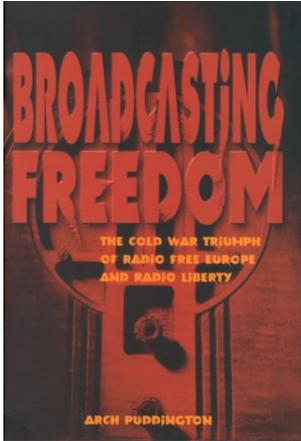

Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty by Arch Puddington (2000), 382 pages.



It is rather difficult to form an opinion about thousands of broadcasting hours relayed to Eastern Europe by RFE over a period of forty years if one never heard so much as one minute of them. It is almost like writing about a musical masterpiece one has never heard, or about a famous painting one has never seen. However, the testimony of actual listeners was always overwhelming, and I am impressed by acute observations of a personal friend that follow. It appears that the communist press relayed three types of information. Firstly, there were absolutely true news: these were death notices; secondly, some news were possibly true: these were weather forecasts; finally came the rest of the news: if they were of political nature, they were outright lies.

The book was written by a former executive of RFE based in New York and covers the 1948-1993 period, but the first broadcast was made on July 4, 1950. Of course, there are two volumes of memoirs by Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, who was head of the Polish section from 1948 to 1976. These excellent books are titled *Wojna w Eterze* and *Polska*

w Oddali, respectively, but it is helpful to gain a larger perspective and to consider a different point of view.

Besides, Puddington's book covers all ethnic outlets, including Radio Liberty, which was aimed exclusively at the Russian audience.

RFE was fully funded by American resources at considerable expense as the elaborate set-up in Munich shows. Its top management was in conflict from time to time when confronted by strong views of a particular ethnic section. It was almost inevitable that the parties did not see eye to eye in certain situations. It required a lot of diplomatic skill to smooth out the differences and to soothe hurt egos. Perhaps the most notable event is the Hungarian uprising of 1956, and Chapter 6 covers it extensively. Suffice it to say that RFE was unexpectedly "trapped" in a dangerous situation during the Budapest upheaval. The question was: could the Hungarians expect some rapid and substantial help from the West, or would they be thrown to the Soviet wolves?

What was the final effect of RFE and possibly of RL in the course of the last 50 years? One could say that ideologically it performed the important function of keeping up the spirit of the nations, served. Yet, what if the Soviet regime had continued for 50 more years? From a realistic point of view, RFE's work really did not influence the collapse Of the Soviet Union. There were other, far more powerful, factors.

George Suboczewski