

May 28, 1958
**Letter, Richard Bertarandias to Howland H.
Sargeant**

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Summary:

RL European program director Richard Bertrandias informs AMCOMLIB President Sargeant of personnel changes made in response to his letter of May 12, 1958, and a subsequent telephone discussion.

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(25)

HOWLAND H. SARGEANT
PRESIDENT
ROBERT F. KELLEY
DEPUTY TO THE PRESIDENT
EUROPE
CABLES: AMCOMLIB MUNICH

NEW YORK ADDRESS:
1657 BROADWAY
NEW YORK 19, N.Y.
CABLES: AMCOMLIB
NEW YORK

May 28, 1958

TRUSTEES
MRS. OSCAR AHLGREN
JOHN R. BURTON
WILLIAM HENRY CHAMBERLIN
HON. CHARLES EDISON
J. PETER GRACE, JR.
ALLEN GROVER
H. J. HEINZ, II
ISAAC DON LEVINE
EUGENE LYONS
HOWLAND H. SARGEANT
DR. JOHN W. STUDEBAKER
REGINALD T. TOWNSEND
WILLIAM L. WHITE
PHILIP H. WILLKIE

AMCONFIDENTIAL

Mr. Howland H. Sargeant
American Committee for Liberation
1657 Broadway
New York 19, New York

Dear Howland:

As a result of your letter of May 12 and our subsequent telephone conversation, I was able to initiate some of the personnel changes we have been discussing, as reported to you by telex on May 20. Some of the points you made in your letter had called for clarification or confirmation from me, which I will attempt to provide, while at the same time adding a few comments of my own.

(1) Re your Paragraph 3: I assure you that Bob Shankland will indeed give priority attention to the Russian Desk. My main reason for putting him over all three desks was to avoid the very real possibility of a serious objection to my original plan for moving him completely out of the Belorussian and Ukrainian Desks on the part of those desks, as well as to avoid resistance to whoever replaced him. I also think that Bob's continuing authority over his old desks is a good precaution. Realizing at the same time that Bob was going to have his hands full, and with respect for the priority we have given the Russian Desk, I felt it more important to keep Peter Dornan there where he would be of most assistance to Bob during and even after the take-over period. Insofar as Joe Scott is concerned, a lot of people here feel that he has a great deal of potential as yet untapped, and I feel inclined to take a chance on it. Actually, my intention was, as you suggested, to put him through a trial period. He understands this and is perfectly happy about it.

(2) Re Paragraph 4 and Victor Frank: First may I say that you did succeed in conveying to me in New York your feelings about the need to give him protection. It is possible, however, that I did not make my intentions entirely

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clear in my letter wherein I described what I had in mind for him. Just let me reiterate the assurances I gave you on the telephone in connection with whatever writing he might do for the Desk. At no time will he be responsible for anything that goes on the air. What he may produce in the way of broadcast materials will at all times be subject to review by Charlie Malamuth, acceptance by the Russian Desk Chief, and final approval by Bob Shankland as advisor to the Russian Desk. As I indicated to you on the telephone, to cut Victor off completely from writing for the Russian Desk would have been so unnatural an arrangement that I feel sure a great amount of speculation would have been raised and unpleasant questions asked throughout the building.

(3) Now that the moves are over, I feel greatly relieved. As I have said to you in past correspondence, Victor's handling of the Russian Desk was, from an organizational point of view, much less than satisfactory. I think he will be far better placed in his new role and that his contribution will be that much more valuable to us. As for Bob Shankland, I have extremely high hopes that he is going to bring about a great many changes in the Desk and in the quality of its output which are long overdue. I have discussed his new role with him at great length and feel that he has not only a clear grasp of what must be done, but an enthusiasm for doing it as well. I have a very strong feeling that the question you raise in Point 6 regarding responsibility for decision-making will, insofar as the Russian Desk is concerned, be answered by Bob. I have also noted that he is anxious to work closely with the Policy and Planning Office as well as to improve communications with New York -- all of which seems to augur well for the future.

(4) May I also give you an idea at this point of a tentative time-table which Bob has submitted to me as a result of his preliminary thinking. While he has assumed the responsibility for the content of the Russian program, he estimated it will require two or three weeks before he can effect a complete take-over. He feels quite firmly that talent and effort on the Desk is badly distributed (I agree with him fully on this) and he proposes to offer a plan in about a month hence intended to increase to a large degree the utilization of Desk personnel. By July 1 he hopes that all of the News Department output will be channeled back through the Russian Desk, thus giving the Desk complete control and responsibility for the entire Russian-language program. He estimates, too, that in about two months he should be able to bring the content of all materials going to Taiwan directly under the Desk's control. I am encouraging all of his proposals and have assured him that I will work closely with him to help get them

through in the event that he meets resistance anywhere along the line. In other words, I'm willing to make a big bet on Bob and hope the difference in the Russian Desk operation and an improvement in its quality will be noticeable to you in the not too distant future.

(5) Re your Paragraph 5, the contents of which I have discussed with Bob Kelley, as in fact I did the rest of the letter: Bob was with me when our recent visitor summarized for us his conversations with Charlie and his own views. Neither Bob nor I can recall specific reference to a 90-day trial period, although in principle it seems like a reasonable idea. I assure you everything will be done to make this effort succeed.

(6) Re your Paragraphs 7 and 8 in Annex A: The status of Newsroom operations is just about as you reviewed it. Nevertheless, let me give you a little more detail on this, particularly with regard to responsibility. On all days when Charlie is in the office he joins the Newsroom's morning meeting in selecting and discussing those items which will appear in the late afternoon cast. Any items which appear to require delicate handling or in any way could be construed as doubtful, are earmarked for review by him after they are written. All news selections are, of course, reviewed again at the noon meeting and discussed further if circumstances seem to warrant it. You know, of course, that we have retained our 2200 news which ordinarily is not completed until 2100; however, the Newsroom is very firmly instructed that any news items which show up in the evening take which could conceivably be doubtful or deserving of cautious treatment should be deferred until the following day unless, of course, their urgency demands earlier release, in which case the news supervisor will attempt to reach Mr. Malamuth or myself by telephone. The responsibility for the night news change rests, then, with the night shift supervisor -- namely, Ronalds, Ryser, or Obolensky. As mentioned before, there are also days when Mr. Malamuth is not or cannot be here; I referred to holidays, Saturdays, or periods when he is not in town, such as last week when he was away for two days attending the periodic regional meeting. In view of the foregoing, I think you would agree with Bob Kelley and myself that it would be difficult to assume that Charlie could technically accept complete responsibility for all news content. His role, as it stands, is to participate in the selection of news, advise on the handling of possibly controversial items, and determine that established policy is being followed. He understands this role and has accepted it. There is one more factor which has to do with internal relationships between emigres and American advisors and supervisory personnel which we cannot afford to ignore. I think to indicate that all responsibility suddenly had been removed from the News Department would produce an unhealthy

internal situation. Now, I hasten to point out that the present arrangement is working quite well. The idea of exercising every caution in the selection and handling of news is uppermost in the minds of Newsroom personnel and Charlie's advice is being followed closely and willingly.

(7) Also bearing on the matter of news responsibility is the question you raise in the second part of your Paragraph 8, and which I answered in part above. Bob Shankland's proposal that all Newsroom output to the Russian program again will be run through the Russian Desk will be carried out. This will not, however, eliminate any of the procedures described above, but it will give us one more checkpoint, as well as place the final responsibility for what goes on the air. At the same time, this allows us to retain the hydro-matic or fluid drive concept you once described to me as a desirable modus operandi. Bob has, in fact, already begun to move in on this as much as his present heavy schedule permits. He has selected July 1 as the effective date in line with Pete Dornan's and Joe Scott's returns from home leave late in June.

(8) Re your Paragraph 9 of Annex A: I have been in more recent communication with Gene King on this subject and I believe he is prepared to brief you on my views as they stand at this time. I would just like to emphasize, however, that I hope that whatever we do we keep in mind Mr. Ronalds' long service and real value to Radio Liberation and that we not permit him to feel that he is being punished for delinquencies which in the past have been characteristic of the entire radio operation rather than the Newsroom as an isolated unit. I think I might add here an opinion most succinctly and effectively expressed by our recent visitor when discussing the charges leveled against our Newsroom operations. In effect, he said that a great part of the trouble very likely had to do with our effort to reshape the character and content of the station in response to new demands placed upon it. (I certainly didn't express that as well as he did, but I imagine he said the same thing to you upon his return.)

(9) I can only hope that the dust will soon settle. We have much to do -- so much, in fact, that I begin to spin each time I try to sum it up. The problems of the past few months have been extremely time-consuming and distracting, not only to me, but to others as well, with whom I must discuss these matters in order to resolve them. God, our critics, and staff willing, I'd like now to be able to get on with the job. I don't expect you to reply to the obvious.

Once again, many thanks for your patience and your support. And just by the way, I seem to remember your having said something about paying us a visit sometime soon -- is that still a possibility?

Sincere best regards,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'RB', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Richard Bertrandias

RB:lr

cc: Mr. Kelley
Mr. King