



**May 25, 1955**

## **Equipment for Radio Free Europe Studio in London**

### **Citation:**

"Equipment for Radio Free Europe Studio in London", May 25, 1955, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Obtained and contributed to CWIHP by A. Ross Johnson. UK National Archives, FO 1110-743 <https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/134494>

### **Summary:**

The Foreign Office writes to the Treasury to ask it to reverse its denial to RFE of customs duties exemption for import of technical equipment for a new London bureau. RFE "deserves the full support of her Majesty's Government," wrote the Foreign Office, adding that a London bureau will enable better cooperation between the U.K. and RFE and facilitate its interviewing of East European refugees. The Foreign Office notes that RFE is not a commercial organization and "is in fact supported by US Government money contributed covertly.. For political and other reasons the US Government are unable to admit this ...."

### **Original Language:**

English

### **Contents:**

Original Scan

1955

PR

PR134 / 11 / G

INFORMATION RESEARCH\*

FROM *Submissions,*  
*Mr Rennie,*  
*to Mr Grey.*  
No.  
Dated *May 25*  
Received in  
Registry— *June 15.*

*Import of equipment for*  
*the Radio Free Europe studio*  
*in London.*

References to former relevant papers

MINUTES

*PR134 / 10 G.*

(Print)

(How disposed of)

*Off Mr. Hillis, Treasury*  
*from Mr. Grey 17 June*

(Action completed)

(Index)

*JMB*  
*5.8.55*

*lyt*

References to later relevant papers

*- / 56*

EQUIPMENT FOR R.F.E. STUDIO IN LONDONProblem

Radio Free Europe wish to import without payment of duty £2,700 worth of magnetic tape recording equipment for a new studio in London. A copy of their letter describing the steps taken so far and the uses to which the equipment will be put is attached. An application by R.F.E. to the Board of Trade for duty-free importation under Section 8 of the Finance Act 1936 (permitting duty-free importation of cultural materials etc.) has already been refused. H.M. Customs would only permit duty-free entry if the importation were temporary.

Argument

2. It is to Her Majesty's Government's interest to facilitate entry of this equipment for the following reasons:

- (a) R.F.E. is an organisation whose principal aim is to transmit news and explain Western policy to, and maintain the morale of, the inhabitants of the European Satellites. It therefore deserves the full support of Her Majesty's Government. To this end it maintains links with the Foreign Office and B.B.C. It is not a commercial organisation.
- (b) R.F.E., though independently constituted, is in fact supported to a great extent by U.S. Government money contributed covertly. For political and other reasons the U.S. Government are unable to admit this by sponsoring officially R.F.E.'s application for waiver of duty.
- (c) It is to Her Majesty's Government's advantage that R.F.E. should establish a studio and branch-office in London, as this will facilitate liaison and improve co-ordination with H.M.G. and British organisations, notably the Foreign Office and B.B.C. (see (a) above). At present, R.F.E.'s nearest office is in Munich, which is inconvenient and involves the Foreign Office in the time and expense of special journeys to Munich to discuss problems.
- (d) It is also to Her Majesty's Government's interest that R.F.E. should have the best possible facilities for interviewing and recording the stories of East European refugees. It is probable that R.F.E. will encounter increasing difficulties in doing this work in Germany.
- (e) The equipment comes from R.F.E.'s existing stock and was not purchased specially for the studio in London. Some of it is part-worn or reconditioned.

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- (f) Insistence by Her Majesty's Government upon payment of duty in this instance might be misunderstood in the United States, where unfriendly critics are quick to seize upon anything which might be used to suggest that Britain is not pulling her weight in carrying out agreed Western policy and maintaining resistance to Communism.

## Recommendation

3. I therefore recommend that a case be put to the Treasury for extra-statutory waiver of duty on the equipment (£500-£600 is involved).
4. Northern Department, American Department and German Information Department agree.

*J. O. Rennie*  
(J.O. Rennie)  
May 25, 1955.

Mr. P.F. Grey.

*I agree - unless we can cut  
the Gordian knot by getting the  
Americans to bring it on under  
diplomatic cover. Would not be  
a shocking suggestion?*

*J.O. R.*

*Discussed with Mr. Rennie: draft to Mr. Hillis, Tsy.*

*B.U. 24/6*

*File 16  
6*



Registry No.

~~Top Secret~~  
Secret  
~~Confidential~~  
~~Restricted~~  
~~Secret~~

HTAO  
14/6

Draft letter to:  
A. H. M. HULLIS Esq.  
The Treasury.

From: Mr. Grey.

NOTHING TO BE WRITTEN IN THIS MARGIN.

Cleared with  
Finance Dept.

hi: ~~Return~~ safe  
file

Letter disp'd  
by Mr Grey's  
office.

17/6

As your Department is already aware, Radio Free Europe recently applied to the Board of Trade to import without payment of duty, under Section 8 of the Finance Act 1936, a quantity of magnetic tape recording equipment for a new studio which they are establishing in London. The application was refused on the ground that the equipment did not qualify under the Section. This Department has now been approached on the matter; I attach a copy of R.F.E.'s letter.

2. In our opinion, it is to Her Majesty's Government's interests to waive payment of duty on this equipment for the following reasons:

(a) R.F.E. is an organization whose principal aim is to transmit news and explain Western policy to, and maintain the morale of, the inhabitants of the European Satellites. It therefore deserves the full support of Her Majesty's Government. To this end it maintains links with the Foreign Office and B.B.C. It is not a commercial organization.

(b) R.F.E., though independently constituted, is in fact supported to a great extent by U.S. Government money contributed covertly. For political and other reasons the U.S. Government are unable to admit this by sponsoring officially R.F.E.'s application for waiver of duty.

(c) It is to Her Majesty's Government's advantage that R.F.E. should establish a studio and branch-office in London, as this will facilitate liaison and improve co-ordination with H.M.G. and British

organizations, notably the Foreign Office and  
BEC (see (a) above). At present, R.F.E.'s  
nearest office is in Munich, which is  
inconvenient and involves the Foreign Office  
in the time and expense of special journeys to  
Munich to discuss problems.

(d) It is also to Her Majesty's Government's  
interest that R.F.E. should have the best  
possible facilities for interviewing and  
recording the stories of East European refugees.  
It is probable that R.F.E. will encounter  
increasing difficulties in doing this work in  
Germany.

(e) The equipment comes from R.F.E.'s existing  
stock and was not purchased specially for the  
studio in London. Some of it is part-worn or  
reconditioned.

*I should therefore be most grateful if you would use  
your kind influence with the department of the treasury  
be given for ~~an~~ extra-statutory waiver of duty  
covered with ~~the~~ extra-statutory waiver of duty.*  
on these grounds. I understand that the total  
value of the equipment is about £2,700, and that  
£500-£600 of duty is involved.

*CE*

NOTHING TO BE WRITTEN IN THIS MARGIN.

# Wilson Center Originals Archive

12 CARLTON HOUSE TERRACE,  
S.W.1.

SECRET

June 17, 1955.

As your Department is already aware, Radio Free Europe recently applied to the Board of Trade to import without payment of duty, under Section 9 of the Finance Act 1936, a quantity of magnetic tape recording equipment for a new studio which they are establishing in London. The application was refused on the ground that the equipment did not qualify under the Section. This Department has now been approached on the matter; I attach a copy of R.F.E.'s letter.

In our opinion, it is to Her Majesty's Government's interests to waive payment of duty on this equipment for the following reasons:-

(a) R.F.E. is an organization whose principal aim is to transmit news and explain Western policy to, and maintain the morale of, the inhabitants of the European Satellites. It therefore deserves the full support of Her Majesty's Government. To this end it maintains links with the Foreign Office and B.B.C. It is not a commercial organization.

(b) R.F.E., though independently constituted, is in fact supported to a great extent by U.S. Government money contributed covertly. For political and other reasons the U.S. Government are unable to admit this by sponsoring officially R.F.E.'s application for waiver of duty.

(c) It is to Her Majesty's Government's advantage that R.F.E. should establish a studio and branch-office in London, as this will facilitate liaison and improve co-ordination with H.M.G. and British organisations, notably the Foreign Office and B.B.C. (see (a) above). At present, R.F.E.'s nearest office is in Munich, which is inconvenient and involves the Foreign Office in the time and expense of special journeys to Munich to discuss problems.

(d) It is also to Her Majesty's Government's interest that R.F.E. should have the best possible facilities for interviewing and recording the stories of East European refugees. It is probable that R.F.E. will encounter increasing difficulties in doing this work in Germany.

(e) The equipment comes from R.F.E.'s existing stock and was not purchased specially for the studio in London. Some of it is part-worn or reconditioned.

/ I should

A.H.M. Hillis, Esq.,  
Treasury,  
S.W.1.

I should therefore be most grateful if you would use your kind influence with the department of the Treasury concerned with extra-statutory waiver of duty. I understand that the total value of the equipment is about £2,700, and that £500 - £600 of duty is involved.

(P. P. Grey)