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Robert Kelley, 'Comments on Schramm Report'

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Summary:

Radio Liberation official Robert Kelley comments on the September 1, 1955, report on RL listenership by consultant William Schramm.

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COMMENTS ON SCHRAMM REPORT

Robert Kelley

RLC

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As requested, here are my comments on the Schramm report of 1 September 1955. My comments will follow the outline of Mr. Schramm's conclusions, which begin on page 21 of his report.

1. I would like to point out that a great deal of valuable evidence on effectiveness of our broadcasts has come in since the Schramm report was completed. Included in this new evidence are:

- a. several letters from listeners in the Soviet Union and In Poland,
- b. first hand information on listening in Vorkuta and Siberian camps,
- c. a report from the American Embassy that Radio Liberation had been heard in Moscow itself recently,
- d. a report from a Soviet tourist at the Olympic games that he was familiar with Radio Liberation and that a number of people listened although they did not talk about it, and
- e. a report from a repatriated Greek who heard Radio Liberation in Alma Ata, and who reported that one of the songs used regularly in our programs has since been banned for use in the Soviet Union.

This new information carries out the trends noted by Mr. Schramm and also introduces the new element that seems to be missing from his report; that is, that people in the various concentration camps have been able to find out about the broadcasts of Radio Liberation and are very much interested in listening.

Another important bit of evidence was that the Soviet journalists on tour of America allowed themselves to get into public discussion on the merits of Radio Liberation, thereby, I think, giving useful evidence that it is taken seriously in high places in the Soviet Union.

2. It is rather interesting that there has been relatively little regime reaction; i.e., Soviet newspaper attacks on Radio Liberation, since the Schramm report came out. Just what conclusions we can draw from this I do not know, but we do have increasing evidence of widespread listening to Radio Liberation. The fact that in the face of this widespread listening the Soviet government does not attack us is, in my opinion, very interesting.

3. The discouraging trend here was, of course, inevitable. On one hand, we had a radio to which the Soviet citizens have been listening, and which the Soviet government apparently takes seriously. On the other hand, we have had no significant increase in our own broadcasting strength for the past two years. Obviously the Soviet regime has taken quick and decisive steps to drown us out. Under the circumstances, I think it is remarkable that we still get reports that Radio Liberation is being heard in the Soviet Union over wide areas. The only encouraging thing in this is that despite our own technical weakness and despite the intensive efforts of the Soviets, we are able to get through. This certainly points up the necessity and the feasibility for undertaking a great expansion in our technical facilities.

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4. I agree with Mr. Schramm that Radio Liberation is reaching a small but important group of the Soviet "vlast", notably members of the hierarchy and of the military forces, especially those stationed outside the Soviet borders. I also agree with Mr. Schramm's conclusions on page 16 that our audience must contain representatives of the official hierarchy, representatives of the military officer class, and a smattering of the general population. However, in view of the evidence that we have received from returning German prisoners of war and forced labor camp inmates, I think Mr. Schramm may underestimate our ability to reach the general population, and to win listeners among opponents of the regime. I would also like to point out that our Basic Program Policy Memoranda No. 2-55, draft of October 5, and No. 3-55, draft of October 6, entitled "To Whom Are We Speaking" and "Why Does the Listener Listen to Us", probably cover the subject more thoroughly and more satisfactorily than Mr. Schramm's report. Of course, Mr. Schramm was speaking on the basis of the evidence available to him at the time, whereas our Memoranda were drawn up on the basis of assumptions which we feel to be valid, even if undocumented. I think it would be useful to repeat here the conclusions of "Basic Program Policy Memorandum No. 3-55:

Our main assumptions are as follows:

1. The motivations for listening on which we should lay greatest stress in our programming are:

The Spirit of Opposition, and
Intellectual Interest.

2. Insofar as the Spirit of Opposition is concerned, we should think first of those conscious opponents of the regime primarily interested in well-reasoned, well-documented, telling criticism of the regime; in serious discussion of what a democratic regime would be like; and in serious discussion of how a democratic regime might be achieved.
3. The listener motivated by Intellectual Interest is primarily interested in honest news and commentary about developments at home and abroad; in keeping track of the score in the great competition between Capitalism and Communism (as Khrushchev puts it) or between Democracy and Totalitarianism (as we put it); and in free discussion on the vital issues of the day.
4. It follows that one type of program -- seriously and rationally attacking the totalitarian Communist regime and seriously and rationally advocating a democratic regime -- could appeal to the listeners described under both 2 and 3 above, and should therefore be the "common denominator" program for Radio Liberation.

It should be noted that, whereas Mr. Schramm speaks of listeners motivated by what we call intellectual interest, he does tend to ignore or minimize the type of listener whom we speak of as being motivated by "the spirit of opposition". I think in our BPPMs we have carefully and, I hope, successfully, worked out a solution to the problem of how to prepare programs that will win the respect and attention of both kinds of listeners.

I think Mr. Schramm is on the right track when he points out all the difficulties -- in fact very serious difficulties -- which face Radio Liberation which are not faced by RFE. He summarizes this as follows: "With these listeners (members of the Soviet vlast) Radio Liberation is undertaking a task of enormous difficulty. There are no ready-made conditions for acceptance as for Radio Free Europe. Rather, these listeners approach Radio Liberation with suspicion, listen to it through jamming, and think of it not as their voice in attacking an imposed government but as an outside voice attacking their government."

We at Radio Liberation are well aware of these difficulties and are doing our very best to work out specialized programming approaches and specialized programs that will appeal to the kind of audience that Mr. Schramm has in mind, or will, at least, make this kind of Soviet citizen give us a hearing. At the same time I want to point out that, as stated above, we do feel and we do have evidence that we have many listeners who are much more sympathetic to us and our aims than Mr. Schramm indicates.

In the latter part of Point 4 of his conclusions, Mr. Schramm takes up the question of what Radio Liberation can realistically hope to accomplish. As Mr. Schramm sees it, the objective of Radio Liberation "as it clearly emerges from the circumstances we have cited, and as it appears from the recent documents of the Committee, is much more modest than that of Radio Free Europe. It is essentially to plant the seeds of doubt in the minds of Russians who have previously never heard more than one side of political questions, to make a beginning toward restoring the art of political thought to a culture where people have been invited to agree rather than to evaluate, and, in a very small way, to keep the isolated and walled-in Soviet peoples in touch with the world outside the Iron Curtain."

I think Mr. Schramm is quite right as far as he goes, and I certainly agree with him that our purpose, the purpose of Radio Liberation must necessarily be a very modest one. I think perhaps we may have stated our goal somewhat better in our BPPM NO. 1-55, draft of October 14, 1955. In this, we describe Radio Liberation's modus operandi (which might also be called its purpose) as:

"to supply Soviet citizens who are isolated from the outside world and denied free discussion at home with ideas and information which will give them a more conscious desire and a stronger will to achieve a democratic regime in place of the present totalitarian Communist regime".

I do not think it unrealistic to set this as our goal, which goes considerably beyond the goal set for us by Mr. Schramm. I think we have to keep in mind that our audience is made up of two important elements:

1. Persons already opposed to the regime in one degree or another, whom we want to confirm in this opposition and to whom we want to give new ideas concerning how their opposition may be made more purposeful and new ideas concerning what the democratic alternative to the Soviet dictatorship might be like in their country.
2. The second big group of listeners is the one which Mr. Schramm speaks about, the people who may well be hostile to what we are trying to tell them. We are well aware of the necessity for preparing our programs in such a way as to win the interest of many listeners of this type, so that we may give them new ideas about

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what the outside world is really like and so we may be able, as Mr. Schramm says, to implant doubts in their mind as to the rightness of the policies and ideology of the Soviet Communist dictatorship.

I think Mr. Schramm does have a point when he says that Radio Liberation's realistic mission is therefore smaller than the name "Liberation" may indicate. However, our broad aim is (and we do not hesitate to say so from time to time on the radio) the achievement of a democratic regime in the Soviet Union in place of the present totalitarian Communist dictatorship. This aim certainly deserves the name "Osvobozhdenia" or Liberation.

But it is true, as Mr. Schramm says, that we are more in the nature of a "free speech" station rather than a station actually leading some sort of liberation movement. I am not sure that it would be wise to change our name at this time, but I think we should do all we can to stress that Radio Liberation is a "free speech" station of and for the peoples of the Soviet Union, staffed by representatives of these people abroad, with, of course, the help and backing of the American people through the agency of the AMCOMLIB.

Mr. Schramm goes on to say: "If the curtain should open, if something like normal exchange of printed materials and persons should become possible between the Soviet Union and the West, then we should doubtless want to reconsider the function, and even perhaps the need, of Radio Liberation". This statement is fair enough if we stress the word "normal"; in other words, if American newspapers and magazines and European newspapers and magazines could go into the Soviet Union and be really circulated and discussed, then I think there would be much less justification for such a station as Radio Liberation. But I certainly do not think that a limited exchange of printed materials and persons should be considered as in any way supplanting the need for Radio Liberation. Radio Liberation is important and vital until such time as free discussion in the full sense of the meaning is allowed within the Soviet Union. I certainly see no chance of such free discussion being allowed in the foreseeable future.

Mr. Schramm continues: "Radio Liberation must be valued for what it is: one of the few ways we have to talk seriously with a few Russians in the power structure, and more impact than this must not be expected of it." As has already been said above, I think this is an important function of Radio Liberation but not the only function. I think we are now in touch with a rather broad segment of the Soviet population and not merely a few Russians in the power structure, as Mr. Schramm puts it. My point will be much stronger if and when we get adequate facilities.

I am convinced the Russians in the power structure will be inclined to take us seriously only if they think we are reaching a sizable audience and are therefore a force to reckon with. With adequate transmitting facilities I think we would have the possibility for encouraging belief in democracy and spreading doubts in the rightness of Communism and its ideology over broad areas and in many different sectors and levels of the population.

5. I certainly agree with Mr. Schramm's suggestion that the plan for establishing transmitting facilities in Spain be pushed vigorously. I feel we have moved much too slowly there. I think we must carry out plans that will enable us to get ahead of the jammers for a change, and put them in the position of trying to catch up with us. Since we seem to be ahead of them for the time being in our broadcasts to the Far East, I think that simultaneously with our effort to get ahead in the West we should make an especial effort to stay ahead

in the East.

As to Point (b) under 5, I certainly agree that everything possible should be done to strengthen the desk personnel of Radio Liberation, for the desk personnel are the people who give validity and genuineness to our claim to be the free voice of the peoples of the Soviet Union, the free discussion station of and for the peoples there.

As for point (c), I am very much in favor of establishing Moscow and Washington correspondents for Radio Liberation. Also in our new budget request, we will set forth a plan for establishing correspondents in other key centers of the world to increase listener interest in our programs, to increase the effectiveness of our democratic education broadcasts, and also to broaden the image of the station and give the Soviet listener the feeling that in Radio Liberation he really has a station which is making an honest and energetic effort to give him an interesting, honest, significant picture of what's going on in the world, on the spot, first hand, for him.

I would also like to comment on one point which Mr. Schramm did not include in his conclusions: this was his stress in the body of his report on the great need Radio Liberation has for information of all kinds about what is going on inside the country from all available sources. We are doing what we can in this, but we certainly do need intensive regular help from classified sources.

As Mr. Sargeant has pointed out, Mr. Schramm's description of the sources and documents he has consulted carries the implication the American Committee is quite weak and lacking in studies and basic policy papers. Although this implication may have been correct when Mr. Schramm completed his study, I think we have taken important steps in overcoming this shortage with the nine Basic Program Policy Memoranda that were prepared in October of last year and submitted to New York at that time. In looking through these BPPMs again, I see nothing that conflicts with the conclusions and spirit of the Schramm report. I do think, however, as said above that we have gone considerably further than Mr. Schramm did in analyzing our audience and in estimating what we can realistically hope to accomplish. I think it would be very useful if Mr. Schramm had the time and opportunity to comment at length on our BPPMs.

I would also like to make one further suggestion. The fact that we are getting important new evidence in almost every day now makes imperative that some sort of coordinated central file of listener reaction reports, monitoring reports, regime reaction reports, and program evaluations be set up so that everybody concerned can readily refer to the evidence available. I am making a proposal along these lines to New York through regular channels.