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SCOPE AND THEMES OF COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA:

*Notes and Nuggets Relating to the
Question of RFE and Radio Liberty*

10 March 1972

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NOTES ON OMISSIONS

SOVIET DOMESTIC AFFAIRS: In all media and to all audiences, domestic as well as foreign, the image-conscious Soviet regime exercises tight control over what is divulged about domestic conditions and developments. The limited degree of free play allowed the media under Khrushchev and in the immediate post-Khrushchev period has been substantially withdrawn. It is this clampdown that has prompted writers, scientists, and others to air their literary and political writings in hand-circulated documents (samizdat). Often basically factual material--reports on investigations, arrests, trials, and protest demonstrations--is passed on in this form to the West (usually, clearly, in the hope that the information will then filter back to a larger audience in the USSR).

In the case of a great number of important developments inside the USSR--the overthrow of a Khrushchev, a wave of arrests of dissidents, the banning of Solzhenitsyn's works--the Soviet citizen learns almost nothing from Soviet information media. The death of Khrushchev last September was first reported by TASS and Radio Moscow after midnight on 12-13 September in the briefest possible announcement, some 36 hours after the death had occurred--and notwithstanding the fact that Western news agencies had reported it nearly a day and a half earlier.

FOREIGN DEVELOPMENTS INVOLVING THE USSR: Advances in international communications modes have made it less easy than it once was for Moscow, in its broadcast beamed abroad, to suppress major events that are widely publicized by the media of other countries. Nevertheless, the Soviet broadcast effort remains tightly controlled and orchestrated, betraying special sensitivity on matters involving the USSR itself. Some examples:

+ Moscow media have never acknowledged the plight of the Soviet nuclear-powered submarine which has been floundering in the North Atlantic since late February. Soviet propaganda invariably exploited incidents involving U.S. aircraft and naval vessels (the loss of nuclear weapons at Palomares and Greenland, the accidental sinking of two nuclear submarines in April 1963 and May 1968, and such lesser incidents as the discharge of radioactive wastes in January 1972 into the water at Groton). As recently as 7 March, an IZVESTIYA article on environmental pollution--reported in TASS' international service--said that "numerous instances of U.S. aircraft 'losing' nuclear bombs are fresh in people's minds."

+ Soviet media have distorted the nature of the NATO response to Brezhnev's proposal for the opening of talks on force and armaments reductions in central Europe. Propaganda in early October 1971 acknowledged that former NATO Secretary General Brosio had been designated as emissary by the Alliance to meet with Soviet representatives to explore the force-reduction issue. Since then, however, Moscow has maintained a virtual silence on Brosio's so-far fruitless mission. A Moscow radio talk for Italian listeners on 2 February complained that the West has limited itself to "general phrases on the desirability of reductions but has given no concrete reply--if it has replied at all--about opening real negotiations."

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EAST EUROPEAN AFFAIRS: Most East European media are more freewheeling than Moscow in reporting international developments, sometimes commenting on subjects Moscow won't touch--in such instances at times seeming to serve as proxy spokesmen for Moscow and at other times, with respect to developments that are not especially sensitive, seeming simply to exercise the measure of license they enjoy. But there is a tight lid on information about domestic affairs, particularly where popular dissent is involved. Some examples:

+ Obscuring the widespread voter apathy and resistance in Czechoslovakia, that country's media for both foreign and domestic consumption claimed 99.45-percent voter participation in the 26-27 November 1971 elections. The widespread disruptive activities during the voting were portrayed by the Prague radio on the 27th as "isolated negative phenomena" which "did not influence the voters and were condemned by the people themselves." Czechoslovak media said the election results constituted a massive defeat for the "rightists" (the liberal reformers of 1968), as well as proof that the "consolidation" (establishment of Soviet control over the country following the August 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion) had been successfully "completed."

+ Prague media--and the media of the rest of the Soviet bloc--have maintained silence regarding widespread arrests in recent months of prominent progressives who supported the 1968 reforms, said by Radio Free Europe to have reached a total of some 200 by early February 1972.

+ In December 1970, RFE's publicity for reports emanating from regional transmitters in the Polish coastal area regarding riots in that area on 14-15 December forced the central Warsaw news media to end their news blackout of the coastal disturbances: The Warsaw domestic radio at 1500 GMT on 16 December broadcast its first, belated acknowledgment of the developments in the form of a "communique," and Warsaw television carried a film of the riots that evening.

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THE COMMUNIST VIEW OF RFE AND RADIO LIBERTY

One measure of the impact of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty is the extent of the counter-effort mounted against them in Soviet and East European media. In a sense, attack may be taken here as the sincerest form of flattery. The thrust of most recent Soviet bloc comment on the two radios is directed at what are called their "refined" methods of "psychological warfare," said to be aimed at weakening listeners' confidence in "the superiority of the socialist system" and "socialist internationalism." These have been constant themes, with ebbs and flows in volume. During the early post-invasion period of "normalization" in Czechoslovakia, the media of Moscow and its allies were especially vocal in denouncing RFE and Radio Liberty as prime instruments of Western "imperialist" efforts to abet the Dubcek reformists and to encourage "counterrevolution" in Czechoslovakia.

Against the background of the signing of the Moscow and Warsaw treaties with Bonn in late 1970 and the developing detente in central Europe under Chancellor Brandt's Ostpolitik, Soviet bloc media stepped up their efforts to picture the two radios as "cold war relics" impeding detente. Recurrent references are made to past publicly disclosed links of the radios with the CIA: both are said to be "subservient to their CIA masters." These charges have recurred in a seemingly well-orchestrated Soviet bloc effort to pressure Bonn and, through it, Washington to close down the "slandorous," "lying," "rabid anticommunist mouthpieces" transmitting from Munich. When the license under which RFE operates in West Germany was up for renewal at the beginning of June 1971, Warsaw media publicized a letter from the then foreign minister Jedrychowski to his West German counterpart, Scheel, protesting that Bonn's actions did not correspond to the Ostpolitik. When the license was renewed, there were prompt, sharp denunciations in the same vein from the media of Moscow and its allies.

Some recent propaganda has seized on differences on the issue in Congress to welcome the appearance of what are called "realistic" elements in the United States who understand that the two radios are cold war "anachronisms" in a period when the trend is toward detente. At the same time, a continuing staple of Soviet domestic propaganda is the theme that while the Soviet Union moves ahead with its policy of peace and detente, there can be no peaceful coexistence on the ideological front.

Here are two examples of denunciatory comment:

+ Bulgaria, the most extreme of Moscow's proxy spokesmen, had this to say about RFE and Radio Liberty in the party organ RABOTNICHESKO DELO on 8 March 1972:

We have called them "notorious" because these two monstrous offsprings of anticommunism have gained over the 20 years of their existence the unenviable fame of main mouthpieces

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of ideological subversion against the Soviet Union and the European socialist countries. This is because they have become synonymous with false information, slander, and beastly hatred for the peoples who have taken the road of socialism; this is because they have become hideouts for renegades and traitors of their countries, prepared to accomplish any and all dirty deeds

[After denouncing the citizens' committee formed by George Ball, Nelson Rockefeller, and others, the article went on to charge that the two radios] will probably continue their antisocialist and anti-Soviet work, which is to be envied even by the hoods of Goebbels.

+ IZVESTIYA, in the course of an article on Congressional plans to fund the two radios, said on 11 December 1971:

Imperialist propaganda is stepping up its struggle against the ideas of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism. The activity of the American ideological sabotage centers in Europe is a gross violation of existing norms of international law and open interference in the internal affairs of the countries of the socialist bloc.

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U.S. EVENTS AND POLICIES: THE VIEW FROM THE SOVIET BLOC

Some examples of how American events and actions are portrayed in the media of Moscow and its hardcore allies:

THE ANGELA DAVIS CASE: The extent of Radio Moscow's continuing propaganda effort to exploit the Angela Davis case is reflected in the number of radio commentaries devoted to it: 20 commentaries, in all languages taken together, in the week ending 5 March. Moscow has mentioned that Miss Davis is charged with complicity in murder, but the thrust of its comment is that she is a "political prisoner" being persecuted because of her avowed communist affiliations and her color. On 4 March, reporting an interview with Miss Davis, TASS' international service said the campaign to close "the so-called 'case of Angela Davis' . . . is of great significance not only for the trial in San Jose but also for destinies of all political prisoners" in the United States.

TASS on 23 February, reporting that the USSR's NOVOSTI press agency had put out a book in Russian, English, French, German, and Spanish entitled FREEDOM TO ANGELA, stated that "the courageous American Communist" had been "framed by the U.S. authorities."

THE PEACE CORPS: Sofia's army daily NARODNA ARMIYA on 19 January carried a scathing attack on the Peace Corps as "one of the ideological weapons used by U.S. imperialism and neocolonialism against the developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America." Citing the Indian press, the article said facts show "that the olive branch hides the cloak and dagger of spies." The article went on to assert that the organization's activities unmask it

as a tool of the State Department, the FBI, and the CIA. According to the admissions made by Senator Barry Goldwater, well known American "hawk," the "Peace Corps" is "the best thing in U.S. foreign policy." The "best thing" consists of the subversive activity by "volunteers" which inflicts grave harm upon the national interests of independent states, the collection of espionage data and recruitment of agents among local people, the propagation of the "American way of life," slanders against socialism, participation in the distribution of narcotics, and so on.

THE COMMON MARKET: In connection with the expansion of the European Common Market to 10 countries with a uniform external tariff, a commentary in the Prague party daily RUDE PRAVO of 8 March--also publicized in broadcast media--portrayed the expansion as a new discriminatory move, backed by the United States, aimed at the communist countries:

In the case of the EEC, it is a matter of the reactionary forces in the United States and

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Western Europe exploiting the trends toward an internationalization of production forces for creating and strengthening military-political blocs directed against the socialist countries. In the present instance, the closed economic bloc of the EEC states should serve--quite in harmony with U.S. interests--as a firm base for the NATO Pact.

THE MIDDLE EAST: Moscow depicts U.S. policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict as one of total support for Israel--political, military, economic, and financial. The policy is said to be carried out to the accompaniment of "hypocritical" professions of a desire for peace in the region and of readiness to assist in the quest for a settlement.

Soviet propaganda for all audiences denigrates American efforts to assist in Israeli-Egyptian talks on an interim settlement regarding reopening the Suez Canal, describing this "alleged mediation role" as intended to replace Ambassador Jarring's mission of assisting in an overall settlement based on the November 1967 Security Council resolution. A broadcast in Arabic in November said of the U.S. "mediatory role":

The purpose is to extinguish the vigilance of the Arabs and help the United States win their confidence in order that the United States may ultimately create differences between them and their true friends, thus weakening them and disarming them in the face of aggression, in order to impose the will of the imperialists.

Another Arabic-language broadcast that month said the American mediation

from beginning to end has been based on lies, deception, and misleading activity, because all along the United States has been giving the biggest support in every form--material, moral, and political--to Israeli aggression against the Arab countries.

An Arabic-language broadcast this February again accused the United States of trying to replace Dr. Jarring's mission with American mediation. It ascribed to Washington the following motives:

The chief aim of the ill-famed American quarters is first to strengthen and support U.S. positions in the Arab world, and secondly to help the Israeli extremists to profit materially from their aggression against the Arab countries.

In line with periodic advice to the Arabs to use U.S. interests in the Middle East--particularly petroleum--to the Arabs' own advantage, this commentary called it logical that the Arabs "should

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make every effort to mobilize their resources and potential" to strengthen the confrontation against "imperialism" and Israel.

A Moscow domestic service commentary in late December, discussing Israel's occupation policy, referred to

numerous reports on monstrous, truly colonialist methods of assimilating occupied Arab lands by Israel. Savage tyranny reigns there, entire villages are destroyed, thousands and thousands of peoples are forced out of them, and cultural monuments are torn down. Israeli propaganda literally turns this inside out, trying to prove that the occupiers are benefactors and that the Arabs did not begin to live in a human manner until they came. But it is clear that an Arab--provided he manages, in order to escape death by starvation, to find work in Israeli concerns--receives only a quarter of the wages received by Israeli workers. Other highly unsavory details of the Israeli presence in Arab territories have become known. The occupiers have begun to exploit, hurriedly and rapaciously, Egyptian oil deposits in the Sinai desert. This is robbery in itself, but those who were ordered to carry the theft out, high officials and managers, stole not only for Israel but also for themselves.

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