

RFE MONITORING

The Monitoring Section, one part of the News and Information Service, constitutes the ears of RFE's Program Desks. By listening to the home transmissions of radio stations behind the Iron Curtain - that is, the broadcasts which the Communist regimes beam to their own people - RFE glean a great deal of information about the internal situation of the satellite countries, the propaganda tactics of the Communists and, by reading between the lines, the reaction of the people.

Information acquired in this way and combined with refugee reports gathered by RFE correspondents stationed along the western side of the Iron Curtain affords quite a comprehensive picture of conditions in the East. In addition, much valuable material is picked up mechanically by Morse and Hellschreiber* from the Eastern European wire services in English, French, and other languages (Tass, CTK, PAP, MTI, ADN, Tanyug, Agerpress, BTA, and ATA), which combines with the aural monitoring to form the grist of the mill for Program Desks.

It is one of the wonders of American engineering that in addition to their propaganda beamed abroad, we are able to hear so many of the self-revealing local broadcasts, because in most cases the Curtain stations are not concerned with reaching beyond their own borders - whereas American equipment and techniques have enabled us to "pull in" stations from great distances. This is of high importance just because the local flavor of these broadcasts spell something to the exiles who are working in Munich formulating the free world's answer to them.

At present 35 Curtain stations are monitored regularly, 4 to 6 others on spot basis. In the course of a week twelve languages will be used. The daily intake by aural monitoring runs between 45,000 and 48,000 words. On some heavy days the total monitoring intake (including news services, monitored mechanically) will run better than 200,000 words. In any service this is an extremely heavy volume. However, when it is considered that the bulk of this material is highly specialized, dealing with specific targets, it can be seen that this great volume is necessary, in order to keep fresh the highly diversified fields of programming. We suffer periods of strangulation when atmospheric cut off one country or another, and the fact that we have a good cushion of wordage to fall back on enables the desks, through close cross-reporting, to weather the setbacks.

As Radio Free Europe comprises actually five radio stations in one, so the Monitoring Section, which employs 51 persons, is broken down into nine sub-sections according to the country monitored:

* A NOTE ABOUT THE HELLSCHREIBER:

The Hellschreiber is little known outside Europe. It is a short-wave and long-wave transmitting and receiving system at slow speed, and can be copied over great distances. It is, perhaps, a forerunner of radio-teletype.

The fact that most of the satellites use Hellschreiber for at least part of their news transmission is a windfall for RFE, for it means that we can have much of their news output as soon as, or even before their own newspapers. The Hellschreiber enables RFE editors to dissect the satellites' news budget and be on the air with our answers to it often before it has appeared in the local press.

(more)

1. The three major monitored sub-sections - Czech-Slovak, Hungarian, and Polish - supply three major program Desks with news, political commentaries, dramatic programs, economic and labor reports, etc. - in short, all types of material which can be used for full-feature programs. One of the most successful types of program is that which makes direct answer to false statements and misleading information from the Communist radio, such as the Polish and Czechoslovak "The Other Side of the Coin" and the Hungarian "Reflector" programs. Such programs as these are based almost exclusively upon monitoring reports.
2. The Romanian and Bulgarian Monitoring sub-sections supply much the same sort of material to their respective program desks, though on a somewhat smaller scale. They also supply supplementary material to the three major desks, who keep a weather eye out for significant developments in all other satellites.
3. More collateral information is provided by the Russian, Serbo-Croat, Albanian, and East-German sub-sections. The Russian sub-section keeps up with daily broadcasts of Radio Moscow, including the daily PRAVDA editorial, which sets the pattern for the day's journalistic line in the satellite press. The East-German sub-section has been operating at full strength since the June 17, 1953 revolt in the East Zone. As the show-window of Communist activity and policy, East Germany is watched attentively by all the radio desks of RFE.

The Monitoring Section covers the red broadcasts from 0500 hours to 0100 hours the following morning. Peak operation hours are in the early morning, when most of the satellite regime editorials for the day are broadcast, and the evening hours. A broad schedule such as this is covered by means of shift work and tape recordings, the latter also serving as a means for covering simultaneous programs from the same country. Frequently, important events, such as speeches, Party congresses, etc., require overtime work.

"Rotation" for Speed: A special "rotation" system for speedy handling of important speeches was worked out by the Hungarian sub-section. By transcribing the speech in relay style, 15 minutes at a time, the first monitor is able to finish and rush to the editors the first quarter hour of the program in time to pick up the fifth quarter hour; the second monitor takes the second and sixth quarter hours; and so on. In this way, the editors and translators have the whole speech only minutes after the end of the broadcast.

In order to have the closest possible liaison with the working desks, three sub-sections (Czech-Slovak, Hungarian and Polish) are located on the second floor of the English Garden building, receiving their programs piped in from the receiving stations. From a central panel in the Monitoring rooms these signals are relayed to the desired magnecorders, where the monitors may listen directly to the program while it is being recorded on tape. Lines may also be "patched" from the monitoring room panel directly into conference rooms of the corresponding Program Desks, enabling members of the Czechoslovak Desk, for example, to listen in to a round table on economics from Radio Prague and to go on the air immediately afterwards with their own round table of comment and analysis.

In all operations the monitoring sub-sections are geared to the speediest possible distribution of the news. On occasion, RFE has been able to scoop both the West and the East. For example, in the case of Stalin's death, the Beria purge,