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**BOLSHEVIK VOICES: RADIO BROADCASTING IN THE SOVIET UNION,
1917 - 1991**

by
Bradley J. Trinkner II

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of History
College of Humanities and Social Science
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
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Master of Arts
at
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Thesis Chair: James Heinzen, Ph.D.

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Abstract

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BOLSHEVIK VOICES: RADIO BROADCASTING IN THE SOVIET UNION,
1917 – 1991
2013/14
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Radio broadcasting has a long and varied history in many industrialized nations yet research into radio in the Soviet Union has been given little attention from scholars. Radio offers the power to unite distant people and reinforce the party agenda yet also leaves the door open to unauthorized transmissions. The story of radio must be understood as two sides of the same coin, namely the motivation and purpose of broadcasting by the regime as well as the effects on those who listened. The dual purpose of broadcasting was represented both by the potential it offered party authorities as well as a subversive element for listeners when the reality for citizens rarely met the vision of the regime. The earliest years of Soviet broadcasting were hindered by material shortages and an inability to understand the special qualities of radio. The Stalin years and World War II transformed the purpose and function of broadcasting in Russia. The greatest challenge to central broadcasting came for foreign radio broadcasts that brought “enemy voices” into the homes of Soviet listeners as stations such as Voice of America and Radio Liberty provided news and entertainment that was more in line with the demands of native audiences. Despite the opportunity to use radio to reinforce the single narrative of Soviet history and to lay the grounds for the new Soviet man, authorities ultimately built an apparatus that did not offer widespread appeal and in many cases drove listeners to foreign broadcasting. As a result, Soviet radio did not build the state and the culture as it did in other nations.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In a 1947 broadcast, Radio Moscow boasted, “When Alexander Popov, the great Russian scientist, invented the radio he dreamed of enriching mankind with the most perfect method of communication and of broadening the outlook of peoples.”¹

Representing the vision of the model worker’s society, the Soviet Union never ceased to brag about its technical and modern achievements. In the early 20th century, few innovations represented modernity as effectively as radio. In 1945, just two days before World War II had officially ended, Joseph Stalin declared that the first Radio Day would be recognized on May 7th. This new holiday honored radio’s wartime contribution and coincided with the 50th anniversary of Alexander Popov’s public demonstration of broadcasting technology. In true Soviet fashion, Stalin considered Popov (a Russian) to have invented and pioneered the use of radio, thereby undermining its more traditionally recognized father, Guglielmo Marconi.² While the truth behind Popov’s invention can be debated, it is fitting that Russia may have a right to claim ownership of one of the most powerful transmitters of knowledge civilization has ever known. Radio broadcasting revolutionized how humans communicate. Numerous societies, recognizing radio’s potential, have used it as a way to connect people. As one of the 20th century’s textbook examples of totalitarianism, the Soviet regime depended on its ability to disseminate and

¹ “Soviet Radio is Truthful, Ours Not, Says Soviet Radio.” New York Times (1857-1922) 9 May 1947. <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed February 2, 2014).

² The debate has legs in our own time with a few individuals claiming the right to be called “inventor,” though many in Eastern Europe regard Popov’s radio receiver as taking precedence.

ensor information in such a way as to mobilize its society. Broadcasting offered new possibilities for a society that was always finding ways to talk about itself.

In many ways it seems as if broadcasting was tailor-made for the Soviet Union. The very existence of radio could be the crux of the totalitarian state - an opportunity to broadcast the party line into the homes, workplaces, and private lives of the ordinary Soviet citizen. For men like Stalin, broadcasting offered a mass media forum to unite the vast corners of the Soviet Union and take the Stalinist cult to new heights. Paradoxically, the very nature of radio waves made the medium an opportunity for subversion since complete censorship of outside broadcasts was nearly impossible. Almost anyone with a wireless receiver could gain access to the very information the party was trying to hide and to gain a glimpse of life on the other side of the Iron Curtain. The enormous potential of radio broadcasting in the Soviet Union offers perspective on some of the biggest topics in modern Soviet studies including the maintenance of private life, identity formation, mass media, and the techniques of propaganda and indoctrination.

Despite the significant potential of this field of study, there is a puzzling lack of English-language scholarship. There are no monographs dedicated to Soviet broadcasting. The secondary literature has relegated radio to small passages or chapters in larger works on Soviet media. In the last few decades, most historical research has focused on print media, film, and television. Aside from print, no other medium reached more citizens, so the scholarly concentration on other media seems unfair given the availability and wide application of radio. When broadcasting is studied, it is almost always in the context of the Cold War and the ideological battleground with western radio. In the popular field of Cold War propaganda, western broadcasting for the

expressed purpose of targeting Soviet listeners has seen significant scholarship, while other Soviet periods are relatively untouched by comparison. Part of the problem stems from the lack of available evidence of radio broadcasts. Only a few dozen sound recordings exist. Print and cinema from the Soviet era survive and are relatively available so it is considerably easier for the scholar to focus on these mediums rather than to speculate on radio broadcasting. Still, Soviet studies can certainly benefit from increased attention to both the opportunities and realities of Russian radio.

Despite the lack of English-language scholarship, there have been a few studies undertaken to understand the phenomenon of broadcasting inside the USSR. Published in 1959, Alex Inkeles and Raymond Bauer's *The Soviet Citizen* explores daily life in a totalitarian society. Drawn predominantly from the interviews associated with the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, the authors attempt to piece together major components of postwar society and exposure to mass media is given adequate attention. Radio broadcasting is not the focus of the book but the monograph provides ample quantitative and statistical information regarding exposure to radio and listening trends. The authors bring to life vital information about motivations for using radio as well as what classes and occupations relied on broadcasting. Given the book's early publication and larger concentration on society as a whole, a complete picture of radio is unobtainable especially when discerning the goals and motivations of the Soviet regime.

A decade following Inkeles and Bauer's sociological survey, Gayle Durham Hollander published a study in mass media and its audience in the post-Stalin years. Similar to her predecessors, Hollander's *Soviet Political Indoctrination* uses radio broadcasting only as a way to understand the influence of political agitation and

propaganda. The author's contribution comes by way of her investigations into both sides of broadcasting, the regime and the listener. Statistics provide a window into Soviet listening habits with information demonstrating distinctions in primary vs. secondary listening, peak listening hours, and criticisms of Soviet programming. The book also spends time understanding the extent to which foreign broadcasts were available and consumed by citizens. Again, radio is only a small part of the study's focus and its 1972 publication prevents it from investigating trends in the final two decades of the USSR. The 1970s also saw the publication of Mark Hopkins's *Mass Media in the Soviet Union*. Similar to audience studies completed previous by Alex Inkeles, Hopkins focus is on both print and broadcast media and makes available information that had otherwise been available only in Russian. The monograph provides some of the first information on statistics for radio's first decade as well as the development of the wired loudspeaker network but focuses most heavily on events since the end of World War II. Hopkins provides a fairly balanced study by investigating the motivations and struggles of radiofication on the part of the regime as well as criticisms of listeners. The study recognizes the discrepancy between radio's potential and its implementation. The book is notably detail-oriented and losses sight of broadcasting's impact on culture and offers events only up until the Brezhnev years.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Radio Liberty was conducting informal polling of Soviet tourists to gain hard evidence on the audience for foreign radio. Similar to the Harvard Interview Project, subsequent studies have used that information to compile studies on media and foreign broadcasting's impact on the Russian public. Ellen Propper Mickiewicz's *Media and the Russian Public*, published in 1981, represents one the first

books available to Western audiences offering Soviet-conducted audience research that provided insight into television, radio, movies, theater, newspapers, and public lectures. Mickiewicz provides what is primarily a study into communications where she is intent on exploring exposure to mass media and public opinion. The book offers a wealth of information on programming preferences, listening habits, and statistics on demographics. Frequent comparisons with American media offer a framework in comparing communication systems. Mickiewicz's major assumption is that Soviet media was incapable of satisfying the demands of the public in providing entertainment as well as fostering a youth culture. Using similar information from the 50,000 Radio Liberty surveys, R. Eugene's Parta's 2007, *Discovering the Hidden Listener*, provides an overview of the impact of Western radio with a focus on Radio Liberty. Writing his monograph from the listener's perspective, the author investigates audience size, demographic trends, and other listening habits. While comparatively brief, the book provides interesting charts and graphs in an effort to quantify the experience of foreign broadcasting. Both of these studies are especially revealing though neither has much to say about domestic broadcasting nor radio's earliest years of development prior to World War II.

Without question, foreign radio broadcasting to the Soviet Union represents the greatest source of scholarship on Russian airwaves. Maury Lisann's 1975 *Broadcasting to the Soviet Union* offers an analysis of the reaction of Soviet citizens and their government to foreign broadcasting. The author uses radio to understand feelings towards information media in general and its relation to government policies. A good portion of the monograph deals with Soviet efforts at jamming foreign broadcasts. Official

responses to foreign broadcasts provide an ideal framework for understanding the purpose and methods of the Soviet use of radio. In the last twenty years, former staffers of Western broadcasting stations have written reflections of their time fighting the Cold War over the airways. The 1999 *Sparks of Liberty* by Gene Sosin is an insider's memoir detailing over thirty years working for Radio Liberty. Drawing both from memory and his own collection of papers, Sosin brings to life not only the programming but also the motivations and broadcasting decisions that made Radio Liberty one of the most effective and most regime-hated stations broadcasting into the country. The monograph is especially helpful in understanding the final years of the Soviet Union in an era of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. Despite its successes, the book is vague on audience impact and does not provide needed sources with respect to trends in Soviet listenership.

The last ten years have offered some of the most comprehensive studies on the effects of radio broadcasting inside the Soviet Union and offers hope that increased understanding will continue to develop. Kristin Roth-Ey's *Moscow Primetime*, published in 2011, investigates the Soviet media empire and how it lost the "cultural Cold War." In similar fashion to earlier works, Roth-Ey does not provide an entire monograph dedicated to radio but focuses on the development of film, television, radio, and to a lesser extent, print media, since the 1950s. The author focuses on the explosive growth of radio during this period and the ways it allowed citizens to access the medium privately thus undercutting the collective activity of gathering around outdoor radio loudspeakers. The study spends a great deal of time looking into foreign radio and the regime's largely unsuccessful attempts at jamming the "enemy voices." Facts and figures taken from foreign and domestic sources are also presented and comment on everything from

production figures, to listener preferences, to demographic breakdowns. The author provides an overall look into the changing nature of Soviet broadcasting and the average radio listener all while tying the medium into a larger media empire.

Perhaps the greatest gap in Soviet radio scholarship has been the origins of broadcasting in the earliest days of the regime and up through the Stalin years. While no monographs exist for this period, recent articles by Stephen Lovell have provided helpful coverage. The author's 2011 "How Russia Learned to Listen" and 2013's "Broadcasting Bolshevik" have explored the earliest motivations and struggles facing the regime as the foundations for broadcasting were being established. Lovell has linked radio with established oral agitation networks and its struggles in being recognized as more than just spoken newspaper. Through past studies on public speaking in Russia, Lovell has made interesting comparisons between radio and the Soviet emphasis on effective speaking as a means of inciting mass participation. The author admirably handles a lesser-documented era in radio's history and places the emphasis on party authorities, broadcasters, and to a lesser extent, listeners themselves. The study also provides interesting statistics on the early wired radio network and audience accessibility. Both articles downplay radio's influence on cultural formation beyond the links with Bolshevik-speak and neither traces developments any farther than the conclusion of World War II.

It should be obvious that no study has taken a comprehensive look into the development and impact of radio in the world's first communist nation. This thesis will attempt to fill in these gaps and provide a balanced picture of what radio meant for both the regime and its people. After all, broadcasting offered immense potential for Soviet authorities. Among the enduring problems of Russian history has been the ability to unite

the nation's vast lands. Possessing close to 11.5% of the planet's landmass or around 8,144,000 square miles of country, Russia's incredible size meant that early Bolshevik authorities needed to establish socialism in a land of numerous languages, ethnicities, cultures, and peoples spread across Eurasia. Radio was the first real opportunity to unite listeners from Petrograd to Vladivostok. Broadcasting could also reach those areas that were either cut off by geography or poor transportation. The early Bolshevik period saw the party develop as masters of print culture. The world's first Marxist experiment required the education and mobilization of Russian peasantry and working classes. As sophisticated as newspaper production was, with a population around 160 million, and three-quarters of that number suffering from illiteracy in the early part of the century, many citizens could not be reached through ink and paper. Broadcasting offered the ability to overcome illiteracy as one voice could reach across the airwaves and into the hearts and minds of millions. Radio also fit perfectly into the Soviet culture of educating, mobilizing, and delivering the official worldview. From its early days the party was frequently trying to find ways to shape public opinion and radio was geared to achieving that in a way no other media could.

Despite radio's potential to unite, broadcasting also offered the opportunity to undermine the regime. Soviet media was always known for its strict control of information and highly controlled censors to guarantee the precise flow of news. The problem for early broadcasters was the fact that radio was a "live" medium with potential for slipups or errors in inflection and interpretation. As the number of wireless radio sets grew so did the opportunities listeners had in interacting with the culture on their own terms. The way in which listeners used radio privately was not often what authorities had

in mind. The availability of shortwave sets in particular allowed for the reception of foreign broadcasts. “Enemy voices,” as Soviet authorities called them, broadcasted directly to Soviet audiences and presented a very real threat in the competition for listenership. Outside transmissions often provided more current news than could be heard inside the Soviet Union and thus lured listeners away from central broadcasting. Even when information was not current it generally was news that was being censored inside the USSR or was running contrary to official media sources. Soviet audiences were usually able to connect the dots and realize their media was not offering a complete picture, if they were hiding that information then what else were citizens not being told? While some western stations were indirect about their critique of the Soviet system, others were unabashed about their anti-Soviet stance and deliberately delivered attacks on the regime and propaganda intended to sway listening audiences. The availability of shortwave radio in the Soviet Union opened a window to a world that those in power saw as better left closed.

In looking at the entirety of Russia’s communist years it is obvious that radio broadcasting had always held a dual purpose in the history of the Soviet Union; offering immense potential for authorities and the fulfillment of their goals yet providing a subversive element as the reality for citizens rarely met the vision of the regime. Numerous questions will be considered as this thesis investigates the history and influence of radio broadcasting inside the Soviet Union. Who exactly had access to radio? For what purposes did they listen? How much of its content was believed and what kind of impact did it have? What was the impact of foreign broadcasting? To what extent would listeners have admitted they were tuning into foreign stations? In what way did

these foreign programs run contrary to official transmissions from the party apparatus and thus undermine Soviet propaganda efforts? Were they acts of defiance or simply motivated by curiosity?

This thesis will attempt to understand the impact of radio broadcasting on the country throughout the course of the Soviet regime. Special attention will be focused on the early Bolshevik period and the birth of broadcasting, the growth and development of the medium during the Stalin years, the transformation and importance of radio during the war, post-Stalin liberalization and its effect on broadcasting, the challenge of foreign radio, and radio in the final years of the regime. The history of broadcasting inside the USSR must be understood from the perspective of both the Soviet authorities and the everyday citizen. In separating these two perspectives we are treated with a unique understanding of the potential radio offered, as well as its official goals. We can then place those in juxtaposition to what the reality on the ground was and how impactful these goals were. Radio was an essential feature to 20th century life and came to have enormous impact on the building of nations such as the United States, Great Britain, and Germany. Radio was a perfect fit for the Soviet experiment. The building of the socialist state needed the opportunities broadcasting could provide, opportunities that could effectively make or break this new society.

Chapter 2

Bolshevik Broadcasting: Radio's Early Years in the Soviet Union

“What the press was to the nineteenth century, radio will be to the twentieth.”¹

The quote from Joseph Goebbels was originally intended as a statement of the immense potential broadcasting offered Germany and the building of the Nazi state. Within the Soviet Union it was very obvious that even the earliest Bolsheviks recognized its potential. Lenin himself hailed the possibilities of radio in the 1920s, referring to it as “newspaper without paper and ‘without distances.’”² For the man who brought a communist revolution into the world, broadcasting seemed the perfect fit for educating the masses and uniting the workers from all corners of Russia. Broadcasting would fill the communications gap by delivering information over great distances. Popular ignorance of Marxist-Leninist terminology was an early concern for the Bolsheviks and the effective use of language was integral to building support for party goals. Lenin believed that through educational enrichment the lowest classes would be able to lift themselves from their backwardness and take full stock in building the Soviet state.³ A 1925 party directive made specific mention of the “significant role which radio should play as a powerful means of education and propaganda.”⁴

¹ Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Primetime: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001), page 6.

² Vladimir Lenin, “Letter to M.A. Bonch-Bruyevich,” *Marxists Internet Archive*, accessed June 1, 2014, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/feb/05mabb.htm>.

³ James Von Geldern, *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays, and Folklore, 1917 – 1953* (Indiana University Press, 1995), xvi.

⁴ Mark W. Hopkins, *Mass Media in the Soviet Union* (New York: Pegasus, 1970), 244.

Motivations and Potential of Soviet Broadcasting

Culture was a weapon of class struggle and radio was a way to develop that culture and remake the consciousness of the citizen. The Bolsheviks had learned from both the revolution and the civil war the value of mass media and its partisan implications. Seeking to deny the opposition access to public opinion, the party established a state monopoly over agents of cultural dissemination including movie houses, printing presses, and theaters – broadcasting stations fit right into this fold.⁵ Published later than the focus of this chapter, the following excerpt from an article appearing in *Pravda* dated May 7, 1953, encapsulates the vision for radio:

Radio broadcasts in our country must bring to the masses the all-victorious ideas of Marxism-Leninism, the ideas of Soviet patriotism and proletarian internationalism. They must have an active role in the communist education of the Soviet people, in the propaganda of the advanced experience of industry and agriculture, in politically informing the population and in popularizing the achievements of Soviet culture, science, and technology.⁶

Radio was to be the medium to facilitate the education and inspiring of the masses through the doctrine of Marxism. In many ways, radio was an extension of the oral agitation network developed shortly following the Bolshevik coup. Professional propagandists were sent out to inspire and mobilize the Russian people into creating the new society; these agitators were most responsible for bringing the party message across the country.

While the Bolsheviks were masters of the printed word, newspapers could only take the message so far. The voice of agitators could supplement the papers by appealing to those who could not read and offering further explanations to those who could. Lenin

⁵ Von Geldern, *Mass Culture*, xi.

⁶ Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 18, vol. 5, June 1953, p. 18-19.

believed that good speakers were made and not born; these were individuals who could read the relevant party congress resolutions, speak directly, and avoided tones of haughty arrogance.⁷ Stephen Kotkin's *Magnetic Mountain* coined the idea of "speaking Bolshevik," the process of turning the new communist verbiage into political discourse. Historian Stephen Lovell argues that radio, in a similar tradition, continued the trend of "broadcasting Bolshevik."⁸ The airwaves were a fitting place to familiarize the Soviet people with the language and ideas of the party and imbue society with the new identity of *Homo sovieticus*. The revolutionary period had placed a premium on the ability to effectively communicate through speech. This was one of the principle ways by which to establish communist discourse and work to elicit popular participation at the same time. It was not too much of a stretch to see radio broadcasting as a natural successor to this oral agitation network.

Early Problems of Radiofication

Russian naval transmissions represent the first use of broadcasting in the nation but radio would soon make the transition over to the civilian sector.⁹ Most of the earliest radios in the Soviet Union were made to deliver broadcasts along a wired network. Broadcasts would be sent through the airwaves, picked up by a relay station and then sent along a diffusion network made up of telegraph lines to public amplifiers (*radiotochki*). The Soviet Union was largely connected by this wired loudspeaker network until the

⁷ Stephen Lovell, "Broadcasting Bolshevik: The Radio Voice of Soviet Culture, 1920s – 1950s" *Journal of Contemporary History* 48, no. 78 (2013): 82.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁹ Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 81.

1950s and it would not be until 1963 that wireless set (*priemniki*) numbers would surpass those of wired speakers. For the Soviet regime, wired sets offered certain advantages over their freestanding cousins. Since these sets received signals that were relayed across telegraph lines and into a loudspeaker, listeners were unable to control the station or alter the reception of the broadcast signal. This was especially beneficial for Soviet authorities, as citizens had no choice but to hear the official worldview of the party. In many ways wired sets operated more along the lines of a public address system than a radio in the modern sense of the word, delivering news or updates without the listener's ability to change channels or switch off.

The early wired network certainly shaped the culture of listening and impacted broadcasting trends for years to come. One of the most important trends was the access to broadcasts and who was listening. The relay network was hindered by the technological availability of the day. Loudspeakers generally were limited to areas where both electric and communication lines were available; in most cases this favored urban over rural areas. The process of electrification was a major goal of the early Bolsheviks though bringing electricity to the whole of Russia was an enormous task that would take years to complete and thus this radio relay network was subsequently stymied. This was not the only hindrance as wired sets also relied on available equipment and expertise that were chronically in short supply. Electrification was never much of a concern for the agricultural establishment and electrical engineers faced more interesting challenges than connecting distant villages.¹⁰ As would be the case in so much of Soviet history this meant that whole areas of the nation's countryside went unconnected and remained

¹⁰ Jonathan Coopersmith, *The Electrification of Russia, 1880 – 1926* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 167.

unaware of broadcasting technologies. Ironically, the lack of electricity often coincided with areas of highest illiteracy. As these amplifiers functioned more in the realm of public address systems, collective listening became the cultural norm. The average listener did not have an amplifier in their home, and in most cases they appeared in public places such as town centers, inside factories, or on farms where electricity was available. For much of the early days of broadcasting, listening was a communal activity with Soviet citizens huddled around an amplifier. In other industrialized nations, radio was considerably more developed by the 1920s and had become a standard item of furniture for many households. That kind of independent availability was turning Western radio into a more intimate experience in contrast to the Soviet Union where it would remain a collective activity until after the war. Such an activity was also very much along the lines of the kind of camaraderie and popular shared participation that the regime was attempting to foster.¹¹

Early Successes

The early years of Soviet broadcasting were not without their successes, many of which were in some ways impressive given the state of the country following the civil war and the challenges of building the communist state. The party understood the potential and even developed commissions to explore the progress of radio technology in foreign countries. By the mid to late 1920s, foreign companies were being consulted on developing Russia's transmission technologies. Firms such as Westinghouse, RCA, and the General Wireless Telegraph Company of Paris were exchanging patents and offering

¹¹ Lovell, *Listen*, 601.

technical assistance.¹² By 1928, thirty-six foreign firms were engaged in giving necessary radio support to the Soviet Union.¹³ Much of the earliest developments actually came from ham radio operators. This type of grassroots enthusiasm was used by the Bolsheviks to advance radiofication, and in 1923 the Society of Radio Lovers was created. The build-your-own style of radio development was well within the Soviet concept of ingenuity over obstacles. In the words of Stephen Lovell, “radio hams, in the Soviet Union as elsewhere, were almost by definition self-motivated loners for whom the pursuit of new frequencies and the quest to transmit over ever greater distances stood far above the spread of popular enlightenment.”¹⁴ Among the most exciting achievements for these radio amateurs was to receive broadcasts from the United States, an early sign of the interest in life outside the Soviet Union. Before authorities lost control over access to information, authorities criminalized the use of unregistered radio equipment by 1924.¹⁵

The first broadcasting station opened in 1922 but the first public broadcast was not made until 1924. Over the next ten years, the number of stations continued to rise with 23 stations in 1929, 60 stations in 1932, and 90 stations by 1933.¹⁶ Much of these later numbers can easily be associated with the expansion of industry and infrastructure under Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan. The wired relay network was not the only form of broadcasting in the Soviet Union as wireless transistor radios were introduced in much more modest numbers. Owning a transistor radio was a status symbol and would remain so until the 1960s. Members of the communist party were often among the privileged few

¹² “Soviet Ratifies Radio Contract,” *New York Times* (1857-1922) 15 September 1923, accessed February 4, 2014, <http://www.proquest.com>.

¹³ “Radio Communication With Russia Forecast,” *New York Times* (1857-1922) 22 August 1928, accessed February 4, 2014, <http://www.proquest.com>.

¹⁴ Lovell, *Listen*, 600.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Hopkins, *Mass Media*, 246.

that were able to afford or have access to wireless sets. Radio, for many citizens, was the perfect symbol of modernity and the progress of the Soviet state.

Radio offered the opportunity to bring Soviet philosophy and ideology to the masses. The first live direct broadcast came on November 7, 1925 during the 8th anniversary of the Revolution. While most of the speeches from that day had already been broadcast and would appear in print, this broadcast offered insight into how the capital was “abuzz and enjoying itself.”¹⁷ Listeners could hear the sounds of bells and military maneuvers as the announcer verbally painted a picture of the hanging tapestries, the marble busts of Lenin and Marx, as well as the joyous expressions on the face of the crowd as the parade moves along.

Comrades, we’re coming up on Red Square. What a tremendous stream of people. A mighty, great power, the power of October, is moving this stream. There are no sad or cloudy faces. The holiday belongs to all workers; they feel close to it and have a heartfelt understanding of it. A holiday for workers and their children... We are next to Lenin’s tomb. A megaphone booms: “Long live the worldwide victory of workers!” The little red flag quivers, and the proletarian tot yells in a bell-like little voice: “Hurrah!”¹⁸

This form of live commentary would be important in future May Day and Revolution Day celebrations and key parts of the radio calendar. Scenes such as this brought listeners into far off events in ways never before imagined. Broadcasts showed the party for the first time the ability of radio to allow for popular participation. In the past, *Pravda* could write up descriptions or publish pictures of events like this but radio could make every listener feel as if they too had taken part, these shared experiences had the opportunity to foster a sense of closeness between people in ways never before imagined.

¹⁷ “Radio-Newspaper Correspondence Report No. 285,” in von Geldern, *Mass Culture*, 114.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 115 – 116.

Despite the preponderance of news and information programs, the majority of airtime was devoted to music. Classical music and opera were in the same spirit of the cultural and educational enrichment Lenin had hoped would lift the masses out of ignorance. The first radio concert premiered in 1922 and would only continue to grow along with the expansion of public broadcasting. Alongside music, radio programs were also becoming more class specific. By 1926, separate programs for workers and peasant audiences were being introduced.¹⁹ The party recognized the ability of radio to target and appeal to the unique interests and conditions of these two halves of the Soviet economy. It was already showing signs of being a vehicle by which to unite Russian labor behind the goals of the state.

Despite enormous success, radio broadcasting in the early Soviet period was not without its problems. As mentioned earlier, the task of making radio broadcasting available to the majority of citizens was not an easy task. The process of radiofication required a rather large investment of money, technology, and resources – all which would have been in chronic short supply in the first decade of Soviet rule. The civil war did not end until 1922 and when it did, the extent of devastation was overwhelming and economic recovery was certainly a long way off. As mentioned earlier, one of the biggest issues impeding radiofication were early efforts at electrification and the substantial barriers it offered to establishing a vast wired network. Soviet energy production throughout the 1920s was only one-twentieth of the United States and by 1928 only 92,000 receivers existed in the whole of the Soviet Union. Almost all of these receivers

¹⁹ Lovell, “Broadcasting Bolshevik,” 83.

could be found in cities where one-sixth of the country's population lived.²⁰ Russia's problems with reaching its rural audience would continue until long after the Stalin years. Even in these areas where broadcasting was delivered, the peasants' unfamiliarity with radio proved a major obstacle. People had to be convinced that an amplifier broadcasting a disembodied voice was worth their time.

Oddly enough, one of the greatest hurdles facing early radio was deciding what purpose the medium would serve. Even before the advent of radio, Soviet authorities had a difficult time deciding whether the spoken word would best serve oratorical or information purposes. Were agitators speaking in order to inspire or to inform their listeners so how much natural speaking talent was needed? Radio, as a form of mass culture, had another difficult question implicit in its broadcasts. Was the medium operating in such a way as to edify, inform, or to entertain? The dilemma of finding the appropriate balance would be a considerable way off and had no real answer in the earliest days of Russian broadcasting.

Just as Lenin had originally seen the potential of radio to bring newspaper-like information to the people, so did many others who could originally only understand broadcasting in the context of a spoken newspaper. The technology was so new and its purpose so similar to printed news it is hard to imagine that many people would have seen radio as an art form or a medium in its own right. Some were seeing broadcasting as an extant of agitation and more along the lines of a "glorified loudspeaker."²¹ As the first broadcast announced on November 23, 1924 noted, "radio newspaper is the most live newspaper in the world. It is written in lively conversational language. It consists of

²⁰ Hopkins, *Mass Media*, 246.

²¹ Lovell, "Broadcasting Bolshevik," 83.

lively short articles. And lively short announcements. Anyone who picks up the receiver of their radio set will listen through the end. And they'll find out about all the most important political and other events."²² Along these same lines, "radio wall newspapers" had a similar methodology. Inside a workplace, one person would be charged with listening to a full TASS report and then write down the main points to display for the other comrades.²³ Many listeners complained of the sheer redundancy as radio was often reporting the same information as was appearing in the papers and being discussed in worker meetings. Without an understanding of radio's special qualities it became difficult to be able to overcome written language. Listeners were having a hard time listening to large texts on a single theme and getting bogged down with statistical information. In combination with electrification issues, equating radio with the printed word was the greatest obstacle toward radio growth.²⁴

The earliest problems not only involved misunderstandings on the part of the regime and the listener but also on the radio broadcaster as well. In its infancy, broadcasting authorities had difficulty deciding how news and information should be presented and whether radio announcing was a skill unto itself. Reflecting the Bolshevik emphasis on effective communication and impactful speaking, some of the earliest announcers were actually Russian actors brought in to read the news, many of who came from the Moscow Arts Theatre.²⁵ Even these individuals seasoned with reading from a script had difficulty finding their voice. It took time trying to find the balance between projection and conversational language and some struggled with feeling any type of

²² Quoted in *ibid.*, 83.

²³ Lovell, *Listen*, 606.

²⁴ Hopkins, *Mass Media*, 245.

²⁵ Lovell, "Broadcasting Bolshevik," 84.

audience connection when broadcasting in an empty room. Were announcers considered readers, actors, or something else entirely? Broadcasters were also faced with a bevy of glitches given the inadequacy of technical support in the early years. Without the ability to pre-record, radio was very much a live medium in its early years where slipups, incorrect pronunciations, errors in intonation and other aired mistakes were not uncommon.

Radio seems to have been a source of great anxiety for a party that strove for unblemished authority. Even when broadcasting music, radio workers simply placed a gramophone next to the microphone, while scraping chairs and footsteps could be heard during the broadcast. The consequences of such mistakes sometimes lead to arrests. Due in large part to strict government censors, many announcers complained that they were given scripts too late to adequately prepare for broadcasts. It was estimated by one radio worker that 90% of all mistakes stemmed from poor editing and the lack of preparation time needed to spot such errors.²⁶ All in all, radio workers complained that they were under too much pressure and were both underpaid and overworked. In Gorkii, far from a major metropolitan area like Moscow, the production schedule included two daily news broadcasts of thirty minutes each, two agitprop programs of thirty-five minutes each, one survey of local newspapers for fifteen minutes, twenty minute youth programs that were broadcast three times a week, as well as weekly and monthly musical and literary programs. The Gorkii station had just fifty-eight employees, most with less than a year of radio experience.

²⁶ Ibid., 85.

If broadcasting resources around urban areas were poor, then in the countryside it could only be described as embarrassing for Soviet authorities. One of the biggest problems of radio outside the Russian heartland was finding competent staff in these remote regions. Editing texts in local languages proved to be one of the greatest obstacles outside of the inadequacy of local resources. Many of these stations were simple wooden shacks, where often the greatest qualification for broadcasting was just being literate. Radio schedules in the 1920s made few concessions to rural populations and the programming from Moscow Central spoke for these peripheral settlements. Not only was this a result of underdeveloped resources but likely a way to end the cultural divide between the city and countryside. The socialist society needed a uniform culture as variations implied ideological unorthodoxy in the eyes of party. In the words of James von Geldern, “the disappearance of autonomous environments meant that local cultural production was replaced by centralized institutions. Cities, towns, and villages in the center and the provinces heard and saw approximately the same thing, aided by new expanse-shrinking technologies – foremost the radio.”²⁷

Conclusion

From the earliest days of public broadcasting to the transition to Stalinist rule, the development of radio inside the Soviet Union was slow and uneven at best. The audience was small due in large part to the obstacles in the way of radiofication and the geographical challenges of Russia. Wired speakers were largely confined to public squares and “red corners” inside factories, although they were designed to target large

²⁷ Von Geldern, *Mass Culture*, xvi.

groups of listeners, they inevitably made listening for any great length of time difficult. With wireless transistor radios still operating as more of a luxury item and a few decades away from mass availability, radio audiences remained low. The collective nature of listening meant that news and information would only be heard during the very limited free time available to workers. Given the relative novelty and lack of broadcasting experience, authorities recognized the potential but did not commit the technological resources or provide the education necessary to make the medium fully realized.

Historian Mark Hopkins believes that radio was too young at this stage to draw the full support of Soviet political leadership.²⁸ As radio struggled to find its place in its first few years, it fell back on the familiar and functioned more as the “newspaper without the paper” that Lenin had originally envisioned. The redundancy of hearing and reading the same news would be a significant impediment for growing the interest in domestic broadcasting for the next few decades. While the reality of what radio could be at this early period was not fully realized, the vision for radio’s potential is certainly discernable at this time. By the 1930s the country was fully in the grips of Stalin’s economic and social revolution and, like much of the nation, radio’s purpose would be redefined. With war also looming on the horizon, the next three decades would prove decisive for the future of Soviet broadcasting.

²⁸ Hopkins, *Mass Media*, 246.

Chapter 3

Radio's "Revolution from Above:" Soviet Broadcasting in the Stalin Years

The decades of the 1930s and 1940s represent a period of fundamental change in the history of the Soviet Union. The nation redefined its reputation as a cultural and economic backwater and repositioned itself as a world power capable of repelling the armies of Adolf Hitler and shaping the postwar world. The reforms associated with Stalin's "revolution from above" brought Russia a second revolution that hastened some of the greatest economic and social change seen in the 20th century. Broadcasting found itself once again in the middle of the party's new vision. Though this vision would take a backseat as the country was thrown into the grips of the Great Patriotic War and radio was called on to unite the nation. Party propaganda and traditional censorship rules were relaxed so as to bring both comfort and hope all while invoking the patriotism necessary to counter the fascist invasion of the motherland. While the earliest years of Soviet broadcasting were uneven and slowed by a lack of familiarity, the expansion and acceleration of broadcasting changes represent a new chapter in radio's long history, though a chapter filled with successes and failures.

The Expansion of Broadcasting

Despite the significant changes radio would undergo in the Stalin years, the period began with significant obstacles. With the Soviet regime firmly established in the 1920s and the greater availability of newspapers (*Pravda*, *Izvestia*, and numerous local papers), print became the dominant means of information dissemination by the communist regime. Radio was still in its infancy and the print culture was more familiar

and well established. Stephen Lovell argues that public speaking had lost its charismatic origins by the Stalinist period as the printed word came to represent orthodox scripture; for all intents and purposes, what appeared in Soviet newspapers was to be accepted as truth.²⁹ Official governmental and party positions were spelled out first in print and reinforced through speech as needed. Citizens who had access to radio were wise to keep up with print culture even if that meant reading between the lines. The vast majority of respondents from the Harvard Interview Project who admitted listening to radio also said they kept up with at least one other national or local paper. Despite this preference for the printed word, Soviet authorities still invested significant resources into the expansion of radio broadcasting. As part of the industrial reforms that came along with the First Five-Year Plan, by 1932, the power of radio transmissions had been augmented eight times since radio's introduction and the number of broadcasting stations had doubled to ninety.³⁰ By 1940, the number of radio receivers had increased nearly seven times to 7 million including both wired and wireless sets. Of that figure, only 1.6 million were in the countryside, which represents a notable increase over the previous period but one that continued to show the challenges of reaching Russia's rural population. The audience for radio at this time was likely over 10 million due in large part to the collective nature of radio listening.³¹

Radio became a mass medium for the first time in the 1930s. Radio's equation with progress and modernity continued through this period as well. The ability to own a

²⁹ Stephen Lovell, "Broadcasting Bolshevik: The Radio Voice of Soviet Culture, 1920s – 1950s" *Journal of Contemporary History* 48, no. 78 (2013): page 79.

³⁰ James W. Markham, *Voices of the Red Giants: Communications in Russia and China* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1967), 76.

³¹ Mark W. Hopkins, *Mass Media in the Soviet Union* (New York: Pegasus, 1970), 246.

wireless set was often a status symbol and many citizens expressed disappointment in not being able to own a radio. In describing a friend of his, the diary of Andrei Stepanovich Arzhilovsky dated November 13, 1936 saw “sign(s) of prosperity everywhere, a coat lined with expensive fur, two new pairs of felt boots... Life for them indeed has gotten better and happier; the radio blares right into your ear, keeping you posted about the latest events in the world.”³² Wireless radios were still rare for much of the 1930s as sets themselves were out of the price range of the average Russian worker. Ownership of sets seems to have been limited to military officials, the NKVD, technicians and other specialists, party officials, managers of big plants, and the chairmen of the local raikon / obkom. Citizens lucky enough to own their own wireless set had to register their radio with the NKVD at the local post office.³³ Wireless and wired sets could increasingly be found throughout the Soviet Union especially in public areas and various clubrooms of universities, collectives, and gulags to name a few. Radios were traditionally a principal source of entertainment in smaller towns that lacked other amenities like movies and stadiums. What does seem clear is that it was pretty hard to escape radio or at least the loudspeaker by 1949.

Soviet Broadcasting in International Context

The growth of broadcasting in Russia throughout the 1930s was very much in line with its development in other industrial states; still, a comparative look reveals some of the unique challenges of the Soviet Union. Radio in Nazi Germany makes one of the best

³² Andrei Stepanovich Arzhilovsky in Veronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen, eds. *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930's* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 122.

³³ Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule A, Vol. 9, Case 121 (interviewer M.F., type A4). Male, 27, Ukrainian, Turner. Widener Library, Harvard University.

comparisons as both states were increasingly centered on totalitarian rule with similar propaganda and mobilization needs. German officials had become convinced of the power of propaganda after falling behind on that front in World War I. Unlike the Soviet Union, German broadcasting was not introduced by the state, rather it was a loosely knit network of independent regional companies in which Berlin had only marginal political influence.³⁴ In 1932, German radio was nationalized under Franz von Papen in an attempt to provide pro-government broadcasts at a time when the Weimar Republic's legitimacy and support was at a definite low point. Hitler also recognized the potential of radio to support the regime and subsequently developed one of the most sophisticated broadcasting networks. In March 1933, Hitler specifically mentioned radio as necessary for reaching the population for war measures, citing its ability to "mold the character and will of the German nation and train a new political type."³⁵ In this way German and Russian motivations were very much the same.

Despite the similarities in the ideologies of broadcasting, the reality of the situation for each country was very different. By the 1930s, the Russian broadcasting system was still operating on the very beginning of radio technology whereas the Nazis had inherited a sophisticated working system. The Volkempfänger (people's set) was an inexpensive radio set made for mass-market audiences as both the price and technological sophistication persuaded average Germans to purchase these sets; licensing fees were also kept low for a similar reason. Between August 1933 and July 1934, 37 percent of all radios sold in Germany were people's sets and the Nazi party found a direct voice into

³⁴ Horst J.P. Bergmeier and Rainer E. Lotz, *Hitler's Airwaves: The Inside Story of Nazi Radio Broadcasting and Propaganda Swing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

the private lives of its citizens.³⁶ As a result of these developments, wireless sets became a common household item in Germany by 1937 in a way that Soviet sets would not be until the early 1960s. Wireless radios in Russia were fairly expensive and predominately seen as a luxury item; on average, most sets cost anywhere between 700 – 1,500 rubles. One citizen who owned a “Minsk” set (offering 4 bands: two shortwave, one medium wave, and one long wave) cost him around 1,000 rubles adding up to about two months salary not accounting for the cost of food.³⁷ More expensive sets such as the “Neva” model could run upwards of 2,600 rubles, far out of the price range for almost all ordinary workers. Purchasing a wireless radio usually meant sacrificing other things such as buying new shoes. One citizen reported buying a radio over a suit (the respondent felt he was too old and no longer handsome enough to justify the purchase).³⁸

The Soviet preference for collective listening meant that wired sets were still the preferred medium and the one most available to the masses. In place of freestanding sets, wired reproducers could be installed in a home for considerably less money. Loudspeakers were usually installed for 25 rubles per line and between 3 – 5 rubles a month for its use. This was common for foreign citizens living in the Soviet Union as they were not allowed to own a radio but could have a reproducer installed instead.³⁹ The drawback to this would undoubtedly be the listener’s inability to choose what they were hearing. Horst Bergmeier and Rainer Lotz argue that German Propaganda Minister

³⁶ Ibid., 9.

³⁷ Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule A, Vol. 9, Case 121 (interviewer M.F., type A4). Male, 27, Ukrainian, Turner. Widener Library, Harvard University.

³⁸ Harvard Project. Schedule B, Vol. 13, Case 121 (Special interview about the "Voice of America" by M.F.). Widener Library, Harvard University.

³⁹ Harvard Project. Schedule A, Vol. 35, Case 96/(NY)1493 (interviewer A.S., type A4). Male, 43, Great Russian, Engineer-economist. Widener Library, Harvard University.

Goebbels may have deserved the Soviet-style of wired uniformity.⁴⁰ Alas, such a network was never established but it certainly can be argued that Germany was more effective at reaching a greater number of people in the end. The year Hitler would be named Chancellor (1933), there were an estimated 4.3 million receivers and with Nazi policies that number doubled the next year. By 1941, there were around 15 million sets reaching some 50 million listeners.⁴¹

By 1936, German broadcasting was significantly ahead of all other countries in terms of technology, equipment, staff numbers, and expertise, and as a result the Soviet Union certainly seemed backwards by comparison.⁴² If Russian broadcasting was placed in the context of another communist and formerly agricultural state like China, the observations are certainly more kind. Chinese broadcasting did not begin in earnest until 1945, substantially later than most other countries. The task of trying to communicate with the whole of the nation was very similar to the obstacles facing the early Bolsheviks in the 1920s. China's large population, vast distances, relative economic backwardness, low consumer buying power, and rampant illiteracy all mirror the Soviet experience and reflect similar motivations behind the expansion of broadcasting. Similar to German development, Chinese radio consisted of eighty-three stations in 1950 that all were slowly absorbed by the state.⁴³ Both China and Russia faced shortages of equipment, electronic manufacturing, and personnel. For similar reasons, the Chinese communist government placed resources into the building of the wired network. The collective listening element was an attractive prospect for a government that valued peasant over

⁴⁰ Bergmeier, *Hitler's Airwaves*, 7.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴³ Markham, *Voices*, 363.

industrial labor and envisioned a future of state-run collectivized farms with an emphasis on the communal life of the farmers. The communist party required peasants to visit community auditoriums to listen to broadcasts for these very reasons.⁴⁴ The Soviet recognition of the power of radio to fulfill propaganda needs was also a hallmark of Chinese broadcasting. Chou Yang, Chinese deputy minister of the Propaganda Department, argued, “broadcasting should promote the propaganda of the Great Leap Forward. Radio broadcasting must carry out propaganda for agriculture and industry... Broadcasting is allowed to criticize but its primary function is to encourage.”⁴⁵ This statement is precisely the same rhetoric we see used in providing agitation and mobilization of Soviet labor for supporting Stalin’s economic and social reforms.

China’s difficulty in reaching its rural population was an all too familiar problem for the Soviets as well. As in the previous period, electrification remained one of the greatest barriers to radiofication in the countryside. Despite the obstacles, the number of sets available to the peasants (mostly in the form of wired reproducers) rose from 650,000 in 1936 to over 1.3 million in 1947.⁴⁶ While the doubling of available radios represents a substantial increase, it remains a paltry figure given the size of Russia’s rural population. The average kolkhoznik could not afford to purchase a radio even if they were to work their entire life. Unlike Mao’s China, Stalin placed significant resources into building Russia’s industrial working class at the expense of the peasantry and this seems especially obvious when we consider the inability of radio to reach the Soviet countryside. When it came to reaching the villages and shaping the opinions of the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 363 – 364.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 401.

⁴⁶ Alex Inkeles and Raymond Augustine Bauser, *The Soviet Citizen: Daily Life in a Totalitarian Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 171.

kolkhoz, peasants were more influenced by oral agitation than radio broadcasting. As long as the resources dedicated to radiofication were confined to major urban areas, the villages would continue to remain outside the pale of broadcasting.

Musical Content

Throughout the 1930s, the basic structure of radio broadcasting remained much the same as it had in the previous decade. News, which was highly propagandized, and music comprised the general format of Soviet broadcasting with small additions added on occasion. The recognition of radio as a cultural apparatus was becoming realized throughout this period. In 1935, Rose Ziglin, Director of the International Bureau of the Committee for Radiofication and Broadcasting in Moscow, published an article detailing the success of radio inside of the Soviet Union as well as the vision for radio's potential. In her own words, "radio broadcasting brings the toilers close to the social and political life of the country, and interests them in music, literature, art and science."⁴⁷ In the same tradition of Lenin's cultural enrichment of the masses, music remained the bulk of airtime and continued to be one of the major motivations for listening to radio. In 1928, music accounted for 96 percent of all broadcasting with news and speeches rounding out the rest of the time.⁴⁸ Operas and classical music continued to be the majority of music played over radio and with the invention of recording capabilities, live performances and plays could be recorded and then broadcast at a later date; some operas would last up to two and a half hours.

⁴⁷ Rose Ziglin, "Radio Broadcasting in the Soviet Union" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 177 (1935), 66, <http://jstor.org>.

⁴⁸ Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 82.

Despite the predominance of classical music, most listeners preferred popular or folk music. Jazz, which was especially popular in many western nations, was officially censored inside the Soviet Union in lieu of its label as “bourgeois eroticism.”⁴⁹ Proletarian composers attempted to create substitutes by creating songs for workers and collectivized farmers but they rarely caught on. Following the success of the First Five Plan, the subsequent celebrations saw a restoration of celebrity, officer ranks, and other signs of privilege – one of these being jazz. The “Red Jazz Age” lasted from 1932 to 1936 and produced huge radio hits such as “Katyusha” and “Over Hill and Dale” both by the peasant-born Lydia Ruslanova. Interests in American-style dance and other jazz styles came to replace the “mass song” that was promoted just a few years earlier. This remained the case until the period of the purges where such music could easily be linked with subversion and western leaning. From this period up until the war, mass song and more traditional dance music would reign supreme. Moscow Central even possessed its own symphony orchestra, two choruses, and one folk orchestra.⁵⁰ Musical interest and appreciation were important to audiences, making up 60 percent of listener reasons for tuning into radio broadcasts.⁵¹

Specialized broadcasts

In her report on the growth of Soviet broadcasting, Rose Ziglin argued that, “the immense growth of the cultural demands of the population since the Revolution makes

⁴⁹ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 82.

⁵¹ Ziglin, “Radio Broadcasting,” 66.

the radio one of the most important instrumentalities of the cultural revolution.”⁵² For this reason radio was not just limited to music and news but instead operated in such a way as to appeal to various interests and different subgroups in Soviet society. As was previously noted in the last decade, broadcasts were already becoming specific to the special needs of labor. Ziglin herself mentions the broadcasts that are prepared for the kolkhoz, noting that a one-hour daily broadcast is dedicated to literature, agrotechnical information, and news about current campaigns.⁵³ Farmers were not the only ones to have pieces of literature read to them over the air. Most broadcasts around the country contained some form of theatrical performances or serialized and condensed novels recorded by readers’ brigades, including the adventure tales of foreign authors such as H.G. Wells and Jules Verne. Educational programs often aired to appeal to a variety of interests on topics as diverse as natural science, psychology, art history, party/current politics, mathematics, physics, and travel, to name a few. Musical education programs began with a lecture on music appreciation and a talk with Soviet composers.⁵⁴ To encourage physical education and fitness, a morning sport program got listeners to stand up, count, and do exercises.⁵⁵ Any of these programs were seen by the regime as “serving the cultural needs of the toilers and establishing for them a pleasant, sensible recreation.”⁵⁶

Children were also an audience in which Soviet authorities saw as important enough to develop special broadcasts. These programs attempted to appeal to children based on the issues of contemporary youth and in Ziglin’s words, to “devote attention to

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 67.

⁵⁴ James von Geldern, “Radio Moscow: Voice from the Center” in Richard Stites, *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 46.

⁵⁵ Harvard Project. Schedule A, Vol. 5, Case 51 (interviewer E.H., type A3). Female, 30, Great Russian, Accountant/assistant bookkeeper. Widener Library, Harvard University.

⁵⁶ Ziglin, “Radio Broadcasting,” 71-72.

new ethics and morality.”⁵⁷ Often broadcasting in the early morning, broadcasts for preschool-aged children featured fairy tales and other stories usually with accompanying musical backgrounds.⁵⁸ As children got older there were other programs created that strengthened and supplemented what was being learned in school or were designed to develop inventive interests and foster creativity. Personalities such as “Professor Brainteaser” challenged students to think outside the box while other programs thrilled schoolchildren with stories of spies and other excitement. Most of these programs were broadcast for an hour and usually twice a day. For orphans, radio offered a link with a society in which they had never been fully a part. As one child put it, “our ‘window on the world’ was the classroom, the Pioneers, the radio in the red corner, and [the newspaper] ‘Pioneer’s Truth.’”⁵⁹ Even though these programs appealed to listener interests beyond the more traditional TASS-censored information, it nevertheless was heavily controlled and broadcast for specific reasons. Ziglin believed that:

The close cooperation of the radio commission with the governmental organs on the one hand, and its close association with the masses of radio listeners on the other hand, aid the radio commissions in fulfilling their responsible duties in the cause of lifting the cultural standard of the toiling masses to a higher place and educating the population of the Soviet Union in the spirit of conscious builders of a new, classless society.⁶⁰

The rhetoric here harkens back to Lenin’s emphasis on culture and its links with public enlightenment. Without public opinion polling it is difficult to know whether these programs appealed to the interests of the average listener or simply failed to draw in audiences.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 68.

⁵⁸ Harvard Project. Schedule A, Vol. 14, Case 258 (interviewer J.B., type A4). Female, 24, Great Russian (father Polish, mother Russian), Student. Widener Library, Harvard University.

⁵⁹ Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin’s Russia* (New York: Picador, 2007), 117.

⁶⁰ Ziglin, “Radio Broadcasting,” 72.

News and Information

Despite the preponderance of music and other cultural programs, the broadcasting of news and information perhaps remains the most important aspect of Soviet radio. While broadcasting was still defining itself in the 1930s, radio remained a major vehicle for official policies and the communist worldview. According to historian Mark Hopkins, under Stalin the Soviet people were a “gray and malleable mass” to be “sculpted by the press.”⁶¹ Very much like print sources, radio had to be listened to with a critical ear if one wanted to gain an understanding of the truth and this usually meant reading in between the lines. As one expatriate put it, “First, if the paper says that something is white, he is almost sure that it is black. Second, he asks himself the question, ‘why are the authorities telling me this?’”⁶² The overwhelming majority of respondents who lived under the Stalinist system and were interviewed as part of the Harvard Interview Project noted their inherent mistrust of radio news and information. In most cases, listeners could recognize the discrepancy between what was being reported and the reality around them. The same respondent quoted earlier admitted that he listened to the speeches of Stalin over the radio in order to get a sense of which way the government was leaning and to become acquainted with official policies but turned the radio off whenever minor officials or other news was aired.⁶³ Hopkins argued that “trust” and “belief” were the greatest losses suffered by the press during the Stalin years.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Hopkins, *Mass Media*, 310.

⁶² Harvard Project. Schedule A, Vol. 33, Case 338/(NY)1390 (interviewer G.A., type A4). Male, 52, Great Russian, Buyer of materials and supplies for factories. Widener Library, Harvard University.

⁶³ Harvard Project. Schedule B, Vol. 13, Case 121 (Special interview about the "Voice of America" by M.F.). Widener Library, Harvard University.

⁶⁴ Hopkins, *Mass Media*, 339.

Systematic listening to Soviet radio often revealed more information than reading the paper as it flat out spoke about subjects not mentioned in newspapers. It may have been that it was safer for the regime to broadcast information rather than put it into print where it would be on file and hanging around in a library or archive.⁶⁵ Big campaigns, those with a political basis, were usually spelled out over newspapers whereas smaller ones, such as the coordination of spare parts for industry, were broadcast over radio.⁶⁶ Another interviewee complained that listeners never knew the programs ahead of time, which meant that he had to sit through “propaganda speeches” while waiting for a good program to air.⁶⁷ For these reasons many former Soviet citizens declared radio to be immensely boring, droning on about subjects of little interest to most listeners. This was a notorious problem with the wired loudspeakers, as listeners had no way of changing the station or, in some cases, unable to turn it off entirely. City loudspeakers announced production figures for the kolkhoz and other propaganda figures about the recent harvest. In other cases, loudspeakers installed in the home were often connected with the factory receiving set; bringing the same information meant for the workplace into one’s living space.⁶⁸

Audience studies conducted during the 1920s disappeared under the traditional and more conservative policies of Stalin along with most forms of sociological research. There were not any public opinion polls on listener interests; radio was by-and-large a one-way form of communication.⁶⁹ The only forms of audience studies were in the form

⁶⁵ Harvard Project. Schedule B, Vol. 4, Case 403 (interviewer J.B.). Widener Library, Harvard University.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Harvard Project. Schedule A, Vol. 33, Case 338/(NY)1390 (interviewer G.A., type A4). Male, 52, Great Russian, Buyer of materials and supplies for factories. Widener Library, Harvard University.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Hopkins, *Mass Media*, 313.

of mass observation of crowd response to public loudspeakers by party authorities. Broadcasts destined for the factory were specifically designed to stimulate higher production and radio was recruited for the First Five-Year Plan to assist Stalin's call for rapid industrialization. Workplace radio even became a participatory medium as ordinary people were brought to the microphone for the first time. Workers were asked to make statements about the work they were doing as well as their future goals. While finding this type of domestic news boring, many listeners preferred international news and information about foreign countries. One of the few polls of listeners undertaken in 1940 noted a call for more variety in songs, more foreign broadcasts, radio debates, and information on everyday living.⁷⁰ The interest in life outside of the Soviet Union was already observable in some of the earliest radio amateurs and would remain a fixture of Soviet audiences until the era of *glasnost* in the 1980s.

As mentioned earlier, the development of tape recording in this period meant that radio could be taken places it had never been. One of these places was inside the courtroom. Parts of the Moscow Show Trials of 1937 were broadcast over the airwaves including Andrey Vyshinsky's speeches for the prosecution.⁷¹ John Scott, an American worker in the Soviet Union, recalled the public trial of a factory director accused of "wrecking" industry by embezzling funds, the most important speeches of the proceedings were broadcast over radio.⁷² Radio offered the opportunity to give listeners an idea of the severity of crimes facing the accused as well as confirmation of the

⁷⁰ Stephen Lovell, "How Russia Learned to Listen: Radio and the Making of Soviet Culture," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and European History* 12, no. 3 (2011): 606.

⁷¹ Lyubov Shaporina, *Intimacy and Terror*, 350.

⁷² John Scott, *Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia's City of Steel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1942), 185.

“dangers” that existed among enemies of Soviet labor. On-the-scene reporting from exotic places, on the other hand, could bring excitement or a sense of adventure to the homes of ordinary people in the 1930s. Broadcasts of Soviet achievers such as mountain climbers, icebreaker skippers, airmen, and Stakhanovites could be broadcast for the first time.⁷³ Radio was a perfect fit to broadcast the pride in Soviet achievement and human daring. One such sketch by I.T. Spirin, a noted arctic pilot and aviation expert, discussed how the 1938 arctic expedition of Ivan Papanin overcame the harshness of the environment to create a dinner of powdered chicken cutlets. The act of mixing aviation fuel with the cutlets in order to cook them was a testament to Soviet resolve and ingenuity in the midst of extreme conditions. The broadcast boasted that, “not a single restaurant, not a single menu offered dishes like those we invented then.”⁷⁴ Radio brought these instances of Soviet achievement home to the nation as never before seen. Listeners could share the pride and gain the appreciation for their country’s success in ways never before possible. Perfect for a regime looking to toast its own accomplishments and inspire loyalty.

Radio and the Stalin Cult

The years of Joseph Stalin brought not only widespread economic and social change to the Soviet Union but they also saw new forms of political control which were to become associated with communist regimes around the world. Stalin’s cult of personality has been widely studied and is often cited as a textbook aspect of totalitarian

⁷³ Stites, *Popular Culture*, 83.

⁷⁴ I.T. Spirin, “Dinner at the Pole,” in James Von Geldern, *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays, and Folklore, 1917 – 1953* (Indiana University Press, 1995), 267.

regimes. It would also seem as if radio was used to support the cult as intensely as it was used to support the leader's other initiatives. Stalin was clearly not the only leader in the 20th century who recognized the potential of broadcasting as the development of radio can be directly related to the speed in which leader cults grew around the world. Radio was key to cult development since it could be controlled easily and it offered the opportunity for the leader's voice to be heard by millions for the first time in history; often times this meant bringing that voice into the homes of private citizens. Personality cults had always thrived on a listener's ability to be captivated by a speaker's image, body language, and the forcefulness of his voice; radio simply expanded the audience several times over. Men like Hitler, Mussolini, and Roosevelt understood this opportunity and capitalized on it in much the way Stalin did. Roosevelt's fireside chats could reach between 60 – 70 million listeners out of a population of 130 million at one of the bleakest times in American history. Jan Plamper's recent monograph on the Stalin cult draws on the power of broadcasting:

Because of the development of the radio, in theory the entire world could now hear Stalin's, Hitler's, or Mussolini's voice in real time. This tectonic shift had an impact on how these leaders were represented in their cults. The representation of Stalin as calm and unmoving was deliberately juxtaposed to Hitler's wild, "hysterical" body language... thus the semiotics of the modern personality cult became relational or entangled.⁷⁵

As will be made clear during World War II, the power of voice was an important way to bring people comfort or to draw them into the cult. In her diary entry dated December 6, 1937, Galin Shtange, a professor's wife and a member of the Soviet intelligentsia, noted:

Stalin speaks very slowly and distinctly—extremely simply, So simply that each word penetrates into your consciousness and I think the man cannot be found who

⁷⁵ Jan Plamper, *The Stalin Cult: A Study in the Alchemy of Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 25.

would not be able to understand what he says. I really love that, I don't like high faluting, bombastic speeches that are aimed at creating an acoustic effect.⁷⁶

The last line, an obvious reference to Adolf Hitler, demonstrates how radio listeners could contrast the words of their leader and appreciate what made him unique and identifiably Russian. Radio's ability to offer closeness with the leader to those in far-off places was instrumental in achieving this new brand of loyalty. Mass media communication, like radio, seems to have been almost tailor-made to the needs of the 20th century totalitarian regimes.

Radio's ability to bring Stalin's voice into the home and workplace was not the only way broadcasting was made to work for the personality cult. The image or the idea of radio could be used as a substitute for Stalin himself or a way to demonstrate the effect he had on others. As mentioned earlier, Arctic explorers were some of the standard images of Soviet heroes who battled against and overcame incredible odds. The expedition of Papanin exemplifies this phenomenon as news reports explained how the crew, huddled around their radio at the pole, were "warmed by Stalin-like care." An article dated May 24, 1938 explained that:

Yesterday evening there was the extraordinary picture of a meeting of the 30 members of the leading unit of the expedition on the ice at the pole, listening to the reading of a telegram of greetings from the leaders of the party and government. They gathered under the open sky, in a snowstorm, but felt no cold because the bright words and the anxious care of the great Stalin warmed them and they sensed the glowing breath of their beloved homeland.⁷⁷

This concept of presence-in-absence was also used in Soviet art and other visual sources. It was not uncommon in the later years of the Stalin regime to see radio used as a stand-in for the man himself. The device, with citizens gathered around the receiver, could be an

⁷⁶ Galin Shtange in Garros, *Intimacy and Terror*, 205.

⁷⁷ Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 40.

allusion or metaphor to Stalin through the “shining faces of radio listeners.” Plamper believes this replacement might have functioned as preparing the Soviet people for his death.⁷⁸ While this is speculation, what is certain is that radio brought a sense of closeness to the regime that had not existed in the earliest Bolshevik days and formed a major component of the Stalin cult. The leader was no longer a picture in the newspaper or just another name living behind the walls of the Kremlin. Before the invention of television, radio was the vehicle that brought the listener into the cult. For the first time, Stalin was speaking to the citizen, offering them words of encouragement, and telling them what they most needed to hear.

Broadcasting Dangers

Few things in the Stalinist Thirties were without fear of running afoul of the party, arrest, or worse, and radio was certainly not immune. As seen in the previous period, the work of radio broadcasters was often unattractive. Overwork was a persistent issue and technical support and technicians were weak and usually poorly educated. Broadcasters had to work hard and imaginatively to develop effective ways of reaching their audience. By the end of 1934, slips of the tongue and on-air glitches could automatically be interpreted as counterrevolutionary sabotage.⁷⁹ As in other countries, announcers were traditionally required to shed their accent and in the Soviet Union this also meant avoiding provincialism and other errors in stress. Stephen Lovell believes that:

The task of a radio presenter in the 1930's was unenviable. There were so many pitfalls to avoid: “bourgeois” rhetoric, “aristocratic” declamation, staginess in all its manifestations. It was not clear how the requirements for a “proletarian” style

⁷⁸ Ibid., 86.

⁷⁹ Lovell, “Broadcasting Bolshevik,” 87.

of delivery could be made compatible with the rigorous high-cultural standards that obtained in public discourse.⁸⁰

Tape recording was a blessing for this very reason as it meant that editing could give broadcasting more fluency and clarity. In most cases broadcasters were better off playing it safe and prerecording broadcasts whenever possible. Prerecorded broadcasts became the norm up until the war and those programs that still ran live interviews were usually heavily scripted. Soviet children's author Lev Kassil argued that "no form of art and propaganda gets so much harsh criticism as radio. A newspaper sits there at home and stays silent until you open it, but radio invades all the crevices of your mind and you notice even the slightest slip and find it offensive."⁸¹

One of the greatest dangers for those listeners with wireless sets was the lore of foreign radio. Standard sets with shortwave capabilities could pick up any number of stations broadcasting from countries outside the Soviet Union, mostly in the West. The phenomenon of foreign broadcasting will be investigated in greater depth in Chapter 3 but needs to be given a cursory glance during the later Stalin years when tuning in to non-Soviet sources of information was a very real possibility for some radio owners. Listening was never officially declared illegal but any taint of foreign influence or suspicion on the part of the NKVD would be enough to warrant arrest. One former prisoner believed that in his camp at Kharkov, 2 – 3% of all prisoners were there for listening to foreign broadcasting.⁸² Another respondent in the Harvard Interview Project, who used to visit his boss's house in 1939 to listen to foreign stations, did so by keeping

⁸⁰ Ibid., 89.

⁸¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 87.

⁸² Harvard Project. Schedule B, Vol. 13, Case 121 (Special interview about the "Voice of America" by M.F.). Widener Library, Harvard University.

the volume low and placing dark coverings over the windows. He acknowledged that if he had been caught the standard punishment was ten years hard labor and confiscation of his radio.⁸³ German broadcasts were among the most popular foreign stations to pick up if a listener knew the language. One interviewee would find out about the war by listening to Hitler's speeches about victory in France following the Nazi-Soviet Pact. In the years immediately after the pact, Soviet citizens could openly listen to German programs since the propaganda coming from their stations was primarily anti-English and not anti-Soviet. Often a listener could find out more about the war from outside stations than they could by listening to official broadcasts. Anti-Soviet broadcasts could be picked up with greater frequency following the Finnish War. The same respondent would listen to the Tehran station as it would play music not typically heard in Russia.⁸⁴

Radio's Wartime Service

“Comrades, citizens, brothers and sisters, men of our Army and Navy! My words are addressed to you, dear friends!” Such were the opening lines of Stalin's radio address to the Soviet people on July 3, 1941 and indeed his words were addressed to the nation like never before. Hitler's invasion of the USSR had begun just twelve days earlier and this was the first time the Russian people heard their leader's voice on the matter; for some, this was the moment they first learned their country was at war. In the course of this twelve-minute address, Stalin attempted to rally his people behind the government, using words such as “brothers and sisters” to denote a common war effort. The broadcast

⁸³ Harvard Project. Schedule A, Vol. 33, Case 338/(NY)1390 (interviewer G.A., type A4). Male, 52, Great Russian, Buyer of materials and supplies for factories. Widener Library, Harvard University.

⁸⁴ Harvard Project. Schedule A, Vol. 3, Case 25 (interviewers J.B., and R.B., type A3). Male, 32, Great Russian, Engineer. Widener Library, Harvard University.

would be an important sign of later wartime imagery by reminding listeners of historic Russian battles against invaders such as Napoleon and Kaiser Wilhelm II, appealing to nationalism rather than party ideology. Calling for the whole nation to be placed on a war footing, Stalin's address would mark the beginning of a long period of suffering and sacrifice for the Soviet people. This speech would also start a new period for radio as a medium to unite the nation in new and dramatic ways. Previous rules and rigid censors were to be abandoned and patriotic camaraderie fostered. Rumor, doubt, and confusion would be hallmarks of the next four years but one thing was clear – radio had been called up for duty.⁸⁵

Stephen Lovell argues that the acquisition of radio proficiency is an important part of a country gearing up for war.⁸⁶ If this is the case, then everything we have seen so far suggests that the Soviet Union may or may not have been ready to meet the challenge of the Nazis. One of the first acts on the part of the Soviet government was to requisition all standard wireless radio receivers. The Germans had already been broadcasting anti-Soviet propaganda in the occupied Russian territories and the regime was sure to put themselves in a position to control all wartime information in lands still under their control. By 1945, only 473,000 sets out of the prewar total of 1.1 million were still in operation, mostly for party use.⁸⁷ Unfortunately for set owners, no documents were provided upon requisition so no one could prove ownership after the war had ended.⁸⁸ Only wired sets were allowed in the Soviet-controlled areas thanks largely to the reasons

⁸⁵ Ibiblio, "Stalin, Soviet Premier, Broadcast to the People of the Soviet Union," ibiblio.org, accessed March 4, 2014, <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1941/410703a.html>.

⁸⁶ Lovell, *Listen*, 601.

⁸⁷ Hopkins, *Mass Media*, 246.

⁸⁸ Harvard Project. Schedule A, Vol. 33, Case 134/(NY)1368 (interviewer T.H., type A4). Female, 45, Great Russian, Typist. Widener Library, Harvard University.

spelled out in Chapter 1, namely: greater reliability and less vulnerability to enemy propaganda (the regime could be assured they knew what their people were hearing and that critical information was not being broadcast to the German enemy). In fact, possession of a wireless receiver in German-occupied territory was punishable by death.

Despite these early actions, radio failed most listeners in the early months of the war. The State Radio Committee failed to enact wartime reforms and as a result broadcasts could not keep up with the rapid pace of this war.⁸⁹ In the earliest phase of the conflict, radio played up patriotic themes but otherwise did not so much as mention the war. Without the ability to broadcast without Moscow's approval, republic and local stations were unable to report German attacks to the center. Radiofication had come a long way by 1940 but service was still inadequate in many parts of the country. In major cities there were sixty-seven receivers per every 1,000 people, in the countryside that number dropped to eight, and in non-Slavic republics it was only three.⁹⁰ Broadcasting reforms were eventually enacted and as seen in Stalin's July 1941 address, radio provided the opportunity to link people, the state, and their leader into one. The airways were soon reorganized to link the front and the rear, occupied and freed zones, besieged cities and the capital in a united spirit of adversity and common danger. A new Informbiuro was created to streamline the process of censorship and allow for rapid relay of fast-breaking news⁹¹. Radio Moscow provided 18½ hours of programming at the height of war with bulletin updates every forty-five minutes. The new formula devoted equal time to news

⁸⁹ James Von Geldern, "Radio Moscow: Voice from the Center," in Richard Stites, *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 44.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

and cultural programs. This effect was undoubtedly known to the Germans as Luftwaffe bomber pilots marked radio stations as prime targets in both Moscow and Leningrad.

World War II solidified the place of radio in Soviet culture as people for the first time relied on it every day. Radio became a space of comfort and inspiration for a people looking to feel connected and the voice of Moscow as supreme political and military authority let citizens know that government endured and the defense of the motherland continued. Radio provided a powerful cultural media especially as theaters, movies, and concert halls closed down and broadcasting became the prime medium for citizens to turn towards. Apart from updates about the war effort, broadcasts of Russian literature, poems, and history were greatly expanded. With the Nazi invasion came renewal of patriotic imagery and radio reminded people about the nation's glorious past. Radio lectures on past Russian victories and heroes were common and included lessons on Kutusov, the Battle of Borodino, the Invasion of 1812, and Aleksandr Nevskii, to name a few. *War and Peace*, one of the great Russian works of literature, was serialized over radio throughout the war. Tolstoy's iconic work about Russian culture in the face of the Napoleonic invasion was a fitting symbol for a people beleaguered by another foreign invasion. Classic writers, the likes of Dostoyevsky and Pushkin, were also given their due over radio. High culture was seen as a national treasure that belonged to the masses and that needed to be protected from the German hordes. As Richard Stites put it, "Radio listeners heard the musical and dramatic classics of Russian culture and Western civilization in a promotion of Russian nationalism and allied solidarity against barbarism."⁹² Contemporary authors espousing the spirit and cultural determination of the

⁹² Stites, *Popular Culture*, 110.

nation were also brought to the public's attention. Konstantin Simonov's "Wait for Me" appeared over the airwaves in 1941 and would be replayed throughout the course of the war and recited by some as if it were a prayer:

Wait for me, and I'll come back!
Wait with all you've got!
Wait, when dreary yellow rains
Tell you, you should not.
Wait when snow is falling fast,
Wait when summer's hot,
Wait when yesterdays are past,
Others are forgot.
Wait, when from that far-off place,
Letters don't arrive.
Wait, when those with whom you wait
Doubt if I'm alive.⁹³

Simonov was the voice for thousands of soldiers and other loved ones who did not know how the war would end, nor where they would be when it did. Broadcasts of these works helped to reshape national identity by "fusing information, culture, and emotionalism into a picture of a just and martyred people beleaguered by the evil force."⁹⁴

Perhaps one of the most important roles radio played during the war was in Leningrad during the hard blockade winter of 1941 – 1942. As the Germans strangled the city and its residents faced the reality of a Russian winter without heat and food, Leningrad radio continued to broadcast. With thousands dying of starvation around them and the situation appearing bleak, tuning into the city's radio let residents know that people were still there and the resistance continued. Olga Berggolts's poem "Conversation with a Neighbor" first read over radio fortified the spirit of the city in the

⁹³ Konstantin Simonov, "Wait for Me" in von Geldern, *Mass Culture*, 335.

⁹⁴ Stites, *Popular Culture*, 110.

midst of the famine. Its words depict the hope and optimism that life will return to normal and the war will end:

Dariya Vlasievna, wait a little:
The day will come when from the sky
The last alert will howl its warning,
The last all-clear ring out on high.

And how remote and dimly distant
The war will seem to us that day
We casually remove the shutters
And put the black-out blinds away

....

Dariya Vlasieva, by your spirit
The whole wide world renowned shall be.
The name of that spirit is Russia.
Stand and be bold then, even as She.⁹⁵

One of the great acts of patriotism to come out of the Leningrad blockade was the playing of Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony, written specifically for and about the besieged city. Musicians risked their lives and in some cases left their posts to perform the eighty-minute piece live over Radio Leningrad for the first time in the winter of 1942. The piece as well as its performance was said to have reflected triumph over fascism and the faith in humanism and light.⁹⁶ Not every broadcast in Leningrad was positive and filled with confidence; in fact some of the most powerful programs were those expressing sorrow, letting listeners know they were not alone in their anguish. In the city and all throughout Russia, ordinary people were handed microphones to share their outrage and personal thoughts on the German invasion or to let husbands and sons fighting on the front know that their families were safe; by May of 1943, 3,000 soldiers on the Leningrad

⁹⁵ Olga Berggolts, "Conversation with a Neighbor," in von Geldern, *Mass Culture*, 378.

⁹⁶ Von Geldern, "Radio Moscow," 51.

front had spoken on radio.⁹⁷ These individual contributions and heartfelt emotions were unlike anything seen over radio in the previous two decades and brought to radio a more authentic popular voice.

The sense of reassurance that broadcasting provided was not unique to Leningrad, but could be felt throughout the country. Many listeners tuned into broadcasts to hear familiar voices like Yury Levitan, the voice of Radio Moscow. Levitan's deep rich timbre offered an "overtone of reassurance" and an "undertone of paternal authority" – he was also the first man Hitler promised to hang after the capture of Moscow.⁹⁸ In many ways, the stiff programming of early years had given way to spontaneous interviews and extraordinary public outpourings. One of the most popular and useful services radio provided was the reading of letters received by Radio Moscow to and from front-line soldiers. By the end of the war, 2,000 letters had been received and through careful selection and censorship some 9,000 broadcasts delivered the words of loved words throughout the nation.⁹⁹ Radio also provided updated addresses for civilians who had either been evacuated or displaced in an attempt to connect loved ones who had been separated by the war. This practice continued after 1945 and acted almost as a missing persons center and for another twenty years radio continued with stories of loved ones reunited.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 54.

⁹⁸ Stites, *Popular Culture*, 109.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 110.

Conclusion

Never before had there been such bonding of the Soviet people to the media as there was during the Great Patriotic War. Stalin himself declared the first Radio Day on May 7, 1945 to officially recognize the wartime contribution of radio and its importance to the Russian people at a time of absolute desperation. Radio had shed most of the formalities and stifling rigidity of the early Stalin years and came into its own during the war. The administration had shed its ambivalence to popular tastes and set about forging a connection between core and periphery that was essential to maintaining civilian support. As the actor Vladimir Iakhontov succinctly put it:

Living without listening to the radio was impossible. Radio informed, signaled and guided us, kept kin and loved ones linked together. The voice that said “Dateline Moscow” grabbed listeners’ attention, comforted them, instilled hope in them. People listened to it all over the country, thousands of miles away.¹⁰⁰

Unfortunately for the Soviet people, much of the wartime freedom and policy relaxation was forgotten in the postwar period and radio was no different. By 1946, station numbers, power, and total receivers had been restored to prewar levels, as was Stalinist rigidity. It is impossible to deny that radio saw significant expansion and change throughout the period though with central control oblivious to popular tastes most listeners saw little purpose in accommodating radio into their lives. The exception to this was the war, when other aspects of traditional life collapsed around them, the regime turned to broadcasting to unite people behind a culture worth saving. What is certain is that radio had proven itself and found a new place in hearts of those who listened. As the postwar period began, the medium was being prepped for significant expansion and further retooling that would see radio take the mantle of preferred party media.

¹⁰⁰ Von Geldern, “Radio Moscow,” 55.

Chapter 4

Opportunity and Reality: Broadcasting in Postwar Russia

The Soviet Union in the postwar years can be defined both by how much change the nation underwent and yet how much it stayed the same. As detailed in the last chapter, radio underwent significant adjustments throughout much of the 1930s followed by a complete overhaul during the war. In many ways Soviet authorities recognized the ability of radio broadcasting to be at the forefront of mass media and information dissemination. As *Pravda* boasted in May 1953, “our country is the birthplace of all the most outstanding discoveries and inventions in the field of radio, such as radar, radio navigation, television, radio acoustics and the use of high-frequency currents in the national economy.”¹ Obvious falsehoods but these boastings demonstrate the way in which authorities had committed to the expansion of radio technology. Following the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 and the start of liberalization under Khrushchev, radiofication was intensified and the number of sets available reached numbers that were on par with those of western nations. Yet with the expansion of wireless transmitters with shortwave capabilities came the increased capability of listening into broadcasts from foreign nations, some directly aimed at disseminating anti-Soviet propaganda. As the airways increasingly became a battleground in the Cold War, Soviet authorities were forced to take steps in order to curb the enthusiasm and for foreign broadcasting. Some of these measures brought greater reforms to domestic broadcasting though the effectiveness of such changes remain in debate. In the regime’s final years, Soviet radio, like much of the system, would be impacted by the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. The degree to

¹ Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 18, vol. 5, June 1953, p. 18-19.

which radio opened the regime up to the kinds of criticism that hastened its demise can be argued though it seems fair to say that the possibilities of broadcasting never caught up with the realities for Soviet audiences.

“Communications Explosion”

For the great majority of Soviet citizens, it was radio that first informed them of the death of Stalin. As the country and the people he oppressed wept for him, great changes were already underway as the Soviet Union was becoming much more modernized in the postwar world than it had been in the years leading up to the war. In the words of Gayle Durham Hollander, the Soviet Union underwent a “communications explosion” in the years after Stalin’s death and radio was part of this new vanguard.² In the 1950s radio had progressed significantly from its less than humble origins thirty years earlier, but it was still moving uphill in comparison with other industrialized nations. It was not until the early 1950s that the Soviet Union reached the levels of radio broadcasting seen in the United States in the 1930s. In 1959, *Izvestia* was reporting that broadcasting-central, republic, and local was supplying over 580 hours of broadcasting daily in 58 languages of the USSR. By 1952, the Soviet Union was operating 125 broadcasting stations with 100 receivers on average for every 1,000 people while that number was around 200 in Europe and 500 per 1,000 in the United States.³ By the 1960s, radiofication had become not only a high priority goal of the regime but also a keyword of “socialist modernity.”

² Gayle Durham Hollander, *Soviet Political Indoctrination: Developments in Mass Media and Propaganda since Stalin* (New York: Praeger, 1972), 124.

³ Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 11, vol. 18, June 3, 1959, p. 7-8.

In their attempt to increase access to radio, Soviet authorities concentrated on the growth in the number of available wireless sets. As had been the case in the past, transistor radios were traditionally in demand; they were consumer items, status symbols, and one of the first luxuries a Soviet citizen was willing to buy even over more essential items like bicycles and sewing machines. Wireless sets were also becoming cheaper to make, were generally more reliable, and most importantly, they avoided the need to string expensive telegraph wire and commit the resources necessary for the expansion of the loudspeaker network; electricity was no longer a prerequisite for listening to radio. By 1953, there were 21 million receiving sets in the Soviet Union, 7.2 million were wireless sets. The number of radios confiscated and brought back from Germany in the years after the surrender may account for a small part of this increase.⁴ By 1955, the country was producing more wireless sets yearly than had existed in the entirety of prewar Russia.

Radio ownership had reached near saturation levels by the early 1960s. By 1968 the total number of sets available was calculated at around 85.5 million and by 1970 at 95 million.⁵ Annual sales of radios in 1950 were ten times higher than they had been in 1940.⁶ This was likely impacted by the drop in prices for transistor radios to between 70 – 100 rubles. As a result of these trends, in 1963 wireless sets outnumbered wired reproducers for the first time in the history of Soviet radio.⁷ While the growth of transistor sets would only continue, the loudspeaker network continued to expand; in fact, radio speakers were still found in workplaces up into the 1990s. Rural areas continued to

⁴ Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule A, Vol. 3, Case 25 (interviewers J.B., and R.B., type A3). Male, 32, Great Russian, Engineer. Widener Library, Harvard University.

⁵ All figures provided in Hollander, *Political Indoctrination*, 102 and Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Primetime: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001), 11.

⁶ Roth-Ey, *Moscow Primetime*, 137.

⁷ Hollander, *Political Indoctrination*, 101.

remain outside the pale though the gap was noticeably decreasing. In 1950, one-fifth of loudspeakers could be found in the villages whereas that number grew to one-half by 1956 – this is also a testament to the growth of wireless sets in the more urbanized areas of the Soviet Union.⁸ Reports note that more than half of collectivized farms were without radios in the areas of Azerbaijan, Latvia, Moldavia, and Kirgizia.⁹ Articles frequently appeared in *Pravda* complaining of the lack of fulfillment of radiofication in rural villages. One such article complains that the radio installation plan for the first quarter of 1958 was only 54 percent fulfilled. The reasons can be traced back to shortages of steel wire used in building relay lines among other causes.¹⁰ All indications however suggest that radio was almost as accessible to the rural population as newspaper.

Since the inception of Soviet broadcasting, radio had always taken a backseat to the information medium most preferred by the party hierarchy, print. As discussed earlier, the print culture was not without its problems. In the 1960s Soviet authorities believed that news should be transmitted to the population faster. As a result, radio was given the go ahead to release information before it appeared in *Pravda*. This new recognition of the power and status of radio was a tremendous turning point in the history of Soviet broadcasting. The general news structure remained unchanged as information continued to be heavily propagandized and slow to clear the censors but TASS reports were given permission to go out over radio first. This fact appears to be even more impressive amidst the growth of television. Like radio, television underwent a process of expansion and improvement in the 1960s but was hampered by many of the same

⁸ Mark W. Hopkins, *Mass Media in the Soviet Union* (New York: Pegasus, 1970), 247.

⁹ Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 11, vol. 18, June 3, 1959, p. 11.

¹⁰ Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 10, vol. 29, August 27, 1958, p. 26.

problems that plagued radio in its earliest years. As a newer medium, television repeated information that had already appeared elsewhere, was limited to a small audience of people who could afford TV sets, and was caught up with the same fundamental question that pestered radio--was its purpose to inform or to entertain?

Audience

One rather abrupt change from the previous period was the resumption of public opinion polling. Under Stalin, the press was a one-way form of communication with little to no reciprocal interests in tastes or opinions. Following Khrushchev's 1956 "Secret Speech" denouncing Stalinism, public opinion polling was reintroduced by the state. A 1960 survey undertaken to assess and compare media deemed radio superior in its speed of delivering the news.¹¹ Despite polling, most feedback on radio was gathered informally by reading the letters sent to broadcasting stations from their listeners; in 1958 alone, *Izvestia* reported that there were over 400,000 letters sent to central broadcasting.¹² All of these sources are especially useful in helping to understand radio audiences since their voice had largely went unheard. One of the great difficulties in fully realizing the extent of broadcasting in the early years is the simple complaint of a lack of source material. Broadcasts were not traditionally recorded and listener reactions and preferences were ignored; this fact accounts for much of the speculation in earlier chapters. In the post-Stalin years this picture becomes more in focus thanks to these surveys as well as western interviews with current and former listeners.

¹¹ Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public* (New York: Praeger, 1981), 46.

¹² Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 18, vol 11. June 3, 1959, pages 7 – 8.

Especially useful in regards to this line of information was an understanding of audience trends. One of the prime reasons for radio's recognition as preferred party communication almost certainly stemmed from the increase in listenership. On average, around 80 percent of citizens were listening to radio for at least an hour per day. One of the unique things about radio is that it can be regarded as both a primary and a secondary activity. The act of reading a newspaper requires almost total focus that would constitute a primary activity much the way actively listening to radio would. Unlike the paper however, radio can also be "listened" to in the background while one attends to other tasks, thus radio becomes a secondary activity. The latter was most commonly the case with housewives, retired persons, and others who traditionally stayed at home during the course of the day. As a result, women figure a bit higher in the overall radio audience. According to information gathered from Radio Liberty surveys, the amount of time most people listened daily with their full attention was around six minutes whereas the number increased significantly to thirty-six minutes as a secondary activity.¹³ Around 17 percent of surveyed people said they traditionally mixed housework with radio listening.¹⁴

Surveys and interviews conducted around this time reveal interesting trends in both audience and listening habits that were not available in previous periods. As would likely come as no surprise, peak listening hours were in the morning between 6AM and 9AM as well as in the evening from 5PM to 12AM. These times reflect listening trends for major urban areas such as Moscow and Leningrad and correspond with working shifts for the average laborer. The hours between 7PM and 9PM had the highest rate of listenership with 42.7% of respondents admitting listening to radio. Foreign radio

¹³ Hollander, *Political Indoctrination*, 110 – 111.

¹⁴ Mickiewicz, *Media*, 43.

broadcasting was most active at night especially around the midnight hours, which may account for listeners in the late evening.¹⁵ Skilled laborers tended to listen longer than unskilled laborers, 42 minutes compared with 30 minutes respectively.¹⁶ These numbers are also consistent with overall listenership among various social groups. According to information obtained from personal interviews with western sociologists, skilled workers represented one of broadcasting's largest audiences as 22 percent of respondents identified radio as their most important source of information. Radio's second and third largest subgroups were collective farm peasants (18%) and ordinary workers (14%) and the intelligentsia and white-collar employees rounding out the bottom spots (both at 9%).¹⁷

In looking at these numbers an inverse trend is revealed between education and radio listenership; as a listener's level of education increases the importance of radio decreases. Respondents with higher levels of education were more prone to cite newspapers as their primary source of information. Perhaps people with higher education prefer to read the articles and take charge of what information they read rather than to simply digest whatever news broadcasters send out. Radio also fits better in the early mornings and late evenings when a laborer's schedule is already so filled.

Content

The postwar years brought both interesting changes to radio content as well as maintained standard practices that had been seen in earlier periods. Soviet authorities

¹⁵ Hopkins, *Mass Media*, 326.

¹⁶ Hollander, *Political Indoctrination*, 112.

¹⁷ Alex Inkeles and Raymond Augustine Bauer, *The Soviet Citizen: Daily Life in a Totalitarian Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 168.

continued to view broadcasting as a way in which to encourage acceptance of national goals as well as form a particular Soviet culture by elevating public tastes. Even by the 1960s there were not any verbatim monitoring reports of Soviet broadcasts and thus it remains hard to know the different types of news featured over the airways. Domestic news was largely overweighed with either party and government information or the publicizing of economic achievements. This constant droning on about repeat news and information was probably the reason why so many listeners saw radio as persistently dull. An article in *Sovetskaya kultura* from May 1957 noted that at least fifteen broadcasts of “latest news” come from Moscow daily yet these are some of the most criticized by listeners. The author that, “not infrequently the information broadcast is made up of fortuitous matters of little significance, which gives a very pale reflection of our eventful life. In a recent broadcast of the “latest news” by the all-Union radio, there were 11 items devoted to the day’s events in the USSR. It was quite a broadcast: all the items had to do with conferences and meetings!”¹⁸

According to an article appearing in *Izvestia* in 1959, 18 of the 66 hours of broadcasting daily were devoted to political programs (news, commentaries on domestic and foreign issues, press reviews, and statements by workers and collective farmers). The article boasted that central broadcasting provided as much material as five or six central newspapers the size of *Izvestia*.¹⁹ News that would have been of interest in other countries such as reports on crime or other accidents were rarely broadcast in the Soviet Union, as it would have been an embarrassment for officials; most listeners would have to rely on rumors or other word of mouth communication to gain such information. As

¹⁸ Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 19, vol. 9, June 19, 1957, p. 25.

¹⁹ Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 18, vol 11. June 3, 1959, pages 7 – 8.

discussed in the previous chapter, many listeners preferred international news and information about foreign countries that was still in short supply when compared with domestic coverage. Few foreign correspondents appeared on central radio and information on other countries was always presented in a way that illustrated Soviet policies, such as reporting on worker strikes or other revolutionary activities in areas such as Latin America and Africa. Information on the United States and other western European countries would generally serve to highlight the imperialist tendencies of capitalist nations.²⁰

Music continued to be a major reason for listening to both national and foreign radio. The postwar years saw a 50 percent increase in the amount of music being broadcast, still traditionally classical music and operas from around the world. One nationalist complaint immediately following the war was that there was not enough native Russian music being played, too much Bach and Puccini and not enough Tchaikovsky and Mussorgsky.²¹ By the 1950s, Soviet audiences were more interested in jazz and other styles coming from the west, so much so that music was among the primary reasons that listeners sought out western broadcasts. National broadcasting was also allowing listeners to make choices for the first time as well. With the growth of wireless sets, listeners could choose the volume and the station for the first time. Starting in 1963, Radio Moscow offered two different programming channels. A few years later that number jumped to four: Programs 1 and 2 offered various news and information as well as commentaries on a host of other topics, Program 3 was largely devoted to music

²⁰ Hollander, *Political Indoctrination*, 107.

²¹ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931 - 1956* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 220.

and literature, and Program 4 being a mixture and intended for audiences in the far eastern part of the country. Children's programs continued and even saw a sizeable jump after the war. The average Soviet child was devoting sixteen hours a week to broadcasting by the mid 1960s, a steep rise from just six hours during the 1930s.²²

Local Broadcasting

While central broadcasting certainly gets a lot of attention, local broadcasting inside the Soviet Union filled its part of the airways. As seen in previous chapters, local stations often lacked the resources and the personnel to fully embrace the potential of radio. Local broadcasting was a frequent target of criticism and not always for reasons within their control. Radio Moscow took precedence among the Soviet airways and local stations were relegated to a supporting role. In general, local stations were allotted few broadcasting minutes as they traditionally aired during times when they interfered less with Moscow Central. In many cases, these programs were largely a rebroadcast of national news and may have added fuel to the larger complaint of broadcasting redundancy. Due in part to censorship policies, local stations were forbidden from commenting on something until Moscow had spoken first; often this meant that local news was extremely slow in reaching its audience. If a natural disaster or some other event occurred in a region, local radio would be silent until given the official line from the capital.

Lastly, amateurism was another complaint leveled against the staff of local stations and this comes from general inexperience and insufficient staffing in these areas.

²² Roth-Ey, *Moscow Primetime*, 14.

In his private journal of March 27, 1937, collective farmer Ignat Danilovich Frolov lampoons the Kalinin local radio news by calling out the regional and district authorities, calling them “utterly negligent” in their selection of broadcasting staff.

Mispronunciations and lack of professionalism were unacceptable in his eyes, including the misreading of the word “leader” as “cheater” and “army commander” as “enemy commander.”²³ While such slipups may seem innocent and inconsequential, the general inconsistency between local conditions and what was reported, combined with overall boredom, virtually assured smaller listening audiences for local programming.

“Enemy Voices”

By far the most important aspect of postwar radio was the phenomenon of foreign broadcasting to the Soviet Union. One of the few topics in the history of Russian radio that has seen significant scholarship, foreign broadcasts were often understood as a battleground in the propaganda campaign of the larger Cold War. So large was the audience for radio that historian Maury Lisann believed that radio broadcasting accounted for more communication between the communist and non-communist worlds than “all forms of private and laboriously negotiated intergovernmental exchanges combined.”²⁴ Soviet authorities were notably concerned about these “enemy voices” polluting their airways as shortwave broadcasting represented the only significant gap in the control of information inside the USSR. This concern began in February 1947 with the first Russian language broadcast of the Voice of America (VOA).

²³ Ignat Danilovich Frolov in Garros, *Intimacy and Terror*, 21.

²⁴ Maury Lisann, *Broadcasting to the Soviet Union: International Politics and Radio* (New York: Praeger, 1975), v.

Dedicated to informing Soviet listeners about the style and quality of life inside the United States, VOA was certainly not the only western station vying for an audience behind the iron curtain. The growth of shortwave radios inside the USSR meant that listeners could tune into VOA, BBC, Radio Canada, Deutsche Welle, Israel Radio, Radio Monte Carlo, Radio Finland, Radio France, Trans-World, Radio Free Europe, Radio Italy, Radio Luxembourg, Radio Sweden, Radio Vatican, and Radio Liberty to name a few. By the late 1950s, sixty different foreign language stations were broadcasting to the Soviet Union. Programs generally needed to be broadcast in Russian to gain the widest audience as few citizens spoke western languages. Many Russians could and often did listen to Bulgarian and Romanian broadcasts, as the language was similar enough to understand. Some stations were known to broadcast in slow and simple speech in an effort to add listeners who were non-native speakers. It should also be said that Soviet authorities began their own foreign broadcasting service that grew at a faster pace than the domestic network. By 1968, Radio Moscow was beaming 150 hours of programming abroad in 57 languages. The impact and influence of these transmissions are beyond the scope of this paper and requires its own academic study.

While the state did not officially make listening to foreign radio was not officially made illegal, listeners still ran great risks when tuning into non-Soviet programming; as a result, the audience for these broadcasts makes for an interesting investigation. Who were these people? How often did they listen? Why did they listen? Why were their numbers so large? How did authorities respond and attempt to curb access to these voices? These questions get to the heart of foreign radio broadcasting by revealing its appeal and simultaneously providing insight into the shortcomings of domestic broadcasting. The

subject also offers a fascinating perspective into “resistance” to the regime and whether tuning into the VOA and other stations like it was really an act of rebellion against the system or merely harmless curiosity. Whatever the case, there is no denying that much can be learned.

Since most citizens rarely admitted to hearing VOA, Radio Liberty, and others, it is extremely difficult to know the size of the audience and their listening preferences. With that said, there are notable trends that are identifiable from western interviews with Soviet listeners in later years. Due to the perils of listening to foreign broadcasts, many listeners would only listen in groups of two or three – anything more was too large and too dangerous. These groups would keep the volume on their radio dials way down while hanging sheets over the windows to blanket out any light and sound. Such danger existed that others kept their radio sets dismantled or unable to receive shortwave from abroad when they were not in use. Engineers and other specialists could get away with having radio parts scattered about their workshop while friends and investigators were none the wiser. Most often these groups would assemble at night when shortwave reception was better as the peak hours for VOA were after 11PM. Other times these small groups would rotate in and out of listening to the set and discuss what they heard after they were done. The dissemination of information heard over these broadcasts was part of the reason outside information penetrated Soviet society the way in which it did. As one listener remembered, “those who listen to the radio would tell others and people simply soaked up these unofficial rumors. People who heard it would tell it to others and they would tell it again to others and increased in a geometric progression.”²⁵ Much of this talk was

between friends and only in private circles; listeners would attack VOA and other programs when suspicious persons were around.²⁶

Despite the apparent dangers, the audience for foreign radio was likely much higher than authorities realized. A 1965 investigation into public attitudes undertaken by the regime revealed the audience for outside broadcasting to be between 40 – 60 million.²⁷ This number is especially high and somewhat startling given the dangers linked with these enemy voices. Sociological surveys such as this one were the impetus behind media reform undertaken in the 1960s. Radio Liberty attempted its own informal survey with Soviet tourists traveling outside the country. The survey was far from scientific and thus makes it difficult to accurately assess the rates of Western radio listenership. The study maintained a heavy bias towards those citizens from upper socioeconomic backgrounds as they were the ones most likely to be traveling outside of the country, not to mention the spur of the moment style of interview. The survey was also skewed toward a higher number of party members as they maintained a higher proportion of travel visas. Despite these difficulties, Radio Liberty's information provided an interesting picture by pegging the size of the audience for foreign radio at around 67.3 million with over 16 million listening during the course of a year; the former reflects a total audience of 37% of the Soviet Union's adult population!²⁸ Between 1972 and 1988, the audience for Voice of America alone was estimated at around 13 million per week, approximately 15% of

²⁵ Harvard Project. Schedule A, Vol. 3, Case 25 (interviewers J.B., and R.B., type A3). Male, 32, Great Russian, Engineer. Widener Library, Harvard University.

²⁶ Harvard Projec. Schedule B, Vol. 13, Case 381 (Special interview "Voice of America" by M.F.). Widener Library, Harvard University.

²⁷ Lisann, *Broadcasting*, 127.

²⁸ Mickiewicz, *Media*, 142.

the population with BBC and Radio Liberty averaging between 5 – 10% and Deutsche Welle between 2 – 5%.²⁹

Exactly who these listeners were is hard to tell but we can say that listening to western broadcasts was highest among college graduates. Eighty percent of Moscow University students were listening to foreign radio.³⁰ Voice of America was one of the most popular stations among Soviet listeners as it provided insight into life in the United States, the quality of living, and provided access to western musical styles. The general audience for VOA was younger, often tuning in more for entertainment reasons. Radio Liberty was significantly more anti-Soviet with a clear and unmistakable propaganda message that gave commentaries and histories on communism and the great suffering caused by the Soviet regime. The average Radio Liberty listener was older, generally more educated and less urban.

A cursory glance at these numbers could develop the false impression that the vast majority of listeners were turning to the bourgeois propagandists in open defiance of the regime. Despite impressive numbers, significant barriers to foreign radio listening remained. One respondent argued that the mass of the Soviet population was made up of collective farmers who worked too much and would never have had access to shortwave broadcasts. (He also believed that the best way to reach audiences would be to release balloons full of leaflets). The same respondent would not hear his first outside broadcast until he was away from land on a ship as part of a fishing fleet.³¹ For listeners who did

²⁹ Lisann, *Broadcasting*, 127 and R. Eugene Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Listener: An Empirical Assessment of Radio Liberty and Western Broadcasting to the USSR during the Cold War* (Hoover Institution Press Publication, 2007), xix.

³⁰ Roth-Ey, *Moscow Primetime*, 143.

³¹ Harvard Project. Schedule A, Vol. 10, Case 131 (interviewer R.F., type A4). Male, 39, Great Russian, Director and teacher of sports and physical culture. Widener Library, Harvard University.

not know foreign languages, those programs that were not broadcast in Russian would have been inescapable barriers. It is also true that sets that could pick up shortwave transmissions were relatively expensive. Another respondent believed that few laborers were listening to stations like VOA because of their large families and the increased probability that one might tell on the family.³²

Reasons for Tuning into Foreign Radio

Whatever obstacles did exist, broadcasts from outside the Soviet republics were reaching over a quarter of the adult population and all had different reasons for listening. As discussed earlier, the consequences for listening to non-official sources of information could be severe, so what compelled listeners to assume the risks and turn the dial to these foreign voices? One of the most important and widely cited reasons was simply to hear non-Soviet sources of information. As one listener said, “in order to hear the truth, one must listen to foreign news broadcasts.”³³ According to Radio Liberty’s informal polling, 77 percent of all respondents said they listened to western radio in order to hear the most recent information while another 70 percent said it was because the news they were interested in was unavailable inside the Soviet Union.³⁴ Audiences also varied depending on what crises were going on in the globe. The bigger the event or the more it had the potential to affect Soviet lives, the more willing people were to supplement the news they were getting at home.

³² Harvard Project. Schedule B, Vol. 13, Case 121 (Special interview about the "Voice of America" by M.F.). Widener Library, Harvard University.

³³ Harvard Project. Schedule A, Vol. 5, Case 51 (interviewer E.H., type A3). Female, 30, Great Russian, Accountant/assistant bookkeeper. Widener Library, Harvard University.

³⁴ Parta, *Hidden Listener*, 33.

Timeliness was certainly a huge factor. Half the appeal of foreign broadcasting related to the inability of domestic news to provide faster news reporting due in large part to the time it took information to pass through the censors. Listeners to western radio learned, not only about news and information before it appeared in the Soviet press, but also that which would never appear. The term “sharp questions” came to refer to questions that listeners would develop based on information they were hearing from non-official stations and that was either absent or ran contrary to that which was being presented inside the country. Soviet oral agitators were often unable to cope with the barrage of inquiries put to them by listeners to foreign broadcasting. Propagandists often had to avoid these sharp questions all together or risk intensifying the mistrust they were already experiencing. Soviet authorities would train political information specialists (politinformators) specifically to respond to these types of questions and refute information heard over western radio.³⁵

Soviet non-coverage of important issues pushed the public towards unofficial sources of information. Since the government maintained a monopoly on the airways there was little motivation to develop programs with listeners’ tastes in mind. This goes back to the ideology of Soviet broadcasting discussed in earlier chapters, namely that radio was regarded as a medium of cultural and educational entertainment; the need to provide breaking news or satisfy public curiosity was never in the cards. Newscasts were fairly standardized and repetitive, another reason why Soviet radio was stigmatized by

³⁵ Lisann, *Broadcasting*, 66.

citizens as “boring and tendentious.”³⁶ A *Pravda* article dated January 30, 1953 explained the issue:

The Soviet listener wants to enrich his knowledge and experience by means of the radio. Broadcasts on production and scientific themes occupy a larger place in the programs but little satisfy the listeners. These programs usually recount names of enterprises and people, figures and percentages of plan fulfillment, but the living man, with his thoughts and aspirations, his initiative and experience, is supplanted by statistics, technical formulas, and general phrases.³⁷

Facts and figures can only go so far in satisfying listener demands for entertainment and relevant news. The ignorance of popular tastes prompted many to fulfill these desires through other broadcasting outlets.

The press was also famous for avoiding information about disasters and other events of an unplanned nature. These were the same frustrations listeners had about local broadcasting. When natural disasters or industrial accidents happened nearby there was rarely acknowledgement or details despite the popular demand for information. As the Soviet-Afghan War sank into a stalemate and began drawing criticism, citizens increasingly turned to western radio to try and learn the truth about the country's occupation. In 1987, 45% of Russia's urban population was receiving news about the war from western radio and two-thirds of this audience disapproved of the country's involvement, presumably from finding out how bad the conflict was going. According to Radio Liberty's survey, following the Chernobyl meltdown, 36% of respondents admitted to turning to western radio to gain information beyond what little news was being made domestically. So influential was foreign broadcasting that following the Korean Airlines Flight 007 incident in 1983, 80% of non-listeners believed the official Soviet version of

³⁶ Hollander, *Political Indoctrination*, 113.

³⁷ Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 7, vol. 5, March 1953, p. 40-41.

the events compared to only 18% among those that were getting their news from western stations.³⁸ For these reasons, listeners could view even general news programs as anti-Soviet just because they relayed the truth, even when there was not an anti-Soviet intent.

While news and information was certainly the biggest reason for the growth of western broadcasting, others took the risks to find out more about non-Soviet ways of life. As mentioned earlier, the Soviet listener always had a curiosity for international news and frequently cited boredom with domestic press coverage. 62% of respondents to Radio Liberty admitted listening to western stations simply to learn more about the outside world.³⁹ VOA was likely the most listened to program for this reason. The station broadcasted fewer denunciations of the Soviet Union and more general news about life in the United States. The station also broadcasted modern music which 20% of respondents admitted was the reason they listened. American jazz and rock was popular but so too were music programs from Italy, Germany, France, and Iran to name a few. Starting in 1955, Willis Conover's jazz program on VOA was so popular that he became a celebrity in Russia and throughout Eastern Europe. Western jazz was often the entertainment for parties and small social gatherings.

Especially interesting in exploring motivations is to hear from listeners about the style of western broadcasts. The vast majority of respondents preferred those programs that were direct in their attacks on the Soviet regime and avoided getting too much into "philosophical discussions."⁴⁰ Commentaries, information about the history of communist regime, problems on the kolkhoz, and comparisons of civil liberties were

³⁸ All information provided by Radio Liberty survey in Parta, *Hidden Listener*, 55-57.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁰ Harvard Project. Schedule B, Vol. 13, Case 381 (Special interview "Voice of America" by M.F.). Widener Library, Harvard University.

some of the most popular aspects of western radio. Some respondents believed VOA soft pedaled too much and did not expose the regime for its abuses and contradictions, begging authorities to do something rather than actively criticizing them. One listener said that he preferred “sharp propaganda” that flat out gave its point of view rather than danced around it, such as explaining what an American worker could earn and what he could do with that money.⁴¹ Plenty of others switched to German and British broadcasting since America was “too delicate in their comments.”⁴² Another complained about the style of British broadcasting saying, “I do not like the BBC because they tell you that Attlee flew someplace or else they give over the radio biographies of Bevin and Churchill etc. People are risking their lives to listen to BBC and they broadcast biographies.”⁴³

Not every listener was looking to subvert the regime and embrace western viewpoints. Out of the Radio Liberty survey, 8% cited “know the adversary” as a reason for listening to foreign radio.⁴⁴ Presumably these were party members either familiarizing themselves with “bourgeois propaganda,” or at least towing the line with their response. Party members were much more likely to listen to VOA, Deutsche Welle, and other programs that were not as inflammatory in their denunciations of the Soviet system.⁴⁵ It would seem that tuning into foreign stations was more an act of curiosity than outright resistance to the regime. As can be discerned from understanding the motivations behind

⁴¹ Harvard Project. Schedule A, Vol. 3, Case 25 (interviewers J.B., and R.B., type A3). Male, 32, Great Russian, Engineer. Widener Library, Harvard University.

⁴² Harvard Project. Schedule A, Vol. 9, Case 121 (interviewer M.F., type A4). Male, 27, Ukrainian, Turner. Widener Library, Harvard University.

⁴³ Harvard Project. Schedule A, Vol. 28, Case 536 (interviewer J.R./J.O., type A4). Male, 23, Great Russian, Sergeant and later starshina in Soviet Army. Widener Library, Harvard University.

⁴⁴ Parta, *Hidden Listener*, 33.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

listening to western radio, citizens were simply looking to get expanded and faster news coverage, enjoy music not played in the Soviet Union, and learn about life outside their borders. As Alex Inkeles put it in 1959, “even if he (the citizen) is a completely loyal supporter of the regime he is frequently aware of a disparity between its policies and his own sense of curiosity or his need for certain sorts of information. As a result he tries to get information through unofficial channels...”⁴⁶ Interviews with listeners frequently show that displeasure with Soviet media was not tantamount to dissatisfaction with the regime. Citizens were bombarded with propaganda denouncing the west and its bourgeois decadence, it is easy then to understand that listeners wanted to find out what all the fuss was about. Of course, there were plenty who viewed their own government as corrupt and unrepresentative of its people but that does not mean that western broadcasting was the rallying point for an anti-Soviet movement. In fact, the question must be asked: to what extent did official Soviet attacks on foreign radio increase curiosity about it and drive people closer to the broadcasts? Much like a child who attempts to go where he is told is forbidden, listeners knew that the regime and its authorities discouraged western radio and that alone was reason enough to hear what the enemy voices had to say.

Soviet Responses to Western Broadcasting

While listening to western broadcasting was never officially made a crime, such blatant attempts by Western radio stations to undermine the regime could not go unaddressed. Soviet authorities attempted to rationalize this expanding audience by arguing that foreign radio was a holdover from the bourgeois past. Enemy voices, they

⁴⁶ Inkeles, *Soviet Citizen*, 161 – 162.

argued, represented a sophisticated style of psychological warfare that targeted young people who were highly vulnerable to such western manipulation.⁴⁷ Soviet authorities viewed the public as sensitive, unstable, naïve, and prone to erupt at the slightest moment of stress; resultantly, it feared what foreign broadcasting could provoke. As discussed earlier, the penalties for listening to non-Soviet media were generally prison sentences of around ten years. When asked who could listen without fear, one respondent declared: “there is no such category – only a few people in Moscow who have orders to control and transcribe foreign broadcasts may do it without being afraid.”⁴⁸

Official sources attempted to respond to foreign voices by discrediting them. Authorities portrayed western broadcasters as manipulative, existing only to sow disbelief in the minds of loyal Soviet citizens. A *Pravda* article dated September 1980 commented:

"Birds of a feather flock together" is the best way to describe the close contacts between the Voice of America, the BBC, Deutsche Welle and other western radio stations with Radio Liberty / Radio Free Europe. Despite the official signboard of government information agencies, recently these radio voices have been taking a more and more active part in the “psychological warfare” against the socialist countries-conducting subversive propaganda, in the full sense of the term.

Thus, where as in the past the heads of these radio stations steered clear of the direct use of inflammatory appeals by various dissidents to combat the system existing in the USSR and other socialist countries, leaving the publicizing of the dissidents’ “views” to the Radio Liberty / Radio Free Europe, now the Voice of America, the BBC and Deutsche Welle are offering them their microphones, sometimes a lot of hours to their delirious fabrications.⁴⁹

Programming deemed most offensive were commentaries on domestic affairs especially unflattering accounts of émigrés; many stations broadcasting in Russian were staffed by

⁴⁷ Roth-Ey, *Moscow Primetime*, 155.

⁴⁸ Harvard Project. Schedule B, Vol. 13, Case 121 (Special interview about the "Voice of America" by M.F.). Widener Library, Harvard University.

⁴⁹ Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 38, vol 32. October 1980, pages 7 – 8.

Russian expatriates which made these programs even more threatening to the regime.⁵⁰ Special political information specialists were trained to handle sharp questions and respond to information and claims made by foreign sources. The Soviet magazine RT had one purpose: carry warnings about outside broadcasts and discredit whenever possible. In one twenty month period, it rebutted VOA fifteen times, BBC nine times, Deutsche Welle eight times, and Radio Free Europe two times. As was standard practice, Radio Liberty was not even mentioned by authorities; its anti-Soviet agenda was so direct that officials did not want to call attention to its existence.⁵¹ After 1958, authorities forbade the sale of higher frequency shortwave sets but people could almost always find ways to alter them. In fact, throughout the 1960s, consumers who purchased a new radio would often be approached by “radio doctors,” someone offering to modify a set’s receiving capability for a price.⁵²

In a paradoxical way, western broadcasting could actually be seen as working to the regime’s advantage. For some officials, foreign propaganda broadcasts into the country was proof positive of capitalist deception and their struggle with the Soviet Union; on all accounts it confirmed the Soviet worldview. As Kristin Roth-Ey claimed, the “phenomenon of foreign broadcasting to the USSR was also a ringing testament to its modern, technologically advanced society and a backhanded compliment to its international importance.”⁵³ Sometimes the Soviet government was able to push for modifications in the content of western broadcasting on the diplomatic front. Since programs like VOA and Radio Liberty were partly funded by the American government,

⁵⁰ Hollander, *Political Indoctrination*, 114.

⁵¹ Lisann, *Broadcasting*, 69.

⁵² Roth-Ey, *Moscow Primetime*, 144.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 133.

the Soviets could promise their cooperation on one matter in exchange for altering something particularly troublesome in the content of transmissions. Nevertheless, there was still no denying that the popularity of foreign radio in the USSR was an embarrassment to the regime both at home and abroad. In the words of Maury Lisann:

Those responsible for the management of propaganda and internal ideological cohesion made it clear that the aspect of foreign radio broadcasts that bothered them most was simply the constant supply of hard news, in itself not necessarily anti-Soviet or politically oriented, but constantly holding the Soviet press up to an unfavorable comparison and thereby undermining public confidence in the credibility of all aspects of the regime's dealings with the people.⁵⁴

If the very nature of domestic broadcasting made listeners turn their dial to western media, there was always the option of removing that incentive by competing at home for audience with better information services.

By the 1960s, Soviet authorities were becoming responsive to the calls for media reform especially as the audience for foreign broadcasting was on the rise. As one Soviet journalist put it:

We must respond promptly to various, perhaps unfavorable, phenomena and incidents that occur in our life. Or else it turns out that while we keep silent, the people learn about them in incorrect and distorted interpretations. We still consider ourselves to have a monopoly in the field of information. But this isn't so. After all, by lagging in information, we sometimes involuntarily orient people to foreign radio, and once any false version begins it is difficult to stamp it out.⁵⁵

Radio had originally been envisioned as a vertical top-down medium for information, with the development of western radio the medium had become horizontal. Overly repetitive and ultimately slow news was seen as one of the major reasons why citizens were listening to enemy voices. Some even blamed the phenomenon on the success the

⁵⁴ Lisann, *Political Indoctrination*, 154.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Gayle Durham Hollander, "Recent Developments in Soviet Radio and Television News Reporting," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1967), 362.

nation had made in the last forty years. Mikhail Kharlamov, head of radio and television administration, answered the question other party leaders were asking: “why do people listen to VOA and the BBC? We’re the guilty ones here... now that many of our listeners have become more literate, educated, they want to know a lot of things, and we hide a lot of things in this way, we artificially arouse their interest in programs from foreign countries.”⁵⁶ In an effort to prevent listening to western radio, Soviet authorities introduced comprehensive broadcasting reform in an attempt to give Soviet audiences the kind of programming they believed listeners wanted. Deeming faster news reportage and music the primary reasons for tuning into VOA and others like it, the regime created Mayak (beacon) in 1964, the first station dedicated to round-the-clock news and entertainment. Every half hour, Mayak provided five minutes of news coverage with twenty-five minutes of music. This marked the first time that news was being reported regularly and, in an attempt to avoid redundancy, it was always different.⁵⁷ The focus on news distribution was seen as the first defense against foreign broadcasting. As one article explained, it was imperative to:

recognize that bourgeois information agencies have achieved a high operational efficiency, immediately responding to everything happening in the world, while we are sometimes late. This means that the false version flies around the world faster than the truthful and exact one. And the first report produces some times the greater impression! In contemporary conditions the spread of information and its operational effect is becoming the most important spirit of ideological struggle, and in this, complacency is inadmissible.⁵⁸

As a direct challenge to these stations, Mayak broadcasted its most popular programs at 11pm when VOA listenership was at its height.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Roth-Ey, *Moscow Primetime*, 160.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁵⁸ Lisann, *Broadcasting*, 35.

There is little doubt that Mayak was, at least to some degree, a successful enterprise. A poll conducted in 1965 showed that 70% of listeners reported to listening to Mayak some of the time while another 36% reported to be regular listeners.⁵⁹ The station was also broadcast on the same band frequency as Radio Liberty and thus acted as a type of auxiliary jammer. The Mayak formula was popular enough to be imitated in some of the other Soviet republics, notably Promin in the Ukraine and Araz in Azerbaijan. Despite these successes and initial reforms, Mayak remained hampered by rigid censors and the complex apparatus needed to get information approved before dissemination. The very act of censoring information almost ensures that breaking news is unable to be delivered in a timely fashion. If Mayak hoped to play a significant role in combating bourgeois propaganda it would take more than just providing a new format for news and information but actually engaging in an overhaul of the existing censorship apparatus; changes that the regime would ultimately fail to support. As Stephen Lovell put it, “at just the moment Soviet broadcasters learned to speak, they discovered their listeners had moved on.”⁶⁰

Jamming

Despite the comprehensive media reform, constant fear of punishment, and campaign to discredit western radio, its listenership continued and in most cases was only expanding. Lisann again puts this poignantly:

The dilemma was perfectly clear: foreign radio made it impossible to manage the news about important events in accordance with the ideological planning for

⁵⁹ Roth-Ey, *Moscow Primetime*, 172.

⁶⁰ Stephen Lovell, “Broadcasting Bolshevik: The Radio Voice of Soviet Culture, 1920s – 1950s” *Journal of Contemporary History* 48, no. 78 (2013): 96.

them, yet at the same time, even after the most blatant evidence of the breakdown in those plans, the regime was flatly unwilling to provide full reporting that couldn't anyway satisfy those who turned to foreign radio. The ideological requirements of news management were apparently still considered irreconcilable with the conditions necessary for effective competition with foreign radio. The gap must have engendered frustration, and opened an opportunity for the advocates of the simple shortcut to a solution: the resumption of jamming.⁶¹

The process of jamming foreign broadcasts started with the Voice of America in 1948 and would be applied selectively and inconsistently after 1963. Interestingly, the intensification and cessation of jamming could usually be seen as a barometer of East-West relations. For instance, the jamming of most foreign broadcasts resumed following the Prague Spring in 1968 but would be relaxed again in 1973 as the Cold War entered its period of détente and culminated in the signing of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Jamming basically implied the creation of interfering static, broadcast on the same band as the targeted station or the use of high-pitched sounds designed both to block the signal as well as irritate the listener. During jamming, listeners would have to settle for whichever station had the most audible signal at that moment. By and large, music stations and broadcasts not in Russian were left alone. Often, selective jamming was utilized and varied in accordance with minute by minute content of the broadcast; individual items could be jammed depending on how they furthered or conflicted with Soviet politics at a particular moment. This strategy may have been useful in using foreign broadcasting to prepare public opinion for policy changes. For instance, the regime was not jamming VOA reports of Soviet nuclear tests perhaps as a way to let the public know of the country's military capabilities without making official statements about it on their own.

⁶¹ Lisann, *Broadcasting*, 92.

Despite their best efforts, jamming radio stations was never an exact science. In fact, outside of Moscow, Leningrad, and a few other urban areas, foreign broadcasts were easy to get even during the periods of the most intense jamming. If the interference was bad enough, some listeners could get in a car and drive out to their dacha and listen unhindered.⁶² One respondent commented that he never found the jamming of VOA to be particularly effective as long as he kept his ear close enough to the radio.⁶³ It may also seem puzzling as to why authorities would cease jamming when foreign stations were so noxious for Soviet officials. Part of the reasons for these lulls were due to the nature of international events in the Cold War. At times, however, the regime believed that a modern international power could not keep shielding its citizens from the outside world. There was also a basic assumption that the Soviet political system had so stabilized itself that the public could safely absorb large quantities of uncontrolled information. Sometimes suspension came as a result of diplomacy as the Soviets claimed at times that the United States had restrained the content of VOA and its anti-Soviet propaganda.⁶⁴ Part of these trends may have come from the sheer costs involved; by 1995, the country was spending more on jamming than it was on its own radio programs.⁶⁵ Engineers at VOA and the BBC estimated that the Soviet Union spent between \$500 billion to \$1 billion annually on jamming.⁶⁶ Worse yet, jamming was so intense at certain times that the regime actually began jamming itself! In the absence of Soviet stations, some collective farms could only turn to VOA and BBC to get news and information.

⁶² Gene Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty: An Insider's Memoir of Radio Liberty* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 16.

⁶³ Harvard Project. Schedule B, Vol. 13, Case 381 (Special interview "Voice of America" by M.F.). Widener Library, Harvard University.

⁶⁴ Hollander, *Political Indoctrination*, 114.

⁶⁵ Roth-Ey, *Moscow Primetime*, 131.

⁶⁶ Sosin, *Sparks*, 203.

Foreign broadcasters had their own methods to counter Soviet jamming. Western stations could broadcast on a wavelength so close to those of domestic stations that to jam it could risk jamming themselves. As seen above, even during periods of interference, listeners could understand just by staying close to their sets so western stations began intensifying the tones of their announcers' voices in an effort to cut through the distortion. Even more crafty, outside programs would change stations mid-program so as to elude jammers altogether. In the end, jamming was too inefficient, inconsistent, and ineffective to bring about any real change to listening habits. A 1973 listener's evaluation of audibility showed that Soviet citizens had difficulty distinguishing between periods of jamming and other kinds of natural interference. For instance, 14% of listener's rated Radio Liberty's reception as "better than fair" before the suspension of jamming. That number actually dropped to 13 percent after it ended. For the BBC those numbers were 23 percent and 23 percent respectively, meaning there was no change in the station's audibility!⁶⁷ Given the immense size of the country, complete jamming was nearly impossible and listeners who wanted their fill of western broadcasts were largely unhindered in their efforts. As a result, foreign radio became an important avenue for many Soviet listeners. As Eugene Parta argued:

Broadcasts were a means, not an end. They were a channel of information that reported the news, keep the flame of hope alive, but there had to be a vessel to contain that flame. That vessel was a large audience that was receptive to these broadcasts, to the factual information they provided and the implicit message of hope they contained.⁶⁸

Many listeners did believe that western broadcasters legitimately cared for the people of the Soviet Union. "The VOA cares for the Soviet people who never saw America," one

⁶⁷ Lisann, *Broadcasting*, 171.

⁶⁸ Parta, *Hidden Listener*, 67.

respondent recalled, “the VOA wants to help us through its broadcasts, but they can’t do very much, since its broadcasts are being jammed and can’t be heard very well.”⁶⁹

“Radio Hooligans”

In Chapter 1, radio amateurs were among those individuals at the forefront of radio broadcasting in Russia in the 1920s. Ever since these earliest days, ham radio operating was a popular hobby made up of enthusiasts who would modify their own sets to receive and communicate with foreign broadcasters. Often referred to as “radio hooligans” by those in authority, these hobbyists often used military lines to communicate illegally. They also frequently operated within medium wave frequencies reserved for state broadcasts causing interference and thus were regarded as a national security threat. Usually falling between the ages of 16 and 20, these amateurs received information directly from foreigners in places like the United States and Australia on topics such as houses and prices on consumer goods; resultantly, these people often found themselves under the watch of the NKVD.⁷⁰ Most radio amateurs lived in the Soviet Union’s outlying areas where there was little else in the way of entertainment.⁷¹

Often referring to themselves as “kings” and “lords,” these amateurs created quite a debate since most legal codes had no provisions for ham operating. Numerous articles appeared in newspapers throughout the 1960s and 1970s to either denounce these hooligans as criminals or to push for changes in broadcasting regulations to allow these

⁶⁹ Harvard Project. Schedule B, Vol. 13, Case 121 (Special interview about the "Voice of America" by M.F.). Widener Library, Harvard University.

⁷⁰ Harvard Project. Schedule A, Vol. 33, Case 134/(NY)1368 (interviewer T.H., type A4). Female, 45, Great Russian, Typist. Widener Library, Harvard University.

⁷¹ Harvard Project. Schedule A, Vol. 10, Case 131 (interviewer R.F., type A4). Male, 39, Great Russian, Director and teacher of sports and physical culture. Widener Library, Harvard University.

frustrated ham operators a legal avenue to explore their interests. Despite the interference they caused, some looked upon these hobbyists as representing a positive of the Soviet system. An article appearing in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* in 1974 offered the explanation:

Strange as it may seem, it is positive changes in our life that are behind radio hooliganism. First, rising material prosperity enables every young radio hooligan to possess his own radio-phonograph, tape recorder, etc. Second, knowledge about radio technology has increased: Almost one-third of the hundreds of illegal radio operators apprehended in Moscow and Moscow Province were between the ages of 12 and 14. In the 1930s a 12-year-old radio designer would have been looked on as a child prodigy - today there are thousands of them.⁷²

The vast majority of these amateurs were almost certainly not attempting to cause chaos and disruption on Soviet channels. Many of them were just young adults with an interest in technology; a few were simply broadcasting a song dedicated to their girlfriend.⁷³

When these young people were found, most were simply told to appear in court, pay a fine, and surrender their equipment. If anything, the phenomenon of radio hooliganism was a testament to the way in which radio had been fully embraced by Soviet citizens by the 1960s.

Undermining the Regime

Despite the vast potential radio could have in the Soviet Union and was having elsewhere in the West, there seems to be strong evidence to suggest that it was slowly undermining the regime. Part of this was due in large measure to the impact that western broadcasting was having while the other half can be attributed to domestic problems that were drawing criticism. If foreign radio was so dangerous, why did the Soviet Union continue to build wireless sets that allowed for the reception of shortwave broadcasts?

⁷² Current Digest of Soviet Press, 12, no. 27. April 16, 1975, pages 18 – 28.

⁷³ Current Digest of Soviet Press, 12, no. 27 April 16, 1975, page 18.

The question is an interesting one, especially given the fact that ever since 1949, the USSR was producing more shortwave radios than all other countries of the world combined. In 1958, a Central Committee investigation showed that 85% of wireless sets were in the European part of Russia where no Soviet stations were even broadcasting on shortwave and where the only thing to listen to was foreign broadcasting. To answer the question asked, industry was more likely to try and produce the most current technology so as to continue bragging about the potential of Soviet manufacturing. Shortwave sets were also what citizens were looking to buy and perhaps they continued to be made in an effort to see sales quotas reached. Either way, “the great irony of this Trojan horse,” Kristin Roth-Ey argues, “is that it was built in large measure by the conquered peoples hands: Soviet industry produced the shortwave sets that carried enemy voices (even as the regime was also pouring millions into a futile effort to shut them up).”⁷⁴

The other component to the argument against wireless sets was that it weakened the regime’s ability to keep a control on public opinion as radio listening became more private. Before the war, radio promoted collective listening as individuals would gather together to hear the radio orchestra or find out about the progress of spring fieldwork and the competition between brigades.⁷⁵ As radio became more everyday, these collective and public acts became more private and the communal element was lost. Listeners were now interacting with news and culture on their own terms, rather than being fed whatever the local speaker was broadcasting. In the words of Roth-Ey, “foreign broadcasting... offered an unauthorized private experience without limits and with designs on everyday life. Its

⁷⁴ Roth-Ey, *Moscow Primetime*, 132.

⁷⁵ Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 18, vol 5. June 13, 1953, pages 20 – 50.

very presence in Soviet space was an anthem to the regime's impotence; its very popularity suggested that Soviet culture was substandard, replaceable, even irrelevant."⁷⁶

All of these developments were made worse when placed in the context of the ineptitude of Soviet-controlled media. The lack of a coherent media policy put great strains on the practice of mass communications inside the USSR. Even with new programming and stations such as Mayak, officials were still trying to capture new and faster reporting within the confines of traditional controlled news. The inability to provide up-to-date information led listeners to seek out other sources as the Soviet news system was "so paralyzed by internal constraints that until...prodded from above, it cannot even report an event bringing down its own buildings around its heads."⁷⁷ By many reports, Soviet news ran so contrary to what listeners were seeing around them that it undermined the basic ideological legitimacy of the whole system. According to Lisann, based on interview data, about 20 – 30% of the population generally doubted the credibility of all Soviet information sources.⁷⁸ Soviet authorities clearly understood the essential components to effective media as Radio Moscow's broadcasts to foreign countries were not hampered by the same constraints as domestic broadcasting. Broadcasters were given party approval for greater access to resources, foreign media, and were freed from the perpetual slowness in the delivery of information. Even announcers were allowed to develop on-air personalities all in an effort to compete with foreign media outside the Soviet republics. One has to wonder what may have happened

⁷⁶ Roth-Ey, *Moscow Primetime*, 134.

⁷⁷ Lisann, *Broadcasting*, 53.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

if the same funds and resources were made available to the country's own media institutions.

Radio in the Final Years of the Soviet Union

As the Soviet Union entered the transformative period of its final decade, radio would also continue to play its new role albeit with some new competition. By the 1980s, the growth of television was a major development in Soviet media. In fact, radio became the leisure time activity most displaced by the introduction of television. In rural areas, radio listening was the third most displaced activity behind movies and going to the club. Radio's largest audience by this point was in the morning since television was most popular at night. On average, 80% of citizens were listening to radio before going to work and that number dropped to a staggering 2.3% in the evening when television was on.⁷⁹ Broadcasting maintained its utilitarian character, providing news, music, weather, and crop information for farmers.

In the era of glasnost and perestroika, radio was to play a new role. For the first time, foreign radio became a legitimate and fully legal participant on the Russian media scene. Western programs like Radio Liberty that were still being jammed became uncensored for the first time in 1988. Voice of America's dominance among Soviet audiences ended as Radio Liberty moved from the voice of the dissident movement to all around political and information focus by 1986. In fact, the station became one of the go-to sources for information on perestroika. Western radio still had the ability to affect public opinion, three out of ten listeners to Western radio believed the government's handling of perestroika was effective whereas that number was about half among non-

⁷⁹ Mickiewicz, *Media*, 15 – 17.

listeners.⁸⁰ Radio Liberty was used by 30% of Muscovites during the August Coup to find out information on fast-breaking news. Gorbachev himself reportedly listened to Radio Liberty, BBC, and VOA during his imprisonment.⁸¹ Regarded as Radio Liberty's "finest hour" by one former employee, the station played a role in keeping people informed when Soviet media was characteristically silent. Leonid Ionin of the liberal paper *Nezavisimaya Gazet* explained:

Radio Liberty and the BBC defeated the KGB and the CPSU... If the high-level plotters had... seized the newspapers, radio stations, television, cut off the telephones and isolated the White House [Supreme Soviet building] from Moscow, and Moscow from the rest of the Soviet Union and the world – they would have succeeded. Any other way they were doomed.⁸²

This was not the first time in which foreign broadcasting filled in for a lack of available domestic coverage though it may have been the first time it was openly commended by Soviet authorities. Yeltsin himself commented that, "during the coup... Radio Liberty was one of the very few channels through which it was possible to send messages to the whole world and, most important, to the whole of Russia because virtually every family in Russia listens to Radio Liberty."⁸³ As a measure of appreciation, Boris Yeltsin permitted Radio Liberty to open a permanent bureau in Moscow! Foreign radio had come along way from enemy voice to welcomed participant in the Russian media scene.

Despite these trends, foreign listening actually dropped starting around 1985 as perestroika made Soviet radio livelier and less censored. Domestic broadcasting now provided live interviews, group discussions, highlights of upcoming programs, cross-reporting of events, and special shows on science, medicine, sports, religion, etc.

⁸⁰ Parta, *Hidden Listener*, 59.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, xvi.

⁸² Quoted in Sosin, *Sparks*, 217.

⁸³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 218.

Recognizing that the “content and orientation of broadcasts do much to shape public opinion and people’s sentiments,” Gorbachev decreed on July 14, 1990, significant changes to the state’s control over radio and television broadcasting. He proclaimed that:

The functions of state television and radio broadcasting are to be exercised independently of political and public organizations in order to serve the goal of providing objective and comprehensive coverage of processes taking place in the country. Monopolization of airtime by any one party, political trend or grouping is impermissible, as is the conversion of state television and radio into a means of profit for the personal political views of its employees.⁸⁴

By the stroke of his pen, the President of the USSR made it illegal for the party to monopolize broadcasting for its own benefits and to express its own political views. The decree essentially reinvented the purpose radio had been serving since its earliest days inside the Soviet Union. Actual media reform brought listeners what they had been searching for all these years, a media that could provide breaking information about news that people cared about, not to mention the newfound personality broadcasts were suddenly given.

Conclusion

The Soviet Union’s postwar years saw substantial changes in everything from politics to mass media. In many ways, radio came into its own during this period as radiofication expanded the audience and in many ways saturated the market. The ongoing Cold War with the United States fueled interest for international news and when obsolete media models prevented radio from meeting the needs of its listeners, many began to turn to alternate sources of information. These decades represent one of the first times audiences were able to control how they listened to radio. The biggest development on

⁸⁴ Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 42, no. 28, August 1990, p.13.

this front was the emergence of foreign broadcasting. “Enemy voices” were a constant source of concern for the regime yet citizens set aside the risks to find out what the west was saying. After years of vilifying the west and its institutions it was only natural that citizens developed a healthy curiosity about these supposed “enemies of Soviet labor.”

The medium of radio broadcasting is an inherently fascinating one as the airways both offer the potential to unite a nation and at the same time let in unwanted voices who have the chance to sow the seeds of discord. Foreign radio did not create a movement against the Soviet regime but it certainly did not do anything to stop its growth. Radio did play a role in destabilizing the regime though western broadcasting cannot be totally to blame. The other half of radio’s link with dissatisfaction towards authorities came from the ineptitude of domestic broadcasting. Radio Moscow possessed the means by which to continue supporting national goals while at the same time provide the style of news and entertainment listeners were looking to hear. However, a rigid grasp on outdated models of censoring information blocked any chance of achieving the success of media outlets in the West. By the time authorities realized their models were driving listeners away, their attempts at meaningful reform were ultimately too little and too late. The clamoring for a free media would continue long into the 1980s until the Gorbachev reforms finally allowed for something at least resembling the media structure of other democratic nations. By this time the regime was on its last leg and the new reforms in combination with the open listening of foreign broadcasters would be a tidal wave that officials could not hope to hold back. Radio, the medium that had supported the state and the party since its foundations, had now contributed to their end; its ultimate success was surviving the system itself.

Conclusion

In the words of Mark Hopkins, radio was the “genuine vehicle of social revolution.”¹ If this is the case, it is hard to imagine that radio could find a better home than that of the Soviet Union, one of the twentieth century’s most prolific examples of social transformation. Following the success of the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks faced a monumental task that was almost unprecedented in the history of the modern world. A relatively obscure minority had seized power and was attempting to bring about complete political, economic, social, and cultural transformation in the world’s largest country. This unenviable task was no doubt daunting but the early Bolsheviks were resolved to seize the opportunity and set themselves to work. Fortunately for the party, broadcasting technologies were established enough that radio seemed to be a way to shrink the vast expanse of the nation and unite the people behind a common message and inspire in them the flame of creating the classless society.

The potential of radio broadcasting seems almost unlimited given the extent of work that lay before the Soviet authorities. Even as the original party creed was lost in the early years of the regime and later corrupted under the totalitarian influence of Stalin, radio seemed poised and ready to support the goals of whatever captains were steering the ship. The collective participation that radio fostered in the early years as listeners huddled around public amplifiers was the kind of behavior the party supported. Radio offered the opportunity to broadcast not only propaganda and other information geared at agitation but also other cultural programs aimed at public enlightenment. The size and diversity of the country worked against the regime, made worse by the lack of education and literacy

¹ Mark Hopkins, *Mass Media in the Soviet Union* (New York Pegasus, 1970), 25.

that ran rampant; party organs like *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* could only go so far. Radio was perfectly suited to bring cultures together, unite the peasants with the proletariat, connect both ends of the country, and extend the oral agitation network already being developed. This was the potential radio offered; it was the vehicle to drive a backward nation into the twentieth century.

Unfortunately for the regime and the mass of the Soviet people, this opportunity was never realized. The reality was that radio was never able to live up to its potential, due in large part to the mishandling by the same regime that needed the technology so desperately. In the earliest decades of the party, radio played a very minor role. Thanks to problems with electrification and the lack of funds necessary to bring the wired network to the mass of the peasantry, broadcasts were unable to reach huge swaths of the country. Even in areas where the technology was in place, radio was unable to stand out as a medium that was in anyway different from print media. As a result, radio was stigmatized as persistently dull for much of its life as it simply repeated the same information being heard in the newspapers, by agitators, and in union meetings. Even the creation of Mayak was not enough to draw in listeners. Until the era of *perestroika*, broadcast programming lacked character and the necessary liveliness to appeal to audiences. Despite the negatives, radio's ability to unite the country in the face of Nazi invasion was a testament to the potential broadcasting technology offered; it was all too unfortunate for listeners that these lessons were soon forgot. As with other Soviet mass media, the discrepancy between what was real and what was being reported led to a lack of trust in the regime. The more slowly that news was being reported and the more the censors prevented meaningful broadcasts, the more some Soviet listeners tuned to the multitude of foreign

voices being broadcast into the country. Each varied with regards to the intensity of its anti-Soviet message though almost all undermined the authority of domestic broadcasting. Rather than sponsor meaningful reforms, Soviet authorities invested between \$500 million and \$1 billion annually into jamming foreign broadcasts such as the BBC, VOA, and Radio Liberty.² In the end, only fifty-one percent of listeners said that jamming caused them to listen less frequently.³

For much of the early history of Soviet radio, listeners were largely unaffected by the medium. The predominance of wired loudspeakers only in public places and the relative lack of them in the countryside meant that the average citizen was unexposed. Even as wireless sets grew in popularity, the relative expensiveness of these devices kept consumers away until the late 1950s and early 1960s. Once these sets became the norm, the collective nature of radio gave way to the individual's greater control of their own listening. Decisions were being made about how to interact with culture on one's own terms within the privacy of one's home. Many listeners were more interested in music and other entertainment programs than they were about production figures or information about the autumn harvest. International news was the one bit of information many listeners cared to hear though it was also the news less likely to be aired. Despite these frustrations most listeners did not turn to foreign stations in ways to subtly defy the regime. For the most part, listeners were driven more by curiosity and the lure of the forbidden. What they found was news and entertainment that further exposed the fundamental issues of their own broadcasting.

² Gene Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty: An Insider's Memoir of Radio Liberty* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 203.

³ R. Eugene Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Listener: An Empirical Assessment of Radio Liberty and Western Broadcasting to the USSR during the Cold War* (Hoover Institution Press Publication, 2007), 10.

Radio did not single-handedly bring down the Soviet Union. What is clear is that radio never quite mobilized the population as it did for the Nazis in Germany or led to the cultural appeal the way it did in the United States. In this, the Soviet Union missed an opportunity to take hold of that “genuine vehicle of social revolution.” Then again, the same can be said of many other things in the Soviet system. Radio is intrinsically part of the much larger story of Soviet successes and failures. In 1895, Alexander Popov demonstrated the potential of radio broadcasting and ever since Russia’s claim to the birth of radio has been mired in debate, it seems only fitting that at the end of the Soviet Union the role of radio is once again front and center.

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