

June 19, 1964

Prague Embassy Praises Radio Free Europe

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Summary:

In Airgram 556, the Prague Embassy again commends RFE but suggests further improvements in its broadcasts

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AIRGRAM

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A-556

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TO : Department of State
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This document consists of 5 pages, No. MC of 3, series Series A

RUMAN ANALYSIS & DISTRIBUTION BRANCH

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FROM : AmEmbassy PRAGUE

DATE: June 19, 1964

SUBJECT : Appraisal of Current Broadcasting by Radio Free Europe

REF : Department's CA-10223, April 6, 1964

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LIMIT DISTRIBUTION

In accordance with instructions contained in the Department's airgram, the Embassy has examined and appraised current RFE broadcasting to Czechoslovakia.

Because of intense and effective jamming of RFE broadcasts in the Prague area, it was not possible for the Embassy to base its appraisal on monitoring of actual broadcasts. Monitoring efforts during this period outside Prague showed that good to very good reception was possible in many areas, but there was no opportunity for sustained monitoring of value in connection with this appraisal.

In these circumstances, our comments are based almost exclusively on RFE scripts supplied by EAS Munich. Approximately 100 of such scripts, covering the period mid-March to mid-May were considered.

General Comment

In general the Embassy considers that RFE, to the extent that it is able to penetrate electronic jamming, is effectively operating within the framework of its current policy guidance. With its concentration on developments in Czechoslovakia, and more generally in its reporting on trends and events in the "socialist" world, its coverage does not duplicate that of the VOA to any great extent.

Coverage of Sino-Soviet dispute and cross reporting on reactions of other communist parties is excellent. (Behind the Curtain E-256,

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April 10, reporting on the Polish CP approach to the dispute is a good example.) The subject is one of great interest in Czechoslovakia and RFE coverage serves to correct distortions and significant omissions in official media such as the treatment of the Rumanian position on the Sino-Soviet dispute and that country's steps away from Moscow's tutelage.

In the specific European context, we should like to see more coverage of developments both in the Federal Republic of Germany and in East Germany. The regime effectively exploits such events as Transport Minister SEEBOHM's utterances to play upon historic apprehensions and concern over growing German economic and military strength. RFE could, we feel, profitably devote more attention to the democratic nature of the Federal Republic and to placing extremist statements such as those of Minister Seebom into proper context. Further, it would be helpful to place more stress on Germany as a NATO partner whose limited rearmament was a consequence of Soviet aggressive moves after World War II. In such programs, RFE should consider that they are addressing themselves to the leadership and to those in a position to influence the leadership, not to those who want to change the system radically.

In addition, we consider more attention to the current role and status of smaller Western European states as being both appropriate and timely. Increased coverage of developments in Austria, Switzerland or Sweden (as neutrals) or in Belgium, Netherlands or Denmark (as NATO powers) would, we believe, provide obvious opportunities for comparisons by listeners of conditions in Czechoslovakia and those obtaining in states of roughly similar size. This would help counteract the constant propaganda claims that such small Western European states exercise no real power or influence in various Western European councils while Czechoslovakia, a member of CEMA and the Warsaw Pact, allegedly benefits from its Soviet-imposed associations.

Insofar as reporting on internal Czechoslovak developments is concerned, our general impression is that coverage is effective and responsive to policy guidance. Internal contradictions in political, cultural and economic areas and historical distortions are effectively pointed up. Our one general criticism, however, is that scripts tend at times to be too negative, vituperative and sarcastic. We feel that a somewhat lighter touch in which listeners are invited to draw their own conclusions would improve RFE's image and effectiveness. More detailed comment on this point follows.

Having made the above general comments, the following specific points seem to us to merit more detailed treatment.

1. The Embassy notes that RFE continues to employ a blatantly propagandistic, heavily sarcastic and vituperative tone in many of its scripts -- particularly those on internal matters. Czechs who take the trouble to fight their way through heavy jamming to listen to political commentary from the West are generally sufficiently sophisticated and perceptive in a political

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sense to reject this type of approach, one with which they are all too familiar since it is so frequently employed by the regime itself. They are, however, interested in knowing what is going on both at home and abroad and in intelligent commentary on these developments.

Judging from the appraisal carried out two years ago and reported in A-6895 of June 1, 1962, there has been a marked decline in the sneering, name calling type of reporting, but we feel that further progress in this direction is necessary.

2. The Embassy suggests the toning down and, in fact, elimination of the "Novotny must go" theme which runs through many scripts. (See A Block E-878, April 2, for example.) While Novotny and his close supporters are, of course, responsible for current foreign and domestic policies, we believe that better results can be obtained by the use of less inflammatory and vituperative language against leading personalities. Czechs and Slovaks know where responsibility lies and it is unnecessary to remind them so constantly.

RFE can and does provide vigorous and effective support for the elements within Czechoslovakia pressing for more rapid internal reform and modernization, free contacts and exchanges with the West, and a more independent foreign policy. It is clear that the regime leadership, fearful of the consequences of rapid movement, is attempting to apply the brakes, particularly on the ideological front. But at the same time it has responded to demands for change in a number of ways and seems prepared to move even further. The general trend is in the direction of a less repressive society. To hasten this process is a valid policy objective but one which is not, in our view, furthered by personalized attacks which have the effect of pushing the regime toward even more vigorous efforts to repress dissident elements.

Further, we think that Czechoslovakia, as some other Eastern European countries have already done, will in due course halt jamming. Such a development is highly desirable, given the efficacy of current jamming which eliminates a good portion of potential listeners. Highly personal attacks upon regime leaders tend obviously to delay the day when such a development takes place.

3. The use of the terms "our" and "we" in talking about Czechoslovakia is misplaced and should be stopped. While it is understandable that the Czechoslovak staff of RFE might think in these terms, the fact remains that RFE today does not and should not speak for any particular Czechoslovak exiles, either collectively or individually. An attempt to do so, implied in the "our-we" phraseology is more likely to cause resentment than appreciation.

4. In economic matters, we feel that more stress could be placed on Western European progress towards economic integration and the resultant

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dramatic economic progress. Here, too, the distortion that Czechoslovakia's economic woes are attributable to a Western "blockade" of which the Common Market is a part needs more attention. At the same time, reportage on CEMA's much slower development and the heavy economic burden imposed by resort to inefficient bilateral relationships would supply effective contrast.

Coverage of the UNCTAD Geneva conference in scripts such as A-Block E-875, March 30, was excellent in correcting the local press line portraying the "socialist" countries as defenders of LDC interests against the "capitalists."

5. While access to the West has improved slightly during the past year, Czechoslovak intellectuals are still substantially cut off from the main currents of Western philosophical trends. There is a deep interest in intellectual circles in questions such as man's place in society and the relationship between Marxism and the individual. RFE could profitably devote more attention to fundamental philosophical questions than we have noted in the scripts.

6. Without access to "non-socialist" newspapers, Czechoslovaks are deprived of the opportunity to see the image projected abroad of modern Czechoslovakia. A regular program devoted to western press reports about Czechoslovakia would, we believe, be well received and instructive. Consideration might also be given to including comment on western press coverage of other Eastern European Soviet-oriented countries such as Rumania and Hungary with the intent of showing how Czechoslovakia's image suffers by comparison.

7. The Slovak equality theme was well handled (Script E-130, April 19, is an example) and responsive to the demands of the Slovaks, including Party members, for a larger measure of autonomy.

8. Current leadership moves toward some basic changes in the economic system (flexible prices, more incentives to individual enterprises, and closer ties between production and sales) should be encouraged as evidence that the regime is finally beginning to respond to rational economic needs at the expense of ideological dogma.

9. In reporting on current developments and their historical background, the Embassy considers it appropriate that differences within NATO should be covered -- but always in the context of a free defensive association and common overall objectives. In this connection we found one script (A-Block E-870, March 24) which seemed intended to belittle France's assertion of big power status in Latin America. We found this type of reporting of questionable value in pursuance of US policy aims in Czechoslovakia where press media already cover enthusiastically evidences of Western disunity.

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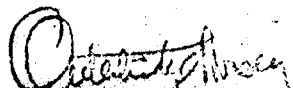
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10. Countering of press distortions of US positions, actions and developments -- in Southeast Asia, for example -- is an important RFE function, supplemental to VOA treatment. RFE coverage in this area is effective.

11. We found effective and useful scripts on the electoral campaign, e.g. "The Day at Home and Abroad" A-Block E-862, March 16. Other scripts showing at least some possibility for limited choice in other Eastern European countries were also of value. While the older generation can still remember what democratic elections are like, the post-war generation now reaching maturity needs a background and point of reference for evaluating the present Czech electoral system.

12. In the context of cross reporting on developments in other "socialist" countries, RFE has effectively covered trends in Yugoslavia such as limited acceptance of work stoppages, reappraisal of the Party role, and economic innovation. We regard this type of reporting and commentary of real value -- particularly in view of the close ties developing between the two countries and Novotny's pending (September) visit.

In summary, the Embassy's overall impression is that RFE is performing effectively an important function in penetrating what is basically still a closed society and sustaining popular pressures for reintegration of Czechoslovakia into the European community of nations. Our one major suggestion is that RFE should strive toward an approach which accentuates and encourages the positive trend of developments and raises the general tone of its argumentation to a level more appropriate to its relatively sophisticated and perceptive audience. Invidious comparisons should be downplayed in favor of more straight reporting on themes of interest to that audience, permitting them to draw the appropriate conclusions.


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