which make a point of appealing to the village populations. As a student in Hungary, I spent my summers in a village. The church, of all denominations, represented the center of most activities in the village. The priest or pastor always played a dominant role in the life of the village. True, Communists are against religion, but, if the battle is against Communists and all they stand for, it is all the more imperative to restore the important role of religion, not only Catholic, but all forms of religion to emphasize freedom of religion.

3. RFE Commentators. To me the most impressive of the RFE commentators is Janus, who was generally calm and logical. Notarius seemed good in his field. Colonel Bell in military affairs and Agrarius in his are both evidently men of wide background. Colonel Bell has a tendency to veer into emotional political

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commentary as well. Tibor Sebök has a fine voice and is lucid. Gallicus, occasionally is almost hysterical, hindering his own effectiveness. Laszlo Lovas and Jozsef Molnar seem adequate, though the latter also has a tendency to get excited. Vasvari seems a good reporter, as is also Hegyi.

I do not wish to leave this subject without a few general comments on the way comments were made and what was said. It is my personal opinion that the unidentified voices of exhortation are not effective. Some of these exhortations are:

"With murderers there is no peace. Repeal martial law immediately."

"...Gerö is responsible for blood in the streets. Bring him to justice."

The most deplorable of these are the two broadcasts I heard of "the black voice." In one, this sepulchral, highly emotional voice urges that "people should note down everything and remember. Women and children are being murdered. Take pen in hand and note everything for the black book!" In another, it says "the rats have come out of the sewers, grinning in back of Soviet tanks. Continue writing the black book!" I would like to know who will be influenced by such comments. They left me with a bad taste in my mouth, like an unfulfilled commercial on our television. There is no dignity to this kind of approach.

4. The role of the intellectual. There seemed to me to be inadequate appeal to the intellectual in RFE broadcasts. Hungary has a magnificent literature, with many other fine and stirring writers than Petöfi, Ady and the modern Howath. True, on 1 November in reel #5, there was broadcast a good literary program in memory of the martyrs of the battle for freedom. But this was a requiem. Surely, there is much more in the way of positive appeal that RFE could do: ask writers to speak, quote from books, poems, put on plays (on 25 October in reel #18 on the Boy Scout program there was an excellent play called "The Little Drummer") panel discussions by writers and/or students, etc. There just did not seem to be enough of an appeal to the intellectuals, yet they were a group in the fore of the revolution.

5. The role of women. Similarly, women are neglected in RFE broadcasts, yet they have had and will have an important role in Hungary's history. There is a woman announcer, but that is not what I mean. Leading Hungarian women should be asked to deliver speeches. For example, could not Anna Kethly have been requested to prepare a broadcast, or Ilona Massey, etc.

6. Conclusion. The comments above are intended to be constructive. It is my firm belief that there is no need to defend the activities of RFE during these historical days. Rather, I would say that we may be proud of what it did and wish it could have done more. When one observes the tragedy of the Hungarians (a characteristic not limited to them alone!) that they are united against a common foe, but are divided when they are left alone, one realizes the immense problem in backing the right group. When there are no external battles to be fought, Hungarians fight among themselves. To me the most amazing and significant development in Hungary's recent history as reflected by

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these broadcasts is the news that the last Nagy government emphasized its desire for neutrality. For a Hungarian to be neutral in anything, is in itself a victory over the impossible. Neutrality, or impartiality is a role recommended for RFE.


CIA Librarian~~SECRET~~