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Stealing the Monopoly of Knowledge?

Soviet Reactions to U.S. Cold War Broadcasting¹

Simo Mikkonen

A new era in international relations dawned after the Second World War: the Cold War was not a conventional war, but it was definitely not the peace people had been waiting for. It was a war that was waged in several arenas as the role of armed forces was diminished, and the battlefields moved elsewhere: to the United Nations, to the economic sphere, to sports events and concert halls, and to a great extent to international media. Indeed, the media played a decisive role in the development of the Cold War, and they significantly affected policies. The media also played an important role in bringing the Cold War to a relatively peaceful end. With the help of Western radio and television broadcasts, people under Communist rule developed a certain image of the West, which arguably contributed to the fact that they did not defend their regimes at crucial moments in the years 1989–1991. Although the media are commonly believed to have played an important part in the Cold War, the over forty years of foreign broadcasting after the Second World War remain a poorly researched area, despite the growing interest in the cultural side of the Cold War in general. This study is part of the growing literature dealing with the cultural Cold War and addressing the impact of foreign radio broadcasting on the Soviet Union.²

¹ I am grateful to Stanford University's Russian Workshop, where I received valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Special thanks also to Amir Weiner for both his support and his comments during the writing of this article. I am also grateful to Richard Cummings and Eugene Parta for their valuable comments and feedback.

² During the last decade, several monographs have addressed the role of culture and propaganda in the development of the Cold War from a fresh viewpoint. Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1944-1961* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997); David Cauter, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003). On the US psychological warfare program and its relations to communication research, see Christopher Simpson, *Science of Coercion. Communication Research & Psychological Warfare, 1945-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Generally on the evolution of propaganda see Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Day* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). There are considerably fewer publications dealing with the subject from the Soviet viewpoint. These include, for example, Frederick C. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960); Nigel Gould-Davies, "The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 27, 2 (2003), 193-214. For a very good article on Soviet responses to American cultural influencing, see Susan E. Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom?": Soviet

The United States' radio broadcasting to the Soviet Union had a background that is anything but straightforward. Immediately after the Second World War, US authorities found themselves with very little information about conditions in the USSR. The USA, therefore, tried to reach over the Iron Curtain to increase its knowledge, while avoiding direct military conflict, and at the same time making an effort to cultivate indirect methods of getting at its adversary. Men like Allen Dulles, George Kennan and General Lucius Clay were prone to believe that the Communist system was vulnerable to aggressive forms of psychological warfare. It was in this context that Radio Free Europe in 1950 and Radio Liberation in 1953 (later known as Radio Liberty – hereafter RL in this text³) came into existence. RL not only broadcast to the Soviet Union in Russian, but by 1954 it was using an arsenal of seventeen Soviet languages in an attempt to appeal to non-Russian minorities. From the beginning, the ultimate objective of RL was to promote the collapse of the Soviet totalitarian government. It was an integral part of the US Cold War strategy.

Subversive international broadcasting as such was not a new phenomenon. The Soviet Union had been a master of radio propaganda ever since the early 1920s. After the defeat of Nazi Germany, the Soviet leaders hardly expected to be seriously challenged by international propaganda, and especially not in their own territory. However, from the beginning to the end of the Cold War, Soviet leaders had to cope with hostile propaganda directed at Soviet citizens. Although Western broadcasting frequently violated international laws, strong protests would have forced the Soviets to alter their own activities abroad. However, US activities did not merely follow the Soviet model; the Second World War in particular had given birth to several models for future subversive radio stations, and now, when there was no direct military confrontation with the target countries, these techniques were developed to

Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959," in *Kritika. Explorations in Soviet and Eurasian History* 9, 4 (2008), 855-904. Generally on Soviet propaganda capabilities, see Peter Kenez, *Birth of the Propaganda State. Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

³ It should also be mentioned that Soviet officials used the name *Liberation (Osvobozhdenie)* years after the station had become *Liberty (Svoboda)*. They also confused it deliberately with Radio Free Europe (RFE), another Munich-based American station, which never broadcast in Russian. They were separate organizations until the early 1970s, when they merged to become RFE/RL Inc., the name it still bears today.

a previously unprecedented level. This is especially well illustrated by the case of RL, which, as a project designed primarily to influence the Soviet Union, I will use here as a case to illustrate the reactions and effects that followed the increase in foreign broadcasting to the Soviet Union. The main objective of this article is to assess the impact of foreign broadcasting [on what precisely?] during the first decades of the Cold War. I propose that as a consequence of Western broadcasting, the Soviet authorities were forced to reorganize and rethink their own domestic propaganda policies, as the scope of foreign broadcasting activity turned out to be more extensive than they had previously anticipated. I will also examine the prerequisites and existing potential for Soviet citizens to listen to foreign broadcasts in the 1950s and 1960s in particular.

Although there were several dozen international broadcasters transmitting to the Soviet Union, RL represented a new approach to the practice. Stations with similarly aggressive objectives had existed before, but they had typically broadcast the views of their countries of origin to numerous different countries; such was the practice of the Voice of America (VOA) or Radio Moscow, for example. The activities of RL, on the other hand, were built around the specific use of Soviet émigrés; it spoke only to the Soviet people, using the Soviet experiences of the émigrés, and it dealt with Soviet internal affairs. Although it was an instrument of psychological warfare, RL likened itself to an alternative domestic service rather than a foreign broadcaster, attempting thus to insinuate voices from the West into the midst of the Soviet people. This was naturally a subject of major controversy between the Soviet and US governments, and it also involved West Germany, where RL's headquarters were located. This location, together with secret funding, handily helped the US authorities deny responsibility for RL's broadcasts, unlike the case of VOA. Only in the late 1960s was the United States forced to admit RL's close connections with the CIA.⁴

⁴ See for example, Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom. The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 187-90; for more background, see Meyer, *Facing reality. From World Federalism to the CIA* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 86-94. The connection of RL with the CIA was a poorly kept secret and hardly a major sensation. It became a bigger issue in 1971, when certain members of the US Senate wanted to reorganize RL's funding.

To achieve its ultimate goal, Radio Liberty tried to appeal directly to the Soviet people. While a single radio station can hardly take the credit for toppling the Soviet system, it is now clear that for many people, including dissidents like Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Andrei Sakharov, RL became the primary source of accurate information, which was absent in the Soviet media.⁵ Yet it was not only a handful of dissidents who followed the broadcasts closely during the Cold War decades; quite a few members of the Soviet political elite also regularly listened in to foreign radio broadcasts. Nor was this a phenomenon that started with the rise of dissidence in the 1970s; it had roots that went back to the 1950s. All this considered, it is notable that, despite several eye-witness accounts by Soviet citizens and post-Soviet-era memoirs written by members of the RL staff themselves which mention foreign broadcasting, there exist hardly any studies of the impact that foreign broadcasts had on developments in the Soviet Union.⁶

In this article, I explore the vast question of the effects foreign broadcasts had on the Soviet Union especially through the activities of RL, using archival material that has never been systematically examined before. Instead of providing numerical statistics on how widespread the listening actually was, I aim to describe the phenomenon and the reactions it generated in the Soviet Union. My first claims are then that foreign broadcasters had a significant audience and that there were

⁵ Especially Solzhenitsyn on several occasions mentions the importance of RL as a source of information about what was happening in the Soviet Union. See for example: *Washington Post* 3 April 1972, A17.

⁶ With regard to US Cold War broadcasting, Michael Nelson's *War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997) deserves special mention. It offers great insight and perceptions, but concentrates on the Western side using archival resources sparingly. It was preceded by a much older, but perceptive, book written by Maury Lisann, *Broadcasting to the Soviet Union. International Politics and Radio* (New York: Praeger, 1975). This fairly short presentation of Soviet reactions to foreign broadcasts is still rich in insight. Radio Liberty itself has also been the subject of several books, most of which concentrate on its activities and organization rather than on its impact. Most of these are written by its former employees and therefore provide very valuable knowledge about the station itself. See Sig Mickelson, *America's Other Voice. The Story of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (New York: Praeger, 1983); James Critchlow, *Radio Hole-in-the-Head. An Insider's Story of Cold War Broadcasting* (Washington: The American University Press, 1995); Gene Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty: An insider's memoir of Radio Liberty* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom*. A comparative approach to several international broadcasters during the Cold War can be found in Julian Hale, *Radio Power: Propaganda and International Broadcasting* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975). An interesting conference addressing the impact of foreign broadcasting to the Soviet Union was held at the Hoover Institution in October 2004. It brought together scholars, and people personally involved in Cold War broadcasting. A summary of the Conference has been published: *Cold War Broadcasting Impact: Conference Summary* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 2005). There is also an edited volume of selected conference papers forthcoming, which apparently includes some archival studies on the impact of Western broadcasts.

people who considered it important to listen to foreign broadcasts. This article concentrates on the early days of RL, when foreign broadcasts in general were still a relatively new phenomenon, both for the Soviet authorities and for the intended audiences. Although the size and composition of RL's audience from the 1970s onwards have been studied, the first two decades of Cold War broadcasting to the Soviet Union have remained poorly covered by research so far.⁷ Yet these very decades are crucial for grasping the development of Soviet reactions as foreign broadcasts continued to increase and strengthen.

My second argument is that foreign broadcasts aroused reactions in the Soviet Union and caused considerable concern among the Soviet authorities, especially in the early 1960s.⁸ RL started broadcasting at a time when the Soviet Union was experiencing major changes: the death of Stalin, the dismantling of the Gulag, the renunciation of physical mass terror, upheavals in East Germany, Hungary and Poland, and the expansion of foreign contacts were all closely linked to the early activities of the station. Howland Sargeant, the President of the American Committee for Liberation from Bolshevism, the organ controlling RL, was certain that "the events of October and November 1956 [in Hungary] represent something so fundamental that the Soviet Union can never reform and regroup [to what] it was before these events." In his view, Soviet people were now "more prone to pay attention to outside communication than at any time since the end of the war."⁹ Though perhaps only making an educated guess, Sargeant was right: The Soviet Union was more profoundly shaken by the events in Hungary than was generally believed at the time.¹⁰ I intend to show that some of the changes

⁷ R. Eugene Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Listener. An Assessment of Radio Liberty and Western Broadcasting to the USSR during the Cold War* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 2007).

⁸ As I focus on the reactions within the Soviet Union, I have omitted efforts of the KGB and other organs to harass Radio Liberty and other foreign broadcasters outside the Soviet borders. At times, these efforts became quite extensive: intimidation, threats of murder and kidnapping, some of them actually taking place. A selection of the most dramatic operations is presented in detail in Richard H. Cummings: *Cold War Radio. The Dangerous History of American Broadcasting in Europe, 1950-1989* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009).

⁹ Howland Sargeant, *Communicating with the People Behind the Iron Curtain* (New York: American Committee for Liberation from Bolshevism, 1957), 1. See also, Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty*, 68-69.

¹⁰ See especially Amir Weiner, "The Empire Pays a Visit: Gulag Returnees, East European Rebellions, and Soviet Frontier Politics" in *The Journal of Modern History* 78 (June 2006): 333-76; "Déjà Vu All Over Again: Prague Spring, Romanian Summer and Soviet Autumn on the Soviet Western Frontier" in *Contemporary European History* 15,

that were effecting the USSR at the time were the consequence of foreign broadcasting activity. This was especially the case with the Soviet media, which would sometimes even imitate the style of their Western counterparts.

Sources for foreign radio listening in the Soviet Union

As there is no single collection of source material that fully describes the foreign broadcasters' impact on Soviet listeners, we can only trace some of the effects and elucidate their likely origin. This is also the case with the stations' administrators, who had only a vague idea about who was listening and whether their broadcasts really had any impact. Techniques for assessing the impact of RL were quickly developed, but only from the late 1970s onwards does sound quantitative data become available.¹¹ There are, however, several other ways to evaluate the responses that foreign broadcasts elicited in the Soviet Union. Soviet archives naturally yield lots of information, and these sources provide us with information about government fears, reactions and motivations – the main subject of this paper. But they are also problematical, since they only tell us what the Soviet government organs managed to learn, and information was often distorted as it was filtered through the thick layers of Soviet bureaucracy. Moreover, with the main KGB archives unavailable, the operative side of the responses inevitably remains incomplete. Furthermore, government organs often saw dangers where they did not really exist, thereby distorting reports to suit their own interests. Thus this material is not very useful for measuring the reactions of individual citizens.

The big picture in this paper, however, can be filled in by supplementing the available Soviet material with the rich offerings of the RFE/RL collection in the Hoover Archives, which provide many details about radio listening in the Soviet Union. To be sure, this collection presents several challenges

(summer 2006): 159-194. Here, Weiner illustrates how events in Hungary had a major impact on the western parts of the Soviet Union. The latter article discusses the late 1960s and points out how parallels were then drawn with Hungarian events of 1956 and that the wounds had hardly healed even by then.

¹¹ See especially Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Listener*. Parta describes the system that was used to evaluate audiences from the 1970s onwards.

of its own that need to be addressed through a short description of how RL was structured and how the material was collected. RL was unique for its émigré staff, which provided a better means of understanding its audience than foreign broadcasters had generally. But beyond this RL focused much effort on the efficient gathering of current information, for two primary purposes: first of all in order to provide Soviet citizens with accurate and substantive facts about internal Soviet affairs absent in the Soviet media;¹² and secondly in order to determine what kind of audience listened to foreign broadcasts in the USSR.¹³ The scheme was conceived primarily by Max Ralis, a Moscow-born, multilingual son of a Menshevik émigré who had lived in Berlin and Paris and had fought with the French army before escaping from the Nazis over the Pyrenees to join the US army as a volunteer. There he was introduced to intelligence work, some of the techniques of which he helped to develop during his post-war academic career under Paul Lazarsfeld, and he obtained a doctorate in the social sciences with a dissertation on interviewing techniques. He took part in the Harvard Emigre Interview Project¹⁴ and was hired for the Psychological Warfare division, which eventually led him to the post where he would spend nearly three decades: the directorship of RL's Audience Research Department (hereafter the ARD), essentially his own creation.¹⁵

The methods used by Ralis' department, which was separate from RL while primarily serving its needs, were in many ways unprecedented.¹⁶ Material was obtained by the ARD's agents primarily from Soviet travelers to the West using sophisticated interviewing techniques. The interviews were

¹² Ibid. 3.

¹³ It is important to note that RL also needed evidence to prove to its funding agency that the station actually had an audience. Although the material I am using was intended for internal use, not meant for its funders, for whom RL produced separate material, a possible bias in it needs to be recognized.

¹⁴ Also known as the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. It consisted of 705 interviews with refugees from the Soviet Union. It produced data primarily on the period from 1917 to the end of WWII. See online: <http://hcl.harvard.edu/collections/hpsss/index.html> (last consulted 2.2.2009).

¹⁵ Leo Bogart, "Obituary of Max Ralis" in *Public Opinion Quarterly* 63, 2 (1999), 261-62; also, Critchlow, *Radio-Hole-In-The-Head*, 101.

¹⁶ Radio Liberty was an organ of the American Committee on Liberation from Bolshevism, which was originally intended to be a body that would supervise various operational units of Soviet émigrés of which only RL and the Institute for the Study of the USSR in Munich realized. The American Committee would eventually assume a more descriptive name: the Radio Liberty Committee. Under this Committee, RL and ARD were separate units albeit part of the same undertaking.

conducted informally and orally without recording equipment or note-taking. Quite often the interviews were based on casual, although hardly accidental, conversations in restaurants, coffee shops, and even bars. ARD agents actively sought contact with travelers when they were alone. The reports were usually written up from memory immediately after the actual interviews; no systematic questionnaires were ever used. Ralis tried to maintain a high level of source criticism by carefully selecting his interviewers and estimating source credibility from the contexts in which interviews were carried out and from the actual reports themselves. Whenever Ralis had doubts about the credibility of a report, he would note this in the report. The informal conduct of the interviews was also necessary in order to get Soviet travelers to speak without arousing their suspicions. To offset the limitations created by the forced informality, interviewers would develop their skills in memorizing essential facts. Ralis personally trained and selected interviewers from Soviet émigrés. These were former Soviet citizens, who in most cases had left the Soviet Union recently and knew the behavior and manners of speech of Soviet people.¹⁷

Ralis' plan to interview Soviet travelers was initiated simultaneously with the opening of Soviet borders to permit a certain amount of professional and even tourist trips abroad. Most often the interviews took place in one of the capital cities of Europe like Paris, London, Athens, Rome or Helsinki.¹⁸ One of the problems with this material is that the Soviet travelers were hardly average people, but rather privileged Soviet citizens.¹⁹ Thus, instead of representing the views of average Soviet citizens, the material can only provide some isolated examples and the views of some people towards Western broadcasters and RL in particular. But it is enough to indicate that quite a few

¹⁷ A good description of how ARD interviewers operated is provided by Max Ralis when he describes the methods of his department to RL's director of the radio programming division. HIA, RFE/RL, b. 529.3. Max Ralis: "Some aspects of the audience research department's field work at the Brussels World Fair". See also: Mickelson, *America's Other Voice*, 210-211.

¹⁸ Ibid. 210. Mickelson mentions Helsinki as the most productive center for interviews.

¹⁹ The selection of Soviet delegates abroad was always complex. People could be eliminated just days before departure. For example, when Soviet radio specialists were about to be sent to USA in January 1959, four people from a list of nine were eventually excluded, including half of those who could speak English. All the non-Party members were ruled out, as was the only foreigner (a Bulgarian), although he was a member of the Soviet Communist Party. "Memorandum to the TsK KPSS from Il'ichev and Kazakov," 23 December 1958 (RGANI f. 5, (Central Committee of the Communist Party) op. 33, d. 72, l. 94).

privileged members of Soviet society did listen to foreign broadcasts. Reports were produced only in cases where someone provided information that was thought useful for RL. Therefore, the true number of interviews conducted can only be guessed. The annual number of reports, however, is easier to estimate: it ranged from 150–200 reports per year in the early 1960s to 300–500 reports by the end of the 1960s.²⁰ When interviewees felt confident enough, they often revealed facts about their radio listening habits, thus giving valuable information about how foreign radio broadcasts were perceived by Soviet citizens.

There are, however, certain key issues that need to be borne in mind in using this kind of source material. Firstly, Ralis paid Soviet émigrés for successful interviews. While it is possible that interviewers could have made up reports in order to be paid, Ralis was vigilant, trained the interviewers himself, and kept their number small, which facilitated both control and made it easier to protect their identity from the KGB. Perhaps a more important question is whether the role of RL and radio listening was exaggerated in these reports. Naturally, in some cases, the interviewers would lead the discussion towards radio listening, but they had no reason to exaggerate the role of foreign broadcasts in the lives of those they interviewed, nor did the interviewees themselves. Ralis, through whom all the reports filtered, had hardly any reason to exaggerate the results either quantitatively or qualitatively; on the contrary, what the ARD sought was accuracy²¹.

The reports were meant for internal use by the leaders of RL. Had exaggeration taken place, the number of reports would probably have been greater, and they would have attributed a wider audience for RL than they did. In the majority of the reports, RL is mentioned only incidentally or in a veiled way using circumlocutions like “the radio station in Munich”. Surely, interviewers picked up RL more

²⁰ At the Brussels World Fair alone, 300 interviews took place, of which only a minor portion were turned into reports. Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty*, 73. Writing in 1983, Mickelson speaks of 1000 to 1400 interviews annually. Mickelson, *America's Other Voice*, 211.

²¹ Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Audience*, 2-4, Parta also emphasizes that credibility of sources and their reports was continuously checked, 76-77; Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom*, 168. In the field of international media research, ARD became one of the most highly esteemed organs in the world, being also used also by VOA and the BBC: see Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens*, 132.

easily than some smaller stations in their interviews, but the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and VOA were being mentioned even more often than RL in the ARD reports. Thus, the possibility of bias prevents any quantitative conclusions about radio listening in the Soviet Union on the basis of these sources²². They do reveal, however, that foreign broadcasters were known among the Soviet elite. Also, they offer examples of how and where listening took place. Instead of providing us with extensive statistics, interview reports can help us understand why the Soviet authorities felt foreign broadcasts to be such a threat.

One final factor to consider in using the material produced by RL is that it was essentially a political weapon, although the motivation behind it was complex. RL was ostensibly a Soviet émigré project, but one funded by the CIA, and its work also constituted part of US foreign policy objectives. One of the leading tenets of RL was the free flow of information, although this needs to be perceived in the light of its subversive mission. In the words of Sargeant: “Even totalitarian governments [...] cannot ignore that deadliest of all enemies of totalitarian regimes – the desire for freedom.” RL was to “bring its listeners not only the uncensored news and a feeling of contact with the outside world, but to give the Soviet listener [...] some of the forbidden fruits; [...] parts of both national and international culture which the regime forbids its own people to read or hear.”²³ By mixing cultural programs of interest for the Soviet audience with the questioning of the Soviet media and politics, RL aimed at sowing seeds of doubt among the Soviet populace and making it hostile, or at least indifferent, to the Soviet government.

Whether this was a successful approach or not, Soviet officials at least seized on the concept of freedom and how it was used by RL and other foreign broadcasters and raised the issue in their numerous attacks against RL. Especially its émigré staff was said to be far from free and controlled by

²² Parta describes how gathering of interview materials later expanded, and after being combined with other sources were in fact used to produce sound quantitative data about radio listening in the Soviet Union. This, however, was not topical in the 1950s or early 1960s. Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Audience*, 75-78.

²³ Sargeant, *Communicating with the People*, 1, 5. As an example, Sargeant mentioned an outstanding performance by the New York Philharmonic of Stravinsky's *Petruchka*, conducted by the composer himself. This great Russian composer was a persona non grata in the Soviet Union.

their American bosses; worst of all, imperialist capital lay behind the whole project. In other words, they argued that all these activities that were alleged to be free were controlled by money and the market economy.²⁴ The Soviet authorities claimed that what RL marketed as the free flow of information was in fact propaganda of the worst kind. The fact that the Soviet authorities had to compete for people's attention in their own backyard was a bitter pill for them to swallow. It seems that both sides did agree on one point: the Soviet populace yearned for knowledge, and foreign broadcasters could use this aspiration to their own advantage, as RL learned to do quite early on.

The Soviet air waves

Naturally, foreign radio broadcasts did not enter a vacuum. By the time Stalin died, Soviet radio was already a well-established and constantly expanding medium. In 1960 the Soviet Union had an estimated 27 million wireless and 31 million wired sets ("wired" referring to outdoor loudspeakers and other public radio sets operating in a closed system). Only with wireless devices was it possible to choose the frequency and channel, and these were the sets that people listened to at home, in their cars, or as portable radios. By 1965 the number of wireless sets had risen to 37 million, exceeding the total of wired output devices.²⁵ The Soviet estimate for 1960 was that three quarters of non-wired sets were powerful enough to receive foreign broadcasts.²⁶ This would mean 24 million sets, and the number was increasing fast during the 1960s. This situation was made possible by the fact that the Soviet authorities had developed short-wave broadcasting during the Second World War in order to better reach distant parts of the country. It was just this, however, that allowed foreign broadcasters to reach the Soviet

²⁴ The amount of Soviet literature committed to exposing the "true nature" of foreign radio broadcasters and generally attacking them is truly massive. Some works were meant for internal use, but many were published in several languages to point out the international crimes committed by the West. These works range from P. Buniakov's and V. Komolov's *Tri Tsveta, a mast' odna* (Moscow: Gospolizdat, 1957) and *Poimany s polichnym. Sbornik faktov o shpionazhe i podrybnykh deistviakh SShA protiv SSSR* (Moscow: Sovinformbiuro, 1960) to A. Panfilov's *Broadcasting Pirates or Abuse of the Microphone* (Moscow: Progress, 1981).

²⁵ Mark Hopkins, *Mass Media in the Soviet Union* (New York: Pegasus, 1970), 248. Hopkins quotes Soviet sources of the time.

²⁶ "Memorandum to the TsK KPSS from L. Il'ichev and G. Kazakov regarding active measures to be taken to counter hostile radio propaganda to the Soviet population," July 1960 (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennii Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii (RGANI) f. 89 (The Communist Party of the Soviet Union on Trial), op. 46, d. 14, l. 2).

Union, since the state's policy involved the production of more powerful sets with short-wave capacity.

As the Cold War quickly intensified, Soviet monitors found themselves in serious trouble: according to one estimate presented to the Central Committee in 1960, as many as 50 to 60 different radio stations were transmitting short-wave broadcasts to the Soviet Union.²⁷ Even more worrying for the authorities was the fact that instead of short-wave receivers being located in the peripheral areas, 85% of them were situated in the European part of the USSR, where it was often foreign broadcasts rather than Soviet ones that occurred by short-wave.²⁸ Many Soviet citizens thus had the technical facilities for listening to foreign broadcasts if they so desired.

As soon as the Soviet authorities realized this situation, they tried to limit the production of sets capable of receiving foreign broadcasts. Earlier, local attempts to limit the production of receivers had all but failed.²⁹ The next logical step was to alter the radio sets being produced. Certain parts were taken out of receivers meant for Soviet use, making it impossible to turn to frequencies used by foreign broadcasters. However, the factories that exported fully functional sets kept losing these parts, which mysteriously surfaced in Soviet shops as under-the-counter items.³⁰ Cases of these specially-equipped radios being sold were reported everywhere, including Moscow's largest department store GUM, testifying to the broad interest in radios capable of receiving foreign broadcasts.³¹

Another problem was the fact that people with radio skills helped others to adjust radio sets that were incapable of receiving foreign broadcasts. The Central Committee's Agitprop officials lamented

²⁷ "Memorandum to the TsK KPSS from L. Il'ichev and G. Kazakov regarding the jamming of foreign radio stations," 6 August, 1958 (RGANI f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, l. 164).

²⁸ Ibid. l. 162. The authorities tried to prohibit the sale of receivers capable of receiving certain higher frequencies that were irrelevant for Soviet broadcasts. See also Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens*, 92.

²⁹ "Resolution of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party regarding additional measures to limit the audibility of hostile radio broadcasts," January 1953 (Eesti Riigiarhiiv (ERA), f. 1, n. 5, s. 52, l. 2, 7). Estonian Party officials' attempt to limit the distribution of radio sets conflicted with calls for more individual radio sets. I am grateful for Amir Weiner for showing me this document.

³⁰ Hoover Institution Archives (HIA), RFE/RL, box 564.8. "Target Area Listener Report (TALR) # 98 – 66." August 22, 1966.

³¹ "Memorandum to the TsK KPSS from L. Il'ichev and G. Kazakov regarding active measures to be taken to counter hostile radio propaganda to the Soviet population," 15 July 1960 (RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 14, l. 2).

the fact that for 250-300 rubles “individual war invalids [veterans?] with radio skills and some radio amateurs” reportedly fixed radios to receive foreign short-wave transmissions.³² The main dilemma for the authorities was that while people hankered after radio sets of better quality, these also made it easier to listen to anti-Soviet broadcasts. In the early 1960s, many Soviet citizens mentioned in RL’s interviews that they had recently acquired new radio sets that had very good audibility, and also that the signal of foreign broadcasts was much better with them.³³ In 1960 the authorities woke up to find their air waves full of foreign voices and, even more alarming, Soviet citizens eagerly listening.

The Soviet authorities' reaction: jamming

The first and most persistent reaction of the Soviet authorities to foreign broadcasts was jamming, which means interfering with signals on certain frequencies. The jamming was never officially admitted, but everyone knew about it. However, it was never completely comprehensive. The vast area of the USSR always had places outside the jammers' reach, and even in cities there were gaps. Moreover, foreign broadcasters constantly reinforced their signals, keeping Soviet officials on the defensive. At first, the jamming was directed at all signals coming from abroad. Later, however, a lack of resources would cause the Soviet authorities to be selective about which stations were jammed.

Jamming was controlled by the KGB, which in turn reported to the Central Committee of the Party. The level of KGB’s monitoring is illustrated by an early example of a planned exemption from jamming. In some isolated cases exemptions were granted for certain programs. Such decisions were preceded by intense scrutiny of the programs concerned. Such a case happened after the first Soviet-American agreement on cultural exchange was signed on 27 January 1958. The agreement, also called the “Lacy-Zarubin agreement” after its negotiators, embodied numerous itemized points referring to cultural exchange, including exchange of radio and television programs.³⁴ Yet, it also contained a

³² Ibid.

³³ See, for example, HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.1. “TALR # 170 – 61.” 29 December 1961.

³⁴ “U.S.-Soviet Exchange Agreement.” Policy Information Statement Prepared in the Department of State on 29 January

broader expression of good-will, aiming at better understanding between the American and Soviet peoples through increased contacts. Apparently in connection with this, at 9 pm on Saturday 25 January 1958 VOA broadcast a half-hour program called “Life in America” in Russian. The KGB was listening, as usual, but in this particular case, the KGB was to send the whole script to the Central Committee. After three broadcasts of “Life in America”, the jamming of this particular program began to be suspended, but the KGB would continue keep an eye on its content and was ready to re-install jamming if necessary.³⁵ Cases like this clearly indicate the Soviet authorities' sensitivity to foreign broadcasts. Within a year, however, exemptions to jamming would be forced rather than being a part of any far-sighted strategy. The changing levels of jamming indicate that Soviet authorities did not dispose of unlimited resources and that jamming was in fact a highly taxing procedure.

With the rapidly growing number of foreign broadcasts, the authorities first chose to limit the languages to be jammed. Obviously, they concentrated on jamming the most hostile broadcasts that used official Soviet languages; this was most persistently done to RL and to a lesser extent to VOA, the BBC, Deutsche Welle (DW), Kol Israel, Radio Peking, and others. Thus, Radio Madrid, Radio Paris, the BBC's English Service or DW in German would come through without interference. As early as 1958, the KGB had suggested ceasing the jamming of languages that were not generally spoken in the Soviet Union, referring to Spanish, English, Finnish and other languages.³⁶ Although these were important for that small minority of repatriates from abroad, or those who had otherwise mastered some foreign language, the authorities felt more threatened by broadcasts in Soviet languages. The

1958 in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960*. Volume X, part 2, 2-8 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1989). See also Victor Rosenberg, *Soviet-American Relations, 1953-1960. Diplomacy and Cultural Exchange During the Eisenhower Presidency* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2005), 131-2.

³⁵ “Memoranda and transcriptions to the TsK KPSS from I. Savchenko and S. Belchensky from the KGB,” January to April 1958 (RGANI f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, ll. 1-89). On the decision about the exemption from jamming: see “On discontinuing the dissolving of the radio broadcasting of VoA ‘Life in America’ and organizing the radio broadcasting of ‘Life in the USSR’ to the USA,” (ibid. l. 96). The decision was drafted in the Ideological Commission of the Central Committee late in February 1958.

³⁶ “Memorandum to TsK KPSS from P. Kuznetsov (KGB) regarding effectivity of jamming of anti-Soviet radio broadcasts,” 10 June 1958 (RGANI f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, ll. 146-148).

languages used by RL in 1954 ranged from Ukrainian and Turkmen to Ossetin, Avar and Kumyk.³⁷

When it became unavoidable to impose limitations in jamming, it was only natural that the authorities should concentrate on those transmissions that were considered most dangerous. Later, however, jamming was further curtailed even with regard to the more hostile stations, and the jamming efforts were concentrated on programs that were considered to have political significance. Therefore, musical programs were often excluded from jamming, only for it to start up again right after the music stopped. Thus, one Soviet composer described in an ARD interview how this gave him the opportunity to study jazz and modern music, but he claimed that straightforward political material got through more rarely.³⁸ Many other interviews confirm the fact that foreign broadcasts were for many a seemingly harmless source of Western music, which was otherwise unavailable in the Soviet Union. Many tape-recorded what they heard, and some even sold the tapes to interested customers on the black market, while students played it at their parties.³⁹

The popularity of Western jazz and later pop music in the Soviet Union is well known. This was to a large extent thanks to Western broadcasters. However, Western governments did not spend billions of dollars just to introduce Soviet citizens to the Beatles. Music was used to attract people to listen to more serious and ideological fare.⁴⁰ Western broadcasters were able to use music much more flexibly than their Soviet counterparts. Besides its appeal, Western pop culture was important in that it undermined efforts to nurture Soviet culture, which the authorities considered to be healthier and more morally uplifting. Although an interest in foreign culture as such was not a harmful phenomenon, Soviet culture constituted an integral part of the socialist fabric, and a loss of interest in it was considered potentially dangerous. However, with their lack of resources, the officials had to make some qualitative choices and jammed mainly programs with a downright political content. With regard

³⁷ Howland Sargeant, "Introduction" in *A Free Voice at the Soviet Writers' Congress* (New York: AmComLib, 1954); later president of RFE/RL confirms that by using numerous languages RL aimed at appealing to Soviet nationalities and causing further problems to Moscow, see: Mickelson, *America's other voice*, 89.

³⁸ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.3. "TALR # 101 – 62." 25 October 1962.

³⁹ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.4. "TALR # 78 – 63." 29 November 1963; - b. 564.9. "TALR # 13 – 67." 17 February 1967.

⁴⁰ Although VOA used it more, RL, too, experimented with music: see Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty*, 101-2.

to cultural programs, it is possible that they felt that the Soviet culture was superior to that of the West and believed that the people would feel the same.⁴¹ Nonetheless, jamming everything was no longer a viable solution.

While the reception of RL, the most heavily jammed station, was reportedly sometimes good, on the eve of ideologically or politically important occasions jamming was raised to unprecedented levels, especially in bigger cities, as interviews with people from Leningrad, Gorky, or Yaroslavl seem to testify.⁴² In all of them, audibility might have been good just prior to such an event, but during it listening in became impossible. Similarly, during and after the Cuban crisis in late 1962, jamming was intensified, making previously clear signals inaudible.⁴³ However, the Cuban crisis was followed by a five-year period when the jamming of most foreign broadcasters ceased, only to intensify again with the Prague Spring in 1968, and then ceasing again in 1973, when Kissinger became Secretary of the State.⁴⁴ However, jamming was to be completely and irreversibly stopped only after Gorbachev came to power by a decree to that effect on 29 September 1986 (although it finally ceased only two years later). The reasoning, not surprisingly, was the same as it had been more than two decades earlier: a more open information and publicity policy would decrease the effectiveness of foreign propaganda and end the need for jamming. Furthermore, the transmission resources that were freed from jamming

⁴¹ For an interesting argument about how the Soviet admiration of Western life and the decreasing Soviet ability to prevent Western cultural productions from pouring into the Soviet Union fueled the need for social reforms under Mikhail Gorbachev, see Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁴² HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.1. "TALR # 163 – 61" - "TALR # 167 – 61"; - "TALR # 168 – 61." 29 December 1961. These three separate interviews from a single day were conducted in London, apparently with members of a delegation of Soviet engineers and technicians. Although possibility that Soviet authorities attempted to spread misinformation through the delegates exists, no such attempts were ever encountered by the ARD. Furthermore, interviewees' answers were far from tendentious, which was usually the case when authorities fed ready-made responses for travellers. Usually, ARD interviewers did not put the same questions to different travelers; rather the reports produced information on a number of issues. In this case, however, ARD must have been curious about the drastic increase in jamming that took place early November 1961. See below.

⁴³ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.4. "TALR # 41 – 63." 17 July 1963.

⁴⁴ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 627.9. Memorandum drafted by Henry O. Hart on 13 September 1973. See also: Lisann, *Broadcasting to the USSR*, 14-15; Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom*, 215. The jamming of VOA, BBC and several other broadcasters gradually ended in the spring and summer of 1963. RL continued to be jammed as before. Most of the East European satellites ceased jamming completely in 1964.

could then be used for Soviet broadcasts abroad.⁴⁵

The lack of sufficient resources is clearly illustrated in a case from early November 1961. Immediately after the 22nd Party Congress, Western broadcasters were expected to comment negatively on its proceedings. Furthermore, the October Revolution festivities were about to take place. Therefore, the KGB, the Ministry of Communications and the Radio Committee convened with the Agitprop Department of the Central Committee aiming at ensuring that prime time on the air would be exclusively Soviet. Among the measures was a notion that all broadcasts from the West were to be jammed completely from 9 p.m. to midnight.⁴⁶ Usually, this was hardly the case. They also prepared special counter propaganda for the event and aimed at coordinating and briefing TASS, the censors, and other organs about the upcoming countermeasures.⁴⁷

All this suggests that the Soviet ability to impede foreign broadcasting was highly limited. On special occasions, or following high-level decrees, jamming could be stepped up and Soviet broadcasts improved, but only through an arduous process of co-operation between several bureaucratic organizations. Jamming was also so expensive that the government simply could not afford to maintain it at high levels for long. In the 1950s jamming already exceeded the capacity of all foreign broadcasts to the Soviet Union put together by more than three times, but even so it simply could not cover all the broadcasts which kept coming through. At certain times of the day, the power used for jamming was 20 times that used for broadcasting. In 1958, the Central Committee mentioned that the sum they spent on jamming was *greater* than the sum they spent on domestic and international broadcasting combined.⁴⁸ It goes without saying that Soviet foreign broadcasting activity was truly vast in scale. However, it still

⁴⁵ “Memorandum to the TsK KPSS from I. E. Ligachev and V. Chebrikov on terminating the jamming...,” 29 September 1986 (RGANI f. 89, op. 18, d. 105, ll. 1-2). However, it seems that it took two years to enforce the decree since the actual cessation of all jamming did not take place until 21 November 1988. See *Cold War Broadcasting*, 19. Cf. “Resolution of the Secretariat of the Communist Party regarding active measures to counter hostile radio propaganda,” 19 July 1960 (RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 14, ll. 53-54).

⁴⁶ “Memorandum to the TsK KPSS from V. Snastin and G. Kazakov regarding counterpropaganda,” November 1961 (RGANI f. 89, op. 28, d. 9, l. 1).

⁴⁷ Ibid. ll. 1-2.

⁴⁸ “Memorandum to the TsK KPSS from L. Il'ichev and G. Kazakov regarding the jamming of foreign radio stations,” 6 August 1958 (RGANI f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, l. 164).

paled in comparison with jamming. Nevertheless, the authorities were fighting a losing battle: although jamming stations were erected throughout the 1950s all over the Soviet Union, all kinds of ad hoc measures were needed to cover lacunae. An illustrative case from Estonia shows how civilian air forces, radio equipment in steamships and fishing boats, and even the radio transmitters of the Red Navy's Baltic Fleet were employed for jamming.⁴⁹

Angry reactions to jamming

The reactions recorded by ARD suggest that jamming had little support among the people. Even those who in ARD reports seemed otherwise favorable to Soviet policies were opposed on this particular matter. The apparent contradiction can be explained in part by the annoyance actually caused by jamming. Some Party sympathizers reasoned that ordinary people could easily see through Western propaganda, and that jamming only made them more interested. Yet, despite temporary mitigations in jamming, it was something that Soviet citizens constantly had to live with. Perhaps thus Soviet travelers were surprised to hear that the Americans were free to listen to Radio Moscow without jamming.⁵⁰

There was not a single case of someone defending jamming in the ARD reports. Opposition to it, however, was commonplace. While ARD reports simultaneously brought forward hostility towards Western broadcasters, as well as vindication of Soviet policies, it seems plausible that there was genuine resentment towards jamming among the Soviet elite. In one interview, a Soviet traveler expressed his anger in the following words: "Millions of rubles of public funds [...] go up in smoke. They really do, because people have long ago devised portable anti-jammers that strain off most of the din."⁵¹ Indeed, people quickly learned that jamming was not an impassable obstacle, but merely a hindrance to be overcome. This was admitted in the Central Committee: circumventing jamming was

⁴⁹ "Resolution of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party regarding additional measures to limit the audibility of hostile radio broadcasts," 7 January, 1953 (ERA f. 1, n. 5, s. 52, ll. 2-3).

⁵⁰ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 529.7. Background report # 20 – 60. 29 June 1960; - b. 564.3. "TALR # 97 – 62. 28 September 1962.

⁵¹ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 524.2. "Analysis Report # 9 – 63" August 1963.

both possible and practiced in the Soviet Union.⁵² The ARD found numerous cases pointing in this direction, ranging from readjusting sets with bits collected here and there to simply placing two radio sets close to each other with a very close wave length.⁵³ The ARD reports also suggest that there were cases in which engineers engaged in jamming leaked information about jamming and helped their friends overcome it with devices they built or gave them advice on how to build their own appliances.⁵⁴

People also quickly learned to follow jamming patterns. RL, for example, constantly changed its broadcasting frequencies, forcing Soviet jamming staff to make strenuous tuning efforts.

Neighboring frequencies were also used with the goal of forcing the Soviets either to jam their own broadcasts, or to give up jamming altogether.⁵⁵ Sometimes the jammers were accidentally directed to the wrong stations, even to Radio Moscow. One interviewee told about an official who had been punished for making such a grave mistake.⁵⁶ Even if this particular case was untrue, it points out that he was aware that RL used frequencies neighboring those used by Radio Moscow. This was a major headache for Soviet authorities. It was mentioned in the Central Committee that this practice of RL caused “extreme difficulties for our own broadcasting”.⁵⁷

Radio hams often spotted deficiencies in the jamming and discovered other limits to it, but they were not the only ones. According to several ARD reports, jamming concentrated on big cities, and people had learned to go to the countryside to listen to foreign broadcasts. Just some 40 miles outside

⁵² “Memorandum to the TsK KPSS from L. Il'ichev and G. Kazakov regarding the jamming of foreign radio stations,” 6 August, 1958 (RGANI f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, l. 164).

⁵³ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.3. “TALR # 87 – 62.” 12 September 1962; - “TALR # 98 – 62. September 28, 1962; HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.4. “TALR # 6 – 63.” 17 January 1963; - b. 564.8. “TALR # 113 – 66.” 15 September 1966. Cases poured in over the years, these being mere examples of methods mentioned above.

⁵⁴ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.4. “TALR # 5 – 63.” 16 January 1963; in another example, a radio electronics engineer was mentioned adjusting interviewees radio: - b. 564.3. “TALR # 100 – 62. 17 October 1962.

⁵⁵ The earliest example I have come across dates back to 1953: “Secretary of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party, V. Kosov, to M. A. Suslov,” January 1953 (ERA f. 1, n. 5, s. 52, l. 5). In this case, the Estonian Communist Party was forced to send a request to Secretary Suslov in Moscow in order to change the frequency of Estonian broadcasts, which could no longer be heard because of the jamming of VOA's more powerful broadcasts on a neighboring frequency.

⁵⁶ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.3. “TALR # 87 – 62.” 12 September 1962.

⁵⁷ Memorandum to the TsK KPSS from A. Romanov and G. Kazakov regarding foreign broadcasting activity,” March 1958 (RGANI f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, l. 97).

Moscow, the audibility of RL was very good.⁵⁸ Dachas also provided peaceful surroundings for radio listening, with no prying neighbors or building superintendents. One wounded Second World War veteran and active Party member, according to his own account, drove 35 miles to his dacha every other day just to listen to foreign newscasts.⁵⁹ The existence of such gaps was listed in reports to the Central Committee as well. The KGB reported that in the summer of 1958 it had tested the audibility of several foreign broadcasts in numerous locations in the Soviet Union. Even in the outskirts of Moscow, as close as Izmailovo and Khovrino, which are just 6 and 11 miles respectively from the Kremlin, both VOA and RL could be picked up at least during certain times of the day. Farther away, audibility was naturally better.⁶⁰

Thus, even if jamming intensified in Moscow itself, it was much harder to extend coverage to the less-populated areas outside the centers. The best audibility was usually reported in the countryside, often just 25 to 45 miles outside the main urban centers.⁶¹ Same applied to the minority languages: the authorities mainly jammed broadcasts in the national language of the particular area. For instance, outside RSFSR, Russian broadcasts often went unjammed.⁶² Generally, in places where Soviet citizens spent their free time, like holiday resorts, jamming was not a problem. Judging from RL's reports, the jamming pattern seems quite clear: primary targets were urban centers and majority languages of the area. Without the resources for jamming everything, these choices seem logical, but they were also easily discovered by those interested in foreign broadcasts.

Circumventing jamming seems to have become almost a kind of hobby for some people; indeed

⁵⁸ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.4. "TALR # 5 – 63." 16 January 1963.

⁵⁹ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.9. "TALR # 20 – 67." 7 March 1967. This war veteran had befriended a foreign (most likely Finnish) postgraduate student in Moscow, and he later took possession of the student's Japanese transistor radio in order to listen to foreign radio broadcasts.

⁶⁰ "Memorandum to TsK KPSS from P. Kuznetsov (KGB) regarding the effectiveness of the jamming of anti-Soviet radio broadcasts," 10 June 1958 (RGANI f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, ll. 146-148).

⁶¹ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.8. "TALR # 96 – 66." 8 August 1966.

⁶² For example, HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.1. "TALR # 83 – 61." 16 August 1961; - b. 564.3. "TALR # 108 – 62." 31 October 1962; - b. 564.4. "TALR # 69 – 63." 9 October 1963; - b. 564.7. "TALR # 95a – 65." 22 October 1965; - b. 564.8. "TALR # 29 – 66." 3 May 1966; - b. 564.8. "TALR # 107 – 66." 23 August 1966; - b. 564.8. "TALR # 116 – 66." 27 September 1966. These examples describe good audibility in Russian broadcasts as compared to local languages in Belarussian, Caucasian, Karelian and Ukrainian republics, and from the Finnish border in Leningrad oblast where there were numerous elite dachas.

it should be noted that listening to foreign broadcasts might not necessarily represent a political act but rather just reflect a temptation to “taste the forbidden fruit”. Foreign radio listening was widespread among Soviet youth, especially high school students, and it is easy to imagine that for them the thrill of thwarting the authorities and the opportunity to listen to Western music were more important than politics. With expensive radio sets often outside their reach, they set up “radio circles”. These legal recreational clubs became highly popular during the 1960s, but when the authorities found out that in them people learned not only how to build their own sets but also how to circumvent jamming, they secretly tried to prevent their further growth.⁶³ However, there were cases where even junior school children started to build their own sets in order to listen to Western broadcasts.⁶⁴

The authorities seem to have been very concerned about Soviet youth, believing them to be the section of the population that was most easily corrupted by these broadcasts. The Communist Party’s concern about the younger generation’s attitude was reflected in a 14-page article by the Secretary of the Moscow City Committee, N. Egorychev. He wrote that people who were “ideologically unstable and politically immature” had certainly been affected by the events of recent years. He referred to the struggle of two ideologies and to channels through which bourgeois ideology infiltrated into Soviet society, and how these channels had widened daily, increasing the amount of false information.⁶⁵ Although young people were not necessarily seeking an alternative worldview from the foreign broadcasts, this was exactly what they were provided with, whether it came in the form of a direct political message or some other type of material that merely satisfied Soviet youth’s adulation of Western culture. It was, in any event, an ideological threat to the Communist Party. In 1965, the Chairman of the KGB in Baku wrote that individuals would listen to foreign calumny and in some

⁶³ Central Committee Apparatchiks, based on the KGB’s findings, laconically state that while jamming covered the centers of Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and Riga well, even there foreign broadcasts could be listened to relatively easily with antennas built by radio amateurs. See “Memorandum to TsK KPSS from L. Ilichev, A. Romanov, and G. Kazakov regarding the jamming of foreign radio stations,” 6 August 1958 (RGANI f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, ll. 163-167).

⁶⁴ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.2. “TALR # 33 – 62.” 31 May 1962. In this interview a Soviet teacher, who was openly hostile to foreign broadcasts, mentioned that children in her school built sets to listen to Western broadcasts.

⁶⁵ N. Egorychev “Vospitanie molodezhi – delo partiinoe” in *Kommunist* no. 3, (1965), 16.

cases would disseminate it, causing “considerable harm to themselves and their comrades.”⁶⁶ The problem for the authorities was not only that listeners were affected but the fact that they spread the information they had heard. One obvious explanation for this might be the cessation of the jamming of most stations in 1963, which suggested to people that foreign broadcasts were now officially more acceptable. It is important, therefore, to keep in mind that Soviet policies concerning foreign broadcasts were not invariable but fluctuated over time. A more persistent specter haunting Soviet officials was the fear of an alternative worldview from abroad and the loss of their monopoly of information channels.

The thirst for knowledge

An attempt to retain firm control of the distribution of information seems to have been one of the guiding principles of the Soviet authorities during the 1950s and 1960s. This was indeed an area where foreign broadcasts had a major impact: they both answered and added to the Soviet citizens' tremendous thirst for knowledge. The impression in RL was that by the 1960s people in the Soviet Union had become bolder with regard to foreign broadcasts, and the information obtained from them was effectively passed on by word-of-mouth. In Ralis' opinion, people had initially dismissed foreign broadcasts as “nonsense” (*chepukha*), even when agreeing with them, but by 1965 they were openly comparing what they had heard and venting their opinions about it, and they did not hide the fact that their source was foreign broadcasts when they passed on information. RL felt that the majority of people were no longer ready to accept seriously what was offered to them by obligatory ideological education and Party meetings, which were the traditional sources of information. Foreign broadcasts had increased people's need to know and had helped to produce more people who asked questions and

⁶⁶ S. Tsvigun, “Nashe oruzhie” in *Bakinsky Rabochy* October 10, 1965, 3. Quoted and translated in HIA, RFE/RL, b. 554.2. “Regime Reaction Report # 12 – 58.” 15 May 1958. In the 1970s, Semion Tsvigun became the Deputy Chairman of the Soviet KGB.

were less afraid.⁶⁷ Radio Liberty felt that, along with other foreign broadcasters, it had contributed to the change, although at the time it could hardly point to any tremendous changes. One case in which RL regarded itself as having played a big role was the dissemination of Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (1958) in the Soviet Union⁶⁸. At first, this novel was surrounded by official silence, and it was not published in the Soviet Union until 1988, but it became well-known in the bigger cities and among students through the version of it read on RL and through *samizdat* (clandestine) versions, also distributed by RL. This was part of RL's objective: to insinuate Western ideas slowly among the Soviet populace. Although RL naturally exaggerated its role in the overall process, it is quite evident that foreign broadcasts had played a part in the change of attitudes in the Soviet Union.

The leaders of RL believed that it was possible to smuggle Western values into the Soviet Union by satisfying the thirst for Western technical data, scientific books, and culture. The Soviet intelligentsia reasoned that in order to prevent backwardness it was necessary to have some kind of access to Western achievements in science and culture. RL believed it could use this to broaden its accessibility in the Soviet Union. They also tried to exploit the rising nationalism in the Third World by carefully selecting material that was believed to promote national sentiments within the Soviet Union, too. Soviet nationalities were addressed in their own languages, not only in Russian. RL also tried to appeal to religious sentiments, Islamic and Christian alike. RL's leadership, however, was fully aware that the local political elites were dependent on Moscow. Thus, in RL's analysis in 1965, there was no evidence that Soviet citizens were taking a more active part in political, social or cultural life than in Stalin's times. People still thought that "the Party knows best" and rank-and-file-members that "the leaders know best". RL thus acknowledged that instead of believing in the collapse of the Communist Party, people believed in its evolutionary reform. However, seeing people demanding more and higher-

⁶⁷ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 627.13. Max Ralis: "Looking forward: Some attitudes and aspirations of the Soviet people." October, 1965.

⁶⁸ Doctor Zhivago played a central role in bringing the Nobel Prize to its author. For a good introduction to Pasternak and his life in the Soviet literary world, see, for example Lazar Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak: The Poet and His Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

quality goods, the station tried to keep Soviet citizens aware of what there was on the other side of the Iron Curtain.⁶⁹ Their material needs were intentionally politicized. This, it must be noted, had been part of American foreign policy objectives from the late 1950s onwards, although initially the plan did not enjoy any major successes.⁷⁰

The suppression of the overtly political tone in foreign broadcasts, which had been particularly characteristic of RL towards the end of the 1950s, seems to have found support among the Soviet audience. By the same token, however, continuous jamming and the information provided in foreign broadcasts increased people's doubts about their government. In fact, mid-ranking officials were peppered with questions about why foreign broadcasts were jammed, and they had an increasingly hard time justifying it. In one eye-witness account collected by the ARD, a government official was reported to have participated in a gathering at Moscow State University. He faced students who bombarded him with questions about foreign broadcasts, and he responded by saying that the Soviet media were obliged to improve constantly, since otherwise people would continue listening to foreign broadcasts. Unpleasant encounters like this with all-too-aware students had become commonplace, making life difficult for Agitprop officials. Thus, when asked why only Communist papers from the West were available instead of *The New York Times* or *Le Monde*, this official resorted to humor, questioning the students' need for these papers: "[...] because you all listen to foreign radio broadcasts, anyway." This, in the end, evoked hearty laughter from the audience and saved him on that occasion.⁷¹ Disturbingly enough, this was not an isolated example. On the contrary, the Central Committee received reports that people were publicly asking questions about information presented in foreign media but omitted by the

⁶⁹ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 627.13. Max Ralis: "Looking forward: Some attitudes and aspirations of the Soviet people." October, 1965; see also Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom*, 164-165.

⁷⁰ See State Department "U.S.-Soviet Exchange Agreement." One of the major outcomes of this agreement reached in January 1958 was a Soviet exhibition held in New York and an American exhibition in Moscow in summer 1959. Here, the Americans tried, among other things, to influence the Soviet population with a lavish exhibition concentrating on consumer goods. The aim was to induce a thirst for consumer goods in the Soviet Union, which would in turn put pressure on the Soviet authorities to transfer resources away from the war industry. The results of this exhibition have been a subject of controversy. See especially: Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*. Cf. Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom?"

⁷¹ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.9. "TALR # 13 - 67." 17 February 1967.

Soviet sources.⁷²

Since the jamming was not sufficiently effective, the only solution that authorities were able to come up with was to improve Soviet media. One new method was to concentrate heavily on developing television, and this was adopted as a new policy from 1959 onwards.⁷³ But this was only part of the solution. The Central Committee aimed at improving Soviet media in general. The inferior nature of Soviet broadcasts was constantly addressed in reports pouring in to the Central Committee.⁷⁴ This would hardly have been too worrying if there had not also been reports of widespread listening to foreign broadcasts. In some areas, by the 1960s this was no longer even a private phenomenon, and listening would sometimes take place in public, for example in teahouses in Tajikistan, traditional gathering places for Tajik men. Local Communists, however, seem to have paid little attention to the practice.⁷⁵

The Central Committee of the Party was probably correct in assuming that the problem with foreign broadcasts had become acute partly because local officials paid little attention to the problem. Most likely, many of them listened to the broadcasts themselves. One ARD interview with a native Georgian from Ordzhonikidze described how local Party officials had learned from RL about the purge of Vasilevsky⁷⁶ (mentioned by Soviet media only later), which helped those with connections to Vasilevsky to prepare their defenses and denounce him before they ended up following him. Thus, in his opinion RL kept them better informed about Soviet internal changes than their own media.⁷⁷ They had every reason, then, to play down the problem. Indeed, in Tajikistan, the authorities had received

⁷² Ibid. II. 2-4.

⁷³ The development of Soviet television is discussed in depth in Kristin Roth-Ey, "Mass Media and the Remaking of Soviet Culture, 1950s-60s" (Ph. D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2003) and in her forthcoming book. The development of Soviet television as possibly limiting the access of Soviet population to foreign propaganda is mentioned in "Memorandum to TsK KPSS by G. Kazakov and A. Romanov regarding enemy propaganda," 22 April, 1959 (RGANI f. 5, op. 33, d. 106, l. 26),

⁷⁴ "Memorandum to the TsK KPSS from L. Il'ichev and G. Kazakov regarding active measures to be taken to counter hostile radio propaganda to the Soviet population," 15 July 1960 (RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 14, l. 2).

⁷⁵ Ibid. II. 2-4.

⁷⁶ The interviewee is likely referring to Aleksander Vasilevsky's removal from major positions in 1957.

⁷⁷ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.3. "TALR # 89 – 62." September 20, 1962.

reports about foreign radio listening for years⁷⁸, but only in 1960 did Moscow react to the situation, and even then it was most probably not at the instigation of local officials.

The lost audience

In the late 1950s, the Central Committee had slowly been waking up to the dreadful situation concerning the audibility of Soviet broadcasts around the vast country. The first signs accidentally emerged in the context of other problems: for example, in a report of struggle against foreign propaganda in the Ukraine. It could be read between the lines of this 1958 report that in the southern and western Ukraine dozens of foreign broadcasts were audible, while the reception of broadcasts from Kiev was at times very poor. Furthermore, signals from Moscow were certainly not dependable everywhere, as Soviet jammers themselves impeded reception.⁷⁹ Similar hints about problems in audibility due to lack of resources in local broadcasting poured in from other republics, too. This, however, was a mere prelude to coming revelations.

The most deeply disturbing discovery connected with foreign broadcasting made by the Central Committee was the dreadful state of Soviet transmissions east of the Urals. They found out that several locations, especially in the far eastern regions, were outside the range of Soviet transmissions, while foreign broadcasts in Russian came through loud and clear. In some cases, especially east of Lake Baikal, Soviet broadcasts came through, but were poorly timed, with the last broadcast of local news aired at 8 pm and nothing even from Moscow after that.⁸⁰ The fact that RL constantly received mail from the local audience seems to suggest that censors in the east were also less scrupulous than those in

⁷⁸ Semion Tsvigun's speech in *Kommunist Tajikistana*, 16 January 1958; translation provided in HIA, RFE/RL, b. 554.2. Regime Reaction Report # 12 – 58. May 15, 1958. For example, a speech given by one kolkhoz chairman at the Tajik Party Congress named Radio Liberation as the cause of unrest in the republic.

⁷⁹ “Memorandum to the TsK KPSS from S. Chervonenko on strengthening the struggle against foreign propaganda in Ukrainian SSR,” July 1958 (RGANI f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, ll. 102-109).

⁸⁰ “Memorandum to the TsK KPSS from L. Il'ichev and G. Kazakov regarding active measures to be taken to counter hostile radio propaganda to the Soviet population,” 15 July 1960 (RGANI f. 89, op. 37, d. 31, l. 38). When ARD interviewed Soviet travelers from the area, many, like a man from Khabarovsk in 1961, pointed out that RL had good audibility: HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.1. “TALR # 162 – 61.” 28 December 1961.

the western Soviet Union.⁸¹

The Central Committee's Agitprop Department could then only look with stupor at how foreign broadcasters had managed to take a lion's share of the peoples' radio listening time and how their own programs were broadcast either when people were working or sleeping. During the 1950s, programs containing the latest news items were usually transmitted directly from Moscow. The main news was aired at 7:00 pm Moscow time when in Chita it was already well past midnight, with practically no-one listening. Meanwhile, a report submitted to the Central Committee stated that the Americans broadcast their latest news items to Chita at 10:00 pm local time, exploiting the prime spot for radio listening. To varying degrees, the same applied to other areas east of the Urals.⁸²

A survey made about the audibility of Soviet radio in the far eastern areas hardly made hilarious reading for the Soviet authorities. They found out that in Sverdlovsk only one frequency gave satisfactory audibility. Chelyabinsk had good audibility on two frequencies, but in three cases there was interference with an otherwise satisfactory signal from other transmissions. In Omsk, all frequencies were generally satisfactory, but still had unbearable background noise, while Novosibirsk had uncertain reception; Krasnoyarsk two good and two satisfactory frequencies, Tomsk one good and one satisfactory, and in Kemerovo short-wave transmission could not be heard at all due to noise. Ulan-Ude had one audible frequency, Irkutsk had three good frequencies, Yakutsk three good or satisfactory ones, and in Blagoveshchensk one frequency was heard, while Kyzyl had three satisfactory and Chita one good and two satisfactory frequencies. Thus Omsk and Kemerovo were without audible signals even in urban areas, while Sverdlovsk, Novosibirsk, Ulan-Ude and Blagoveshchensk depended on single frequencies.⁸³ The neglect of broadcasts in the far eastern regions seems to have been part of a

⁸¹ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 524.2 "Analysis Report # 2 – 1963" 7 February 1963. Letters were received at least from Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Yakutsk and Novosibirsk.

⁸² "Memorandum to the TsK KPSS from L. Il'ichev and G. Kazakov regarding active measures to be taken to counter hostile radio propaganda to the Soviet population," 15 July 1960 (RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 14, ll. 2-3).

⁸³ "Report from the Radio Committee (M. Egorov and V. Kuzmin) to the TsK KPSS," 22 August 1960 (RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 14, ll. 9-10). More detailed results from the Tiumen', Kurgan, Perm and Orenburg oblasts were unfortunately not included in the report.

greater neglect of the area.⁸⁴ With such a poor situation with the domestic media in Siberia it is hardly surprising that people turned to foreign broadcasts in order to get at least some current information. Furthermore, RL was potentially audible in all of these areas. This was taken care of by a powerful transmitter site located in Taiwan that started operating in 1955.⁸⁵

The idea that large parts of the eastern Soviet Union were outside working information channels from Moscow is intriguing. The authorities there naturally received up-to-date information through telegraph and telephone connections, but ordinary people could be reached only by personal communications, or through newspapers, which arrived slowly and depended on transportation. According to a report submitted to the Central Committee, up to 25 different hostile radio broadcasts reached the area daily, most intensively from 6:00 to 9:00 am and 5:30 to 10:00 pm, i.e. during carefully selected prime time. In some areas, there were no broadcasts from Moscow from 5 pm until 8 pm, when there was a review of the previous day's newspapers. A Party secretary from Magadan laconically stated that there was little point in transmitting broadcasts from Moscow between midnight and 5:00 am, when workers were sleeping. He also expressed his distress over foreign broadcasts, which constantly gave rise to questions in local party meetings.⁸⁶

Grasping the severity of the situation, the Radio Committee, the KGB, the Ministry of Communications and the Central Committee's Agitprop Department drafted a resolution entitled "Measures to Actively Counter Hostile Radio Propaganda," which is indicative of the phlegmatic nature of their actions until then. In fact, it seems that early in 1959 they still believed that US broadcasts to the Soviet Union would soon diminish and instead of concentrating on Soviet domestic broadcasts they focused on broadcasting abroad.⁸⁷ When the assumption about a decrease of US

⁸⁴ Reports by Siberian Party officials to the Central Committee allege such neglect existed after WWII. See especially reports from the early 1960s: A. B. Konovalov, *Partiinaiia nomenklatura sibiri v sisteme regionalnoi vlasti (1945-1991)* (Kemerovo: Kuzbassvuzizdat, 2006), 463-64.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty*, 73; Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom*, 167; Mickelson, *America's Other Voice*, 110.

⁸⁶ "Memorandum from the Party Secretary of the Magadan Obkom, P. Afanas'ev, to the TsK KPSS," August 1960 (RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 14, ll. 13-14).

⁸⁷ "Zapiska otdela propagandy i agitatsii TsK KPSS po soiuznym respublikam," 13 December 1958, in *Ideologicheskie*

broadcasting activity proved to be incorrect, they decided to counter hostile broadcasts with three different approaches, each one harder to implement than the last. The first and easiest solution was to step up transmission power in areas with poor audibility. This was a technical solution, which drained resources, but gave the authorities little to ponder over. Obviously, jamming had used up equipment, skilled manpower and other resources, causing neglects in transmissions to the east, as well as to other areas. Jamming had occupied the most powerful transmission stations, but the termination of certain hostile radio broadcasters gave the authorities a chance to switch some jamming stations to transmitting Soviet signals.⁸⁸ Ironically enough, jamming, supposed to counter hostile broadcasts before they reached Soviet receivers, had led to these broadcasts being the only source of up-to-date information in many areas.

However, not only did the audibility of Soviet transmissions improve, according to the interviewees, but the authorities also reorganized the jamming of hostile broadcasts in the far eastern periphery. In an ARD interview, a listener from Vladivostok confirmed that in late 1960, following the afore-mentioned resolution, jamming had increased, making RL and VOA, whose signals had previously been good, almost inaudible. Farther north, in Yakutsk, the good audibility of RL seems to have continued, despite the resolution. Typically, even in areas where jamming increased, like Novosibirsk, the audibility of RL remained good at times.⁸⁹

A second operation stipulated in the resolution, the changing of Moscow broadcasting times, was considered equally urgent, but it took more than six months to put into effect. Broadcasts beyond

komissii TsK KPSS. 1958–1964: dokumenty, ed. E. S. Afanasieva and V. Iu. Afiani (Moscow: Rosspen, 1998), 136-38. This might be at least partly due to optimism about the consequences of the recent Soviet-American treaty on cultural exchanges. It also coincides with several Soviet achievements in the international arena, like the launching of Sputnik and the encouraging results emanating from the Brussels World Fair earlier in 1958. See for example: Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom?", 861.

⁸⁸ "Memorandum to the TsK KPSS from L. Il'ichev and G. Kazakov regarding active measures to be taken to counter hostile radio propaganda to the Soviet population," 15 July 1960 (RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 14, l. 4.)

⁸⁹ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.1. "TALR # 157 – 61." 27 December 1961 (Vladivostok) - b. 564.2. "TALR # 26 – 62." 30 April 1962 (Yakutsk); - b. 564.8. "TALR # 96 – 66." 8 August 1966. Cf. - b. 564.8. "TALR # 134 – 66." 18 October 1966 (Novosibirsk). Increased jamming would coincide well with the KGB's plan to transfer jamming resources away from broadcasts in foreign languages to be used for jamming broadcasts in Soviet languages; see "Memorandum to TsK KPSS from P. Kuznetsov (KGB) regarding the effectiveness of jamming of anti-Soviet radio broadcasts," 10 June 1958 (RGANI f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, ll. 146-148).

the Urals were to be synchronized with local time rather than with that in Moscow. Special daily newscasts were to be broadcast between 5:00 and 10:00 pm – that is, during the prime time that foreign broadcasters had occupied.⁹⁰ Centrally administered broadcasting activity had disregarded local needs, giving Western broadcasters an easy opening. The latter had managed to find the times when people were actually ready to listen to the radio and only now, when the Soviet authorities discovered that people had turned to Western broadcasters, were they ready to heed the popular demand by transmitting their own programs at those times.

Ideas for improving quality

The development of radio broadcasts to the far eastern areas coincided with an overall attempt to improve Soviet radio. Therefore, it is no wonder that the third operation suggested by the Radio Committee and the Party's Agitprop Department concerned the quality of programming. Even the Central Committee found the current programs uninteresting and dull,⁹¹ and they saw a dire need to improve them. This was also the hardest change, since it required a lot of cooperation within the bureaucracy and, in general, considerable creativity. Nevertheless, changes did happen within a relatively short time. The party leadership seems to have taken this issue to heart. In fact, the whole structure of the resolution suggests that the authorities were extremely concerned about foreign newscasts and the information their citizens were so keen on listening to.

Therefore, at the center of the improvements intended for far eastern broadcasting was a program transmitted by Radio Moscow with the self-explanatory title: "The Latest News". This program, "as a rule, effective and rich in content," as it was described in the resolution, was to be broadcast during prime time so as to ensure that people would have access to the Soviet version of

⁹⁰ "Report from the Radio Committee (S. Kaftanov) about the measures to counter hostile radiopropaganda," no later than 5 January 1961 (RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 14, ll. 41-43). Based on this, Romanov and Kazakov wrote a report to the Central Committee on 5 January 1961.

⁹¹ "Ob uluchshenii radioveshchaniia dlia naseleniia Sovetskogo Soiuzia i na zarubezhnye strany," 12 December 1959 in *Ideologicheskie komissii*, 213.

domestic and world affairs. While the far eastern areas used to be the last to receive Soviet news, now they could enjoy the news from Pravda first thing in the morning, as soon as it came off the presses in Moscow. However, the Radio Committee had to admit in its memorandum to the Central Committee that even “The Latest News” had very little to offer the people of the Urals, Siberia or the Soviet Pacific Coast, in particular. In the near future, the Central Committee asserted, programs would be better targeted to local conditions.⁹² Even so, the main concern seems to have been that people got their news from foreign sources rather than from Soviet ones. In general, this resolution seems to have been a prelude to the more thorough-going changes that were made in Soviet media in 1964, when the whole of radio programming was reorganized with an emphasis on newscasts.⁹³

Just where the ideas for developing Soviet radio came from is an interesting question. A clue is provided by the Central Committee's Agitprop Department, which openly admired the effectiveness of American newscasts and the way they were repeated throughout the evening.⁹⁴ While Soviet radio and television inaugurated some experiments and managed to come up with some notable results,⁹⁵ many of the innovations seem to have followed American examples. Thus, while VOA broadcast the latest news to the far eastern regions from 6:00 pm to 2:00 am every half hour, Soviet broadcasts were to follow course and provide 20 minutes of news every hour, including commentaries on the latest news in the Soviet press.⁹⁶

Not did Soviet radio imitate only the forms of Western broadcasting, but soon it would have even more similarities with its American and British counterparts in terms of content and technique. ARD interviews from the 1960s often report mysterious gaps in the otherwise constant jamming of the

⁹² “Report from the Radio Committee (S. Kaftanov) regarding the measures to counter hostile radiopropaganda,” no later than 5 January 1961 (RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 14, ll. 41-43).

⁹³ Lisann, *Broadcasting to the USSR*, 33-34.

⁹⁴ “Memorandum to the TsK KPSS from L. Il'ichev and G. Kazakov regarding active measures to be taken to counter hostile radio propaganda to the Soviet population,” 15 July 1960 (RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 14, ll. 2-3).

⁹⁵ Roth-Ey, “Mass Media.” She suggests that especially in Soviet television, but also in radio, there was a period of experimentation and that many programs became genuinely popular. See especially pages 257-60; also Lisann, *Broadcasting to the USSR*, 33-35.

⁹⁶ “Resolution of the Secretariat of the Communist Party about active measures to counter hostile radio propaganda,” 19 July 1960 (RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 14, ll. 53-54).

frequency. This allowed some interviewees to listen to certain sections of foreign broadcasts, usually newscasts. The likely explanation is that someone with authority over jamming wanted to hear the news. Indeed, several accounts by Soviet journalists who worked for major Soviet newspapers or radio indicate that listening to foreign newscasts was part of their duties. The authorities needed to know what was happening both within the Soviet Union and abroad, and their own system provided them with information too slowly, if at all.⁹⁷ Thus, the duties of some Soviet journalists included the collecting of information from foreign sources. The price, however, was to give some Soviet citizens jamming-free access to these very newscasts.

A young journalist from Alma-Ata claimed that Western broadcasts were listened to in groups during office hours. According to her account, broadcasts were tape-recorded in the monitoring room and sent to Communist Party editors.⁹⁸ Although it is not hard to imagine that officials in Moscow wanted to hear Western newscasts, it would be interesting to know if they had authorized those at the local level to do so (not that local officials actually cared). ARD reports suggest that foreign newscasts were also listened to in TASS, the Central Soviet News Agency. Until early in 1963, claimed a Soviet journalist, the duties of some members of the staff had included listening to the broadcasts of the most anti-Soviet station, RL, every evening at 5:00 pm. Subsequently, however, they were prohibited from listening to RL and were told to change to the BBC.⁹⁹ The claims of the ARD are supported by the documents of the Central Committee. TASS was seen as too slow compared to Western news agencies. It was passing information both to and from abroad too slowly.¹⁰⁰ The authorities naturally needed to know the content of foreign broadcasts in order to counter their arguments. In fact, a radio professional from Leningrad explained that they had to listen to Western broadcasts because many citizens also

⁹⁷ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.5. "TALR # 22 – 64." 8 March 1964. This account was given by a reporter for a Moscow weekly while he was in Innsbruck. Although the accuracy of this report can be questioned, there was simply no motivation for interviewee to lie. Quite typically, even when these journalists acknowledged that listening to foreign broadcasts was part of their duties, they would otherwise praise their motherland.

⁹⁸ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.1. "TALR # 136 – 61." 18 October 1961.

⁹⁹ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.4. "TALR # 45 – 63." 23 July 1963. The timing comes close to the decreased jamming of the BBC, while RL remained jammed.

¹⁰⁰ "Draft Resolution of TsK KPSS regarding measures to improve the work of TASS," 6 January 1958 (RGANI f. 5, op. 33, d. 71, ll. 2-7).

listened and afterwards asked officials about their truthfulness.¹⁰¹ Providing contrary information would have been much more difficult if they had not been familiar beforehand with what they were going to be asked about. However, the purpose of the monitoring activity was not simply to counter foreign newscasts.

Simultaneously with efforts to improve efficiency of TASS, the Central Committee of the Party received a detailed description of how VOA and RFE worked and how they directed their programs to local audiences, exploiting their culture, religion and history. American radio stations had daily contacts with the US Information Agency, and they shared knowledge and experiences in a way that greatly impressed Soviet observers. This was something Soviet radio stations ought to learn from. Thus, Soviet radio specialists were dispatched to the USA when the chance emerged.¹⁰² ARD reports were in line with this. A discussion with a Radio Moscow employee suggested that, along with information gathering, foreign programs were followed in order to learn their techniques. She said that they “sometimes had to listen to Western broadcasts as part of their duties. Groups of six to ten employees would sit around a conference table listening to BBC, VOA and Radio Liberty programs and discuss them.”¹⁰³ One Polish engineer, who used to work for Radio Moscow, also admitted that RL's broadcasts were superior to domestic ones. He claimed in an ARD interview that all broadcasts to Russia from abroad were “taped, transcribed, and – in written form – circulated among key Soviet radio personnel and the most responsible political commentators.”¹⁰⁴ In order to restore at least some of the crumbling credibility of Soviet media and to find ideas for improving them, the authorities were

¹⁰¹ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.4. “TALR # 82 – 63.” 29 November 1963.

¹⁰² “Memorandum to TsK KPSS from I. Zhukov (GKKS) on the American state propaganda service USIA,” 20 January 1958 (RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 270, ll. 6-25); about assignment to the USA, see “Memorandum to TsK KPSS from the State Radio and Television Committee regarding the delegation to the USA,” 21 November 1958 (RGANI f. 5, op. 33, d. 72, ll. 90-92; apparently, the policy was enduring. The following document from the early 1970s suggests that Soviet radio professionals still followed closely foreign broadcasts evaluating what features from them they could use in their own broadcasting. See: “About measures to counter hostile radio propaganda to the Soviet Ukraine” (Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv hromads'kykh ob"iednan' Ukrainy (TsDAHOU), f. 1, op. 25, spr. 868, ll. 44-64) I am grateful to Amir Weiner for passing me this document.

¹⁰³ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.4. “TALR # 81 – 63.” 29 November 1963. The interview took place at a party for Soviet delegates. The interviewer was one of the Western hosts.

¹⁰⁴ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.7. “TALR # 51 – 65.” 12 July 1965; - b. 564.9. “TALR # 8 – 67.” 2 February 1967. In the latter report, Soviet radio engineer working in a large monitoring complex in Tbilisi alleged that programs were recorded also for personal use, see

ready to allow its media personnel to learn from Western broadcasts.

Foreign broadcasts, especially newscasts, were thus closely followed by many people in the USSR, regular citizens and officials alike. News was allegedly gathered from American sources, but of course not everything was repeated in Soviet newscasts in light of censorship and other factors. The result was that the Soviet media constantly lagged behind in the up-to-date coverage of what was happening. An illustrative case was the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s. For years, Soviet media pretended that nothing was wrong, while RL kept broadcasting news about the corrosion of relations. Many actually considered news of the Sino-Soviet split to be Western propaganda until the reality became clear to everyone. In the long run, cases like this, which indicated that the foreign broadcasters had been right, further eroded trust in the Soviet media and drove people to seek accurate news from foreign broadcasts. It is hardly surprising, then, that Party officials were among the keenest listeners to foreign broadcasts.¹⁰⁵ Foreign broadcasts had become a source that helped people to fill in gaps in their knowledge. The situation was so dire that the authorities could no longer turn a blind eye to it, but were forced to change their own programming in an attempt to hang on to their crumbling media monopoly.

The matters of improving the quality were actively discussed in the Soviet Radio Committee, and several improvements were reported back to the Central Committee in the early 1960s. New programs, however, did not always sound especially tempting. Reports named programs about peace-loving Soviet foreign policy, counter-propaganda material, and attacks on bourgeois ideology and on the capitalist way of life with such titles as “Two worlds - two morals”, “Such is American democracy”, “Spying in the cosmos”.¹⁰⁶ Such ideologically charged political issues were hardly likely

¹⁰⁵ HIA, RFE/RL, b. 564.4. “TALR # 66 – 63.” 10 October 1963; - “TALR # 63 – 63.” 25 September 1963. The latter interviewee was a Soviet official who had been skeptical about the existence of a Sino-Soviet split, considering it propaganda, but had since found out that RL had been correct all along. He claimed to have heard RL to speak about the split much sooner than the BBC. While he claimed to be an ardent supporter of the Soviet system, he nevertheless stated that he listened to foreign broadcasts regularly.

¹⁰⁶ “Report from the Radio Committee (S. Kaftanov) about the measures to counter hostile radio propaganda,” not before 19 July 1960 (RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 14, ll. 42-43); for more on how Soviet radio aimed at improving its programming, see for example “Memorandum of the State Radio and Television Committee regarding TsK KPSS’s resolution for improving Soviet radio”, August 1961 (Gosudarstvennii arkhiv rossiiskoi federatsii (GARF) f. 6903 (Gosteleradio), op. 1, d. 734, l. 2).

to achieve wide popularity, especially when American broadcasters had highly effective weapons like jazz and pop music in their arsenal. All in all, broadcasts from Moscow to eastern parts were to comprise 62% music and 28% press reviews and commentary. The rest was composed of socio-political (6%) and literary broadcasts (4%).¹⁰⁷ Although it is not known (and outside the focus of this research) whether Soviet radio won back audiences in the far eastern regions, there are indications that significant improvements finally did take place as a consequence of the realization of the earlier neglect and the pressure exerted by foreign broadcasters. A new radio station, *Mayak*, which started broadcasting in 1964, was a completely new kind of radio station, at least by Soviet standards. It quite closely resembled American stations in that it combined popular music with news and broadcasting round-the-clock. By the following year, it already had a regular audience comprising more than one third of the citizens of the RSFSR.¹⁰⁸

One core problem remained and was seemingly hard to overcome. All the aforementioned improvements and programs were practically dictated from Moscow, written in Moscow and read from Moscow. Local broadcasters were in many cases excluded from prime time as central broadcasts took up the transmitting capacity. The Secretariat of the Communist Party considered that local authorities were doing too little to actively counter hostile radio propaganda and considered their programs to be of inferior quality to American ones.¹⁰⁹ Apart from their greater willingness to answer to local needs, foreign broadcasters could also count on one permanent advantage: almost unlimited access to both Soviet and Western media, whereas Soviet newscasters could never make full use of Western sources. Indeed, before the late 1980s, Soviet journalists and news personnel had very limited scope to report even on Soviet affairs. They needed permits from their superiors, and there were censors who ensured

¹⁰⁷ “Report from the Radio Committee (S. Kaftanov) about the measures to counter hostile radio propaganda,” not before 19 July 1960 (RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 14, ll. 43-44).

¹⁰⁸ Ellen Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public* (New York: Praeger, 1981), 138; Ellen Mickiewicz, *Split Signals. Television and Politics in Soviet Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 18; A. V. Grigor'eva, *Izuchaem nashu auditoriiu* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Radio Komiteta, 1971), 67-70.

¹⁰⁹ “Report from the Radio Committee (S. Kaftanov) about the measures to counter hostile radio propaganda,” not before 19 July 1960 (RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 14, ll. 44-45).

that no unauthorized material went on the air.

But was there any clear indication that improved Soviet programming was effective and won back Soviet audiences? Perhaps the best indication of Party officials admitting their inability to compete with Western broadcasts was the resumption of extensive jamming. Between 1963 and 1968, the reduction of jamming activity clearly suggested that the main emphasis was being placed on improved domestic programming. But the popularity of foreign broadcasts simply did not vanish. Soon, the attacks on foreign broadcasts increased, culminating in the return of jamming with the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.¹¹⁰

The Soviet authorities tried to compete openly with the Western media by improving their own. However, their countermeasures in the 1960s had very little effect. It was hard to win people over by reading Pravda, even if it was the latest issue. Although Soviet television was a medium with very little foreign competition, apart from areas on the borders of the state, radio remained the most important source of news for the Soviet population well into the seventies. The role of radio in the demise of Communism and the downfall of the Soviet Union has been regarded by some commentators as remarkable,¹¹¹ which only goes to accentuate the lack of proper research into its impact and the reactions it aroused in the Soviet Union.

A Guest in the Living Room

In the fifties and sixties, Radio Liberty, along with the Voice of America and the British Broadcasting Corporation's Russian service and numerous other smaller broadcasters, became part of the daily lives of millions of Soviet citizens. Most of the foreign broadcasters disseminated information omitted by the Soviet media with the toppling of the totalitarian regime as their objective. Levels of aggression differed, however, with RL being the most outspoken. Although these radio broadcasts never managed

¹¹⁰ Lisann, *Broadcasting to the USSR*, esp. 91-108.

¹¹¹ Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom*, 306; Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty*, 222-23, 229; Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens*, 193-96.

to turn the Soviet people against their regime, they did steal the monopoly of knowledge so jealously guarded by the Communist Party. This really hit the Soviet authorities, who knew that the regime was held together by concealing facts and by coercion. The foreign broadcasts were not enough to turn people against the regime, but they were sufficiently alarming for the authorities to take serious action. In the 1960s, the Soviet leadership experimented by ceasing most of the jamming for five years and improving their own radio programming, only to find out that Soviet radio was still unable to compete with Western broadcasts. Foreign broadcasters let the Soviet people taste the free flow of information and made them question authority. Although this hardly caused any widespread activism among the populace at large, it is probable that this sowed the seeds of doubt in their minds.

Soviet radio broadcasting suffered from many problems that became acute with the expansion of foreign broadcasting. The fact that large parts of the Soviet Union were outside Soviet radio's range was perhaps the single most striking discovery for the authorities, especially as several foreign broadcasters enjoyed good audibility in the same areas. Jamming, their primary tool in combating foreign broadcasts, was the cause of many problems. Comprehensive jamming simply drained too many resources, and in many areas the transmission power of Soviet radio was wasted on it. Even then, the jammers could not completely block foreign broadcasts. Soviet people hoarded radios that were capable of receiving foreign broadcasts and invented imaginative ways to eliminate jamming, and even the jamming engineers themselves seem to have leaked information on how to do this.

A direct consequence of foreign broadcasts was that the authorities provided the resources and the impetus to start improving the quality and audibility of Soviet radio programming. However, the broadcasting of news, which was of such concern to the authorities, was something in which the Soviets could never compete with foreign radio stations because of the restrictions on both the accuracy and the speed of delivery of the news. There were, nevertheless, some improvements. Broadcasts that had previously been poorly timed, especially east of the Urals, were from 1960 onwards rearranged to be transmitted concurrently with American broadcasts that had stolen the prime

time in many areas. A bigger problem was the superior quality of American programs, acknowledged by ordinary Soviet citizens and the authorities alike. American examples were adopted in improving newscasts, more music was introduced and concessions were even made in offering pure entertainment programs without a direct educational or political purpose. However, despite some genuine successes, foreign broadcasts maintained their popularity, and the only lasting policy Soviet authorities could come up with was jamming, which continued on and off throughout the Soviet era.

As in many other areas of Soviet administration, bureaucracy was the cause of numerous problems in Soviet radio broadcasting. For example, it led to programs to Siberia being aired when hardly anyone was listening. Furthermore, the emphasis on jamming left many areas without sufficient audibility, thus giving Western broadcasters a near monopoly of radio in some areas. But even when the authorities strove to improve Soviet radio programming, their own bureaucratic and censorship practices inhibited the most efficient measures for succeeding. The result, then, was to resort to selective jamming. Although it was previously believed that the Soviet Union was mostly unaffected by foreign broadcasting activity, it seems that at least the Soviet authorities believed that foreign radio broadcasts were a serious threat. As they slowly started to grasp the scope of the problem, they found that it was much more extensive than they had originally anticipated. This drove them even to imitate American broadcasts and their style, an endeavor in which they enjoyed some genuine success.

The free flow of information seems to have been the biggest fear for the Soviet authorities in regard to the foreign broadcasts. Even more alarming for the Soviet authorities than the dissemination of information about how to listen to foreign broadcasts was the fact that news people had heard from foreign broadcasts was passed on by word of mouth. Although there were hardly any clear indications of unrest being caused by foreign broadcasts within the Soviet Union, the authorities were still afraid of the possible consequences. However, many Party members themselves ardently followed these very newscasts in order to gain information. While Soviet news services were slow and often concealed information, many journalists were actually assigned to follow foreign broadcasts, not only to help the

authorities rebut their arguments but simply to keep up with world affairs. Thus the foreign newscasts became an important source for average Soviet people and officials alike to keep abreast of affairs, both domestic and foreign. Following the title of its campaign in the late 1950s, RL, along with VOA and BBC, became the “guest in the living room”, thus making real the fears of the Soviet authorities.

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