

June 1, 1962

Prague Embassy Views of Radio Free Europe

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Summary:

In Dispatch No. 743, the Prague Embassy views RFE as "doing a job of good quality" but offers suggestions for improving the broadcasts

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FROM : American Embassy PRAGUE

743
NO.

June 1, 1962

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

This document consists of
pages: No. 11 of 11

REF : CW 6895, March 2, 1962

For Dept. Use Only	ACTION	INFO	DEPT	RM/R	REP	AF	ARA	EUR	FE	NEA	CU	INR	E	P	IO	ICA	
				AGR	COM	FRB	INT	LAB	TAN	TR	XMB						
REC'D			OTHER	AIR	ARMY	CIA	NAVY	OSD	OCB	USIA							

SUBJECT: Appraisal of Current Broadcasting by RFE

COPY NO. 13-28 SERIES B

This despatch contains the appraisal of current RFE broadcasting requested by CW 6895 of March 2, 1962.

This document consists of 4 pages number 1 of 6 copies, Series B.

1. General Comment

In the terms of its policy guidance and subject to severe limitations in reception, the Embassy considers that the Czechoslovak service of RFE is doing a job of good quality. Its coverage does not duplicate that of the VOA to any important extent, dealing mainly with the quite different subject of analysis of events in the CSSR and the Bloc. It is believed there should be a still greater emphasis on selective cross reporting on conditions and developments in other Bloc states, since it is considered that an appropriate long-term mission for RFE would be to function as an authoritative outside source of coverage on inner-Bloc developments and the course of Bloc policy abroad to which Czechoslovaks and other Bloc populations would turn for reliable information on internal conditions in their own country and in other Communist states. This is a role which is not duplicated by other radio services and which would, if the Czechoslovak experience is any guide, command interest and attention over a long period. To fill this role, it is felt the tone and vocabulary of many broadcasts reviewed would be improved by further eliminating the sometimes aggressive, vituperative quality and that "identification" with the Czechoslovak audience (Point C. below) would have to be severed. This function would also indicate a greater amount of interpretive comment on USSR affairs and policy and a greater use of Radio Liberation facilities for RFE programming. It is believed that a further shift away from coverage of inner-Bloc affairs toward increased coverage of Western European affairs should be avoided unless this is either considered negotiable in return for cessation of jamming or there is some future possibility of takeover of much of RFE personnel and equipment by a Western European group such as the Common Market countries.

2. Sampling Carried Out

This appraisal is based mainly on analysis of over 200 scripts for the

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FORM 6-61 FS-439

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FORM FS-439c
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From Prague

months of March, April and May of 1962, backed by review of approximately the same number of scripts over the longer period September 1961-February 1962. It proved impossible to base much of the analysis on actual listening. Twelve separate attempts to tune into noon and 5:00 p.m. broadcasts during April and May in Prague on all listed wave lengths were frustrated by jamming. Field attempts in Western Bohemia on April 25 at 1930 and 2200 hours on five separate wave lengths encountered jamming, as did tuning attempts on five wave lengths on April 26 and April 27 at 1800. The field trip had to be broken off because of unusually heavy surveillance by the Czechoslovak police. An Embassy officer did get unjammed reception at several points in Slovakia, two of them outside of Bratislava, during evening broadcasts on May 7-10. Other Embassy officers have received occasional unjammed reception in the Pardubice, Ostrava and Trnava areas over the past six months.

3. Individual Points Noted

A. The program series "Behind the Iron Curtain" has been uniformly good and is considered perhaps most effective of the RFE programs. In practice, the Embassy finds as much--or nearly as much--curiosity, particularly among politically interested Czechoslovaks, and far less available current information, on intra-Bloc developments as in developments in the non-Communist world. It has become very clear from personal conversations between Embassy officers and Czechoslovaks that such subjects as the actual practical effects of somewhat greater political freedoms in Poland (for example, the wider availability of Western publications), the greater liberality of the USSR in the field of exchanges, or wider availability of consumer goods in Hungary, have a greater relevance to daily life in the CSSR and a greater emotional impact on the population, even on the young who have grown up under Communism, than similar material on the U.S. or Western Europe. The same holds in somewhat narrower measure for discussion of current ideological differences among the various Communist Parties. Such programs can create more pressures within "acceptable" limits among the general populations and more dissatisfaction and ferment among the lower Party leadership than examples from Western life which are less interesting because they are so distantly unattainable.

B. It is felt that there is still too much sneering, abusive tone in delivery and, particularly, over-use of heavily colored modifiers. An example is Essay E-21 of March 17, 1962, which speaks of "a power appeasing, no lip-smacking but hiccuping, belching and vomiting as to make people at home feel sick in even watching the spectacle." The Czechoslovak regime is continually referred to as "fools". Possibly correct, but the point can be made equally well, using language which would not detract from a stronger reputation for objectivity. In general, what is suggested is a calmer, more professional, even more scholarly, approach and a less aggressively propagandistic one. It is believed that the majority of the present staff of the Czechoslovak service of RFE is quite capable of making a shift to a redefined style and mission and would in fact welcome such a shift as a contribution to long-range morale. The remaining points below carry out this approach in more detail.

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C. If it is felt that the primary function of RFE should be to provide accurate, if selectively presented, information on internal developments in other Bloc countries and on the success or failure of Bloc foreign policy, and it is desired to achieve a sustained listenership through increased reputation for objectivity and accuracy, then steps should logically also be taken to sever the conscious attempt at identification between the Czechoslovak Service of RFE and the Czechoslovak listener--i.e., the references to "our country," "our economy," "our future," etc., might gradually be dropped and corresponding changes made in the titles and format of individual program series. In this case, the approach would be of the well-informed outsider whose opinions command respect because of his expert knowledge and interpretation, rather than of the political refugee.

D. There is room for more higher level economic analysis on such subjects as the budget and foreign trade balances. This might be utilized to give the program series directed to Party members somewhat more content. For example, there could be more comment on relations between current inadequacies of housing services, transport and consumer goods on one hand and the continued high rate of investment, military expenditure and foreign credits on the other. The economic commentaries in A Block E-151 of March 26 and A Block E-159 of April 3 were good in this regard, but a still higher level may be indicated in line with a more professional approach.

E. Similarly, there could be more treatment of the continuing problems of government institutions such as the National Committees, in this case perhaps giving comparison with local and regional government in the West. Scripts A Block E-114 of March 19, 1962, and A Block E-158 of April 2, 1962, contained a useful discussion on National Committee problems and this is a theme which affects nearly everyone.

F. Though the use of alternating speakers for dramatic effect is obviously justified on technical broadcasting grounds, it was felt both from actual hearing and from script review that too great a use is sometimes made of this device, which sometimes tends in a staccato, nervous style to overdramatize content which would be better treated in somewhat greater depth by individual speakers alternating if necessary at longer intervals. This is particularly noticeable in the series "The Day at Home and Abroad."

G. It is believed there should be more features concentrating on more thorough treatment of one subject. Though the relationship with jamming is clear in this case, it was nevertheless considered that those who took the trouble to find an audible RFE wave length would also have the interest and stamina to listen to a longer talk.

H. It would seem desirable to place slightly more emphasis on programs aimed at special groups such as youth, women, etc. Little material aimed specifically at these groups was noted in the scripts reviewed.

I. It is felt that economic coverage, especially agriculture, should cite more facts and figures, even if from Communist sources. It is realized that this presents difficulties in radio broadcasting.

J. Programs on price and availability of consumer goods both in the Bloc and outside were considered good and, given restraint in tone and style, desirable to maintain current Czechoslovak resentment and pressure on food shortages. Labor and Life E-117 of May 15, 1962, with a comparison of meat consumption in West Germany and the CSSR, was good in this regard.

K. The program series "Calling the Czechoslovak Communist Party" is well conceived, but some of the scripts reviewed were felt to be rather weak. An example was CPE-25 of April 3, 1962, which started off with a rather promising comparison between the position of ex-Party members in France and the CSSR, but failed to make a clear point at the end. The same might be said of CPE-30 of May 8, 1962, on polycentrism, which fails to point any moral at its conclusion. The use of past quotes by Soviet leaders such as the citations from Lenin and Khrushchev in Program No. 31 of this series of May 15, 1962, was considered effective. The essay series of short philosophical editorials (Essay 23 of March 31, 1962, is a good example) is good, but the level could be raised without becoming abstruse.

L. RFE's treatment of the important themes of de-Stalinization and the Barak case was considered timely and excellent.

M. It would be desirable to have more material on inner-Party parliamentarianism, the necessity for formal checks and balances to avoid the excesses of Stalinism and other recurrent demonstrations of human fallibility and more material designed to increase the feeling of mutual solidarity among the Czechoslovak population, factionalized as it is by historical factors.

N. It is believed that a sensitive Czechoslovak nerve should be played on and that there should be more adverse comment on East Germany as a bankrupt subsidy enterprise maintained by Czechoslovakia and other outside economic infusions, and utilizing criticism of East Germany as a vehicle for setting the record straight on West Germany. This was well done in the coverage of the recent Ulbricht visit to Czechoslovakia and should be repeated.

For the Charge d'Affaires ad interim:

Jonathan Dean
First Secretary of Embassy

cc: Janich

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