

in Europe

David Marples took a year from his work at the U of A's Ukrainian Studies Institute to join Radio Free Europe in Munich. Upon his return, Marples reflects on the objectives and operation of Radio Liberty.



Map courtesy University Map Collection

translation of their articles before they appear (there is a less frequent and less influential Russian-language *Bulletin*). Memo-writing to or about those concerned with the production of the *Bulletin* is an almost daily affair. At the same time, the original Radio Liberty Research department has been divided into two. Former Director Keith Bush, who is editor of the *Bulletin*, now administers a section concerned with all-Union affairs (which should not be taken literally, it is not concerned with the Russian Republic per se). The nationalities section forms a separate group under the ambiguous title "Program Support," while the Russian research desk is a law unto itself.

The result of these divisions, for which there is no logical purpose, has been a battle royal, as Bush tries to recover his lost empire, and the two other sections try to gain some form of control over the *Bulletin*. About 75 per cent of *Bulletin* articles are by Bush's staff, and the "outsiders" have to wait their turn. Consequently, there is a shortage of research articles about Soviet nationalities in the *Bulletin*, which weakens that organ as a source of information for many emigres in the West. Meanwhile, as yet, the Board of International Broadcasting has done nothing to prevent the constant wrangling, although a new President, Gene Pell, has replaced Buckley, who resigned to take up a prominent legal appointment in New York.

There is also little control over what happens to a research paper once it reaches the desk of an editor. In reality, the editor of a Soviet nationality desk is given a free hand to prepare his programs. Armed with a team of scriptwriters, a paper can change drastically in appearance by the time it is broadcast. A researcher can thereby become part of a propagandistic broadcast. By and large, broadcasts are hostile to the USSR. They deny its alleged achievements and occasionally scoff at its problems such as shortages of meat and consumer items. In this way they frequently fall short of the rigid guidelines in the BIB.

If one asks the question why the desks engage in such activities, the answer is clear. It lies in the makeup of the employees. The Belorussian Desk, for example, is composed mainly of people who left Soviet Belorussia in the wake of the German army. They have no chance of ever returning to their homeland, and regard themselves as exiles in West Germany. Almost all broadcasters carry with them an air of repressed bitterness, as though their lives will be devoted to a lost

cause and yet there is no alternative but to go on fighting. Contrast the researcher, particularly those of non-East-European background, studiously scanning journals and making what for him are pertinent statements. Inevitably, there is an enormous distance between the researcher and the broadcaster: they often have little in common and moreover, they are not working to the same end. One wants to understand the Soviet system, the other believes he already understands it and seeks only to bring about its downfall.

The heart of RFE-RL is the canteen, located in the basement, where one enters through a film of dense cigarette smoke and encounters a babble of languages, only two or three of which he is likely to

comprehend: the three official languages at the stations are (in order) Russian, English and German. Most employees have at least a smattering of those three, but it is usually the Uzbeks, Bulgarians or Georgians that can be heard. Each nationality group sits at its own table, or set of tables because when the Poles gather in force they seem to occupy about half the area. Rarely do these groups intermingle. And, as noted above, the Russians are divided into warring factions. Arguments and even fights have been known to break out in the canteen, but on the whole it is the only place at which RFE-RL seems a genuine entity rather than a series of minor organizations.

Finally, no researcher can regard himself as isolated from the events around him. The front-line atmosphere is a reality. The CIA presence is now minimal, but Urban is a formidable personality, and brings in guest speakers such as Edward Teller to applaud SDI, or right-wing ideologues like Brian Crozier from Britain to denounce Willy Brandt and indeed anyone with vaguely liberal leanings. Bailey has not been replaced and the Acting Director, Nicholas Vaslef, is a quite, sensible man who is not prepared to make major changes before his successor is appointed. Many employees seem unbalanced, particularly those who originated from the USSR, where many were kept in psychiatric hospitals that clearly had a terribly adverse effect upon them. As a result, these persons are permitted far more leeway for quirky behavior than would be the case at a more "normal" organization.

Thus one desk employee went berserk with an ax and attacked a German technician, but his case was later dismissed in court as being the outcome of a "bad day." Another recently threatened "to kill" one of the summer interns sent to RFE-RL from an American university, and the threat was taken so seriously that the unfortunate intern was not allowed to set foot inside the building during his summer sojourn in Munich (no action was taken against the would-be murderer, however). Others are simply unemployable, but cannot be fired because German labor laws are so strict. They have offices, titles,

positions, but do nothing — and the number of such employees is not small. There are several alcoholics: one Czech lady leaves a glass of white wine on a window ledge in the canteen every day, finishing and replenishing it regularly throughout her working hours. She is haggard, barely alive, but evidently the most popular "outside" broadcaster in Czechoslovakia.

Added to the internal instability are concrete external assaults. The building was subjected to a bomb attack in 1981, the perpetrators of which have never been found. Employees have been physically assaulted by agents of foreign governments (many will recall the infamous umbrella attack on a Bulgarian), and five-man Romanian team which planned, among other things, to "blow up Radio Free Europe" was deported from West Germany in late 1984. With the Red Army Faction (RAF) prominent on the German scene at present, and coming as close as Oberammergau with its assaults, RFE-RL is on constant alert.

In the final analysis, the operation and the future of the stations depends on the United States government, which alternates between the current avid support and outright apathy toward this distant outpost of the administration. There is a move afoot to move Radio Liberty to the United States, where it can be more closely controlled. But the appearance of Radio Marti and the lesser known Radio Free Afghanistan signify that Radio Liberty will not disappear in the near future. It remains near the heart of this beautiful placid city, in which Hitler and his stormtroopers are but a distant memory, and Bavarians revel in the most opulent society that Europe has to offer. Most Germans wrinkle their brows, but accept the existence of *Freies Europa*. But at the station itself, moderation and tolerance are alien factors: the war continues, although the troops are battered.



MOST
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employees
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