



# THE SOFT VOICE OF AMERICA

Aleksandr  
Solzhenitsyn

**T**HIRTY YEARS AGO, in 1953, when I had just been freed from the labor camp, I bought a radio receiver with the first money I earned. It was during my exile in Kazakhstan, and it was considered a suspicious move: why should someone in exile buy a radio? But I listened intently, through the horrendous jamming, and tried to catch some bits of information from the Western nations' Russian-language broadcasts. I got to be so expert that even if I could only catch half a sentence, I could complete it from just those few words. For twenty years I listened constantly to Russian-language broadcasts from the West. I made use of the information, rejoiced in the successes, and was deeply distressed by the mistakes.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance these broadcasts could have if they were well directed. Of course, people in the Soviet Union still listen to them, but many become disillusioned, as I did. I fear that those who determine the general tone of America's Russian-language broadcasts did not understand at the beginning, and do not understand today, the main aim and purpose of these broadcasts. The objective should be to establish mutual trust, warm feelings, and contact with the oppressed people, and thus to tear them away, to help them tear themselves away, from their Communist oppressors. If this had been done over the last thirty years, how different things might be today! I can say without exaggeration that maybe we would not be thinking that there is danger of another world war.

But this has never been understood. In recent years the quality of these broadcasts has steadily declined—the Voice of America has not been good for some time now, and Radio Liberty is getting worse, much worse.

In order to formulate correctly the general direction the broadcasts should take, at least two questions must be answered. First, what is the situation in the countries to which the broadcasts are beamed? And second, what is the condition of those oppressed peoples, what are their needs, what kind of spiritual hunger do they have? With respect to the first question, the entire West, including the United States, seems to be bewitched, doomed eternally to a false vision of the situation in Communist countries. In the Thirties—

during the most dreadful time of Stalinist terror, when Stalin was exterminating many millions of people—editorials in the United States proclaimed the Soviet Union to be a country of social justice. President Roosevelt extended a helping hand to Stalin, and American businessmen rushed to provide the technological assistance without which Stalin could not have built his industrial base. And at the end of the war, America and Britain made Stalin a gift of all of Eastern Europe. It should have been understood that the Soviet rulers were enemies of their own people. But this was not understood. Since, in the West, the government is elected by the people, Westerners like to think that the government and the people are one and the same. Even in this country that is not the case, as I see when I compare the opinions of the people I live among in Vermont with the news from Washington, D.C. And then consider that these differences of outlook are nothing compared to the situation behind the Iron Curtain. In actual fact, in all Communist countries the government and the people are categorically opposed to each other. There is a gulf between them.

Failing to understand this was the great historical mistake that Roosevelt made in the Thirties and Forties. This mistake cost the Free World half of the globe—perhaps less than half in terms of territory, but more than half in population. And today the greatest danger is that the Free World's leaders will repeat Roosevelt's fatal mistake.

In fact, the same mistake has been repeated over and over again through the years. For instance, with Tito. Tito was the murderer, the executioner, of his people. Right after World War II, he shot hundreds of thousands of his fellow citizens. He even shot down American civilian planes near the Austrian border. All this was forgiven (and worse, forgotten), and he has been held up as a great statesman. The same error was repeated again with Cuba. It was proclaimed in the Free World that what had taken place in Cuba was a people's revolution. The same error was repeated again with North Vietnam. A totalitarian gang there seized the whole country, and American progressives proclaimed that it was a national movement for freedom. In Nicaragua, right under our nose, a totalitarian group of Communists seized power, and the Carter Administration hurried to help them financially.

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*This article is adapted from an interview with Representative John LeBoutillier, part of which was broadcast on NBC's Tomorrow Show. It was translated by Julia Mansvetov.*

The fatal historical mistake of liberalism is to see no enemy on the left, to consider that the enemy is always on the right. It is the same mistake which destroyed Russian liberalism in 1917, when the liberals overlooked the real danger, which was from Lenin. The same error—the mistake of Russian liberalism—is being repeated on a worldwide scale today.

And worst of all is China. China in the Eighties is like the Soviet Union in the Thirties; it is in need of everything. It seeks aid from America. If the U.S. provides it with technology and then with weapons, China may, for a while, serve as a safeguard against the Soviet Union, although even that is problematical. But if the U.S. arms China, China may take over the second half of the earth—that second half which includes America.

Never forget that Mao's government murdered millions—even more, probably, in proportion to the population than Stalin did. China is even more closed to foreigners than the Soviet Union. The West knows even less about it. When, thirty years from now, you read the Chinese *Gulag Archipelago*, you will be amazed: "Oh, what a pity, and we didn't know!" But you must know! You must know in time, and not when it is too late.

No matter what the Chinese rulers may say when they are looking for favors from the U.S., no Communist government ever cares about the rights, the development of its people. Communist governments are like cancerous tumors: they grow wildly and have two aims only: first, to strengthen their power, and second, to expand their boundaries. Those are the aims of the Chinese government, as they are those of the Soviet government.

Now, to go back to the second point that VOA, Radio Liberty, and the other Western broadcasters should be considering: the inner state of the people toward whom the broadcasts are directed, their spiritual hunger, their frustrations, their aspirations.

Their main need is for knowledge. Information in the Soviet papers and on Soviet television is distorted beyond recognition. Those who live in the Soviet Union know, in a general way, what is happening in the world, but they know nothing of what is going on in the neighboring town, in the neighboring county. That is why foreign broadcasts are so important for them: only from such broadcasts can they get news about themselves, about what is happening to *them*.

Not to know what is happening in and to your own country is crippling. That is why the Voice of America's self-imposed limits are so misguided. What does the average Soviet citizen know about, say, Afghanistan? Everything he hears from the government is distorted. And yet the Voice of America, which could fill this gap, has placed limits on its own best sources of information. It refrains from using rich accumulations of material because it believes that it only has the right to broadcast in a way which will not irritate the Communist leaders. For instance, the émigré anti-Communist magazine *Possev*, published in Frankfurt am Main, contains plenty of material about Afghanistan; its reporters travel to Afghanistan and meet with Afghan resistance fighters. Yet the Voice of America does not broadcast such material to the Soviet Union because it comes from a magazine which is too anti-Communist. Instead, VOA feeds its listeners second-rate gossip about what diplomats in Delhi hear third-hand. Thus, instead of effectively giving us news, VOA helps to keep us ignorant. In order not to violate

State Department policy, it gives us a stone in place of bread.

Here is another example: a major rebellion took place in Novochoerkassk in 1962, but for over ten years there was not a word about it on Western radio broadcasts—not one! Either the broadcasters did not know about the revolt or it was not reported in "sufficiently proven" sources. If the broadcasters do not have documentary proof, they can't report on rebellions. And so it was not until ten years later that we heard from Western broadcasts about our own great rebellion in Novochoerkassk.

Here is still another example drawn from my personal experience. In December 1973, when I was still in the Soviet Union, *The Gulag Archipelago* was published in the West. VOA—or, rather, one VOA announcer—read an excerpt from *Gulag* on the air. Immediately, Radio Moscow started screaming that VOA had no right to interfere in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union, that the broadcast had fouled the international atmosphere. And what did VOA do? With the agreement of the State Department, it took the announcer off that assignment and forbade the reading of

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*The Gulag Archipelago* to Russia! More, for several years it was forbidden to quote Solzhenitsyn on VOA, so as not to discredit Communist propaganda. My book was written for Russians. Millions of copies were read in the West, but it could not be read to our Motherland!

But the Western broadcasters should be considering not only what the people of the Soviet Union know and don't know, but also what their concrete situation is. For 65 years, Soviet citizens have been working for a pittance. For 65 years, both the mother and the father in a family have worked, but their combined earnings are insufficient to support the family. They are never paid more than 10 or 20 per cent of what their work is worth. All the rest is taken by the government in order to produce weapons. Several generations of my people have gone hungry. We may even be approaching physical degeneration. We are poisoned with alcohol. Women are carrying a load which men could not manage, a double load as workers both inside and outside the home. Our birthrate has fallen sharply, and infant mortality has risen.

We are poisoned both physically and morally. Poisoned physically by military manufacturing that is carried out without any protection of the surrounding environment—there is no control of water or air pollution. And poisoned morally because for 65 years we have been inculcated with Communist lies.

This combination of poisons has brought my people to a

state close to spiritual and physical death. All memory of our past, our history, and especially the history of the last century has been wiped out. The history of the last century is particularly dangerous for the Communists, because that history is their enemy. The Communists are systematically destroying all traces of the truth, so that soon we won't know anything about ourselves. I would compare this to when, in Stalinist times, the father and the mother of a family were both arrested, the children sent to an orphanage, and their last names changed so that they never knew whose children they were, what their origins were, what their past was.

Our people are in the same situation. They are deprived of any memories about themselves. Or they are like someone lying in bed, dying; and the American radio broadcasts are like a visitor—not a doctor, but a visitor—who comes in very self-satisfied, cheerful, beautifully dressed, and sits down, and says: "Now I will entertain you. Now I will tell you how I dress, how many suits I have, what a wonderful apartment I have, what I recently bought, how much money I save, what a good time I have. Do you want me to do a little dance for you?" And the visitor begins to do various dances in front of him.

That's how radio broadcasts to the Soviet Union are run today. They give us nothing to slake our spiritual hunger. Instead, a foreign voice reads us propaganda lectures on how to understand the world. Granted, these lectures come not from a Communist point of view but from a liberal democratic one. But after 65 years *all* propaganda has become repulsive to us.

That's just one aspect. It is the most important aspect for our people; but there is another side, the one that is most important for America. These broadcasts give a picture which does not correspond to the spiritual life of the American people. They speak of trite, superficial things, so that our people have a lower opinion of Americans than Americans deserve.

VOA broadcasts are full of frivolity. For instance, there are three different jazz programs, a program of pop music, a program of dance music, and then a youth program on which all of these are repeated. This is such a mistake. Perhaps those interested in jazz may turn on their radio five minutes earlier or turn it off five minutes later and in this way happen to hear something besides jazz. But the point is, we don't need VOA jazz programs, which are jammed, because our jazz fans have at their disposal jazz programs from the rest of the world, which no one jams. They can hear these programs perfectly. So VOA does not attract listeners that way; all it does is waste valuable air-time.

Or consider sports. With great solemnity VOA broadcasts programs on sports. But sports are a favorite subject of Soviet radio. It is the only interest which Soviet radio willingly fosters in our youth—because, in the Soviet Union, sports act as the opium of the people. They divert young people from thinking about their situation, about their history, and about politics—something the Western broadcasts should not be encouraging. Even worse, the stations find time to broadcast about hobbies. These programs repel and anger the Soviet listener and make him turn off the radio; he feels only contempt for a broadcast that tells him how people with lots of time at their disposal collect empty bottles, or labels from something or another. Or he is told, in great detail, about the conveniences of international travel—information of no conceivable use to him—

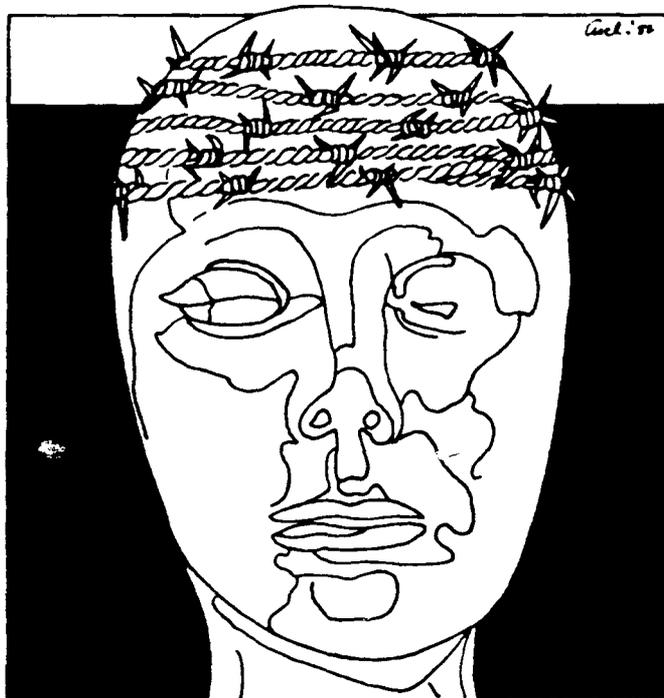
when the time could be spent on subjects of value to him such as history and religion.

To sum up: Radio broadcasts from the United States do not give our people the spiritual help they need. That's one point. Secondly, the broadcasts present Americans as more trivial and less significant than they really are, i.e., they are doing America harm. And, thirdly, the stations limit even simple information about current events. In matters of foreign policy, they are overly scrupulous about sources, as witness the case of Afghanistan. So far as the internal situation in the Soviet Union is concerned, the broadcasts concentrate on material provided by dissidents in Moscow. If tomorrow the dissident movement should be destroyed, that source of information would be lost altogether.

But there are great fields of information about the Soviet Union of which Soviet citizens need to hear, and which the American broadcasters either do not have or do not wish to use. Instead, there is wide coverage on Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union. Half-hour after half-hour is spent on interviews with recent émigrés: how they like America; how they have found work; how much they earn; how they have furnished their houses. Not that there is anything wrong with this. But it is given disproportionate emphasis, and it replaces needed information about the situation within the Soviet Union. And what feeling does it arouse in the Soviet listener? Irritation. Most Soviet citizens cannot emigrate to the West. Only a certain number of Jews can. Why then boast about how well they are doing? It is tactless.

Our people want to be told about our workers, how they fare in our country, but the broadcasts do not speak of that. What is the situation of our peasantry? There is never a broadcast on that subject. The situation in the provinces? The cruel conditions of service in the army? People in the army listen to the broadcasts—there are many shortwave sets there. But nothing is ever broadcast about any of these situations.

The Soviet worker, the peasant, the soldier—all live under dreadful pressure, but their stories remain untold. Such in-



formation is widely available in the émigré press, and it could be broadcast to the USSR without much effort. But to do so would violate State Department policy. The Soviet rulers might get angry at the State Department and refuse to buy from the U.S. the modern electronics without which they cannot live.

The greatest spiritual need of our people is to become aware of themselves. If during the past thirty years the Western broadcasts had helped our people remember who they were, helped them to rise spiritually to their feet, the entire world situation would be different. Our recent history has been trampled and distorted beyond recognition;

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everything we hear is saturated with propaganda. It is hard for Americans to imagine such ignorance. The average Soviet citizen in essence knows nothing: what were the causes of the Revolution; how it occurred, and how the Bolsheviks took it over and instituted totalitarian rule; what people's movements there were against the Bolsheviks, and how they were suppressed; how our peasantry and our working class were destroyed by terrorist means. We need to know the truth about all this. If such knowledge were given us, we would—both civilian and soldier—become spiritually free of our government.

However, programming at VOA and Radio Liberty is now mostly in the hands of ideologues who are operating under the influence of myths, of false beliefs about Russia. And at the root of these myths we find Karl Marx. Marx claimed that the Russian people were "reactionary." And from that claim it followed that all of Russian history was "reactionary"—the monarchy was "reactionary," Russian traditions were "reactionary," most Russian leaders were "reactionary," even our Orthodox religion was "reactionary." So what do the ideologues do? They shoot down two-thirds of our historical figures for fear that they might be called "reactionary." If some American journalist—just one—or some second-rate scholar has ever said about a Russian that he was "reactionary," then that Russian is eliminated from history: he no longer exists.

In this way, paradoxically, American broadcasts tend to help the Communists. The Communists fight to root out our memory of our history, and U.S. broadcasts do the same. Consider a recent example: Last September was the seventieth anniversary of the death—actually the murder—of the greatest Russian statesman of the twentieth century, Prime Minister Stolypin (1862-1911). In the five years prior to his death, Stolypin had succeeded in pulling Russia out of complete chaos and disintegration into a state of prosperity. The act of his murder inaugurated the great terror of the twen-

tieth century. Yet both Radio Liberty and the Voice of America killed anniversary broadcasts on Stolypin. A fine broadcast had been prepared at Radio Liberty; it was dropped without discussion or explanation. The Voice of America had prepared an eight-minute reading from my chapter on Stolypin. The broadcast had already been announced, but it too was killed. These parallel actions show that there is no question of different administrators making independent decisions—there is an ideology that dominates the direction taken by both stations. No matter where one locates Stolypin—some consider him a liberal, others a conservative—he was a great Russian statesman, and I would like to underline the amazing fact that both American radio stations, independently of each other, censored their broadcasts in advance, even though their listeners had been told that the broadcasts would take place.

Consider a final example of the kind of self-censorship which prevents Radio Liberty and the Voice of America from satisfying the spiritual needs of their audience. Russian Orthodoxy, during the past 65 years, has suffered its own Golgotha. Constant efforts have been made to destroy Christianity in Russia, to root it completely out of memory and heart. That is the consistent policy of the Soviet government, and it has resulted in tens of millions of people not being able to go to church. Many live three hundred miles from the nearest church, i.e., they can have a child christened, but they cannot attend church regularly. American broadcasts once again could help fill this gap: they could carry services, mark Christian holidays, explain the divine services and Christian terminology, especially to children, who are almost totally deprived of religion in the USSR. Communist power seeks to deprive us of religion; and American



radio broadcasts, directed by ideologues who accept the stupid premise that Russian Christianity is "reactionary," follow the Communists' lead.

For thirty years the broadcasts have avoided any encouragement to Russian Orthodoxy to rise up and become an organized social power in Russia. I don't know anything about the American Polish-language broadcasts. I hope they have been excellent. I hope they have supported Polish Catholicism, strengthened it. But for the Russian people, the broadcasts ignore religion; it is as if they deliberately seek to avoid encouraging us to find strength in the Church, to create such religious unification as exists in Poland.

The year 1981 saw a sharp turn for the worse in Radio Liberty. I will say nothing about the 15 other languages in

which Radio Liberty broadcasts, which I do not know. But the programs in Russian have degenerated to such an extent that, if they continue as they are going, it would be better to do away with them altogether.

Still, there is a Latin proverb that goes, "*Dum spiro, spero*"—where there's life, there's hope. Thirty years have gone by, but that does not mean that we should not begin again today. We do not know how much time history will give us, and maybe it is still possible to accomplish much if the Reagan Administration actively undertakes to improve U.S. broadcasts. I am not speaking about an increase in the budget, but about a fundamental change in direction. I have said much that needed to be said. The rest is in the hands of your Administration. □

## Richard Brookhiser



ON THE RIGHT-HAND side of the Mall, as you approach the Capitol, lies a squat, characterless building, indistinguishable from its squat fellows, which houses the main offices of the Voice of America. For a few days last fall, the Voice figured luridly in news stories and on the editorial pages of the larger newspapers. A senator fumed and Herblock drew a cartoon. The brouhaha was quickly tamped down, however, and last month Philip Nicolaides, the Reagan appointee who had stimulated it, was released from the Voice's parent agency. The Voice receded from the consciousness of the people for whom it speaks.

It does not deserve this neglect. The Voice of America is one of the largest radio stations in the world. Its 101 transmitters are scattered around the globe, from Liberia to Sri Lanka to Greenville, North Carolina. It broadcasts in 39 languages, from Albanian to Vietnamese, and is heard by as many people in the Soviet Union as read *Pravda* (the Soviets spend more money on jamming VOA than America spends on broadcasting it). The recent events at the Voice were more than an episode in the career of one man; they form a chapter in the endless—and, it sometimes seems, endlessly futile—attempts of Republican Presidents and their supporters to have some influence on their own Administration: they illuminate, from yet another angle, the prejudices of the media, and they raise questions about American strategy—or non-strategy.

The Voice of America first went on the air a month and a half after Pearl Harbor. Eight years after the war's end, Congress placed it within the newly created United States Information Agency—now the U.S. International Communication Agency—where it remains today. (Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe are entirely distinct entities, never associated with the Voice, and overseen by the Board of International Broadcasting.) The mission of the Voice—or as much mission as Congress ever saw fit to commit to paper—was spelled out in its Charter: since "the long-range interests of the United States are served by communicating directly with the people of the world by radio," the Voice

is enjoined to "serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news"; to "present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions"; and to "present the policies of the United States" along with "responsible discussion . . . on these policies."

These injunctions were not Delphic, but they were not exhaustive in their precision either, and over the years there has been a fair amount of hauling and tugging. John Chancellor, Voice Director in the mid-Sixties, observed that "the Voice has been placed at the intersection of journalism and diplomacy." Diplomacy required it, on one famous occasion, to lie: the Voice denied, in 1961, that Washington had anything to do with the Bay of Pigs invasion. There have been acts of omission as well. In 1975, the Voice was urged to withhold for 48 hours the news that Saigon was doomed, in the interests of averting a panic.

Throughout the Seventies, the tidal pull of detente gave rise to numerous flows and eddies. When Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn received the Nobel Prize, the strongest anti-Communist passages in his acceptance speech were blue-penciled from the Voice's account. The prevailing view at the Voice to this day is that he is discredited, generally unpopular, heeded only by small groups of intellectuals. Also a little dull: "He says the same things all the time," one newsroom veteran paraphrased the conventional wisdom. "We can't bug the Soviets about it." In 1978, the Voice edited its own Warsaw correspondent. A poet, addressing a meeting of the Polish Writers' Congress, had denounced the censorship enveloping the Katyn Forest Massacre. It was a remarkable story, a premonition of the spirit of Solidarity, and the reporter got all of it. But the account as finally broadcast omitted all the poet's references to the Soviet Union.

The fact is that different Voice employees have always tended to interpret the Charter in different ways. "The Voice is two radio networks," is how one employee expressed it to me—an English-language one, centered in news and programming, from which most of the scripts emanate; and a foreign-language conglomerate, comprising all the translators and broadcasters responsible for actually reaching the Voice's non-English-speaking listeners. To these two networks, there is added a small diplomatic corps—Foreign

Service Officers (FSOs) who fill various posts, including the top slots in many of the language services.

The English copywriters are overwhelmingly American-born and universally better paid. Their byword—or buzz word—is “professional,” and their fondest memory is Watergate (VOA told the whole story; the Soviet Union downplayed it). In fact, they have all the ambitions and preconceptions of private-sector American newsmen, whose peers they feel they are. They want to be “an international CBS,” a veteran of the European division told me. “We are not spokesmen for the United States.” William Haratunian, acting director during the Carter-Reagan transition, declared to the *Washington Post Magazine* last summer. The planted assumption here is that no one could simultaneously be a spokesman for the United States and a professional; so every effort must be made to avoid the least semblance of spokesmanship. “When Brezhnev’s talking against us,” a former newsroom employee said, “we carry the whole speech. When we talk against them, we give one or two lines.”

If professionalism in practice seems to resemble liberalism, that is because it often is liberalism. “Probably around

newsroom pegged Republicans in the foreign-language services at 80 per cent. But their main rallying cry is topicality, not politics. They are obliged, with few exceptions, to use the news and features passed to them from the central ganglion, and the choices—a 22-part series on crime in America, sweaty excerpts from Albert Goldman’s *Elvis*—often strike them as irrelevant or bizarre. Also parochial: on January 13 of this year, a Solidarity leader who had endorsed the coup reneged. But the top three stories the next day, for every language, were the Air Florida plane crash, the bad winter weather, and the DC Metro crash.

The Foreign Service Officers, the diplomacy half of Chancellor’s intersection, typically stay at the Voice for two- or three-year stints. The rotation is supposed to guarantee a continuous infusion of people with recent foreign experience; it also means that in the context of their own careers the FSOs are marking time—thus reinforcing the natural diplomatic instinct to ruffle no feathers. The occurrence or non-occurrence of some Voice-caused eruption can mean the difference between a post in Ouagadougou and a post in Paris. “Just as they pour tea in their embassies,” said one non-FSO, “they want us to pour tea over the air.”

Coexistence among the three groups is seldom peaceful. Occasionally, the diplomats and the newsroom Woodsteins come to blows, especially whenever there is talk of pulling the Voice under the control of the State Department. But their interests for the most part broadly intersect—the newsroom wants warts-and-all stories about America, the diplomats want no-warts stories about the rest of the world—and they are natural allies in the common face-off with the foreign-language broadcasters. The key word here is “émigré,” suggesting as it does thick accents and soirées spent in the company of deteriorating archdukes. Any reporter covering Voice affairs who uses it is sure to have been coached by newsroom or Foreign Service sources. For the former, “émigré” means the culturally benighted, not raised in the traditions of Milton, Zenger, and Dan Rather; for the latter, it means axe-grinding conspirators, fresh from the cellars and coffeehouses, eager to involve us in dark Balkan plots. The foreign-language broadcasters, meanwhile, continue to wonder what Elvis’s pelvis can mean to Cambodians.

Reagan picked Charles Z. Wick, an entertainment and real-estate millionaire and a personal friend, to be head of the USICA. Wick’s and Reagan’s choice for Director of the Voice was James B. Conkling, founder and president of Warner Brothers Records.

The new team got off to an exciting start. In August, the National Security Council chewed out the Voice for giving American airtime to Georgi Arbatov, whose main job, as head of the Institute of U.S. and Canadian Studies in Moscow, is to figure out how to destroy America. (The Voice had replayed an interview taped by National Public Radio.) That same week, Voice newscasts referred to the Afghan resistance as “anti-government guerrillas.”

Conkling, who was of a mind to take up the complaints, had not reckoned with the bureaucratic skills of his subordinates. When he asked who had been involved in the Arbatov boner, his Acting Program Manager told him the question smacked of McCarthyism. A fortnight later, the staff counter-attacked. Conkling agreed to an interview with an in-house newsletter. Rambling and candid, the text

**S**hould the  
*Administration stay in neutral,  
then the Voice will  
continue, doing what radio stations  
do at home—selling America  
by random show-and-tell*

85 to 90 per cent of the people in the central newsroom are Democrats,” a foreign-language broadcaster, himself a Republican, guesses. “Any senator is well covered by us if he is a Democrat,” another employee offered, “very seldom if he is a Republican.” The three-part treatment given to Reagan’s State of the Union address, in February 1981, was suggestive. Part one, outlining the proposals, focused entirely on the “sharp cuts”—in “food for the needy,” “free school lunches,” “research and development of solar energy,” “passenger-train service.” Part two, domestic reactions, led off with the Congressional Black Caucus, dwelled at length on the AFL-CIO, and closed with a brief paragraph of praise from “business leaders” and “bankers.” Part three gave the foreign reaction, ending with TASS. Taxes were mentioned twice, both times in passing; inflation, only once. Occasionally, the newsroom gets complaints about this kind of thing, but these are easily deflected. “If there was a congressman showing interest,” a former newsroom employee explained, “a new version of a story might be prepared and distributed. Maybe it never ran—but the books showed it had been carried.”

The employees in the foreign-language services tend to be foreign-born. They are permitted, by law, to rise as high in the government pay scale as GS-13 (newsroom employees may rise to GS-15). As the native Americans are liberal, so the naturalized Americans are conservative. The same Voice employee who estimated the percentage of Democrats in the

yielded to patient sifters such nuggets as, "I don't know if we're addressing our goals right, because I don't know exactly what our goals are . . . I'm thinking about it." Two days later (surprise, surprise!) the *Baltimore Sun* ran a blast against Reagan's VOA, citing the Conkling interview.

It was the *Sun* hatchet job and Conkling's ensuing displeasure which brought Philip Nicolaides into the picture. Nicolaides had had experience with radio broadcasting in Houston, and with TV documentaries, and he had come to the USICA in early August. The higher-ups now suggested that he and Conkling get together to try to put the criticisms into perspective. Nicolaides put his thoughts into a ten-page memorandum to Conkling.

The tinder was now in place. Criticism of the Voice continued throughout the fall. Then, early in October, a reading of a short passage from *October 1916*, Solzhenitsyn's work-in-progress, was edited out of the Russian-language "World of Books" program, on the orders of the FSO in charge; Russian listeners heard Joyce Carol Oates instead. Representatives John LeBoutillier and Toby Roth gave public talks in Washington, attacking the Voice's programming. On November 10, the USICA announced three new Voice appointments: Nicolaides was the new Deputy Director for Commentary and Analysis.

Three days later, the *Washington Post* ran a story based on a purloined copy of Nicolaides's memo to Conkling. "Why," Nicolaides had asked, do "we ask the taxpayer to subsidize a global radio network?"

[Senator] Fulbright scoffed at the VOA as a "relic of the cold war." In a sense he was right. The justification for such an enterprise diminishes to the degree that we live in a world of friendly nations posing no threat to us. In such a world most of the functions of the USICA in general and the VOA in particular would be nugatory or redundant . . .

We have, in fact, been in a state of "protracted conflict" with the Soviet Empire since the end of World War II. . . . To put it quite bluntly, the USICA is justified because it is (or should be) the primary psychological arm in a global struggle against a powerful, determined, implacable foe—bent on "burying" our system, as one of its more candid leaders confessed.

There had followed five pages of suggested guidelines and specific recommendations.

We must portray the Soviet Union as the last great predatory empire on earth. . . . We must strive to "destabilize" the Soviet Union and its satellites by promoting disaffection between peoples and rulers. . . . We should fan the flames of nationalism . . . encourage religious revivals behind the Iron Curtain. . . . Our news should be factually accurate. But we need not expatiate endlessly on stories which tend to put us or our allies in a bad light while glossing over stories which discredit the leadership of Communist nations. Given the editorial choice of telling Bulgarians about another U.S. auto-recall announcement or another crop failure in the Ukraine, we should not hesitate to blue-pencil the Detroit story.

But most newsworthy, in the *Post's* judgment, were Nicolaides's preliminary definitions.

Diplomacy is primarily an effort at persuasion aimed at a small number of government officials, carried on with great tact, usually behind the scenes. . . . Advertising involves the persuasion of large numbers of people—chiefly through mass media. . . . Propaganda is a species of the genus advertising: i.e., advertising in the service of a government. . . . In fact we are—as all the world understands—a propaganda agency.

PROPAGANDA ROLE URGED FOR VOICE OF AMERICA, was the *Post's* page-one headline.

All week long, the dead cats flew. The Society of Professional Journalists passed a resolution "condemn[ing] any effort to politicize" the Voice. The *Post* warned the Voice against "imitating Radio Moscow." Senator Charles Percy was "deeply alarmed." Herblock was—the usual.

Reagan's appointees dropped Nicolaides like a hot rock. He was not fired, and indeed he moved physically into the Voice's offices at the end of November. But Conkling had stressed, in a post-*Post* news conference, that he would "not have great policy influence"; and for the next month and a half, Nicolaides led the ghostly, after-life sort of existence of a bureaucratic non-person. It took three days for a typewriter to appear in his office; there never was a secretary or a coat hanger. No one reported to him, and only



one of the commentaries he wrote—a Christmas Eve piece on Poland—was broadcast. A former USICA employee, working in another part of the government, thought to call Nicolaidēs about going back to the Voice. “Don’t approach him,” a friend at the Voice advised. “He’s finished.”

On January 13, Nicolaidēs moved back to the USICA building on Pennsylvania Avenue, from one idleness to another. At the CPAC conference in March, LeBoutillier attacked the Voice’s wimpiness and suggested that Nicolaidēs replace Conkling. Too much, too late. The USICA finally extruded its notorious employee on March 12. James Conkling resigned a week later: “I have been in the private sector too many years to be able to understand the different ways of government workings.” Conkling’s replacement will be John Hughes, now Associate Director of Programs for the USICA; a former editor of the *Christian Science Monitor* and winner, in 1967, of a Pulitzer Prize for reporting on the Indonesian coup. Any opinions on the Nicolaidēs memorandum? the *New York Times* asked. “It is a closed chapter,” Hughes answered. “I want to start with a clean slate.”

So, what is the Voice for, anyway? It is an academic question, since whatever chance there was of raising it in any substantive way was squandered in the bungled *affaire Nicolaidēs*. The Administration could always create a second chance, but only at the cost of the sort of sustained political effort which it has so far been unwilling to make.

If the Reagan Administration stays in neutral, then the Voice will continue, doing abroad what radio stations do at home—selling America by random show-and-tell; CBS Goes to Bucharest. In many parts of the world, this will be harmless, though as Nicolaidēs pointed out it is also redundant and unnecessary. T. S. Eliot, Coca-Cola, and rock-’n’-roll, America’s three great cultural exports of this century, all made their way without a boost from Uncle Sam.

But in other parts of the world—Bucharest, for instance—the situation is different. It has been the premise of our grand strategy, roughly since George Kennan’s “Mr. X” article, that the Soviet Union is an enemy, potentially dangerous, which will, however, collapse of its own weight, provided we respond to its aggression in appropriate ways—containment prescribing “hard” responses, detente “soft” ones. James Burnham argued thirty years ago that the strategy was flawed. But even assuming it is not, is there anything in the strategy itself which prevents us from helping the collapse along? We fear the Soviet empire, and expect “history”—which can only mean, the people of the empire—to remove the cause of our fear. We proved, in 1956, that we would not give those people material help. The lesson stuck; neither Dubček nor Walesa expected or wanted it. But what debars us from offering intellectual help: facts, news, opinions, relevant discussion—a Lend-Lease of the mind?

The Voice of America should not be in the vanguard of such an effort. Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe exist for that purpose. (Radio Marti is on the way, and, in the private sector, Vladimir Bukovsky has proposed a Radio Free Kabul, broadcasting to Russian conscripts in Afghanistan.) But a Voice which speaks in the idiom of the evening news and the embassy reception is good for nothing. People risk their lives to listen to the Voice of America; they don’t want to hear Bill Moyers, prompted by George Ball.

Supporters of the Voice’s status quo often seize on the BBC as a stick for beating conservative critics. The BBC, they say, achieved its respected position, and holds it, by pure objectivity. True enough today, perhaps. It is also true that, since the Suez fiasco, the BBC’s masters have not had a foreign policy which anyone particularly needed to care about. When they did, in World War II, while Britain stood alone, the BBC was honest, but never “objective.” Those who disagreed with British policy frothed at the BBC, George Orwell calling it a “whoreshop and a lunatic asylum.” To his credit, Orwell also acknowledged that the goals he and the government held in common outweighed their differences.

After he defected, former Polish Ambassador Romuald Spasowski recalled building a secret radio during World War II to listen to the BBC, the Beethoven “V” signal giving him a feeling of hope. Today, the Ambassador went on, a similar war is being fought over the airwaves, not a war of weapons, but of information and thought, a war which the forces of freedom must win.

There is a programming option, at least as compelling as the DC Metro crash. □

## Glorobots

A man who had been a gourmet  
Used to plug in his robot and say,  
“Now try not to bolt  
Your vintage of volt.  
But sip it to taste the bouquet.”

A Soviet robot confessed  
His treatment was not of the best,  
So he willfully broke,  
And the Communists spoke  
Of him as “a defect to the West.”

The robot did not have myalgia  
Or any known kind of neuralgia,  
But his recall was such  
He remembered too much  
And suffered from chronic nostalgia.

The teacher’s old influence fades  
Since teaching machines became aides,  
And kiddies bring treats  
Of apples and sweets  
To the robot computing the grades.

GLORIA A. MAXSON