

December 21, 1955

Report by Overton on his visit to Radio Free Europe in Munich

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Summary:

Report by Foreign Office (IRD) official H.T.A. Overton on his visit to RFE between November 24 and November 27, 1955. The report is focused on RFE's news and information operation and the balloon-leaflet operation. Overton viewed as RFE liabilities the extent of autonomy granted to its exile broadcasters, its non-official status, and its location in Bavaria. He notes an effort by Political Advisor William Griffith to encourage the national broadcast services to include more coverage of the Western world and to eliminate "the highly argumentative ... script with no real substance to it." Attached is an RFE summary of its Evaluation and Research Section and an RFE organizational chart.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

FROM Foreign Office
Munich,
Re Overton.

Report by Mr Overton on his
visit to Radio Free Europe
in Munich.

No.
Dated Dec 21
Received in Registry— Dec 29.

References to former relevant papers

MINUTES

P.C. Storey
3/1

EE Desk (has copy)
Mr. Redgaway ^{REC} & Jan
Northern Dept. 187/1.

(Print)

(How disposed of)

sent
Mr. Barker to Jan
for Mr Overton's use

Copies of this report have been
sent to
Bonn, Munich and Washington, and Canada
House (Miss Meagher).

12/1

(Action completed)

(Index)

171/36
2/1

THIS IS A COPY
THE ORIGINAL HAS BEEN RETAINED
IN THE DEPARTMENT UNDER SECTION
3(4) OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT 1958

References to later relevant papers

CONFIDENTIALReport on a visit to Radio Free Europe, Munich

I spent three days in Munich, from November 24-27, primarily in order to renew personal contact with RFE, see something of their organization, and look into the possibility of a freer interchange of research material. During that time I had extensive discussions with Mr. William Griffith, Political Adviser to the European Director of RFE (Mr. Condon); and with the local representative of the Free Europe Press (with its headquarters in New York), a closely associated though separate organization which is responsible for the preparation and dissemination of written publicity and propaganda material. I also visited the FEP balloon site near Berchtesgaden. In the short time available I was not able to investigate in detail the running of RFE's radio services in the various Satellite languages, or examine programmes or scripts. The following notes are therefore essentially to be considered as supplementary to information already available about RFE, and not as a comprehensive report.

RFE's policy

2. The basic aim of the organization is to speak as the voice of the Satellite peoples. Great attention is therefore paid to developing the radio service in each language as a distinct entity with its own national characteristics, and to ensuring that the refugees from the Satellite countries who staff the five services (Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Rumanian and Bulgarian) not only run the programmes but feel that the service is theirs. Great emphasis is also laid upon keeping in touch with developments and thought in the country concerned, and to obtaining "local colour" for programmes. The only American on each service, apart from technical staff and a representative of the Programme Department (see para 4 below and Annex A), is attached in an advisory capacity, being responsible to the Political Adviser. The Political Adviser or his deputy take the chair at a daily meeting of each service, at which the programme for the day and current events raising issues of policy are discussed.

3. The present policy of the Political Adviser is to encourage the national radio services to give greater emphasis than hitherto to telling the Satellite peoples what is going on in the outside world, and to keeping them in touch with current trends of thought and development in the West. (See the parallel policy of FEP - para 7 below). He wishes to reduce the amount of time devoted to discussing the purely domestic affairs of the Satellites, which audience research has shown to bore many listeners, and to eliminate as far as possible the highly argumentative, written-up type of script with no real substance in it. In view of the basic aim of RFE stated in para 2 above and the organizational consequences thereof, it may be some time before the Political Adviser's "advice" in this sense is fully reflected in radio programmes.

Organization

4. A chart of RFE is at Annex A. As mentioned, the Political Adviser has a representative attached to each national service. A paper on the important Evaluation and Research Section, (head, Mr. Gedge) is attached at Annex B. This Section provides centralized intelligence, research and reference facilities for all national services, and seemed to me

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highly efficient. The national card indexes are remarkable for the amount of information they contain. The Munich representative of the FEP, which has its own separate organization, maintains close touch with the national Desks of RFE and depends upon them for advice and preparation of certain material.

5. RFE has a network of representatives, interrogators and correspondents in the field. They include a British correspondent in Hamburg, Alexander Ramsay, who has good relations with the German Red Cross and interviews ex-P.O.W. repatriated from the Soviet Union for news of Satellite nationals in Russia, (RFE Headquarters also recently sent a circular letter on the same subject to repatriates returned home under the agreement reached by Dr. Adenauer; it met with a surprisingly good response). There are interrogation centres for Bulgarian refugees in Athens, Salonika and Istanbul. Owing to its non-official status and employment of staff not cleared for security, RFE is denied access to classified American material and therefore largely depends upon its own resources, news agencies, ~~xxx xxx~~ radio stations (RFE regularly monitors the Satellite radio stations) and the press for information about the Satellites.

6. The radio transmitters of RFE are mostly in Portugal, whither the programmes are ~~played~~ by short wave. Owing to political and technical difficulties RFE have temporarily shelved their plan for opening up transmitters etc. in Istanbul, largely for broadcasting to Bulgaria.

Policy of Free Europe Press

7. FEP aim to provide the Satellite countries to which they send written material, mostly by balloon (though it has also been sent by post on occasion), with the equivalent of a free national press. This goal is by no means unattainable, taking into account the technical facilities now disposed of (see para 9 below). Apart from occasional publicity "scoops" like the revelations of Swiatlo, the senior officer of the Polish secret police, which were printed in a special miniature 20-page booklet for sending by balloon, it is FEP's present policy to concentrate upon sending in large quantities a monthly "newspaper". Recently modified as regards format and content, this now consists of a two page pamphlet attractively got up with photographs, news, and views and comment in the form of extracts from the Western, and predominantly the European press. FEP are expanding their capacity to send material by balloon still further in the hope and expectation that it will soon no longer be considered an abnormal event in the Satellites for products of the FEP to drop from the skies. When this stage is reached, FEP will consider their battle half-won.

8. FEP send material by balloon to Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland at present. They hope to extend the service eventually to Roumania. In addition to pamphlets, they are toying with the idea of sending special editions of suitable books. However the "newspaper" has priority.

FEP ballooning

9. FEP have 3 balloon launching sites, connected by teleprinter with a central meteorological section and command post in Munich. While experimenting with larger balloons, they are at present concentrating upon mass-launching of a type of constant-altitude plastic balloon, the P.120, each of which carries 2 lbs. of



printed material. The present launching capacity of the Berchtesgaden site is 750 balloons of this type per hour. This gives a combined launching capacity for all three sites together of about $4\frac{1}{2}$ tons of literature per hour. Launching to Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland can be carried on consecutively for up to 14 hours in the winter months, if the wind remains favourable. Coverage in the Satellites concerned seems to be good. Release mechanisms are of a simple mechanical type to eliminate the possibility of injury to children etc. in the Satellites, and a tripping device will shortly be generally introduced whereby the balloon automatically reverses itself and falls to earth after releasing its load. An advantage of the P.120 plastic balloon is that it is too small and flimsy to endanger aircraft.

10. RFE have an extensive system of reporting for audience research purposes, and seem to have a very good idea of local reactions to their radio programmes and FEP literature. Refugee reports and reactions of various kinds on the part of the authorities form the basis of their research; letters from people in the country provide a useful supplement.

Security

11. Neither RFE or FEP are secure organizations, and it is the policy of both to conduct all their activities openly. Copies of all RFE and FEP output are sent to the German authorities, and close liaison is maintained with them on such matters as registration of staff; importation of printed matter and equipment; guarding of the balloon-launching sites. The latter have not yet been directly attacked, though a Czech arrested in November 1954 near a site in possession of arms and illegal documents confessed to be reconnoitring for an attempt to destroy the site.

Relations with the Germans

12. These are satisfactory and often cordial at the technical level, satisfactory at the level of the Federal Government, less than satisfactory in so far as the Bavarian State Government is concerned. RFE is regularly attacked in the Bavarian Parliament. It does what it can to avoid hostile criticism by exercising the utmost discretion in handling topics of direct interest to Germans, or which are political issues in Germany, such as the Oder/Neisse line; and by pursuing the open-handed policy described in para 11 above. Dr. Adenauer recently granted a 5-year extension of RFE's permit to operate, to their considerable satisfaction.

General Conclusion

13. Within its self-imposed limitations, RFE is a highly efficient organization and is doing valuable work. These limitations are

- (a) its policy of granting a considerable degree of autonomy to the five national radio services (paras 2 and 3 above);
- (b) its non-official status, which denies to it the numerous advantages enjoyed by American official organizations;
- (c) its location in Germany.

H. T. A. Overton

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FOREIGN OFFICE,

LONDON, S.W.1.

CONFIDENTIAL

PR 134/32

January 12, 1956

I enclose a copy of my report on my recent visit to Radio Free Europe in Munich. It is really a series of notes rather than a comprehensive report; you may find some items of interest. I am sorry that the carbon copy is rather a dim one. A copy has also gone to the Canadians.

(H.T.A. Overton)

W. Barker Esq.,
H.M. Embassy,
Washington.

The Evaluation and Research Section comprises the great storehouse of information, sedulously garnered, checked, classified and indexed day by day, year after year, on which Programming depends for most of the material on which its programmes are based. It has a total staff of 100 persons, of whom 48 work in the Evaluation and 42 in the Research and Library sub-section. Experienced visitors acquainted with other organizations engaged in similar work constantly confirm that there is no other storehouse of information about the countries behind the Iron Curtain which can compare in the amount of processed material with RFE's Evaluation and Research Section.

The staff of the Evaluation sub-section are the watchdogs of the organization, whose first, but by no means only duty it is, to check the information which flows into this headquarters from its field offices and other sources, and so to safeguard the Programming staff against possible errors in the material provided for their use. The first source of Evaluation's material is the sixteen field offices of Radio Free Europe, some situated close to the Iron Curtain, like the Austrian bureaus and the Berlin bureau, others at more remote places specially suited for the collection of first hand information from visitors from satellite countries such as the ports of Hamburg and Istanbul and some in greater or lesser capitals like London, Paris or Stockholm. It is these field offices which provide the most live contacts with the population of what we call the "captive nations" living in what we call our "target countries" - Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Bulgaria. This they do by means of their "Reports," which reach RFE to the time of something like 1200 a month. These consist in the main of detailed interviews with refugees, visitors from behind the Curtain such as footballers, dancers, weight-lifters, musicians, members of dramatic companies, and many other categories. These are mostly neutral in politics, but among them are numbers both of convinced anti-communists and of zealous partisans of the regime. Not all

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of these consciously furnish information to RFE, although some do so. All but the most reliable communists are always spied on abroad by police agents from their home countries, yet even so, they inevitably make casual or deliberate contacts with the nations of the countries visited. There must be a few items of information which they let slip which are not sooner or later culled by an active RFE reporter and sent by the bureau chief in the form of an Evaluation Report. Other sources of information for these Reports are persons of similar or other categories who visit the target countries (and who are tracked down on their return and invited to answer the questions of RFE reporters,) and even employees of legations and communist organizations abroad, some of whom, of course, deliberately supply false information. A great many Reports illustrate the life of the country in which the bureau is situated, and provide interesting but non-political feature material for our listeners.]

It is with these Reports that the work of Evaluation begins. When the Report arrives from the field - most often in the language of the target country, so that none of the flavor of the original material may be lost to Program writers through translation - it goes to the appropriate Evaluation Section. An English summary and English subtitles supplied by the Field Bureau give pretty full knowledge of the content of the Report to American and other members of the staff who, of course, cannot speak the languages of all the target countries in which Reports are mainly written, as well as to the nationals of other target countries. The "National Evaluators" proceed to analyze the contents and index it under the appropriate titles of the evaluation code, and to check its accuracy against the records built up over a number of years. There are, of course, many possibilities for errors to creep into Reports. The overstrung refugee, or the emigrant filled with blind hatred of the regime, is prone to exaggeration and inaccuracy. More than once a supposed refugee has turned out to be an agent of the regime, deliberately planting false information. Others mislead through an excessive desire to please their interviewers, or convince themselves of the literal accuracy of some half-remembered fact

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or experience.

The Evaluators work patiently through the Reports, checking them line by line against their accumulated knowledge. Apart from factual checks, every Evaluator has to lead a double life - a physical one in Munich, an imaginative one in his own captive country, so that he can instinctively spot anything which is at variance with the picture he has - and keeps fresh through his work - of the country from which the fugitive, or visitor, has come. The factual basis at his disposal is enormous.

Hungarian Evaluation, for example, with a staff today of two Evaluators and three researchers, has built up a register of 56,000 individual or biographic cards, and 20,000 "collective cards," which give a detailed breakdown of individual factories, kolkhozes, Party units and so forth, from the top down to the smallest cell. Among the personal cards are 180 devoted to star performers - the top men and women of the regime whose movements and actions are closely followed and recorded from day to day. Other cards record price and wage developments, provide indexes, not only to Reports from field offices, but also to recorded material clipped from the press or from RFE's daily monitoring, of the target and other countries' broadcasts. All these cards facilitate the use of the extensive subject files containing actual Reports, clippings and so forth. [In Polish Evaluation you will find 50,000 personal index cards and 30,000 on concerns (of which 80-90 per cent of the total are covered,) Party organizations, towns and villages. The work here is done by two Evaluators, four researchers and three typists.] No name of a person, locality or enterprise appearing in any Report is ever passed in any Evaluation Section without the most careful checking against these index cards, maps, gazetteers, telephone and street directories, guides, railway time tables and other official and unofficial publications. [Where it is inadvisable to publish exact details about the source of a Report, the Evaluator retains the details in his confidential files and includes remarks on his estimate ^{of the} reliability of the source in his comments.]

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The Polish Desk reads and clips 6 dailies, 26 periodicals, and occasional copies of the provincial newspapers. Every Polish town and many villages have their own folders. The subject files amount to some 800. Some 200 "star" communists have special biographical files. Some 200-300 entries are made daily in the Polish index cards.

The index cards in the Czechoslovak Desk amount to 48,000 personal and 26,000 subject cards, 6,000 town and village index cards and 3000 price cards. (No record has ever been made of the number of entries on index cards, but, for the whole five National Evaluation Desks, they probably run into millions.) The two Evaluators and four researchers have to supply information promptly to some 32 Czechoslovak Editors in the Programming Department. The Labor Editor, for example, is supplied with such details about a certain factory as production figures, workers' meetings, instances of mismanagement, names and records of stakhanovites and anything else the Editor may request to present a detailed and up-to-date picture of the concern. The Economic Editor, on the other hand, may require to be informed about the current moves of the State Planning Office, or about the state of Plan fulfillment in different industrial sectors. In Czechoslovak Evaluation, every day eight newspapers are read, clipped and the extracts carded; the same thing is done with radio monitoring reports, an average of ten field office Reports checked, evaluated and prepared for publication and the Western press studied and read. Ten to fourteen periodicals are read and extracts made.

The Rumanian Evaluation Desk is on a much smaller scale than those already considered, consisting only of one Evaluator, one researcher and at times a part-time typist, with half-time assistance from a Rumanian Archives researcher. It processes some 1,000 reports from field offices every year. Half a dozen Rumanian communist dailies, the exile press, monitoring reports and Western newspapers are culled for clippings which are indexed on about 25,000 file cards.

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The Bulgarian Evaluation Desk has over 20,000 personal and 8,000 subject file cards. Though also much smaller than the first three sections considered here [- it has only one Evaluator and two researchers, neither of whom can devote their whole time to Bulgarian affairs -] it checks about 1,200 Bulgarian reports from field offices annually, clips seven Bulgarian dailies and 16 Bulgarian periodicals, in addition to some 30-50 typewritten pages of monitoring per day, and items of Bulgarian news from the world press.

In addition to the five target countries Evaluation Desks, there is a non-target desk in which an enormous amount of material about other communist and non-communist countries - among the former the USSR, East Germany and China, among the latter Italy and Greece - is registered and filed. [Owing to lack of personnel, the non-target desk is run by a Bulgarian researcher who can only devote from one to two hours daily to non-target work - there can be no detailed analysis or evaluation proper of this vast amount of interesting material, averaging 175 Reports a month. Information collected from other sources - monitoring, newspapers and news services - is also filed here, and the non-target Reports are published just like the others for the information of editors. There are, of course, no personality or subject indexes here.]

* * *

The Research and Library sub-section of the Evaluation and Research Section also supplies Programming with background material required by the editor-writers for the preparation of radio scripts. The section is divided into three units: Reference, Library and Research and employs a total of 42 persons.

The Reference Unit collects information from newspapers, periodicals, press reviews, monitorings. For this purpose the material is classified by code, and clippings are then filed by country and subject. Approximately 50 Western and satellite dailies alone are classified and clipped. The Reference Unit also keeps a card index of important personalities and a biographical file.

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The clippings of the Reference Unit, unlike these of Evaluation, can be borrowed by editors and taken away to their own desks. This, of course, entails a certain percentage of loss. The material in the Evaluation Section must be consulted on the spot and cannot be removed. This makes the Evaluation records complete and permanent.]

The Library Unit handles the book collection and is also occupied in routing out periodicals and newspapers. The Library contains some 25,000 volumes, of which 15,000 are satellite books and 10,000 Western books. Subscriptions to some 1,200 publications, of which 550 are satellite material and some 700 are Western material, are also handled by the Library. A total of about 3,000 copies per month is routed through the Library to the various editors.

The Research Unit is composed of 17 researchers: 5 Poles, 4 Czechoslovaks and 4 Hungarians, 1 Rumanian and 2 outside researchers, and one researcher engaged in the preparation of the Western magazine digest. The researchers are contacted by editor-writers for background material and use both the newspaper collection and the library for this purpose. The two outside researchers collect material from various libraries and research institutes.

At the head of Evaluation and Research is the Chief, Evaluation, who is at the same time Chief of the Research and Library sub-section. He has an assistant chief, and a chief editor, who is responsible for supervising the work of the various copy-readers and for editing the Weekly Information Letter, compiled by the national Evaluators for the information of correspondents, Programming and other departments. [The section has a typing pool with a staff of 10-11 persons, and a translation pool with two Polish, two Czech and three Hungarian translators. Certain categories of Reports from the field have to be translated automatically (with Priority) into English; others are specially translated at the request of the Political Advisor, Programming and others. The Chief of Evaluation selects as many other

interesting Reports as time allows for translation, in order to make them available to all language desks in Programming. He also prepares a daily list of Evaluation Highlights, to call the particular attention of all desks to the most attractive Reports, whatever their original language. He or his assistant attend the four daily policy meetings of all target countries except Bulgaria, which does no Programming from Munich; a national Evaluator also attends the policy meeting of his country.]

The work of Evaluators and their staffs goes far beyond the processing of Reports and the collection of information. It is their job to help the programming desks to become really the "Voice of Free Poland" etc., and for that purpose they are constantly in touch with editors and script writers, not merely to answer enquiries but to make suggestions and offer special material. The same work from a slightly different angle, is done by the Archives researchers, so that, although physically situated in Munich, the Voice of Free Hungary, for example, shall be so minutely, accurately and currently informed that for all intents and purposes it might be speaking from Budapest [- were Budapest not a captive capital.

A word on the "conveyor belt" which turns the raw report from the field into the finished product which, when published - some 140 stencilled copies of regular reports, and over 200 of certain categories are issued - we call "Items." On receipt, the Reports are entered in a ledger and passed to the Chief of Evaluation, who runs quickly through them to establish special priorities and give a preliminary security check. Within half an hour or so they are in the hands of the national Evaluators who, as we have already seen, check and catalogue their contents. The Evaluators add an "Evaluation Comment" in English for the benefit of program editors. Some they reject as untrustworthy or for other reasons; some are held up and queries sent to correspondents asking them to undertake further research on the subject. Some, of insufficient interest for publication, are placed in background files. National Evaluators carefully watch the security angle, making necessary deletions or changes. The

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most delicate Reports are issued for "Limited Distribution," when only some 18 numbered copies are issued, for information only, not for use in broadcasting, the recipients being required to burn them after perusal, having taken any notes they require. The processed Reports are copy-read and then come again to the Chief Evaluator for scrutiny; they are sent by him to the Typing Pool - some also to the Translation Pool. Finally the stencils are again copy-read and the Items run off and issued. A great deal of the time of national Evaluators is taken up by receiving outside visitors of various kinds, especially journalists and representatives of outside institutions, to whom they supply from their subject files and card indexes, the information which these persons require. Like the Archives researcher, they prepare on requests from Programming or the Political Advisor papers on special subjects, research into which may occupy one or two Evaluators for up to a couple of weeks.

End

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ORGANIZATION CHART

RADIO FREE EUROPE

EUROPEAN DIVISION

