

DOCUMENT NO. 10

“Policy Review of Voice for Free Hungary Programming, October 23-November 23, 1956,” December 5, 1956

In the wake of the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolution, Radio Free Europe (RFE) was widely accused of misleading the Hungarian people into believing that they could count on effective U.S. support in their opposition to the Soviets. This report by RFE political adviser William Griffith, published here for the first time, was part of an internal investigation of RFE broadcasts during the Hungarian uprising. The document claims that there were only a “few genuine violations of policy” but reveals that RFE broadcasts in several cases had implied that foreign aid would be forthcoming if the Hungarians succeeded in establishing a “central military command.” The broadcasts also appealed to the Hungarians to “continue to fight vigorously,” and even gave specific tactical advice to the rebels. Significantly, the report also reveals serious flaws in the organizational structure and in the control over sections of RFE. It points out, for example, that important discrepancies existed between the program summaries submitted for review by émigré staff prior to broadcast and the substance of the broadcasts themselves.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mr. Condon¹¹¹

FROM: Mr. Griffith

SUBJECT: Policy Review of Voice for Free Hungary Programming, 23 October – 23 November 1956

INTRODUCTION:

For the past three weeks we have been reviewing RFE’s Hungarian broadcast output during the above period. We have conducted this review primarily for the purpose of determining the degree and effectiveness of compliance with and implementation of RFE policy of VFH scripts during this period. Inevitably, we have also had to consider problems of tone and technique, but I wish to emphasize that these aspects were neither the primary purpose of this review nor should our conclusions as to them be taken as more than provisional ones; they are included herein for what use they may be to the Program Department.

¹¹¹ Richard J. Condon was European director of the RFE.

Our conclusions and recommendations have been made from the viewpoint of policy formulation and implementation only. I have not thought it proper or desirable in respect thereto, to go into personalities with the exception of an evaluation of the VFH Desk Chief from a policy viewpoint, and an appended evaluation of the output of each main writer for the period surveyed.

I. PROCEDURE

We have read for purposes of this policy survey a total of 187 programs in English translation; in addition Mr. Rademaekers has read 121 additional programs in the original Hungarian. Questionable passages from these latter he has translated orally to us verbatim and we have had him double-check the translations of sections of the English texts where serious errors of policy or techniques seem to have been committed. In a few cases tapes of the original broadcasts have also been checked but lack of time and personnel prevented us from doing this extensively. As you know, RFE/Munich translation facilities have proved inadequate to cope with the task of translating programs rapidly after broadcast ever since the beginning of the Hungarian crisis (Oct 23). Only in the last week, as result of emergency measures, have we been able to obtain sufficient translation of programs from the 23 October-4 November period to have a good general impression of them. The lack of a Hungarian language summarizer-analyst in the Program Department (this position was eliminated last June) has also been keenly felt; we have not had a short daily summary of the main lines of programs as broadcast available to us during this time. (The Desk's summaries provided at morning meetings were inaccurate in many instances.)

VFH programming during the first month of the Hungarian Revolution falls naturally into two halves, with November 4 (the second Soviet military intervention) as the dividing line. Many commentaries were broadcast each day up to 4 November. After this date the number of commentaries was gradually restricted and programming emphasized press reviews, reports of Western demonstrations of sympathy with Hungary and accounts of UN developments. The Hungarian Desk apparently found it difficult to surpass its desire to comment, however, for toward the latter part of November a trend back toward more commentaries (since checked) again became evident.

The analysis which follows is based upon approximately 70% of all programming (excluding news) during the period of 24 October through 3 November, including not only commentaries but a large proportion of press reviews and special reports. For the period 4-23 November roughly 50% of all programming (excluding news) has been available for analysis. Relatively few news broadcasts are included in this analysis because very few have been translated. When means of translating them can be found, it would probably be useful to have a separate analysis done of them for the same period which this survey covers.

In general, we have found that the VFH did not measure up to our expectations during the first two weeks of the Hungarian Revolution. Although there were few genuine violations of policy and those did not occur in major political commentaries, the application of policy lines

was more often than not crude and unimaginative. Many of the rules of effective broadcasting technique were violated. The tone of the broadcasts was over-excited. There was too much rhetoric, too much emotionalism, too much generalization. The great majority of programs were lacking in humility and subtlety. VFH output for the first two-week period in particular had a distinct “émigré” tone; too little specific reference was made to the desires and demands of the people in the country. An improvement is discernible toward the end of this first two-week period. By the first days of November considerably more frequent reference was made to the “freedom stations” in Hungary and the demands of the local revolutionary councils, and policy guidance on key questions such as the role of Imre Nagy was applied with greater refinement. The tendency to talk much too much continued into the period following the second Soviet intervention on 4 November. No serious policy violations have been discovered in this period and in some respects techniques also began to improve. Earlier faults remained evident, however, to the end of the period under survey.

II. POLICY VIOLATIONS AND DISTORTIONS

There were relatively few real policy violations. All of them occurred in the first period (before November 4). Of the four discovered out of the 308 programs read for this survey, none occurred in major political commentaries.

A rereading of the summaries originally presented at morning policy meetings for these programs makes it clear that the summaries often failed to reflect the content of the program as it was finally written (this is not the case only with programs where policy violation occurred; the summaries during the period under review in many other cases proved to be very inaccurate descriptions of the programs finally produced). In one instance, however, no summary of a program where a policy violation occurred was presented in advance, because this program was a press review and under normal circumstances would not have been checked in advance. The normal programming schedule of the desk was disrupted during the revolutionary crisis to a degree not justified, in our opinion, by the exigencies of the situation. Program distinctions tended to become meaningless and writers who would not ordinarily have been permitted to write political commentary apparently did so, at least during the period 23 October to 4 November, with very little supervision by those in charge of the desk.

A check of broadcast copies of the four programs which contain policy violations revealed that none of these programs bears the desk chief's (Gellert's)¹¹² initials as having approved them for broadcast. It can therefore be assumed that he did not read them in final form before broadcast.

¹¹² The full name of the Hungarian editors mentioned in the text is as follows: Andor Gellért (chief of the Hungarian desk from September 1954 to June 1957), Viktor Márjás (deputy chief from January 1954 to December 1956); (other staff members on the Hungary desk in alphabetical order) Miklós Ajtay, László Béry, Tamás Bogyay, Gyula Borbándi, Júlián Borsányi, Emil Csonka, László Feketekúthy, Béla Horváth, Katalin Hunyadi, Sándor Körösi-Kirzsán, Gyula Litteráty-Loótz, László Mezőfy, Imre Mikes, József Molnár, Zoltán Németh, János Ölvedi, Zoltán Szabó, Károly Szakmáry, Zoltán Thury and Imre Vámos. László Bús-Fekete and T. Sebők were members of the New York staff.

Of 16 programs which involve distortions of policy or serious failure to employ constructive techniques of policy application, nine were approved by Marjas, three by Bery and five by Olvedi and one by Feketekuthy (again, none by Gellert). We were not aware at the time that Gellert was not editing and approving scripts before broadcast. As you will recall, Marjas very seldom, and Olvedi practically never, attended morning policy meetings during the most of the period under survey. Marjas' language and hearing difficulties make his attendance at meetings of doubtful value in any case. We had assumed, however, that Gellert would brief his subordinates on the conclusions of morning meetings and on policy guidance given him by us at other occasions during the day. If he did so, his briefing does not appear to have been effective.

A. Scripts Which in Themselves Constitute Policy Violations:

1. Borsanyi's "Armed Forces Special" #A1 of 27 October violations the letter and spirit of policy in effect at the time. The program gives detailed instructions as to how partisan and Hungarian armed forces should fight. It advises local authorities to secure stores of arms for the use of Freedom Fighters and tell the population to hide Freedom Fighters who become separated from their units. It advises the population to provide food and supplies for Freedom Fighters. The writer tells Hungarians to sabotage ("disconnect") railroad and telephone lines. It fairly clearly implies that foreign aid will be forthcoming if the resistance forces succeed in establishing a "central military command." The program is cast entirely in the form of advice from the outside; there is no reference to information coming from within the country. The program refers to the "Nagy puppet government" and states that Nagy is relying on the support of the Soviet armed forces. Although the writer is too categorical in his phraseology, his attacks on Nagy are in themselves not out of keeping with policy guidance in effect at the time. The program concludes with some rather complex formulations which could be interpreted by listeners as implying help from the outside.

The summary of this program presented at the morning meeting of the day it was broadcast stated:

"Laws and experience of partisan war. Without inciting the participants of civil war, we tell them what are the experiences and techniques of partisan warfare, citing Russian, Yugoslav, etc., experiences. First rule, e.g., is that groups which are fighting dispersed should establish contact with one another and establish a political center, etc., etc.,"

I considered the program as summarized inappropriate when it was presented at the morning meeting. I pointed out that such a program could be permitted only if it dealt with the topic in purely theoretical terms without any reference to current events in Hungary. Gellert gave assurance that this could be done. This program was approved for broadcast by Bery. There is no evidence that Gellert read it in its completed form.

2. Borsanyi's "Armed Forces Special" #B1 of 28 October gives detailed instructions to Hungarian soldiers on the conduct of partisan warfare.¹¹³ The author states at the beginning of

¹¹³ See Document No. 45.

the program that Hungarians must continue to fight vigorously because this will have a great effect on the handling of the Hungarian question by the Security Council of the UN. Without saying so directly, he implies that the UN will give active support to Hungarians if they keep on fighting. The program is over-optimistic in tone. The opening announcement states: "Colonel Bell will tell Hungarian soldiers how ingenious and smart leadership can counterbalance numerical and arms superiority". The conclusion states: "Colonel Bell has told Hungarian soldiers how to obstruct large forces by small ones and by simple means". In the light of subsequent events the program grossly underestimates the ability of the Soviets to move new troops into Hungary. Borsanyi implies that the most the Soviets can bring in is about four divisions and that it might take as long as two or three weeks for the Soviets to secure the Danube line if Hungarians fight effectively against them. The program makes a feeble effort at indirect propaganda by recounting a story about how Yugoslav partisans fought against much larger forces of Germans in South Serbia in 1943 and beat them; but the indirectness [sic] of this story is completely negated by the obvious comments at the beginning and end of it. This program of Borsanyi's constitutes a serious policy violation, for the author in no way makes any effort to demonstrate that he is basing his advice on opinions or even information coming from within the country. Here at its worst is the émigré on the outside, without responsibility or authority, giving detailed advice to the people fighting at home.

The summary of this program presented at the morning policy meeting of the day on which it was written was at the least misleading; it stated only:

"We review the success in November 1943 of the 500 Serb partisans who were able to hold back the 13,000-man German troop near the town of Nish".

The program was approved for broadcast by Olvedi.

3. Litterati's "Armed Forces Special #D1" of 30 October 1956,¹¹⁴ like Borsanyi programs discussed above, given detailed military instructions to the population of Hungary, this time on the techniques of anti-tank warfare. Litterati does not give his advice in quite as direct, categorical fashion as Borsanyi and makes repeated references to Soviet tactics in World War II. The intent of the program is nevertheless completely clear. A case would perhaps be made that this program is theoretically not a policy violation; in its effect, however, it must be considered as such, for the people of Hungary are not only encouraged to fight, but told how. There is a strong strain of over-optimism in the program; the author gives the impression that tanks are really very easy to destroy. The program is very skillfully written, contains little surplus rhetoric and gives on the whole, militarily sound advice. The summary of this program presented at the morning meeting on 30 October stated only:

"We explain the simple partisan means by which it is possible to avoid responsibility in connection with tanks".

Gellert assured me that this program, like others of its type would be written on a purely theoretical basis without specific reference to current events in Hungary. This program was approved for broadcast by Olvedi; there is no evidence that Gellert read it before broadcast.

¹¹⁴ See Document No. 45.

4. Zoltan Thury's "Special Short World Press Review" #1 of 4 November probably constitutes the most serious violation of all.¹¹⁵ At the conclusion of his press review, Thury quotes excerpts from a London Observer Washington dispatch of the same day as follows:

"If the Soviet troops really attack Hungary, if our expectations should hold true and Hungarians hold-out for three or four days, then the pressure upon the government of the United States to send military help to the Freedom Fighters will become irresistible!"

Thury then comments, paraphrasing the Observer's correspondent's words

"This is what the Observer writes in today's number. The paper observes that the American Congress cannot vote for war as long as the presidential elections have not been held. The article then continues: 'If the Hungarians can continue to fight until Wednesday we shall be closer to a world war than at any time since 1939.'"

Thury's own final comment in this program is:

"The reports from London, Paris, the U.S. and other Western reports show that the world's reaction to Hungarian events surpasses every imagination. In the Western capitals a practical manifestation of Western sympathy is expected at any hour."

The tapes of this program have been checked. It was broadcast in exactly the same form as written. The London Observer dispatch has been checked word for word. It is true that the normally cautious and realistic Observer printed the words Thury quotes (he did not alter them) on its front page. The passage must have been distributed through the Central Newsroom, having been telephoned in from London, since the Observer itself does not ordinarily reach Munich until Monday. It has been impossible, however, to track down the original item put out by the Central Newsroom. The fact that the Observer printed these words hardly gave Thury authorization to broadcast them to Hungary at a time when Hungarians were likely to be clutching for any straws of hope from the West. This program is undoubtedly the one several Hungarian refugees and correspondents have referred to as "the promise that help would come which RFE broadcast on the weekend of 4 November." The quotations from the Observer are bad enough; Thury's own comments are far worse since they clearly represented to the listener the editorial opinions of the VFH. He leads his listeners to believe that military intervention by the West can be expected within a few days. This is contrary to the entire RFE philosophy of broadcasting. To all desks throughout the years we have emphasized over and over again that RFE can never take the responsibility for promising something it cannot deliver. It was agreed with Gellert on 4 November that no promises of hope could be broadcast, that RFE could only attack Kadar and the Soviets for their treachery and give roundups of the reactions of the free world. It was agreed that any free world reactions which indicated promise of more than normal support and action undertaken by the UN General Assembly would be misleading and should not be put on the air.

¹¹⁵ See Document No. 87.

Thury's press review was approved for broadcast by Olvedi. There is no evidence that Gellert saw it.

Another Thury program of the same day, a short special commentary, carried the same thesis as his press review, but in much more guarded form:

"Extraordinary cabinet meetings, a Security Council meeting, protest meetings to be held this afternoon by various parties and organizations prove the quick reaction of the West to the Soviet attack. It is believed in the free countries that the Hungarian Freedom Fight cannot be settled like a coup d'etat. Moscow did not sufficiently assess the echo of her action and the strength of Western possible."

This record programs cannot be called a policy violation, but in light of Thury's press review it is clear what he was trying to get across to his listeners. It is difficult to understand how he could have wished to broadcast such false promi- [text cut off] thinking undoubtedly overcame his judgement. This hardly excuses his action, nor that of the editor who approved his script for broadcast.

In retrospect it appears to have been a mistake to have permitted the VFH to broadcast any programs on military topics during the revolution. As I recall, these programs were permitted because it was felt by Gellert and ourselves that to broadcast information on the theory of partisan warfare, tank defense techniques and elementary principles of civilian defense in a civil war situation might help save lives during the Revolution and at the least would remind Hungarian listeners to be cautious and avoid sacrificing themselves in foolish gestures of resistance. We were mistaken in assuming that the desk's military writers could write on, or the responsible editors edit, these delicate topics with sufficient cleverness and a proper sense of detachment to keep them theoretical while still offering relevant advice. As has been pointed out before, these programs, when presented in summary form at morning meetings were carefully discussed and Gellert gave full assurance that they would be kept entirely theoretical and would not resort to giving specific advice or instructions. Gellert did not take the necessary steps to make his assurances good. Our assumption that he would be able to was therefore also a mistake. We now see clearly that it would have been wiser never have to permitted such programs at all.

B. Groups of Programs which Reveal Serious Distortions of Policy or Failure to Apply Policy Guidance and Advice on Technique and Tone Constructively.

1. Programs Dealing with or Referring to the Political Position of the Nagy Government.

A summary of New York and Munich guidance on this and related topics is attached as Appendix III.¹¹⁶ From this summary it can be seen that New York and Munich were in substantial agreement on the position to be taken in respect to the Nagy Government. New York tended perhaps to advocate slightly stronger questioning of Nagy's integrity and somewhat greater stress on the final goals of complete freedom (free elections, democratic freedoms as

¹¹⁶ Not printed here.

known in the West). It was agreed in both New York and Munich that RFE could not take a complete pro-Nagy position until he made the program of his government clear and rid his government of most of the communists associated with the previous regime. At the same time it was agreed that RFE should not take an irrevocably anti-Nagy position as long as no alternative figures capable of assuming leadership of the Revolution appeared. As the various Freedom Stations developed their activity, it was further agreed in both New York and Munich that the VFH should attempt to fit its line to whatever democratic common denominators the Freedom Station broadcasts contained. The Freedom Stations, of course, never developed a common line among themselves, and there is no evidence that they ever established effective contact among themselves. They attempted at first to take no clear position on Nagy and his government (for the first few days, e.g., there was speculation among correspondents and official quarter in Vienna as to whether Radio Free Györ was not "a camouflaged Nagy station"). In the last days of October the Freedom Stations became increasingly vocal in their criticism of Nagy and his government, asking ever more pointed questions as to what Nagy's program would be and why so many discredited communists remained in positions of authority. On November 1, when Nagy declared that his government would permit free political activity and free elections, that Hungary was leaving the Warsaw Pact and would henceforth adhere to a policy of strict neutrality, the Freedom Stations swung over to complete support of him, still demanding that he reform his government on a broad multi-party basis.

RFE policy toward Nagy and his government followed much the same course. During the first three or four days after the Soviet military intervention it appeared that Nagy might actually have been involved in calling in Soviet troops, that the population could not judge his government or accept its program until he did so. It was agreed that RFE should attack the past records of particularly unsavory communists whether they were associated with the new government or not, but the RFE should not support actively any particular personalities until the attitudes of people inside Hungary became clearer (in this connection see NYC PREB 15, 28 October 56 and the Munich reply to it, MUN 292, 29 October 1956). The Hungarian Desk was constantly advised both from New York and in Munich to avoid giving the impression that the VFH was trying to direct the Revolution in Hungary. The VFH was likewise constantly advised by us to avoid discussing events in Hungary in too dogmatic terms, but instead to emphasize that our information was incomplete, that the situation was so complex that it could not be judged entirely from the outside. We urged the desk to phrase its own comments as much as possible in terms of lines taken by what seemed to be the more responsible commentaries over the Freedom Stations and the lines taken by the local Revolutionary Councils. Gellert indicated full agreement with this advice and complete understanding of the necessity for it. Program summaries presented at daily meetings generally reflected these principles.

A re-reading of the daily summaries of this period after a reading of the programs themselves often reveals wide disparity between the two. The disparity is more often than not one of tone. While the summaries presented in advance are measured, qualified, logical presentations of arguments and points of view, too many of the programs emerged in final form as bombastic, rhetorical, overly emotional blasts at the Nagy Government or certain members of it. The Freedom Stations were quoted too seldom (in many programs, not at all); little reference was made to the fact that the VFH lacked complete information and therefore was not really entitled to pass final judgment. In short, major mistakes of tone and techniques were made in

many of these programs; the result was that policy was badly distorted in the final broadcasts. Nevertheless, the number of outstandingly good programs during the last week of October equals almost exactly the number of extremely bad programs. In reading through this programming, however, we found that the impression of the bad ones tended to cancel out the impression of the good ones; I wonder if the same may not have been the case with our listeners in Hungary. The worst programs are almost always those of Mikes; Bery runs Mikes a close second.

Gellert's two commentaries of 25 October and 2 November are the landmarks of the period. Both are written with consummate skill, richness of thought and logic and construction which makes most of the other commentaries produced by the desk during this period appear amateurish by comparison. The first (Gellert's "Special Commentary #IV", 25 Oct 56) asked a series of pointed questions about the role of Imre Nagy in the first phase of the revolution and particularly in connection with the calling in of Soviet troops. The commentary is an exact reflection of the line suggested in the Nathan Guidance received in Munich the afternoon before (see excerpt from Nathan's 24 October Guidance in Appendix III). In retrospect it can probably be said that both the commentary and guidance went too far in taking a dim view of Nagy. Gellert's commentary should at least have referred to the fact that there might be elements of complexity in Nagy's situation of which we were unaware and therefore our judgment could only be tentative. In terms of the way things looked at the time, however, Gellert insists that Nagy, who appears to have betrayed the trust the nation had in him, must explain himself very carefully and must be ready to take decisive action in favor of the revolution if he is to redeem himself in the eyes of his people and of the world.

Another program of the same day (Mezofy: "Special Commentary VII," 25 Oct 56) discusses Nagy's proclamation of martial law and the threats of the Government against revolutionaries who refused to surrender within the time limits set. In calm and factual fashion Mezofy takes issue with Nagy for calling the revolution "a revolt" and points out that the proclamation of martial law does not absolve a government or its members for responsibility or acts counter to the spirit of accepted principles of human rights.

The next day Mikes wrote a blast against Nagy and Kadar totally lacking in refinement, subtlety and humility (Mikes "Special Reflector #IV," 26 Oct 56), displaying no inclination to admit the differences in the situation faced by the two men, he attacks Nagy for not behaving like Gomulka and states: "Imre Nagy is no solution any more. . .the people backed him, they demanded his return and raised him from the political grave where he was thrown by his Moscow rivals in the eternal fight for power." The writer attacks Nagy for making promises but insisting that the revolution stop before they are implemented. Contradicting himself at the end, he declares "the premier should not make any promises, the people do not need his program now . . . they only need his signature . . . to recall the Soviet Divisions" and in a final frenzied outburst shouts "The last moment was over long ago. It was over when the first martyr of the freedom fight died. Imre Nagy missed the last moment. Yet he still has an opportunity; to follow the will of the people and the nation--away with the Soviets if not away with him for ever!" Mikes's program is a distortion of the 24 October guidance mentioned above and of the Gellert program of the day before. The program was approved by Bery for broadcast.

The summary of this script presented at the morning meeting gave the impression of a much more moderate approach to the problem:

"Imre Nagy's radio speech is crowded with foggy promises. Such promises: (1) After the riot is quelled, he will establish a wide-range People's Front; (2) After the riot is quelled, he will submit a reform program; (3) After the riot is quelled he will start negotiations with Moscow concerning the withdrawal of Soviet Troops. These tragic moments are not the time for promises; blood is being shed. Action is needed. First and foremost--and immediately--the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Conclusion: This is what the country expects, what it demands. This is the factor, which will decide the question of Imre Nagy's straightforwardness. If he acts promptly, then reforms may come. If Soviet troops continue to massacre the population, Imre Nagy will have forfeited himself, together with all his promises as far as the nation is concerned."

Another commentary of the same day (Bery: "Special Russia Commentary" (sic) 26 Oct 56) is less bombastic than Mikes, but indulges in the same kind of unrefined generalizations. It is full of rhetoric and pretends to full knowledge of the Hungarian situation but makes no specific reference to the demands of the Revolutionary Fighters. Bery takes too much of an all-or-nothing position toward Nagy, stating "there are only agents in Hungary who obey orders from Moscow." An excellent opportunity to apply the "golden bridge" theme was missed. This program was approved for broadcast by Feketekuthy. The morning meeting summary gave no indication that it would treat the position of the Nagy Government at all. It seems that Bery must have changed his plan for this commentary after the morning meeting had taken place.

Zoltan Nemeth declared that only the AVH supported the Nagy Government in his "Special Farmers Program #2[?]" of 27 October. The summary of this program presented at the morning meeting gave no indication that it would deal with this question at all:

"Addressing the rural population, we tell them that the battle raging is already a victorious one. The world is watching anxiously, realizing that in this fight not one single stratum of society is backing the regime--the sole help on the aide of the latter is Soviet arms. The Communist economic system has been abolished in the rural areas, never to return. Hungarians are fighting for justified demands and fighting successfully."

The script was approved for broadcast by Bery.

The Vamos "Short Commentary #B2" of 28 October takes a somewhat less violent position on Nagy, but likewise displays a too unrefined attitude.

Bery wrote another commentary on 29 October (Bery: "Special Short Commentary #C3," 29 Oct 56) which has all the faults of his commentary of 26 October, and displays a perhaps even more pronounced and rather petulant "Nagy-is-no-damned-good" attitude. This commentary, too, is lacking in humility. No reference is made to the fact that we do not have enough information to judge Nagy's position and intentions with absolute finality. Bery's commentary could have been highly effective if he had confined himself to summing up the question about

Nagy's position and intentions being asked at that very time by the Freedom Stations and the local National Councils. This commentary was approved by Marjas for broadcast.

The summary of this program presented in advance gives a totally different impression of it--in fact there is very little resemblance between the summary and the program as it was finally written. The reason may be that the summary was prepared by Gellert and the program by Bery without Gellert ever having seen the final product. The summary stated:

"Reflections on Imre Nagy's speech--the speech promises the withdrawal of Soviet troops in case that a new police force is brought about. Who is to organize this force? What guarantee is there that this will not turn into a new AVH? When will it be organized? Soviet troops continue to remain in Budapest. Imre Nagy promises negotiations aiming at withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country. Is the Soviet Union willing to negotiate also? The speech does not include the two main announcements--the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops and free elections. The Hungarian people evaluate Nagy's speech in accordance with these factors."

The programming of 30 October is particularly questionable in tone. This day was one of the most tense days of the whole revolution. Genuine victory appeared near, but nothing was yet clear--the position of the Nagy Government, the attitude of the Russian troops, whether there would be a cease-fire, whether Soviet troops would withdraw. The desk's programming inevitably reflects this tension, and because again there was too much said by the desk, many things were poorly said and many things were said which should not have been said at all. Some of the programming of this day will be dealt with under another heading in the sub-section following this one. Two of the programs bear upon the topic under discussions here:

Szakmary's "Youth Special #D1," 30 Oct 56, contains a feature rare in the programming of the VFH--a reminder at the beginning and at the end of the broadcast that the author is an émigré who feels to some extent ashamed to address people at home because he is not there fighting and does not really know what conditions there are like. This is excellent. But one wishes the writer had had a greater sense of shame, for in the body of the program he does exactly what he says he is ashamed to do. He gives emphatic impassioned advice in a flood of words and rhetoric. He urges fighters not to put down their arms, speaks over-optimistically about the "limited capabilities" of Soviet troops, tells his listeners that the promises of the Nagy government cannot be taken at face value. The program is chaotically organized. Though it is not a policy violation in terms of the policy in effect at the time, it is a poor application of it. No summary of this program had been presented at the morning meeting in advance of the broadcast. It was approved for broadcast by Marjas.

Borsanyi's "Armed Forces Special #D1," 30 October 1956, is devoted primarily to attacking the Defense Minister of the time, Karoly Janza. In the course of the program Borsanyi also attacks Nagy for having communists in his government, for calling in Soviet troops and implies that he has perfidious motives in misleading the people about the true situation. All these are issues with which the Freedom Stations at that time were dealing and many of them were attacking Nagy for the same reasons and asking him to rid his government of old communists and state his political program more clearly. Borsanyi finishes by telling soldiers

that they must demand a democratic government, free elections and a multi-party system. These were also demands of the Freedom Stations of the time. But Borsanyi never once makes any mention of the Freedom Stations. His program, therefore, while not a violation of policy, is not a constructive implementation of it. This program was approved for broadcast by Olvedi.

Borsanyi made another crude attack on the Nagy Government in a short glossary on 31 October ("Special Glossary #E2") and two other programs, of those read for this survey, expressed misgivings about Nagy or his associates in milder form (Csonka, "Chronological Review of Week' Events #E1," 31 Oct 56; Vamos, "Special Commentary #E2," 31 Oct 56)[.] Mikes's "Reflector #E1," of the same day was one of the most tactless of all Mikes's poor programs. It is a supercilious polemic with the university youth and the revolutionary army paper Igazsag on the question of whether Nagy did or did not assent to calling in Soviet troops. For better or for worse, in view of the fact that the revolution was developing, the subject should have been left at that, and we should not have entered into argumentation with the revolutionary forces in Hungary, but instead simply said (as the summary indicated) Radio Budapest reports that Nagy had called them in. Incongruously, at the beginning of this program Mikes states "we do not intend to debate and we do not wish to stir up passions." The whole program does just this, except that one suspects such a program may well have stirred up more passions against RFE than against Nagy or any elements in the Revolutionary Forces. Like all of Mikes's programs this one is lavishly adorned with exaggerated phrases and rhetorical flourish. This program was approved for broadcast by Marjas.

A "Special Short Commentary #F3" by Szakmary, broadcast on 1 Nov., attacked Zoltan Tildy. After this date, however, no further attacks on Nagy or members of his government have been found in VFH broadcasts.

Gellert's well written commentary of 2 November associated the VFH with full support of Nagy.

2. Programs Urging Hungarians to Continue to Fight

Inasmuch as the VFH was in favor of the Hungarian Revolution it was by implication in favor of the Revolution's being carried to a successful conclusion. Policy on the extent to which RFE should indirectly urge Hungarians to continue fighting was never specifically formulated in writing; as the Revolution developed, it became increasingly clear that the best course to follow in judging this difficult question would be to let the Free Radios being heard in increasing volume from within Hungary be our guide. New York and Munich were in complete agreement on this point. As the end of October approached, this subject became increasingly important and was regularly discussed at length at morning policy meetings. It was agreed that programs should point out to listeners that there might be elements of deception in a cease-fire accepted without guarantee that the gains of the Revolution would be preserved and that Hungarians should be warned against attempts by the Communists to infiltrate local Revolutionary Councils. This particular topic was skillfully dealt with in indirect fashion by Korosi-Krizsan in his "Special Calling Communists #D1" of 30 October.

As for the general question of continuing the fighting, it was agreed that statements from the Freedom Stations, decisions of the local Revolutionary Councils and confirmed reports from journalists inside Hungary should be reported, summarized and analyzed. Gellert never expressed any disagreement with this approach. In this respect again, however, the desk's principal political commentators were either unaware of this advice (it is difficult to believe that Bery was, since he usually attended morning meetings regularly) or failed to follow it.

An overly excited Molnar program ("Special Workers Program #1" on 24 Oct 56) had included two sentences, one of which at least clearly urged Hungarians to fight: "No we cannot be pacified with words and half solutions any more . . . do not give up the struggle until you have received an answer to the most burning questions." As far as our survey indicates, this theme was not taken up again until 29 October.

A shrill, violent Mikes broadcast ("Special Reflector #01," 29 Oct 56) urged Freedom Fighters not to give up their arms. It did not directly urge them to continue fighting, as such. It lacked any reference to the fact that people in the country might be able to judge this delicate question better than émigrés on the outside and made no reference to the Freedom Stations or other opinion from within the country. This had been specifically advised and agreed upon at the morning meeting when a summary of the program had been presented. The program was approved for broadcast by Marjas.

In addition to the 30 October Litterati program discussed under sub-section A-1 above, which by implication urged Hungarians to continue fighting, three other programs dealt with this topic directly in the 30th of October: Mikes's Special Reflector #D2, Bery's Special Commentary #D1, and Szakmary's Youth Special #D1 (this last commentary has been partially discussed in Section A-1 above). Mikes made a shrill appeal to Hungarians to continue fighting or variously, at different points in the program, merely to retain their arms. (In this, as in many of Mike[s]'s programs, there are so many internal contradictions that it is often impossible to discover one singly consistent line; one gets the impression that these programs must often have sounded to listeners as emotional outpourings without any consistent line). No summary of this program which in any way reflects its contents seems to have been presented at either morning meeting of the days on which it was broadcast. According to the summary for 30 October, Mikes was to have written about the necessity for the Revolutionary Forces to organize their own police forces to replace the AVH and other discredited regime police elements. This would have been a quite acceptable topic, but in retrospect it is clear that no matter what topic he may have written about at this stage, Mikes would have produced a highly emotional program out of keeping with sound broadcast techniques. Mikes's 30 October program was likewise approved for broadcast by Marjas.

Bery's program of the same day was perhaps worse in its effects than Mikes's for it was much better written from a technical point of view. It clearly encouraged false hopes. Without identifying the source of his information Bery stated flatly that Soviet troops in Hungary were either not fighting or were only fighting half-[heartedly]. He grossly over-estimated the capabilities of the Hungarian Armed Forces:

"With comparatively small losses. . . they can stop for weeks a far greater armed force." Bery declared: "Hungarian soldiers. . . inactivity is treason." In the form in which these statements

are made, without any reference to supporting opinion from within the country, they constitute a policy violation. No summary of this program was presented in advance. The Political Advisor's Office was not told that it was being written. There is no evidence that Gellert ever approved it, or for that matter never knew of its existence. It also was approved for broadcast by Marjas.

Like Bery, Szakmary in his Youth Special #D1 exhibits na'd've and irresponsible over-optimism. He states: "It is evident that a putting down of the weapons based only on the irresponsible promises of Radio Budapest would represent giving up the results achieved so far by the Freedom Fight." As with the Bery program, no summary of Szakmary program was ever printed before broadcast.

On 31 October, as far as can be determined from scripts available for this survey, the "don't-stop-fighting" theme seems to be largely absent from VFH programming. It appeared again on 1 November in a Mikes program ("Special Reflector #F1") in what is probably the most emotional of all Mikes's broadcasts during this period. The bad technique, the extreme rhetoric, the violently nationalistic tone of this program must be read (still, better, I suppose, listened to) to be believed. As with all these other programs, there is no evidence that Gellert read it before it was broadcast. It was again approved for the air by Marjas.

The summary of this program presented at the 1 November morning meeting is very different from the final product:

"There are sporadic signs and reports to the effect that the Stalinist remnants are trying to incite the revolutionary masses to irresponsible interference, thereby frustrating the victory and clean character of their fight for independence. It is this very clean nature of the fight which has brought about the admiration of the entire world, experience in the tremendous amount of assistance, medicines, etc. The arms could not be taken from the insurgents--now they try to take from them their word power, which they will be equally unable to do."

3. Programs Dealing with UN Security Council and General Assembly Sessions.

This category of programs, though on the whole well-done in terms of technique, tends too often to give listeners the impression that serious UN action is likely or imminent. Though no single program of this type can be termed a policy violation in itself, these programs as a group in the period before 3 November involve a distortion of policy which may have misled the population of Hungary and contributed to their later bitterness and disillusionment with the West in general.

Though a Bery program of 27 October ("Special Short Commentary #A2") warned listeners briefly not to expect any swift action from the UN, the first program to deal concretely with Security Council action on Hungary (T. Sebok (NY), "International Commentary #C524," 28 Oct 56) was shrill and rhetorical and could have given listeners the impression that physical UN intervention was imminent. The author chose UN intervention in the Iranian Azerbaijan case in 1946 as an example of successful UN action; this in itself was misleading because it

automatically created the wishful hope that Soviet troops would be forced to withdraw from Hungary in the same way they had withdrawn from Iran in 1946. The author never once mentioned the certain Soviet veto that would prevent any real Security Council action on the Hungarian case. Instead of this poorly formulated and misleading script, it would have been more honest and in accord with policy to have broadcast a factual account of the actual workings of the UN Security Council. Since this script was written in New York, no summary of it was presented here in advance of the broadcast.

A less rhetorical, more informative program on the UN from the same day, written by Mezőfy, likewise failed to mention the possibility of a Soviet veto in the Security Council and concluded by implying that the UN might use force in Hungary. The summary of this program presented at the morning policy meeting gave the impression that the program would be written in a spirit of cold, clear objectivity and I repeatedly urged the desk to raise no false hopes in connection with UN action. The summary stated:

“How is the Hungarian affair treated in the UN machinery? In connection with the fact that the question of Soviet aggression has come up before the Security Council we disclose just how and on what basis the question is discussed before the UN. We review the respective paragraphs of the UN Charter. Our aim is to inform the Hungarian population objectively and clearly on the operation of the UN and in particular the Security Council.”

The following day's programming featured several programs consisting of long excerpts, in translation, of the previous night's Security Council debate. Four such programs have been read among the group selected for this survey. They are in no way objectionable in themselves, but many listeners may not have been able to judge the significance of many of the statements made by Western representatives and may have been inclined to over-interpret them in terms of expectation of action. It also appears that extensive simultaneous programming, in the form of running translation and comment, was done by the desk the night of the first Security Council Session. No scripts of this programming were made and a record of it exists only on tape; limitations of time and personnel prevented out checking it for this survey.

The same commentators in the same programs on 29 October repeated exactly the same errors they had made on the 28th. Sebok (“International Commentary #C525”) gave a rhetorical and largely irrelevant account of the UN debate from New York. He made no mention of a Soviet veto. Mezőfy (“Special UN Program #C1”) gave an over-optimistic account of the previous night's Security Council session, once again failing to mention the possibility of Soviet veto.

Apparently only one other program dealing with the UN's activities was broadcast during the remainder of October. It was “Special International Commentary (#D3)” sent from New York (author not indicated). It is more dramatic than factual.

The passage of time produced more realism in VFH commentaries on the UN's proceedings. Sebok's “International Commentary #H1” of 3 November was the first basically honest VFH commentary on UN developments. It mentioned the veto, Suez complications and

procedural difficulties and pointed out that the UN did not have any armed forces of its own and therefore could not easily undertake military intervention. The New York Desk (author not indicated) gave a well written factual report of the 4 November early morning session of the UN Security Council devoid of promises, false implications or, on the other hand, excessive gloom.

Of five programs dealing with the UN and Hungary on 5 November, only one is relatively unsatisfactory--Bush-Fekete's "Special Short Commentary DJ1" is too excited in tone and uses too many florid phrases.

No objectionable programs on the UN have been discovered in the remainder of the programs for the period 4-23 November read for this survey.

4. Miscellaneous Shortcomings and Errors.

It would naturally be impossible here to go over the flaws and debatable points which can be found in many scripts read for this survey. Compared to the points discussed above many of them are not serious. Three which are serious will be taken up here, however:

Bogyay, a little known writer on the desk, included some rather peculiar references to Spain in a program which he wrote on 27 October ("Special Historical Report #B1"); "We are reminded of a great war 29 years ago... it took place on the Spanish Peninsula, but in part between the same forces which are now facing each other on Hungarian soil. Only in part because the... Spanish Civil War was much more than right wing Spaniards fighting against left wing." The meaning of the passage is not entirely clear, but it could be taken to imply that this commentator regarded the Hungarian Revolution as essentially a struggle of the right against the left, or as the Kremlin itself would have it, of fascists against Communists. This is certainly contrary to all RFE's principles. No summary of it was ever presented before broadcast, and a broadcast copy of this program cannot be found in the files; it is possible that it never went on the air; the desk has been unable to tell us whether it did or not.

Miss Hunyadi in a program dealing with the American reaction to Hungarian events on 29 October ("Special Report #C2") describes demonstrations before the UN Building in New York and in Cleveland in such a way as to give the impression that American public opinion will force the UN into action on Hungary. The program goes on to make reference to the fact that in Cleveland "Groups of Hungarians and Americans gave their names... they want to volunteer to go to Hungary so that they can fight together with the Freedom Fighters." It is no doubt true that people were giving their names to go to Hungary to fight. In the emotional context of this program, however, the subject was handled in such a way that wishful listeners could get the impression that American volunteers would soon be arriving in Hungary to fight against the Soviets. Miss Hunyadi's program was approved for broadcast by Olvedi. It was never submitted in summary from before broadcast.

A Bery program of 7 November ("Special Commentary #L1") commits a different kind of error, one which is unfortunately characteristic of the spirit of several scripts from the post-4 November period. Bery, obviously tired and depressed at the turn Hungarian events have taken, asks "Is there any sense in this fighting?" He then proceeds to answer the question in purely

Western terms by pointing out that the Hungarian tragedy has awakened the West. Never once in the whole program does he make any reference to what is probably the most important aspect of the problem; the fact that the Hungarian Revolution has shaken the Communist system itself to its very roots. The script includes the ridiculous assertion that "the West could have done more for its freedom in Hungary with five divisions than with the 500 it is preparing to set up now." In making this irresponsible, ill-informed statement the author fails to point out to his listeners that any Western intervention in Hungary would have meant an atomic World War III and was for this reason out of the question. Bery misleads his listeners and caters to their delusions instead of informing them realistically.

When Bery's program summary was submitted at the morning meeting, Feketekuthy (in charge of morning meetings after Gellert collapsed) was advised to include reference to the effects of Hungarian events on the Communist movement everywhere, but this advice was not followed. This program was approved for broadcast by Marjas.

A Bery program of 23 November ("Special Commentary #D1") is almost identical in content and tone to Bery's program of 7 November. Marjas likewise approved it for broadcast, contrary to my advice as to what it should contain.

Since this time I have been requiring all commentaries dealing with Hungarian internal events or international reflections of them be presented to me in English translation before broadcast.

C. Cases of Poor Policy Implementation.

The basic problem is not so much that policy was violated as that it was not implemented with imagination, subtlety and cleverness. The incisive, dispassionate analyses of developments in Hungary which Gellert made daily at morning policy meetings are not reflected to the degree we were led to expect they would be (by Gellert himself and by the whole tenor of the morning meetings) in program output. Policy lines which were carefully discussed during these same morning meetings and which Gellert and other members of the desk who were present gave every indication of understanding clearly were frequently applied in crude and unrefined fashion in the programs as they were written. The all-too-frequent failure of program writers to implement policy imaginatively seems to have been merely another facet of their failure to employ effective techniques (see Section II below for a detailed discussion of errors of technique). It is remarkable that a group of Hungarians, most of whom have been with RFE for more than five years, should have absorbed so little of what has consistently been drummed into them--orally, in guidances, in listening sessions and meetings of many kinds--on radio broadcasting and political warfare techniques. Put to the severe test which they faced when the Hungarian Revolution began, the majority of Hungarian editors seem to have neglected to apply most of what they had ostensibly learned of the principles of sound broadcasting and effective political warfare which RFE stands for.

The most crucial failure of all was the failure of leadership within the desk. We overestimated Gellert's ability to keep the desk under control. Without him, of course, the result would have been much worse. But he had just returned from a long and serious illness from

which he had not yet totally recovered. The strain of the revolutionary events was so great that he collapsed at the end of the first week of November and has been seriously ill since. If Gellert had been in perfect health, he would no doubt have been able to maintain a greater degree of effective control over his desk. Bad health is nevertheless not a complete excuse, for Gellert's real shortcoming in leadership must be considered his failure to build up a sound leadership structure immediately under him. On taking over the desk two years ago, I had urged him to replace subordinates who had until then been kept in their positions but who, I felt, were not adequate for their tasks from a political and policy viewpoint. Gellert, instead of making serious efforts to replace these people, enabled them to become more consolidated in their positions and to the Olvedi-Marjas-Bery triumvirate added Ajtay, a man of excessively rightist political convictions and out of touch with developments in Hungary. Until recently we did not realize that he was exercising any supervisory functions in the desk. Marjas, an old journalist specializing in cultural matters, is apolitical but because of his past associations tends to gravitate toward the right. Hearing and language difficulties make it almost impossible to establish oral contact with him. Olvedi, politically more alert but definitely right of center, has likewise proved difficult to communicate with in English or German. Even though he has probably usually appreciated the techniques of political warfare and radio broadcasting which the desk has been expected to observe and has generally understood the main lines of policy guidance, he is (by his own admission) a rather weak person whose authority has not been respected by senior writers in the desk. He has consequently exercised very little authority over them.

Although sound guidance was given to the desk both from New York and in Munich (at morning meetings and frequently on an hour-by-hour basis orally and by phone) through the desk chief, the internal situation in the desk was such that the guidance was not effectively understood and much of the time improperly implemented or ignored. Guidance was understood in terms of prohibitions and elementary, unsubtle unimaginative general lines. This accounts for the fact that there were few actual policy violations, but that far too often policy was applied in a very unrefined form. Though the desk had been schooled in sound broadcasting techniques for years, the majority of writers do not seem to have absorbed this schooling to the extent that they were able to apply it under tense and critical circumstances when the desk lacked competent senior editors with the understanding and ability to require writers to observe good techniques in their programs.

D. Outstandingly Good Program.

As has been mentioned above, many excellent programs were written during the period before the second Russian military intervention on 4 November. In justice to the members of the desk who wrote them a few outstanding commentaries should at least be listed here, though lack of time makes it impossible to discuss them in detail. Interestingly enough even Bery, who wrote so many questionable programs, managed to write three good scripts:

Vamos	Special Commentary #3 – 24 October
B. Horvath	Special Commentary #VI – 25 October
Vamos	Special Commentary #5 – 25 October
Korosi-Krizsan	Calling Communists #C373 – 25 October
Bery	Special Commentary #VIII – 25 October

Bery	Special Commentary #B1 – 28 October
Molnar	Special Workers #C1 – 29 October
Molnar	Special Workers #D1 – 30 October
Korosi-Kirizsan	Special Calling Communists #D1 – 30 October
Borbandy	International Commentary #A1 – 31 October
Molnar	Special Commentary #F2 – 1 November
Korosi-Krizan	Special Calling Communists #D1 – 30 October
Borbandy	International Commentary #A1 – 31 October
Molnar	Special Commentary #F2 – 1 November
Korosi-Krizsan	Short Commentary #F5 – 1 November
Bery	Special Commentary #F4 – 1 November
Mezőfy	Special Warsaw Pact Program #F1 – 1 November
Csonka	Special Freedom Stations #F1 – 1 November
Gellert	Special Commentary – 2 November
Szabo	Special London Press Review #H1 – 3 November

I)¹¹⁷ (More detailed characterizations of these and all other programs are given in Appendix I)

After the second Russian intervention the VFH, in response to continual requests from the Freedom Stations which still remained on the air for several days, continued its regular series of service programs and special announcements devoted to repeating messages from these Freedom Stations, as requested by them. In this way, the VFH undoubtedly served as a useful communications link between the Freedom Stations and groups of Freedom Fighters holding out in various parts of the country. Freedom Station messages were generally rebroadcast without comment.

At the same time, as the flow of refugees into Austria began, the VFH began a daily series of special programs devoted to repeating messages of safe arrival and greeting to their families and friends in Hungary from these refugees. This important service is continuing.

III. TECHNIQUE AND TONE

The previous section has been confined to a discussion of specific policy violations and policy implementation problems. It is difficult, however, to separate the question of policy implementation from the problem of application of sound techniques of radio broadcasting and political warfare. As I have stated in the Introduction, the following remarks on tone and technique are not presented as final, but as our impressions, for such value as they may be to the Program Department in their survey on this subject.

In general, reading of these 308 scripts indicates that the primary reason, in our opinion, why the VFH fell short of expectations during the first phase of the Hungarian Revolution was

¹¹⁷ Not printed here.

not that competent policy guidance was not given, nor that this guidance was not understood and implemented at least by the desk chief and a number of writers (though a sizable portion of other writers did not understand or agree with this guidance and the senior subordinates of the desk chief appear either to have failed to understand or were incapable of enforcing guidance in positive and constructive fashion) but that too many of the writers of the desk used bad techniques of writing and presenting the material over the air and were permitted to do so by the leadership of the desk. Instead of withstanding the emotional stresses of the time, the desk seems to have succumbed to them. The principal errors and shortcomings of technique and tone, all of which are especially characteristic of the programming of the 23 October–4 November period seem to us to be as follows:

- (1) The VFH talked too much. Too many original commentaries were broadcast. With so much being written and put on the air so hurriedly, it is not surprising that the desk chief and the senior editors had difficulty editing the output of the desk adequately. Many programs show no real evidence of having been edited at all. Except for insuring that general policy lines were at least formally complied with, the desk chief seems to have been unable either to infuse a common thread of basic ideas into VFH's programming or to enforce adherence to sound techniques of broadcasting. (His increasingly bad health during this period was certainly a contributing factor in this aspect.)
- (2) Many Hungarian editors show too little understanding for sound radio techniques. Their programs are seldom written around a single idea or set of ideas. The technique of repetition is not constructively used. Writers tend to talk at their listeners or even down to them. A feeling of identification with the audience is too often lacking. Listeners are seldom encouraged to think or to draw their own conclusions on the basis of the information presented to them. Finally, VFH programming gives no impression of organic unity. If commentaries were intended to complement each other, press reviews to supplement and elaborate upon ideas put forth in newscasts and commentaries, this does not become evident from the reading of any single day's programs.
- (3) Probably the most serious fault of all is the tone of the broadcasts. With some encouraging exceptions, writers sound too much like "emigrés" talking from a safe vantage point outside. There is violent denunciation of Communists and Russians and Rakosi but during the first week of the Revolution in particular there is relatively little reference to actual events in the country. The broadcasts tend to be too subjective. Many programs display no feeling of humility on the part of the VFH vis-a-vis the people in the country. Praise of the Hungarian people is too bombastic and rhetorical. Too few writers appear willing to admit that the situation inside the country may be so complex that they are not qualified to give listeners specific advise on what to do. They remind their listeners too rarely that they lack complete information about what is going on in the

country. (One gets the impression that some VFH editors felt it beneath their dignity to admit that they were not omniscient about happenings in Hungary.) Since some writers were occasionally careless about using unconfirmed information--some of which we now know to have been wrong--this pose of omniscience is doubly unfortunate, for listeners in the country must sometimes have realized when hearing these programs that their writers did not know as much as they pretended to. If VFH editors had used caution and understatement more frequently, their broadcasts would have sounded less offensive to the critical ears of their countrymen.

- (4) Editors appear to have been reluctant to use the material from the "Freedom Stations" during the first few days they were broadcasting, in spite of our urgings to them to do so. (It is to be hoped that this material was at least covered in the news.) A special program featuring material from the freedom stations was inaugurated on 31 October. After this time, reference to the broadcasts of the freedom stations and declarations of the local revolutionary councils was from time to time also made in commentaries, but by no means frequently enough. Careful quotations and repetition from broadcasts of the freedom stations and citation of the views of the revolutionary councils would have done much to remove the impression of émigré rhetoric which many political commentaries give, even when they are propagating ideas quite in accordance with policy guidance.
- (5) Although there were relatively few programs which give instructions to the population in any direct way, writers sometimes used imperative phraseology which might easily have given the impression that the VFH was trying to tell Hungarians what to do. In some programs workers were urged to continue the strike, revolutionaries to continue fighting and farmers were advised to oppose Communist efforts to intimidate them. Writers obviously found it hard to avoid giving direct advice and the responsible editors in the desk seem to have been far less alert about changing such passages than they should have been. The most regrettable thing about this tendency to offer advice is the fact that such advice was probably unnecessary. When it was felt to be necessary, it should have been given (as we constantly advised) in the form of quotations from suitable material from the freedom stations, not on the responsibility of the VFH. Writers apparently failed to realize that the credibility of VFH broadcasts would have been greatly enhanced if listeners had been informed directly that the VFH was merely providing a louder voice for the desires and demands of the leading forces of the revolution in the homeland, rather than giving advice itself.
- (6) The propaganda arts of subtlety, insinuation, implication and understatement were too infrequently used by VFH. Instead, the editors sometimes stated obvious and simple truths in bombastic fashion, telling

listeners over and over again they could hardly help know better than anyone on the outside. Denunciations were all too often violent; irony when used was heavy; metaphors were crude. Scripts were replete with rhetorical clichés.

- (7) Certain programs tended to arouse false hopes and expectations of aid from the outside. Many writers repeated promises of support made by Western officials and newspapers in such a way as to imply (albeit not to state) that more than moral support and medical aid was intended. This may not have been the intention of most of these writers--they projected their own wishful thinking into their programs. The leadership of the desk should have used more care in making clear to listeners that only moral support--and no military aid--was likely from the West under the circumstances. A relatively more pessimistic evaluation of the possibility of aid would have been less likely to be misunderstood and would have been in the long run more appropriate than over-optimism. Programs on the UN (many of them from the New York Desk) were too optimistic in tone; for several days they made no mention at all of the certainty of a Soviet veto in the Security Council. When the USSR vetoed the Hungarian issue in the Security Council, this development was also rather glossed over, and relatively exaggerated hopes for General Assembly action were projected to Hungary. Only after 4 November did broadcasting on the UN possibilities become realistic. Press reviews of many kinds contributed to the impression that, variously, the UN, the US, or other elements in the West would find some concrete way to aid Hungarian revolutionaries.
- (8) The technique of some press reviews was bad. Excessively long quotations of editorial opinion were given with no identification of the material except at the beginning of the excerpt and no further identification of the program as a press review, even at the end, was made. At least one program called a press review was devoted mostly to accounts of what domestic Western radio stations (less likely to be fully informed than RFE) were saying. Programs such as these could easily have led desperate listeners to have false hopes. It should be stressed, however, that actual assurances of Western military aid were not made. (It should be noted that some press reviewers employ outstandingly good technique, identifying their material repeatedly and selecting it skillfully.) False hopes and naively optimistic estimates of the military situation were directly encouraged by a group of commentaries (discussed in Section II above) broadcast at the end of October and beginning of November. (It should be kept in mind that the above listing of shortcomings is based almost exclusively on reading scripts; listening to tapes of these programs as actually broadcast might in some cases mitigate and in others accentuate some of the faults noted.) Fully half of the programs read for this survey from the 23 October-4 November period displayed a

combination of several of the errors of tone and technique discussed above. VFH programming was probably at its worst in this respect from 26-30 October. Some improvement occurred on 31 October and continued through the first three days of November. Throughout this whole first period, it is a pleasure to observe, several completely sound and acceptable programs were broadcast every day. Approximately 30% of the programs of this period can be classified as competent or extremely well done. This "minority group" of programs was almost devoid of the errors of tone and technique which characterized the dominant strain of programming during the period. The outstanding programs were more often than not written by writers who are not normally the major political commentators of the desk; they are also, as a group, predominantly "left-of-center" politically in terms of the desk political spectrum.

The fact that a minority of the desk's writers were able to produce excellent commentaries, many of which implemented policy in genuinely creative and imaginative fashion, makes the failure of the majority all the more serious. It is true that the whole Hungarian Desk was nervous, excited and subject to a dozen kinds of strains and stresses during these hectic days. However, to recognize that the desk was tense and excited is not to excuse it for performing ineffectively. As with a military unit, so in political warfare: the battle is the pay-off. An RFE desk should be organized so that it can successfully meet the severest test to which it is likely to be put, so that it can implement policy in constructive fashion, enforce good techniques and maintain sound tone in its broadcasts under the pressure of a crisis. The Hungarian Desk was not so organized and its leadership was not competent: for this reason it fell short of passing its supreme test.

On November 4, the day of the second Russian intervention, the VFH still broadcast too much original material (there were at least 21 commentaries of one sort or another). This happened in spite of the fact that Gellert had specifically agreed to my suggestion that morning that commentaries would be discontinued immediately and told me he had so ordered. During the period 4-23 November no serious policy violations occurred and techniques improved somewhat. Nearly half of the scripts read for this period can nevertheless be classified as still exhibiting some combination of the errors of technique listed above, while somewhat less than 40% of the programs for this period can be classed as good or excellent. A considerable proportion of the scripts from this period can be regarded as neither good nor bad, but inconsequential. Many of them ramble aimlessly, carry no particular message and come to no real conclusion. They would probably have been better not broadcast.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

- (1) There is no evidence in the 308 scripts read in this survey that the VFH could have incited the Hungarian Revolution--i.e., caused it to begin. An additional 50 political programs from the period 1–22 October have been surveyed (See Appendix IV for a detailed discussion of these programs).¹¹⁸ They reveal no policy violations, relatively few policy distortions and generally better technique than the VFH's later programming. There is no evidence from any of these programs that the VFH had an inciting tone during this period.
- (2) The VFH (with one exception) made no direct promise or commitment of Western or UN military support or intervention. Its broadcasts may well, however, have encouraged Hungarians to have false hopes in this respect; they carefully did little or nothing to counteract them.
- (3) Of the four policy violations and approximately 20 cases of misapplication or distortion of policy discovered in the 308 scripts read, three represent instructions on fighting which put the VFH in the position of attempting to direct its listeners; one uses western press comment in such a way to imply, although not state, that western aid is coming. The other scripts which represent distortion and non-constructive application of policy, reveal an unrefined political viewpoint and poor technique (e.g., the frequent violent, “black and white” denunciation of Nagy; note, however, that General Crittentenberger’s¹¹⁹ directive of 2 November ordering cessation of attacks on Nagy was followed).
- (4) The VFH failed to measure up policy-wise to the challenge of the Hungarian Revolution primarily because of the predominance of incompetent personnel in positions of major importance on the desk. Most importantly, these desk personnel who approved scripts did not ensure that policy was implemented (or that proper broadcast technique and tone were used). This failure on their part arose, in my opinion, from their lack of sufficient powers of political analysis, propaganda ability, and radio technique.
- (5) The Desk Chief, although a clear-headed analyst of events and a good originator of propaganda lines, failed to enforce the same degree of calm analytical approach on his chief subordinates. Though he throughout gave to us and others every indication of understanding and agreement with the policy given him, he failed to see that policy guidance was constructively enforced among his subordinates. The state of his health was apparently worse than he realized or admitted; this compounded his failure to exercise sufficient policy control.

¹¹⁸ Not printed here.

¹¹⁹ Willis D. Crittentenberger was chairman of the Free Europe Committee from October 1, 1956 to 1959.

Though we were quite aware that the internal organization of the Hungarian Desk left much to be desired (and had in the past urged that more adequate top subordinates to the Desk Chief be found), we had assumed that the Desk Chief's return would mean that policy would be positively enforced (as it was in general in the period before October 23). This assumption was incorrect. In our opinion, the Desk Chief attempted to compromise with recalcitrant rightist forces in the Desk too frequently during the first stage of the Revolution (particularly in allowing to much and too violent denunciation of Nagy and in not enforcing the use and citation of Freedom Stations) and made impermissible concessions to some of his subordinates, in terms of policy application and adherence to sound techniques to avoid dissatisfaction. Our estimate of his capability to enforce policy must be revised downward.

- (6) Senior political commentators of the VFH proved themselves unable to understand the nature of the revolutionary developments in Hungary or the role which the VFH would and should legitimately play in them. Policy violations and distortions centered in three senior editors.
- (7) We did not detect policy violations and distortions as early as we should have. With few exceptions, there was no indication of them in the desk-prepared summaries for the morning policy meetings; in one case, my oral instructions to revise a program were not carried out. Lack of translation and summarizing facilities seriously handicapped us in detection of violations. There were and are too few Hungarian-speaking Americans in RFE/Munich capable of listening to and to some degree judging policy compliance and programming technique of programs in such a crisis period. Our one such person (Rademaekers) had to spend almost full time keeping us briefed on the rapidly changing Hungarian situation (from monitoring of regime-controlled and freedom stations); we would otherwise not have been able either to give proper policy guidance to the desk nor to have reported adequately to New York.
- (8) Given the American personnel available and current responsible desk personnel, an imposition of a greater degree of American control during this period (e.g., pre-broadcast screening by us of all political commentaries) would have helped somewhat but would not have prevented most of the errors the VFH made during this period, since they very frequently did not occur in political commentaries. One way of avoiding many of the worst errors committed by the VFH during the Revolution would have been to order a drastic curtailment of its original programming as soon as the crisis began. Commentaries in particular should have been severely limited. If the desk had said less, what it did say probably would have been said much better.

(Note: The following conclusion (9) on technique and tone relates to the area of the Program Department, and is presented here for such use as it may be to them.)

- (9) The most regrettable feature of most of the VFH programs was not their relatively few policy violations, but their offense against the canons of good political warfare and broadcasting technique. They delivered in a bombastic and imperative tone a message which could have been conveyed in the form of reports on and repetition of the information coming out of Hungary, particularly that from the Freedom Stations. The VFH told Hungarians things they either already knew or could not in any case have been taught at the last minute by radio. The mere fact that the VFH broadcast so much advice, whether it was needed or not, puts RFE in the position of appearing to have wanted to direct or supervise the Revolution.
- (10) Generally (and there are exceptions), the VFH editors who transgressed the most against policy, tone and technique were "rightists" in terms of the VFH political spectrum. They, more than others, were incapable of grasping the true situation in the country and writing in accordance with it. Specifically, they attacked Nagy in a tone more violent than was justified by the Freedom Station broadcasts.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) A reorganization of the Hungarian Desk should be undertaken. Organizationally, it should aim to establish an internal structure of control within the desk, and competent personnel in the top positions, which will guarantee that policy guidance is effectively transmitted from the Desk Chief to the editors actually writing the programs (and that effective techniques of writing and production are uniformly adhered to in all the Desk's broadcasts). This can only take place if senior personnel responsible for advising writers on the political and propaganda content of their scripts are able to guide these writers on the basis of a correct analysis of the situation in Hungary and a proper implementation of policy (and use of propaganda techniques) in respect to it. From the policy viewpoint, I do not think that the present personnel exercising these functions fulfill these requirements. Politically, the reorganization should attempt to correct the imbalance to the "right" which has existed in the desk from its inception. The composition of the desk (particularly of its senior editors) should be made to reflect more accurately the actual political composition of Hungary as revealed during the Revolution, rather than (as up to now) that of the emigration as represented in the Hungarian National Council. This could be best done by employing the most qualified of the fresh refugees now pouring into Austria, while weeding out stale and incompetent writers and editors now in the desk.

(2) In view of the Desk Chief's health during this period, which certainly played a large part in his failure to enforce policy, consideration should be given to having him take a long leave of absence to recover his full energies. He is unlikely to be in sympathy with our policies in the period to come, particularly if the Kadar Government again becomes liberalized in the Nagy direction. More importantly, however, he will probably be unwilling to make the necessary personnel changes to insure policy implementation. Personnel changes are of course matters for you and the Program Department, not for us, to decide. However, I must advise you and them, from the policy viewpoint, that in my opinion the present Desk Chief has not been in the period since October 23, and is not likely to be in the future, an adequate guarantee for policy enforcement. It would be in my opinion advisable to begin a search for a replacement.

I append below some recommendation (3-5) which the Program Department may wish to consider; they relate to tone and broadcast technique.

- (3) Original broadcasting time should be cut; specifically, political commentaries on internal Hungarian affairs should be restricted to no more than two per day.
- (4) Editors writing press reviews should be schooled on proper technique for this kind of program. Press reviews should be more carefully checked for content and technique by competent senior editors before put on the air.
- (5) The Hungarian program schedule should be revised and the broadcast techniques and propaganda methods restudied so as to emphasize informative rather than polemic methods.
- (6) Translation facilities should be expounded so that they will be able to satisfy RFE needs during emergencies without undue strain. All important scripts should be translated no later than 24 hours after broadcast.
- (7) To assure rapid monitoring and policy control of broadcasts in such critical periods, the number of Hungarian-speaking Americans engaged in this work should be increased. Specifically, I recommend that our office be authorized to hire one additional Policy Assistant for this purpose.
- (8) When doubt exists (as it must until new supervisory desk personnel have proved their competence), commentaries relating to Hungarian internal affairs must be read in translation and approved for broadcast by this office before broadcast. (This recommendation is already in effect).

[Source: From the collection of Simon Bourgin. On file at the National Security Archive, "Soviet Flashpoints" Collection.]