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Radio Free Europe Broadcasts to Poland Reappraised

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Summary:

Radio Free Europe, State Department, and CIA officials review Radio Free Europe broadcasts to Poland in response to State Department criticism

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January 30, 1958

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MINUTES OF MEETING WITH RADIO FREE EUROPE REPRESENTATIVES

Participants: RFE - Mr. Thomas Brown, Director

[Redacted]

- Mr. Cord Meyer

[Redacted]

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- Subjects: (1) The desirability of a reduction in hours of RFE broadcasts to Poland.
- (2) The effectiveness of controls by RFE officials over broadcast content.
- (3) Elimination of the "Voice of Free Poland" label in broadcasts to Poland.
- (4) Signs of Gomulka regime retrogression.
- (5) [Redacted]

[Redacted]

(1) Desirability of a reduction in RFE broadcast hours to Poland.
 Mr. Brown pointed out that arguments favoring a reduction in RFE broadcast hours to Poland are based in part on the assumption that there has been a substantial decrease in effective jamming in Poland. He pointed out that RFE engineers have found that, taking Poland as a whole, jamming has decreased by only 5-10 per cent. Since Poland itself ceased jamming, intensified jamming from the Soviet Union and other Soviet bloc countries has made up for much of the reduction in Polish jamming. Mr. Ramsey pointed out that a U.S. Government monitor recently in Poland has concluded that there was a significant improvement in reception, with between 60-65 per cent of U.S. broadcasts now audible. Mr. Brown remarked that it would be worthwhile if efforts were made to obtain general agreement within the government on this subject, narrowing down differences in the opinions of technical experts.

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Mr. Brown

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Mr. Brown observed that the amount of original programming has been reduced in the past year from 7 to 4-1/2 hours daily (exclusive of the approximately 2-3/4 hours of "news freshened up"). The total RFE broadcast hours to Poland have remained approximately the same because the time for repeat broadcasts has been increased. He furnished the following information regarding the present breakdown of RFE programming:

Three of the 4-1/2 hours of original broadcasts are devoted to "non-political or non-sensitive material", as follows:

"Cultural" broadcasts average 33 minutes daily.

Music and light commentary average 85 minutes daily.

"Western affairs" average 62 minutes daily.

"Special audience programs," (women and youth groups, etc., and religious broadcasts) average 28 minutes daily.

Polish history averages 5 minutes daily.

Of the remaining time, approximately 57 minutes is devoted to commentary on the international situation, while only 41 minutes concerns Polish internal affairs. A portion of the latter time is devoted to describing, for contrast, practices in Western democracies, and to non-political material, so that the actual figure for sensitive commentary on Polish internal affairs would be somewhat lower.

Mr. Brown stated that RFE would be more than glad to cut down broadcast time and reduce the number of transmitters required, but only providing the engineers reached general agreement that jamming had been substantially reduced. He pointed out, however, that it is dangerous to reduce broadcast hours and shift transmitters without firm grounds. It would be difficult at some future date to restore this reduction since, once broadcast hours have been shifted to another part of the world, undesirable political repercussions often result from a further shift. As an illustration, he mentioned that BBC would now like to shift some of the transmitters recently utilized for broadcasting to the Near East to another area, but hesitates to do so for fear that this will be interpreted as a sign of lessening interest in the Near East.

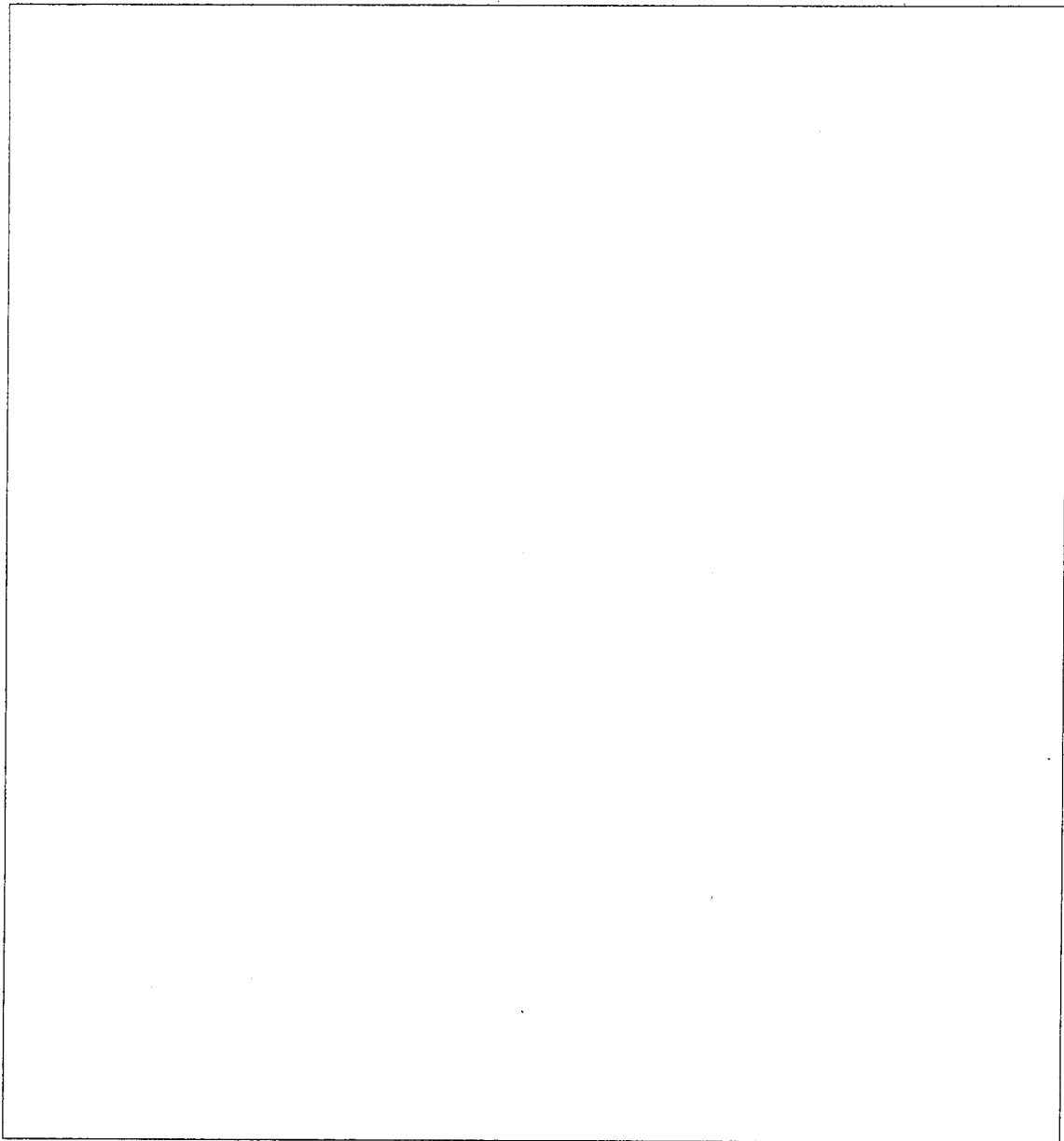
action | Concluding the discussion on this subject, the RFE representatives agreed to frame some questions designed toward reaching overall U.S. agreement on the question of the amount of jamming currently encountered in Poland.

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(3) Elimination of "Voice of Free Poland" label. [] pointed out that RFE had, in accepting the Radio Broadcasting Policy Committee's directive, agreed long ago to drop the use of the "Voice of Free Poland" identification in its broadcasts, and inquired regarding progress in this direction.

Mr. Brown in reply pointed out that the agreement reached had specified that the label would be eliminated "over a period of time." The label, he said, is already being phased out gradually in broadcasts to all

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countries except Poland and Czechoslovakia. It is expected that a gradual phase out will be commenced on broadcasts to the latter two countries, in the case of Poland within 3-7 months. Mr. Brown stated that a sudden complete cessation of the use of this label will be undesirable since listeners might assume that this move represented a change in RFE's approach. Moreover, RFE officials are somewhat concerned that the Polish press might seize upon such a change for purposes of propaganda. RFE had thus wished to drop the use of the "Voice of Free Poland" identification in the other countries first; then to proceed later with Poland and Czechoslovakia on the basis of experience elsewhere. Arguing for a delay in commencing this gradual phase out, Mr. Brown stated that RFE anticipates that the arrival of the Program Analysis Unit in Munich may well cause some difficulties with the existing staff. Desk officers can be expected to fear that they will lose their independence and initiative, and RFE anticipates that considerable time will be required before the Program Analysis Unit can settle into its proper role in the Munich RFE establishment. Mr. Brown claimed that the injection of a second major change in Munich, i.e. the discontinuance of the old "Free Poland" label, would result in a very serious demoralization in the office and possibly some resignations. Mr. Meyer pointed out that this unfavorable reaction in Munich might well be echoed in the U.S., with criticism from Congress and in the press (e.g., by Fulton Lewis).

[redacted] pointed out that the elimination of the "Voice of Free Poland" identification was agreed upon because its continued use is not consistent with our present policy of encouraging evolutionary change in Poland (as opposed to "liberation"). The use of this identifying label implies an emigre posture on RFE's part. He remarked that the views of exiles do not seem to carry much weight in Poland at present, and that the "Europeanization" of RFE broadcasting is more desirable under present circumstances. He expressed doubts that the reaction among Polish listeners to discontinuing the use of the "Free Poland" label would be as great as RFE indicates, providing the content of their programs did not change.

Mr. Meyer stated that the use of the "Voice of Free Poland" label is not intended to indicate that RFE is affiliated with any organized exile group, and that no exile leaders are allowed to use RFE for the propagation of their views. The label is intended to identify RFE as a "Home Service" radio station, which speaks as the Poles themselves would speak if they were free.

In response to a question, Mr. Brown stated that the dropping of the label in broadcasting to Eastern European countries other than Czechoslovakia and Poland did not appear to have resulted in significant problems. He expressed the hope that experience in the case of Poland and Czechoslovakia would be the same.

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[redacted] questioned Mr. Brown's remark that a sudden discontinuance of the label might result in undesirable commentary in the Polish press. He pointed out that discontinuing the label appeared to be in accordance with the wishes of the Polish Government, and expressed doubt that they would take any steps which might reverse this action.

[redacted] asked whether the Polish staff in Munich is not already aware that the policy of dropping the label will eventually be extended to Poland. Mr. Brown replied in the affirmative, but pointed out that as yet there has been no opportunity to gauge what the reaction might be within Poland and that, as a result, the extension of this policy now to Poland would not be well received by the Munich staff.

(4) Signs of Gomulka Regime Retrogression. Mr. Brown stated that the original decision to phase out the "Free Poland" label was based on our view that the United States should support Gomulka and his "relaxation" policies. He claimed that the case for discontinuing use of a label is not nearly as strong at the present time, since the pendulum appears to be swinging the other way in Poland insofar as relaxation is concerned.

[redacted] conceded that there had been some retrogression in connection with press freedom, but asked the RFE representatives what other indications of retrogression they had in mind. Recent increases in passport fees impeding travel abroad were mentioned as one indication, to which [redacted] replied that the actual effect which these increases may have on the volume of overseas travel remains to be seen. In response to a further suggestion that UB (secret police) activity in Poland was increasing, [redacted] stated that there are rumors and unconfirmed reports to this effect but there is as yet no firm evidence. As a third indication, RFE representatives suggested that the church has lost ground in Poland since the early days of the Gomulka regime. [redacted] stated that there will inevitably be "ups and downs" in church-state relations in Poland. He pointed out that the willingness of the Polish Government to allow United States Catholic charities to operate in Poland could be interpreted as a current "up." Finally, Mr. Meyer remarked that the steady removal from posts of authority of those identified with the "Polish October," especially in the field of the press, was a very significant sign of retrogression. He stated that the main hope for preserving the accomplishments of the "Polish October" lay in the maintenance of some measure of press freedom. In conclusion, RFE representatives stated that there is increasing evidence that Moscow is building up its pressures on Poland; the United States must attempt to build up pressures among the Polish people in the opposite direction.

[redacted] replied that it must be assumed that Gomulka, as a Communist, fears a free press, and that some retrogression in this field

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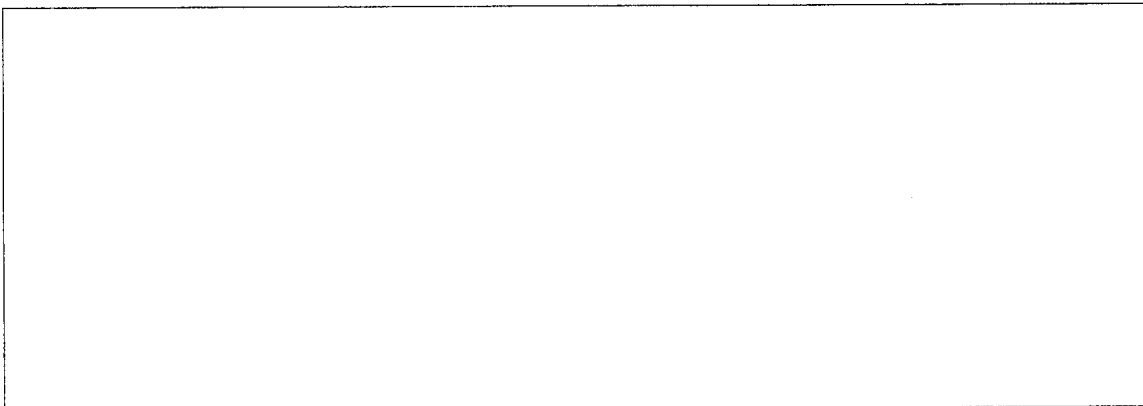
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must be expected. He stated that cumulatively, such capitalist threats as are implied in the continuing use of the "Free Poland" label might actually push Gomulka into further retrogression.

Summarizing the views of the Department of State, [redacted] stated that the irritating effect which this label appears to have on Polish regime officials is the main argument for dropping it. He pointed out that it conveys the impression that the United States is still plotting for their downfall. The Department of State, he said, has no choice but to accept RFE's statement that the label must be dropped gradually, but continues to express a strong preference for prompt action. Mr. Brown agreed that it would be desirable if RFE representatives could provide a concrete commitment as to when the "phase out" of the label's use would commence, and how long it would take. He agreed to check with RFE's field representative on this point by teletype immediately and expressed hope that he could provide firm information within a very few days.



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Secondly, Mr. Meyer stated that RFE has in mind emphasizing the rights of voters under existing Polish law in broadcasts concerning the February local council elections. For example, RFE would call attention to the provision which allows voters to delete names from the ballot or to propose more representative candidates than the party men shown on the ballot. Pointing out that the elections will take place very soon, Mr. Brown requested the views of the Department of State as soon as possible. [redacted] pointed out that such broadcasts would appear to fall in the sensitive realm of "interference" in Polish internal affairs. He requested that RFE furnish a proposed broadcast guidance in order that the Department could see more clearly what RFE had in mind. Mr. Meyer agreed that it would be worthwhile to prepare such a paper for the Department.

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