

January 14, 1957

CIA Librarian, 'Report on a Review of Radio Free Europe Broadcasts Beamed to Hungary, from 24 October to 4 November 1956' [Approved for Release, March 2007]

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Summary:

Report of the CIA Librarian, who with other CIA Hungarian speakers reviewed tapes of RFE Hungarian broadcasts from October 24 to November 4, 1956 and provided responses to seven questions posed by IOD. He provided personal comments in a separate memorandum dated January 10

Credits:

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Original Language:

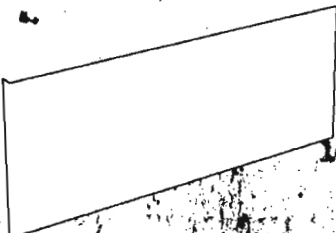
English

Contents:

Original Scan

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14 January 1957

Report on a Review of Radio Free Europe Broadcasts Beamed to Hungary, from 24 October to 4 November 1956.

1. Per request, I organized an informal group, consisting of [redacted] and myself, to review the tapes of broadcasts beamed by Radio Free Europe to Hungary during the period of October 24 to November 4, 1956. We also had the part-time assistance of Messrs. John Hill and Julius Jacobs. With the exception of myself, all the men mentioned are from OSI/NSA.

2. We listened to a total of 247 reels of tape in Hungarian. Our instructions were to bear in mind certain questions which were enumerated for us. Specifically, these questions are listed below, together with our comments.

Question 1. Is there any evidence that RFE broadcasts directly inspired or provoked the uprising? Comment. None. Question. Did RFE make recommendations for action short of armed rebellion which could have incited the revolution? Comment. No. The primary role of RFE was that of a transmitter of news. Historical precedent was frequently quoted. Examples from 24 October broadcasts: "The battle for freedom is being fought by the entire people. He who opposes this battle opposes the people. The police in East Germany and Poland did not fire on the people. He who turns his weapon against the Hungarian people will pay for this." Or another example: "Leaders of armed groups and party functionaries, your place is on the side of the people. He is a traitor who rises against the people in the people's battle." Such advice did not seem to us to incite, it was an invitation to continue the battle for freedom. Commentators interpreted the news, but the direct reporting of news seemed to us to be straightforward and impartial.

Question 2. Did RFE at anytime directly or indirectly imply that military aid from outside would come or might come to the Hungarian people? Comment. It did not. One comment related to this question was a quotation in Reel #15, 29 October, from a speech by John Foster Dulles which expressed "deep sympathy for the suffering Hungarians" and said that the U.S. will take "forceful steps for practical assistance." We took this to mean military, economic, or other similar assistance. Another comment in reel #9 of 4 November reporting Western reaction to the Soviet attack of Hungary, quoted from an article in the London Observer by its Washington correspondent in part as follows: "If the Hungarians hold out for 3-4 days, intense pressure will be brought to bear on the U.S. to offer military assistance to Hungary."

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Question 3. Did RFE call for passive actions such as general strike or failure to deliver farm products? Comment. Here again, RFE based its broadcasts on the news from Hungary, where the workers were on strike. In special messages to both the workers and the peasants, there was continuing emphasis on the fact that for non-fighters the best weapon was the strike, and that peasants should provide food and whatever other assistance they could to the fighters for freedom. Examples from reel #5, 26 October: "...Workers, Hungarians do not report back to work while the Soviets are murdering our brothers; drive the Soviet soldiers back to their barracks." Later, in the same reel, Edith Károly speaks to the villagers and peasants. He says, among other things, that work has stopped in the villages. The villagers stand solidly behind the heroes of Budapest. The longer the villagers do not go back to work the longer the present regime will be embarrassed. In addition, there were appeals to the peasants to give food to the freedom fighters, to take half their food into the cities. To the extent that the peasants were asked to do this, this would be considered a call for passive action or failure to deliver farm products.

Question 4. The policy guidance did permit RFE to serve as a communications center for reporting back to Hungary of broadcasts made by the patriot radios. Did RFE limit its activities to straight rebroadcasts or is there evidence that RFE editorialized and added to the patriot broadcasts? Comment. As far as we can tell, RFE did not editorialize but limited its rebroadcasts to straight reporting of what this or that patriot radio said. It also rebroadcast appeals for medical assistance, and later, messages from Hungarians who had gone abroad, back to their colleagues. In the sense that patriot radio broadcasts were rebroadcast on a selected basis, we believe there was no editorializing but do believe there was a certain amount of editing. For example, only one patriot radio broadcast critical of RFE was rebroadcast and answered (reel #7, 2 November), where radio Győr took offense at something Prof. Sándor Varga of Medical University said in a speech originally broadcast by RFE in reel #2, on 1 November 1956.

Question 5. Did RFE offer advice as to political demands which the patriots should make? Comment. We believe our answer to this question should be a qualified affirmative; qualified to the extent that we cannot determine whether such demands originated with the patriots or whether with RFE. In general, advice was that of caution, - "beware of traitors," "observe solidarity," etc. One instance (reel #7, 29 October) Colonel Bell warns the Hungarian soldiers to be careful of trickery in the new order to cease fire, mentioning the case of the Trojan horse as a lesson. Another type of advice was, for example, on the establishment of National Committees, peasant councils, etc. Then there were suggestions that the RFE be abolished, free elections should be held, etc. At the same time, however, it should be noted that RFE frequently exhorted against revenge, stating that Hungary had won an honorable, clean battle and that it should not besmirch this with acts of revenge.

Question. In this connection to what extent did RFE intervene in suggesting political leaders or in attacking Hungarian political leaders? Comment. The first part of this question, did RFE intervene in suggesting political leaders, can be unhesitatingly answered in the negative. The second part is another matter. There were frequent attacks first on Gero, then on Nagy and later on Kádár, together with all their colleagues who had been or are considered. The RFE broadcaster Balázs Balog,

Gallicus, Janus and others led the attack on the political leaders, Colonel Bell on the military. The RFE reporting on Nagy is a case study in itself. Beginning with the announcement on 24 October that Nagy was the new Prime Minister of Hungary, RFE criticizes Nagy, comparing him to Gerö. In reel #10 of 24 October, for example, Gallicus comments that the revolution first asked for the restoration of Nagy, who imposed martial law as his first act. Later, in reel #13, same day, Gallicus delivers an impassioned talk on who is responsible for Soviet troops in Hungary and states that the responsibility for this crime will be determined by the future. On 25 October, in reel #14 Andor Gallert spends 10 minutes in commenting on the responsibility of Nagy for events. He states that Nagy called in Soviet troops to Hungary and imposed martial law. "This is probably the greatest example of a traitor in history." On 26 October (reel #5) in a general commentary on the history of the past 24 hours, it is said that Gerö is primarily responsible for what happened, and will the Nagy government do anything about bringing Gerö to justice. On 29 October (reel #18) Balazs Balog still attacks Nagy, who lies, he says. Colonel Bell, in reel #2 on 1 November comments on the announcement of the regime that Nagy was not responsible for martial law, etc., that it was Gerö and Hegedüs who ordered this. Then, Colonel Bell says, "if we accept this, why didn't Nagy release Mindszenty?" Later the same day, 1 November, Janus (reel #7) speaks about the 3 renegades, Gerö, Hegedüs and Pirocs, and states that according to Nagy, Gerö was responsible for Soviet intervention. Criticism of Nagy himself seems to taper off, with comments limited to selected members of his regime unacceptable to the Hungarian people. Through the 4th of November, Nagy is primarily a news item, with reporting of his activities culminating in his appeal to the UN and his arrest by the Soviet troops.

Question 6. Did RFE broadcast full texts of the speeches made by the President, the Secretary of State and Ambassador Lodge or were these speeches covered in political commentary with quotes taken out of context? Comment. In general, quotes from these speeches were used in straight news reporting. There is no evidence of quotes taken out of context for political reporting. On 4 November in the several hours devoted to the special rebroadcast of UN General Assembly proceedings, there was a complete rebroadcast in English with Hungarian on-the-spot translation of Ambassador Lodge's speech presenting his resolution.

Question 7. In connection with rebroadcasting of patriot radios, is there any evidence that RFE played down the more flamboyant demands. For example, some of the patriot radios called for Cardinal Mindszenty to become Premier of Hungary. Did RFE avoid broadcasting this? It is recognized that this last point will be very difficult to cover but if there is evidence, it should be reported. Comment. No. The example given, call for Cardinal Mindszenty to become Premier of Hungary was not rebroadcast by RFE. There were frequent references to Mindszenty, particularly with regard to his whereabouts. These comments were made in connection with the release of the Prelate of Poland and requested the release of Mindszenty in the same manner. "The people want to hear Cardinal Mindszenty...The people want a spiritual leader... Cardinal Mindszenty should be released so he could assume the leadership of the Catholic Church in Hungary."

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3. In general, we are agreed that news was usually reported in an impartial manner. Very frequently, there were sentences spoken in by unidentified speakers between program items. We believe, however, that if we put ourselves in the position on Hungarian listeners, these sentences could not be considered as "inciting," - they would inspire one to continue the battle for freedom, but not to start it.

4. On occasion, some of the speakers, like Colonel Bell, Joseph Molnár and others, sounded emotional. Two things should be borne in mind, a) Hungarians are basically emotional, and b) this was an emotional occasion. It seems to us that when twelve years of tyranny are opposed with the first possibility of success, emotionalism can be understood.

5. It may seem presumptuous on our part to comment on how some of these broadcasts may be used. Nevertheless, we feel it incumbent on us to warn that sentences or phrases could possibly be taken out of these broadcast to serve to buttress the point that RFE "incited." These sentences would be out of context, a common propaganda trick.

6. The comments reported reflect our joint opinion.

CIA Librarian

CONCURRENCES: