

May 12, 1958

Letter, Howland H. Sargeant to Richard Bertrandias

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Summary:

AMCOMLIB President Sargeant responds to a letter from RL European program director Bertrandias dated April 28, 1958, discussing RL personnel issues.

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AMCONFIDENTIAL

May 12, 1958

Mr. Richard Bertrandias
American Committee for Liberation
Lillenthalstrasse 2
Munich 19

Dear Dick:

1. To facilitate future ease of reference to portions of this letter which is a reply to your letter of April 28, 1958, I am numbering each of the paragraphs consecutively. During the latter part of last week I had the opportunity of reviewing your proposals which affect personnel concerned with radio programming in Munich with your recent visitor, and others. It has helped me a good deal to have his first-hand report. I like the approach you are making and appreciate your writing me so fully the reasoning behind your several suggestions. I regard these assignments of personnel as of extremely great significance to the improvement of radio programming.
2. I understand that with Victor Rysor deciding to remain in the News room some of the possible shifts that we discussed together in New York are not feasible. From what people tell me, he should continue to add great strength to your news operations.
3. I agree that Bob Shankland is the most suitable choice for Program Advisor for the Russian Desk. Although I am frankly surprised that you and Bob Kelley believe that the three Slavic Desks will accept a single Program Advisor (Shankland) concerned with all three desks, if you can work this out I have no objection to the arrangement. However, it must be clear that Bob Shankland is in fact giving his priority attention and all the time that is required to the Russian Desk. I would have thought myself that since Peter Dornan has had an opportunity to show by actual performance in the job of Assistant Program Advisor what he can offer, it would be more logical that he be the Assistant to Shankland specially concerned with the Belorussian and Ukrainian Desks, with Joe Scott working as Shankland's Assistant on the Russian Desk. However, I am assuming that there appear to you to be strong and compelling reasons to set it up in this way and I certainly will accept your judgment. I should like to suggest, however, that Joe Scott be

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given a probationary period in this capacity. I have no personal recollection that he has in fact worked with a radio or has had this type of experience and feel that everyone concerned would be better off if it were clear at the outset that this would be a trial and that after a suitable period of performance in the job, you would be in a position to make a more informed decision.

4. Now I come to Victor Frank. I feel that I must have failed to convey to you when you were here in New York my feeling that we owe Victor Frank a certain degree of protection if he is going to stay with Radio Liberation. This means to me that he should not under any circumstances be placed in a position for the time being where he can himself be held responsible for completed output that will go out on the air. For this reason, I cannot go along with the complete proposal you make for Victor Frank. I believe that he would be a good and competent analyst of world affairs and of breaking events inside the Soviet Union but I think that your proposal goes far beyond this. If I understand it, it would involve bringing Victor Frank directly onto your own personal staff and would require him to produce something in the vicinity of five daily five-minute programs per week in the first half of the Russian schedule, "wrapping up the more important news breaks each day, and putting them into the kind of perspective our audience may require." I cannot at the present time believe that this is a wise and judicious course to follow. It is not, in my judgment, in the interests of Victor Frank nor of Radio Liberation's programming. My own feeling would be that the kind of assignment that would be best at the moment for Victor Frank would be the part which you describe as analysis. I should think that the logical organizational arrangement would be that Victor Frank should be attached directly to Jim Critchlow's department. I should think that there would be an opportunity of producing a weekly situation report on the Soviet Union and possibly a monthly evaluation of events, just as you suggest. This would not prevent Victor Frank from working closely with Charlie Malamuth, if this is what you and Charlie both desire. I hope I make it clear that at the present time I strongly urge a position in which Victor Frank is in name, and in fact, an analyst, performing research, and presenting to you and your colleagues the results of his cool assessment of trends, patterns and events. I suggest that for the time being this should be his contribution to radio programming.

5. I understand now, after the briefing I received from your recent visitor, that what you and Charlie Malamuth essentially are testing out is a ninety-day trial period in which Charlie accepts complete responsibility for the news content of the Russian-language program. I am very happy that you and he are making this test. For a great many reasons I consider it of enormous importance that you both make every effort for this test to succeed. I very much hope that in the course of this ninety-day trial all objective reviewers can detect a real improvement in the content of the news programs.

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I underscore my feeling that one of the most crucial problems is to have this trial period work out successfully within the area of responsibilities assigned to Charlie and to give you both a feeling of how his abilities would work in broader fields and how he adapts himself to working with the rest of your colleagues.

6. I need hardly point out to you that although you have succeeded in this trial period in lodging responsibility for content so far as the news goes in a man of specialized area knowledge, the rest of the program still remains in the position that you and I talked over when you were here in March and April. I very much hope that you will consider carefully whether there are any measures you can take which would help even on a temporary basis to relieve you of the immediate responsibility for decision-making in these remaining program areas.

Sincerely,

Howland H. Sargeant

HHS:ab

cc: Mr. Kelley
Mr. King
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P.S. For some additional observations relating primarily to your letter of April 30, 1958, please consult the attached Annex A.

ANNEX A

The numbering follows consecutively the numbering of the main body of this letter.

7. I refer specifically to the News room. I note that live news was terminated on April 15; that Mr. Malamuth's presence at News room planning meetings was initiated on April 28 as a daily routine with the exception of Saturdays and holidays when you use special duty assignments to assure top-level supervision; that a pre-broadcast review by Mr. Malamuth of the treatment of all items that could be considered controversial began on the same date; that you are eliminating the News Refresher which you have been carrying at 1200 hours, effective on May 2, to allow more time for careful selection and rewrite of the first half hour in general.

8. I wish to be completely clear that my statement under Paragraph 5 in the main body of this letter is in fact correct -- that Charlie Malamuth accepts complete responsibility for the news content of the Russian-language programs. Further, you did not specifically say in either of your letters that when Bob Shankland becomes Program Advisor for the Russian Desk, you will return to the Russian Desk their authority and responsibility for determining the news they will select and actually carry in the Russian-language program. If this is still your intention, I should like to have you confirm it to me. If not, please advise me how this will work.

9. At the moment I see no reason that you have to change the present management of the News Department until you have some assurance of an ultimate satisfactory replacement. I am assuming, however, that you are prepared to make this change as soon as circumstances permit and I am aware that you need to know more about the availability of Mr. Hymoff and whether Mr. Ronalds can be transferred to New York headquarters for a year under conditions that would make this an acceptable assignment for him. Gene King is exploring both of these problems further but I cannot at the moment give you a final answer on either of these. We will move along just as fast as we can and give you the answers.

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