

February 19, 1959

Ambassador Beam's Critique of Radio Free Europe

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Summary:

Ambassador Jacob Beam forwards to Washington in Warsaw Embassy Dispatch no. 301 his critique of RFE Polish broadcasts as incompatible with US policy goals in Poland. In an attached undated and incomplete memorandum, International Organization Division dissents from the State Department criticism

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IN REFERENCE NUMBER: 10-253

MEMORANDUM FOR: DIRECTOR P. HOFFER
SUBJECT:

Radio Free Europe Polish Broadcasts

REFERENCE: Our Memorandum 10-433, dated 4 November 1958

1. DIRECTOR has recently put forward specific and general criticisms of Radio Free Europe's broadcasts to Poland. As we explained in the memorandum which contained DIRECTOR'S specific criticisms, we share completely DIRECTOR'S concern that RFE maintain a responsible role in its broadcasting to Poland and remain within the policy guide lines that have been laid down.

2. In this case, we have prepared the attached additional general study in collaboration with RFE's New York and Zurich headquarters. This review attempts to present a balanced view of RFE's broadcasts to Poland from July to December 1958. It includes a brief analysis of the Polish situation and a detailed description of RFE's treatment of Polish events and developments.

3. We believe that DIRECTOR will agree that RFE's broadcasts to Poland continue to be generally excellent; that they are based on a realistic analysis of the situation; that they possess a useful function in mitigating further damage by the regime away from the "October Revolution," and are well received by a very large audience. We have selected a few cases in RFE program material, but these were either omitted in the overall programming pattern and have been largely corrected. In other policy areas more detailed. It is our considered judgment that the overall pattern of RFE broadcasting to Poland has progressed steadily in the direction of representing contemporary Polish issues while maintaining a healthy critical balance in the region as required by regime actions and statements. We accordingly believe that RFE continues to operate within the parameters of the Radio Broadcasting Policy Committee's paper for Poland. Together with RFE management, we are maintaining a continuing operating review to insure that the Radio will continue to operate within these policies.

4. We are sure that DIRECTOR will agree that it is in both our interests to reach an early resolution of any outstanding

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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM : Amembassy WARSAW

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TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

February 19, 1959 4227691 H

REF : Embassy's Telegram 618, October 22, 1957

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SUBJECT: Comments on Radio Free Europe Broadcasts to Poland.

In response to informal requests from the Department, the following Embassy views on Radio Free Europe (R.F.E.) Polish broadcasts are submitted herewith. They are based on a study of scripts of broadcasts made over the past several months, as well as on an intermittent monitoring of these broadcasts. An effort is also made to place in perspective the role of R.F.E. in relation to present informational possibilities available to the United States. These comments cannot be considered as all-inclusive and references to individual broadcasts are only made to point up a specific criticism. Emphasis in this summary is placed on those characteristics of R.F.E. broadcasts which the Embassy believes are incompatible with expressed United States' policy and aims in Poland.

In the interest of brevity only general reference is made to the documents which outline established R.F.E. broadcasting policy towards Poland. Likewise, it is not believed necessary to outline the Embassy's views on current Polish developments since these are covered in continuing Embassy communications. I should mention that I am often impressed by the excellence of much of the raw intelligence which comes into the hands of R.F.E. but equally disappointed by the mishandling of this information in several of the broadcasts with which we are acquainted.

The question which naturally continues to arise in a review of R.F.E. broadcasts is to what degree R.F.E. in practice attempts to conform to those broadcasting directives which point out the special conditions which operate in Poland. Briefly summarized are some specific references in broadcasts which appear to violate established policy:

(1) R.F.E. broadcasts should use "thoroughly responsible and reliable sources of news, commentary and other information".

"Revelations" of a Polish official's ex-housekeeper (Swiat-Innatowits) on the "new class", which R.F.E.'s own evaluator said should be used "with extreme caution", were employed in a series of broadcasts in November and appear to have been highly exaggerated. Other distortions have been disseminated; for example, in a January 18 broadcast, the statement was made "hundreds and thousands of Poles who, through the whistles and cat-calls and

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noise of jamming machines, listened to our programs broadcast to Poland". So far as professionally competent monitors can determine, there is no Polish jamming of broadcasts as implied. In a broadcast of January 29, customs duties on gift parcels were called "astronomical" and it would have been fairer to cite the greatly reduced rates which were placed into effect in September 1957, which were included in a Department of Commerce leaflet published at that time. In a broadcast of January 15 on alcohol consumption and the official Polish attitude thereto, mention could have been made of the degree of success which was attained during the past year in reducing the consumption of alcohol, estimated at 8%.

(2) R.F.E. should use "greatest caution" in discussing Poland's relations with the U.S.S.R. and other Communist states in order to avoid "creation of unnecessary difficulties for the GOMULKA regime and its relations with those countries."

An October 8 broadcast was too hasty in drawing unprovable and unsubstantiated conclusions about Gomulka's trip to Moscow and referred to the myth of Soviet pressures on him. A January 12, 1959 broadcast entitled "Still No Polish Consulates in the U.S.S.R." was obviously intended to stir up trouble between Poland and the Soviet Union.

(3) R.F.E. should "avoid excessive and contentious polemics, vituperation and vindictiveness".

On January 9 R.F.E. incorrectly characterized a JEDRYCHOWSKI interview on price and wage reforms as "exactly like the methods in the old Stalinist-Beirutist" days and "now Jedrychowski wants to catch up on Beirut and Kaganovich". Another broadcast on January 3 described Ignar as "a born coward" which may be true but is uncalled for. Vulgar sarcasm was used in a November 21 broadcast referring to "three cubes of bath salts" from Mrs. Cyrankiewicz.

(4) R.F.E. should "avoid the use of program content and tone which either is calculated to be inflammatory or whose affects may reasonably be anticipated as potentially inflammatory".

In R.F.E. comment on Church-State developments there has consistently been an exaggeration of the "offensive" against the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in connection with the Jasna GORA incident. In an October 2 broadcast it was stated that Gomulka said he did not want any war with the Church but "he conducts that war in full". The recent special coverage of the Father PIROZYNSKI trial appears designed to stir up animosities in the religious field.

There have been several references which indicate a continued influence of emigre circles in R.F.E. output. An attempt was made in a January 29 broadcast to gain credit for the return of historical relics for the "Executive

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of National Unity in London" while decrying "no interest" on the part of Polish authorities. Use of emigre opinion in a November 25 broadcast regarding the reopening of consulates stressed that these would serve the "goals of destructive Communist propaganda" and did not attempt to balance this with an expression of U.S. policy favoring a limited re-establishment of consulates.

* * * * *

The above comparison of R.F.E. broadcasting policy toward Poland with selected examples of broadcasts (and many others could be cited) during the recent period leads unmistakably to the conclusion that R.F.E. continues to avoid in a large degree a constructive role in its broadcasts to Poland and violates in a regular fashion policy guidance.

Over and above a repeated failure to conform to directives, which may not be possible under the conditions under which R.F.E. operates, the question arises whether R.F.E. has outlived its usefulness in relation to our national policies and developments which have occurred within Poland and which have affected mutual relations between United States and Poland. Consideration should be given in this connection to the significantly increased opportunities for exchanges of persons and information which have developed within the last two years. Recognition should be made of the recently inaugurated distributed Ameryka magazine, the continued Informational Media Guaranty program, the successful implementation of the Ford and Rockefeller exchanges, and other means for dissemination of information about developments in the West. Even more important has been the development of American-Polish economic relations through credits agreements.

Reaction to R.F.E. is difficult to discuss within small compass. Generally speaking, R.F.E. has a large audience because it is vicariously engaged in making trouble and is anti-Communist. (It may be asked whether the Polish population requires tuition in either respect.) Those of my diplomatic colleagues able to listen to R.F.E. make smiling acknowledgement of disclaimers concerning U.S. official responsibility and express mystification that we seem to be under-cutting our policy of encouraging more normal contacts and relations with Poland which they consider has been so far successful. As to Polish educated groups, quite a few persons acknowledge that R.F.E. occasionally carries good material, such as the interviews with General BOR almost two years ago, but feel strongly that R.F.E. is on the air too long and pads its programs with childish notions and meretricious items.

Conclusions

1. R.F.E. presents the aspect of waging a cold war, in a spirit of emigre self-justification, against conditions as they are today in Poland. It appears to give insufficient attention to the beneficial changes since 1956, the circumstances under which they are being defended and the non-regime personalities (some of whom returned to Poland) who are doing the best they can to influence

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a more liberal course. R.F.E. carries on a personal vendetta, occasionally exceedingly petty, against regime leaders. Although the U.S. has no reason to be fond of Gomulka, he, together with his program, seem to be about the best alternative that Poland can hope for at the present moment. Accordingly there would seem to be no reason for unnecessarily infuriating him and his associates at what is taken to be American instigation, since U.S. responsibility is generally imputed to R.F.E. There is always the possibility that extreme provocation could drive the regime to re-instituting jamming, wholly or in part, to the detriment of the dissemination of more objective Western information material. This is quite apart from the broader danger that R.F.E. provocations lend support to Party elements who question the experiment of cooperation with the West, thus laying us open to the risk of being restricted and punished in other sectors of our informational work which seek gradual and evolutionary changes in the Polish scene.

2. Complaints against R.F.E. seem to be of no avail since mistakes go on being repeated. The question arises whether adequate supervision can be successfully applied and whether a drastic re-organization would not be better indicated.

3. Free world information and criticism continue to be essential in Poland but the advisability of R.F.E. trying to arrogate to itself a dominant role in the cause of freedom is now somewhat questionable in view of the access of the population to other Western news broadcasts and the influences within Poland receiving encouragement through increased contact with the West. A good case could be made that R.F.E. should be dispensed with in favor of a modified Voice of America program which made American criticism and dissatisfaction clear, whenever necessary, through the handling of straight news, with occasional comment. As long, however, as the United States is identified with R.F.E., our policy would be better served by a less strident, more responsible and better balanced approach, both as to volume and content.

Jacob D. Beam
Jacob D. Beam
Ambassador

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