

June 7, 1962

**Warsaw Embassy Appraisal of Current Broadcasting
to Poland by Radio Free Europe**

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Summary:

In Dispatch No. 466, the Warsaw Embassy views RFE as "doing an effective job" in broadcasting to Poland

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NO. 466

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

June 7, 1962
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SUBJECT: Embassy Appraisal of Current Broadcasting to Poland by Radio Free Europe (RFE)

I. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Embassy's considered opinion is that Radio Free Europe is doing an effective job in an important and complex undertaking. This positive evaluation contrasts sharply with that of three years ago and reflects subsequent modifications in RFE broadcasts as well as in the Polish situation.

Examples of RFE effectiveness are numerous and a few have been cited to substantiate the Embassy's general satisfaction with the great majority of programs. There also have been occasional mistakes and some programs of lesser value which, however, were of acceptable number and proportions. Some of those have been cited for illustrative purposes and in a strictly constructive view. A principal point here is that RFE can hardly avoid the onus of being a partial outsider and the burden of all that implies as regards the offering of criticisms, judgments and suggestions.

The Embassy would be interested in further RFE attempts to increase the European component of its popular image, to improve the coverage of Polish activities abroad, and to fully and imaginatively present the facts and implications of U.S.-Polish economic relations. We also feel there would be advantage in increased RFE attention to the intellectual and cultural drabness of Communism and to the particular interests of Polish youth.

II. GENERAL AND COMPARATIVE EVALUATION

The evaluations in this despatch of RFE broadcasts to Poland are based on the Embassy's regular monitoring and script reading over the past two years with particular attention to April and May 1962. Several weekly monitoring reports are enclosed, beginning with that for Christmas week 1960 and extending into June 1962. Comprehensive audibility observations are not presented owing to their repetitiousness and to a recent intensive technical survey reported

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separately. (See also enclosures, and Embassy despatch 220, November 16, 1961, for spot observations on audibility.)

The Embassy believes that RFE will have an important role as long as censorship and distortion of information continue to be practiced in various forms within Poland to the detriment of the U.S. RFE offers to the Polish population timely, accurate and detailed presentations on Western policies and events which are not readily available internally. On all but a few sensitive issues it exhibits a reasonable objectivity, and it implicitly conveys a Western sense of plurality and free expression. Within the limits of its sources and remove, RFE informs the Polish people of developments within Poland which the regime has ignored or obscured, and to some extent it stimulates the regime to be more forthcoming with information and explanations. With its large audience, RFE has an important limiting effect on the regime's near-monopoly of information media. As such, the broadcasting of RFE is highly valued by the Embassy.

Embassy evaluation of current RFE broadcasts is much more positive than three years ago. We attribute this change to modifications in the style and content of the broadcasts as well as to developments on the Polish scene. The latter considerations, most recently reviewed and projected in A-432, January 11, are well known to the Department. RFE, for its part, appears to have substantially reduced the use of emphasis by exaggeration and distortion, of vituperation and vindictiveness, of inflammatory reporting, etc., complained of in the reference despatch. Accordingly, current RFE broadcasting is less propagandistic and tendentious and more accurate, topical and objective than in the past. It also is less titillating and more responsible. In sum, RFE appears to have settled down to a more balanced role in terms of the pertinent and admittedly restrictive policy guidance for broadcasts to Poland.

III. EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVENESS

One dramatic example of an RFE contribution to limiting the regime's near monopoly of information was the extensive reporting of the resumption of Soviet atomic testing at a time when Polish media were perforce silent. The contrast was devastating, and Polish media personnel writhed before their inability to acknowledge a major event known to all Poland through western radio broadcasts. More recently, there have been several useful broadcasts explaining the reasons for the subsequent U.S. resumption of atomic tests, (e.g., on twin morality in Other Side of the Coin, 2828, April 26). RFE has reported extensively and effectively on the complex story of ferment within the Communist bloc following the XXII CPSU Congress (e.g., Special Program 1451, May 5), kept the record straight on Berlin (e.g., Press Review 1669, April 18) and disarmament, highlighted oppressive conditions in East Germany, and disclosed the nature of the VIII Youth Festival (e.g., Special Program 1453, May 14). RFE also revealed the insidious implications of the law on public assembly (e.g., Facts and Views 645, April 4), recalled the unpopular origins of Polish Communism (e.g., Other Side of the Coin 2819, April 6) and helped maintain the memory of non-Communist traditions (e.g., Facts and Views 669, May 3). Notable were the RFE use of confidential pamphlets on de-Stalinization published by the Italian and French Communist parties (e.g., Calling the Communist Party 551, May 14), and the frequent focusing on the failures of dogmatic agricultural practices

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throughout the bloc against the background of the relative successes of pragmatic Polish practices (e.g., Western Farming 262, April 1, and Through the Village 543, April 4). There were good RFE contributions to the maintenance of Polish-Western cultural relationships, including several stimulating reviews of American literature and theater (e.g., Window to the West, April 1, Facts and Views 663, April 26, and American People and Ideas 58, May 11). These several examples represent but a small fraction of RFE broadcasting in April and May, and they are cited only illustratively and to substantiate the Embassy's general satisfaction with the great majority of RFE programs.

IV. EXAMPLES OF SHORTCOMINGS

It is patently impossible for a radio station operating in the circumstances of RFE to edify and entertain a great audience at long distance without making some mistakes and inviting some criticism. The Embassy considers, however, that the number and significance of RFE mistakes have been so markedly reduced in recent years that our continuing responsibility for critical evaluation can be discharged most easily and effectively by informal direct discussion with the responsible officials in Munich as was most recently done during a visit in January (see SHERER TO VERELER Official-Infomal letter of February 1). For illustrative purposes, and looking only at broadcasts during the most recent months, we offer the following comments. We feel that RFE does not always select the best targets for personal criticism, that it sometimes passes unbalanced judgments or inappropriately suggests actions concerning complex internal matters, and that it occasionally fails to develop topics adequately, logically or unemotionally. The Embassy cannot agree "that most listeners consider RFE as people who have 'grown' into the homeland even though we live abroad" (Week in Poland 102, April 1). No matter how close RFE may feel and in fact be to the Polish situation, it cannot completely avoid the onus of being a partial outsider and the burden of all that implies as regards the offering of criticism, judgments and suggestions.

Who in the hierarchy should be criticized, when and in what manner? In general, the RFE formula appears to be satisfactory, e.g., the recent handling of GOMULKA. However, it is questionable if the ad hominum commentary about STAREWICZ in Calling the Communist Party 547, April 9, was well advised. "Dignitaries of Starewicz's type" are about the best Poland can hope for at this time, and certainly there is no lack of considerably more objectionable and vulnerable Party functionaries. A similar observation might be applied to RFE's recent pointed attacks on KISILEWSKI's intentions and influence. There is admittedly room for differences of opinion here, and the commentaries in Facts and Views 650, April 10, and Week in Poland 102, April 1, were generally good. Parenthetically, the beatings which RFE regularly administers to PIASECKI and PAX seem fully justified and are illustrative of the opportunities for strong criticism against carefully selected targets (e.g., Other Side of the Coin 2825, April 17).

In "No Curtain Shall Divide Us 1016, April 27, concerning the "Maria KONOPNICKA" ship fire trial, the main point was that the senior defendants should not have been acquitted. While this might be accurate, we doubt if any outsider can or should point the finger so prominently in such a case. Furthermore, we perceive no advantage in RFE calling for the blood of those fortunate enough to

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escape, particularly when great numbers of technical intelligentsia, many presumably RFE listeners, see themselves regularly forced by the system to cut corners at the risk of safety and sanitation. The subject was better handled in a subsequent factual presentation pointing up the problem without passing judgment on the individuals concerned (No Curtain Shall Divide Us 1020, May 11). Facts and Views 662, April 25, after an edifying presentation on the pending reorganization of the legal profession, suggested that the Polish Bar should defend itself against the changes. This seemed gratuitous and inappropriate, coming from an outsider in the free West with nothing to offer the beleaguered Polish lawyer except the admonition "Defend yourself".

Facts and Views, May 1, concluded a good program by correctly identifying adequate housing as the Polish workers greatest wish. However, this seemed too generally known to warrant particular mention without adding at least some incisive explanation of the causes and possible remedies for the lack of adequate housing. After a good commentary on the "freedom discussion" in Week in Poland 105, April 29, Adam SCHAFF was said to be without influence among Polish intellectuals. Concurrently it was noted that Polish sociologists had helped to open an important window to the USSR at a recent meeting in Moscow. There was no mention, however, that Schaff organized and led the Polish delegation to Moscow. While we hold no particular brief for Schaff, we would expect Polish intellectuals in RFE's audience to question the objectivity of running down Schaff on the one hand and withholding deserved credit on the other. Finally and more importantly, there was the emotionally inaccurate conclusion to a recent, and otherwise good, program giving the woman's view on the resumption of U.S. atomic testing. This program by its final forecast that Polish women would "have to protest against the American murder of children", undercut RFE credibility. Polish women have not as yet had to make any such protest.

V. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT

RFE broadcasts reflect a mixture of points of view and materials running from internal immigration to emigre opposition but including an important and perhaps increasing European component. We consider this latter development very worthwhile for its own sake and to help offset the narrower image of RFE as a U.S.-financed and directed, Polish emigre-operated, anti-Communist radio service speaking from the German Federal Republic. Good techniques to this end were the news roundups by RFE correspondents from several European capitals (e.g., Kaleidoscope 108, April 7) and quotations from a wide range of outstanding Western commentators (e.g. from ARON in Press Review 1666, April 9). Europe with its diversity, vitality and free consensus offers a wide range of topics with interest and appeal for a Polish audience provided it can also be shown that Poland is not being willfully excluded from Europe by the Europeans. We would therefore suggest that RFE consider a series of thoughtful discussions on the Common Market and European political integration in the light of Polish fears of growing economic, political and cultural isolation. A beginning in this field was noted in Economics 375, March 23.

A major limitation on RFE effectiveness is the station's apparent inability to discuss satisfactorily certain delicate controversial topics of major popular interest as well as regime interest in Poland, e.g. recognition of the Oder-Neisse line,

German military policy, and an atom-free zone in Central Europe. Nonetheless, indirect consideration of these matters is useful and could be increased (c.g., the lengthy French statement in Facts and Views 652, April 12; the item on West German refugee attitudes in Special Program 1432, April 16, and the commentary on U.S.-GFR relations in Press Review 1685, May 11). RFE also understandably suffers somewhat from occasional lack of timely on-the-spot details. Compensating techniques which could be used more extensively are intensive coverage of Polish events abroad and commentaries by recent visitors to Poland. The latter technique, which was much well employed several months ago in the interview with Congressman ZABLOCKI, of course requires cooperation from the visitors. Coverage of Polish events is easier but can be mishandled as, for example, the Polish poster art exhibit in Munich (Window to the West 489, April 10). In this case, the poster exhibit was used primarily as an excuse for a contrived criticism of the Polish economic system. Parenthetically, praising the Polish exhibit against the foil of "monotonous... unimaginative...decided by business...monstrous" Western poster art did not enhance the tone of that program.

The Embassy believes there is a need for full and imaginative presentation to the Polish people of the facts and implications of U.S. economic assistance to Poland since 1957 (Embassy A-519 March 15 and despatch 363, March 23). The treatment of this subject in Facts and Views 659, April 20, was good, but it did not specify the extremely favorable long-term and interest-free conditions. Also, such programs should explain in meaningful and readily understandable terms the significance of PL-480 sales to Poland, as well as of the several other exceptional aspects of U.S.-Polish economic relationships. Other topics which RFE might hit harder and more imaginatively are the short and long run fallacies in the Communist wave-of-the future prognostications (e.g. Special Program 1420, April 7), and the personally insulting implications of censorship, surveillance and passport policy, the drab boredom of Communist-supported culture, and the childishness of conspiratorial Party secrecy. It is the ridiculous aspects that need to be stressed here, with humor and irony. This approach would be particularly important in helping to establish some rapport with Polish youth, to whom RFE does not seem to have much to offer. Perhaps a regular, late night modern jazz and avant garde classical music program with brief spot news à la BEC and an occasional imaginative commentary would be worth considering as an attraction to university-age youth. Finally, as RFE is aware, it cannot afford only and always to criticize everything in Poland and still hope to maintain listener rapport, since only a relatively few Poles manage to disassociate themselves from everything that transpires in Poland. Accordingly, we would recommend a more liberal use of positive commentary if only to make the negative observations all the more telling. An example of this was the recent RFE commentary on the "anarchy discussion" in Przeglad Kulturalny, where the RFE speaker pointed out the "serious and interesting" character of some of the articles published.

For the Ambassador:

Lee T. Stull

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First Secretary of Embassy

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