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Simo Mikkonen

Radio Liberty – The Enemy Within? The Dissemination of Western Values through U.S. Cold War Broadcasts

The Cold War is said to have been essentially a clash between two competing ideological systems. While this position has been disputed as an overly simplistic generalization, both sides used ideology as a cover for a variety of operations in order to undermine a rival global power, and ideological competition was a crucial part of the Cold War (Saul 2001: 1–5; Zubok & Pleshakov 1996: 110–116). While the immediate post-Second-World-War situation seemed to favor the Soviet Union and Communist ideology in general, it would soon become unfavorable when it became obvious that the West was able to provide social security and public health care systems, and that workers there were generally better off than those in the Soviet Union. Soviet propaganda and the appeal of the Soviet system were generally based on the assumed inequality and deprivation inherent in the capitalist system. The Great Depression was considered proof of the decline of capitalism and the rise of a more egalitarian communist system. However, the West managed to emerge after the Second World War economically stronger and with a more equal distribution of wealth, a fact that caused the Soviet Union great concern. Naturally, this had to be concealed from the Soviet public. The Soviet media usually depicted only strikes, race riots and all manifestations of worker malcontent in the West (Brooks 2000: 208–211). One thing that had to be maintained in the Soviet Union was the belief that average people were better off there than in the West. This was possible as long as contacts with the West remained at a minimum, as was the case during the Stalinist era. By the time Stalin died, however, the West had developed a sophisticated means of reaching over the Iron Curtain and engaging in the active dissemination of Western values.

This paper is part of my larger project examining the cultural and ideological side of the Cold War, especially with regard to Soviet-American relations. Instead of examining the ideologies of the warring parties as such, I have focused on how culture and ideology were used as weapons in the Cold War and how the superpowers tried to directly influence each others' populations. In the Cold War, the East and the West were considered to be opposites, and it was supposed that the confrontation between the capitalist

and communist systems would minimize the flow of influence crossing the so-called Iron Curtain. Instead of diminishing the exchange of ideas in the international arena, however, the Cold War incorporated cultural influence and the dissemination of values as some of its primary weapons (Krabben-dam & Scott-Smith 2003; Shaw 2001). Instead of being a sideshow for the Cold War, values and ideas and their successful dissemination became the principle battlefield.

The Soviet leaders were shocked to see capitalism emerge triumphant in the 1950s and 1960s, with Western economic growth exceeding all imagination. After the Second World War, capitalism was expected to be on the verge of collapse. The Soviet leaders had believed that capitalism had been about to go under in the Great Depression, while the Soviet Union had been able to step up and expand its industrial base meanwhile. In the 1950s, the Soviet Union continued its active attempts to spread communism, and it expanded its activities abroad to an unprecedented level (Zubok & Pleshakov 1996: 182–186). Soon, however, the Soviet Union was forced onto the defensive in an area in which, before the Second World War, it was thought to be the master – propaganda and the media. With the expansion of its activities abroad, movement over the Soviet borders increased, and it started to become more and more difficult to conceal growing Western superiority in the economic sphere and to get people to opt voluntarily for communism.

Although the Cold War saw a surge of interest in the Soviet Union in the West, the isolationist United States, in particular, had not shown any special interest in that distant regime prior to WWII. Thus, it initially came as a shock to the Americans to realize how little they knew about their Cold War adversary, which throughout the Stalinist era had remained xenophobic, engaging in only the bare minimum of foreign contacts (Gould-Davies 2003; Zubok & Pleshakov 1996: 22–28). With very limited access to Soviet sources, American researchers had to use whatever information there was available and try to find new ways to gather more. Primary sources were, however, limited to older material like the so-called Smolensk Archive, salvaged from the Germans in the course of WWII. Extensive material was also produced in the Harvard *Émigré* Interview Project, in the course of which over 2000 Soviet emigrants living in Germany and the United States were interviewed. This project, however, could not produce up-to-date information about Soviet conditions, as it concentrated on people who had left or were deported from the Soviet Union during the war.

As US officials aspired to reach over the Iron Curtain in their search for more knowledge, while at the same time avoiding direct military conflict, there was a simultaneous effort to nurture indirect methods of affecting the adversary. Men like Allen Dulles, George Kennan and General Lucius Clay were prone to believe that the Communist system was vulnerable to aggressive forms of psychological warfare (Osgood 2003). It was in this context that Radio Free Europe in 1950 and Radio Liberation in 1953 came into existence. Radio Liberation, which after the 1950s became known as Radio Liberty (RL), broadcast to the Soviet Union not only in Russian, but by 1954 it was using an arsenal of seventeen Soviet languages in an attempt to influence other nationalities that were often found to be more receptive to Western messages. Right from the start, the ultimate objective of RL was to further the collapse of the Soviet totalitarian government, but when it was quickly understood that this was not going to happen in the near future, RL became useful in several other ways (Puddington 2000: 187–190).

Although there were several dozen international broadcasters to the Soviet Union, RL represented a completely new approach and therefore deserves special attention. Stations with similarly aggressive objectives had existed before, but they typically broadcast the points of view of their countries of origin, as the Voice of America or Radio Moscow did. RL, instead, was built around Soviet émigrés; it spoke to the Soviet people only through the émigrés' Soviet experiences, and furthermore it dealt with internal Soviet affairs. It likened itself to an alternative domestic service rather than a foreign broadcaster, insinuating voices from the West into the midst of the Soviet people. This was naturally a subject of major controversy between the Soviet and US governments, and it also involved West Germany, since RL's headquarters were situated in Munich. This location, together with concealed funding, was very handy, as it helped US officials deny responsibility for RL's broadcasts, unlike those of the Voice of America. Only in the late 1960s was the United States forced to admit RL's government funding and its close connections with the CIA (Meyer 1980; Nelson 1997; Puddington 2000). Although some detailed accounts of Radio Liberty's personnel and activities exist, these are mostly in the form of memoirs that move on a general level rather than examine the impact or the broader operational environment of the radio. The sole publication that tackles the question of RL's impact on the Soviet Union is Eugene Parta's (2007) valuable description and assessment of the station's audience survey work after 1970.

The unique feature of Radio Liberty was thus its staff, which except for the higher administration, consisted entirely of Soviet émigrés. This provided it with a means of understanding its audiences much better than foreign broadcasters generally. However, the émigrés served only as a starting point for obtaining knowledge about Soviet conditions. In order to have up-to-date Soviet information, even the constant recruitment of recent Soviet émigrés could not suffice. The gathering of current information was crucial for RL as it strived to be a provider of current information and news about Soviet affairs that was lacking in the Soviet media. But RL also needed evidence to prove to its sponsors that the station was actually listened to in the Soviet Union. These two aims created a challenge to which an answer was engineered primarily by one man, Max Ralis. This Moscow-born polyglot had lived in Berlin and Paris, and had fought with the French army before being forced to escape the Nazis over the Pyrenees and then volunteering to serve in the US army. During the war he was introduced to intelligence responsibilities and was hired by the Psychological Warfare Division of SHAEF (Allied European Headquarters). He developed these intelligence skills further in his academic career and wrote his dissertation on interviewing techniques under Paul Lazarsfeld. Naturally enough, he took part in the Harvard Émigré Interview Project, and after several other posts he eventually found himself in the place where he was to spend the rest of his career, heading RL's audience research department, which was basically his own creation (Bogart 1999; Critchlow 1995, 101; Mikkonen 2010).

The methods used by Ralis' department, Audience Research and Program Evaluation for Radio Liberation (ARD), were unprecedented in many ways. Even RL's staff initially considered it impossible to interview Soviet citizens in order to find out about their radio listening habits, but exactly that was Ralis' ambitious goal. Since it would have been very difficult and dangerous to conduct this in the Soviet Union, he planned to get hold of Soviet listeners when they traveled abroad. His plan was inaugurated simultaneously with the opening of Soviet borders to permit a certain amount of professional and even tourist trips abroad. Naturally, with the intense Cold War atmosphere generally, and the relaxations of "peaceful co-existence" not yet in sight, those allowed to travel were kept in carefully watched groups with "chaperones" and usually consisted of people that the Soviet authorities and the KGB considered loyal, mostly Party officials and other stalwarts, as the US National Security Council Report correctly em-

phasized in 1955 (NSC report 5508/1; Parta 2007: 76). Towards the end of the 1950s, the number of tourists increased, but they were also subjected to loyalty checks, were closely watched and were urged to keep an eye on each other (Mickelson 1983: 210–211). Nevertheless, Ralis' undertaking proved highly successful, especially with Soviet ethnic minorities.

Radio Liberty, a CIA-sponsored station destined to affect Soviet popular opinion and people's minds, thus became a crucial tool of Western intelligence. Its subversive role included providing the Soviet audience with information about Soviet internal affairs. Its Audience Research Department naturally produced information about radio listening in the Soviet Union, but more importantly, it gathered extremely valuable information about developments and people's attitudes in the Soviet Union, as Ralis himself describes (HIA, RFE/RL records 529/3A). At first, the interviews were conducted with Soviet visitors to the West, especially in the immediate post-Stalinist years. But towards the late 1950s, when Soviet citizens were becoming a little less cautious, information gathering activities also expanded, and occasionally interviews were conducted inside the Soviet Union as well. If they had the chance, interviewers also gave their interviewees Russian-language literature that was forbidden inside the Soviet Union: this might be a compilation of the broadcasting frequencies of foreign radio stations, Bibles or Boris Pasternak's and Aleksandr Solženicyn's literary works. Furthermore, books like Robert Conquest's *Great Terror*, Vladimir Nabokov's *Pnin* or George Orwell's *Animal Farm* were given to Soviet visitors in Russian translations. The money for all this came from the CIA (HIA, RFE/RL Records 564/7; Critchlow 2004). Interviewers would also tell their subjects facts about the countries they were visiting and offered to put them in contact with émigrés if they so wished. In short, the interviewers provided the visitors with ways of doing things that were at odds either with Soviet ideology or Soviet regulations.

In 1965 Ralis himself described ways in which the information gathered by his department was collected. It took place in several countries and was mostly gleaned from conversations with Soviet citizens from many different walks of life. Reports were also obtained through qualified and observant friends of various nationalities, creeds, and colors, including Western visitors to the USSR, Indian or African exchange students, repatriates or former Soviet citizens. Ralis emphasized the fact that information collected in this way was not representative of a cross-section of the country's population. Even so, it was not one-sided, was collected from a number of

places, had internal consistency and reflected a picture that was perhaps not far from reality. Ralis trained his interviewers personally, and the methods used by them closely resembled those of many cultural anthropologists. Although the objectives are certainly different, the comparison is not too far-fetched: Ralis had participated as a cultural anthropologist in field work in a remote Indian village before enlisting with Radio Liberty (Bogart 1999). Among the interviewees, the proportion of those who admitted to listening to foreign broadcasts ranged annually from 60 to 90 percent. This suggests widespread listening among the Soviet elites. Although RL also collected letters from its audience, a large majority of these were intercepted by the Soviet authorities. In comparison to the widespread listening in to Western broadcasts in the Soviet Union, only 1% of the British population listened to Radio Moscow more than once a week (HIA, RFE/RL records 627/13).

Although the interviewing and information-gathering activities of RL seemed to be in connection with its audience survey work, they had broader dimensions than this narrow mission, being part of extensive but covert US intelligence activities. These created quite a headache for the Soviet authorities, especially since the majority of this work was conducted outside the borders of the Soviet Union.

Western values and their dissemination

One of the core problems in the ideological fight of the Soviet Union against Western influences lay precisely in the ideological make-up of the Soviet Union. The whole reasoning of the Soviet system was tied to the assumption that the Soviet system was superior, that it was more equitable, and so forth. Throughout the Stalinist era, Soviet officials had emphasized the difference between the Soviet system and that in the West: “Soviet values” were opposed with “Western values”, and communist society must have its own culture and values (Mally 1990; Hoffmann 2003). Soviet cultural products, for example, were used to underline Soviet superiority. After years of socialist construction under Stalin, the Soviet authorities believed that an essentially Soviet cultural system existed. However, whereas the Stalinist era had been a xenophobic one with few connections abroad, the mid-1950s saw an ever-growing number of encounters with the West, which challenged Soviet citizens to rethink their relationship with the West. Since personal contacts with foreigners were allowed only for a few select-

ed individuals, developments in communications technology became a crucial vehicle for influencing people in the Soviet Union. Short-wave technology combined with the rapid expansion of radios capable of receiving such broadcasts in the Soviet Union in the 1950s (for example Roth-Ey 2003) gave birth to a phenomenon that was regarded as lethal by the Soviet leaders: this phenomenon was an American station named Radio Liberty.

Radio Liberty was a major agent, and a completely new approach to the dissemination of Western values in the Soviet Union. Many testimonies and archival documents suggest that the impact of RL's broadcasts on Soviet internal affairs was much greater than has been realized so far. There were times when the number of frequent listeners to Radio Liberty would exceed 30% of the Soviet population in certain areas, although constant jamming and other Soviet countermeasures kept it closer to 10% prior to 1988, but this still gives it some 20 million regular listeners (Parta 2007: 7, 12). The dissemination of Western values by RL would not have been such an important issue unless it had actually had a major impact on Soviet internal affairs. I have used both Russian and US archival material in order to ascertain the responses to Western broadcasts of both the Soviet authorities and the people. Perhaps a bit surprisingly, many individuals reacted negatively to these broadcasts, opposing on the grounds that they represented the West and embodied Western values as opposed to Soviet ones. The authorities naturally made this point more aggressively, emphasizing that the broadcasts were in essence Western propaganda and alien to the Soviet Union. Quite often, it was claimed that the foreign broadcasts corrupted young people, who certainly were among the most enthusiastic listeners to Western transmissions (Tolz 2004; Lauristin 1997). Even the more moderate, and at times uncritical, approach of Finnish TV towards the Soviet Union was considered too negative by Soviet officials, who were concerned about its impact in the northern part of Soviet Estonia (Rannu 1997). However, even among the Soviet officials themselves, Western ideas were much more eagerly accepted than has previously been thought. But before we go into that, I will give an example of the content of Radio Liberty's programming.

While certain Western radio stations, for example the Voice of America, were more important sources of Western cultural influences such as jazz or rock music (Nelson 1997: 77), Soviet people otherwise regarded these stations as Western propaganda. Radio Liberty, however, was more complicated than the others. Although the highest administration of the Radio

was firmly American, the radio's programs were meant to sound like Soviet people were talking to each other, but freely, without censorship or other restrictions. When RL's staff made occasional deviations from policy guidelines, this only reinforced the feeling in Soviet citizens that RL was the real thing, not a mere propaganda station. Furthermore, instead of introducing merely Western culture to its Soviet audience, RL concentrated on familiarizing the Soviet audience with prohibited parts of their own culture.

Especially after the Hungarian uprising of 1956, Radio Liberty assumed a less aggressive albeit equally active role in informing Soviet citizens about things that the Soviet media failed to address. In this way, people became aware of books by Boris Pasternak, Aleksandr Solženicyn and others that went unpublished in the Soviet Union. *Doktor Živago* by Pasternak was broadcast as a serial in the late 1950s, giving the Soviet audience a chance to learn about this Nobel-prize-winning book, which was not published in the Soviet Union until thirty years later. Soviet people also heard about the trials of the writers Andrej Sinjavskij and Juli Daniel, as well as the exact whereabouts of the courthouse where they were tried. Many learned about the ousting of Chruščëv through RL well before their own news agencies discussed the matter. The Chernobyl nuclear meltdown in 1986 was also best covered by foreign news services to the Soviet Union, and studies have shown that Soviet people preferred to listen in to RL or the BBC than their own media during the crisis. The audience of Radio Liberty was also able to hear Orthodox mass every Sunday, as well as a reading of the Quran in Moslem areas. Information denied them by Soviet officials was used as a device to attract people to listen to RL's message. Uncensored news about both world and Soviet events was already too much for the Soviet authorities and crippled the monopoly of knowledge they so dearly tried to preserve. One thing that really seems to have struck RL's Soviet audience was the way in which it promoted Western values and contrasted what was possible in the Soviet Union and what in the West. Marju Lauristin (1997) has argued that the mere presence of alternative media was something that helped people to maintain their ethnic identity, as opposed to a Soviet one, and their pride, thus making the change in the late 1980s easier.

In their programs, RL informed its Soviet audience about features of Western life, showed how Western workers lived, what they could buy with their salary, how their leisure was spent, and how they were organized. This was a picture quite opposite to the one Soviet citizens were

offered in their own media and schools, which generally exaggerated the drawbacks of the capitalist system. Initial disbelief that a Western industrial worker could possibly own a car and a fully appointed and equipped house and was not an oppressed slave soon changed into dissatisfaction with the Communist Party and general indifference towards public affairs (HIA, RFE/RL records 529/3B). How organic this change into indifference was and whether Radio Liberty or other Western broadcasters had any role in it are questions that can be disputed. But the fact is that the Soviet authorities were afraid of RL and were horrified to find out how widespread the practice of listening in to the station was already in the late 1950s (RGANI 89/46/14/2). Immediate countermeasures naturally followed.

It is illustrative that Radio Liberty was the only radio station that was constantly jammed from its inauguration in 1953 until 1988, when jamming finally ceased although the decision had been made two years earlier (RGANI 89/18/105/1–2; Cold War Broadcasting 2005). Jamming means interfering with radio signals before they reach target radio receivers. However, the jamming never became total, and people, if they so desired, found ways to listen to RL anyway. But Soviet officials also waged vigorous media campaigns against foreign broadcasters. They resorted to the constant harassment of RL's staff and even murdered a handful of them back in the 1950s (Nelson 1997: 98–99). However, all this does not yet indicate that RL itself had an impact on the Soviet people. Perhaps one of the clearer manifestations of RL's impact was the concern the Soviet leadership expressed about the crippled credibility of its own media while foreign media had increased their credibility in the eyes of the Soviet audience (Lisann 1975: 164–165). The Soviet monopoly on information was crumbling. This was especially alarming since Soviet ideology was held together by a very limited public space. Freedom of the press and Soviet ideology had been found to be incompatible by Lenin immediately after the October Revolution in 1917 (Kenez 1985: 35–44), and the consequences after Gorbačëv inaugurated full *Glasnost* and reinstated freedom of the press in the late 1980s are well known.

Although RL probably did not succeed in making people more Western-orientated politically, it continuously tried to drive a wedge between the people and Soviet ideology. Rather than spreading wide-spread enthusiasm for the West, it managed to sow an indifferent attitude towards the Soviet regime. The number of those who actively struggled against the Soviet system, actual dissidents, remained relatively small throughout the Soviet era.

The KGB was able to keep them in check. However, these people were among the most ardent listeners of RL's programs. Indeed, by the 1970s, RL had become an important link in the *samizdat* system, the Soviet underground publishing network. Radio Liberty often received manuscripts from the Soviet Union and passed them on to be published abroad, but it also read prohibited books in its programs and sometimes even published *samizdat* works itself. Besides publishing material itself, RL would also forward documents to more neutral Western media when it believed this would have a greater impact inside the Soviet Union (Puddington 2000: 170–171). As mentioned above, the interviewers also distributed prohibited literature to their subjects. Even so, these dissidents made up only a fraction of RL's audience in the Soviet Union. Most people were little interested in political messages, and what they found most interesting part in RL's broadcasts was the news about the Soviet Union itself, matters that were absent from the Soviet media, rather than any explicitly political content. While these broader masses of people hardly took part in any active resistance, it was precisely them that the Soviet authorities were worried about. (RGANI 5/33/106/23–42; Nelson 1997: 97) The possibility that the Soviet people might lose their belief in the Soviet media and the consequences of this disturbed the Party elite greatly.

Soviet responses

Soviet people's reactions to foreign broadcasts in the 1950s and 1960s in general are very hard to ascertain apart from the small intelligentsia that was able to travel abroad. However, from what I have been able to glean from the discussions of Soviet officials, they were convinced that the foreign broadcasts had a certain impact. Indeed, one of the direct consequences was that they tried to improve their own media. In 1964 they even set up a radio station of their own named Majak that imitated Western radio. It had more popular music and more newscasts, which they believed was the reason why so many had turned to listening in to foreign broadcasts in the first place (Mickiewicz 1981: 138). Still, it is somewhat ironic that the authorities countered foreign radio stations with Soviet stations that resembled foreign ones. From the authorities' point of view, however, these were at least more easily controlled.

In order to follow the reactions of the people themselves, there are two different groups of sources: KGB reports and Radio Liberty's own audien-

ce research work. Both indicate that active resistance remained relatively small. What is more pertinent, however, is the fact that people were starting to ask questions, were less afraid than before and became increasingly indifferent about public life. Communitarity, one of the basic pillars of the Soviet system during the Stalin era, was being abandoned in favor of privacy; in some cases not even the presence of a KGB representative would prevent people from asking questions in meetings (HIA, RFE/RL records 564/8). After the Second World War, the number of private radios started to grow quite rapidly, exceeding that of wired sets (“wired” referring to outdoor loudspeakers and other radio sets, usually in public places, operating in a closed system) by the 1960s (Hopkins 1970: 248). It became easier to listen to foreign broadcasts in private. Another policy chosen by Soviet officials was to develop the technology of television, which was a much more easily controlled medium than radio (Roth-Ey 2003). But television was also essentially private. The answer of Soviet officials to the challenge of the capitalist world, then, was to increase the production of consumer goods. Although public life still advocated the joys of communitarity and all kinds of mass meetings, people were turning increasingly indifferent towards them.

Although Radio Liberty hardly managed to turn Soviet people into open Western sympathizers, it can be argued that Soviet people became Western-orientated in many ways. Values that are regarded as fundamental pillars of Western capitalist democracies found sound support within the Soviet Union. One of these was the essence of RL: freedom of the press and the free flow of information. This was something that the Soviet authorities were very much afraid of. The government stubbornly tried to hold on to its information monopoly, but it was fighting a losing battle, with very little, if any, support from the people. The KGB reports as well as RL’s own findings right from the late 1950s and early 1960s indicate that the Soviet people were increasingly dissatisfied in this respect (HIA, RFE/RL records 627/13). The reactions of the Soviet authorities to this are also very revealing. In their propaganda attacks against Radio Liberty, the Western conception of freedom was heavily rebutted. Soviet counter-propaganda depicted RL’s Soviet émigré staff as being enslaved by their American masters, or as puppets who lacked their own will and merely reiterated their masters’ propagandist views (HIA, RFE/RL records 553/8; Panfilov & Karčevskij 1974; Alov & Viktorov 1985). Few seem to have fallen for this. RL’s policy of also broadcasting criticism of certain developments in the

West was effective in helping people make up their minds and making them believe RL and Western broadcasts in general rather than their own media. Perhaps an even more prominent aspect of capitalism was consumerism, which also found sound support among the Soviet audience. In 1963, one KGB official lamented (HIA, RFE/RL records 564/4) the fact that the desire of Soviet citizens for private property was perhaps even stronger than that of Western citizens. The KGB saw this as one of the weak points that could be exploited by Western broadcasters.

Western values furthering the Soviet collapse

Although Western historiography acknowledges the view that people did not lose their belief in communism overnight and that there was a long process towards the *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* of the late 1980s, too often the reasons for this ideological decay are not examined properly. Western economic superiority and the increasing breach between the capitalist and communist camps are often mentioned, but it is quite often forgotten that instead of it being the result of a natural process there were active measures through which Western values were fed or introduced into the Soviet Union. It is very difficult to measure the actual impact of the Western activities, but without active Western policies, the communist regime might have managed to keep contacts with the West down and succeeded in its propaganda within the Soviet sphere. Without the active discrediting of Soviet propaganda, it would have been much easier for Soviet officials to point out that the West was heading towards collapse and that the Soviet model was the only possible option. By using Soviet experiences and Soviet voices, RL was able to get closer to the Soviet audience and point out that this was hardly the case.

We can also discuss how profound these changes were, and whether the indifference in the Soviet Union constituted a change at all. What I think is inarguable is that Michail Gorbačëv was still a true believer in communism and in the Marxist-Leninist system when he became General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party and inaugurated his policies of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*. He believed that the system could be revived and that there existed enough activism among the people for them to rally behind the common Soviet cause. As it turned out, *Perestroika* was a success only in one sense: in speeding up the destruction of the Soviet system. Even the majority of Communist Party members were more oriented towards consu-

merism than communism and cared more for their own welfare than for the survival of Soviet ideology. Idealism had been replaced by cynicism, and in the end even the true believer had to admit this. Thus, when Gorbachev was locked into his dacha during the attempted coup by Yanayev's junta in mid-August 1991, he tuned in to Radio Liberty and other Western broadcasters for information about what was really happening in the Soviet Union, something quite a lot of people in the Soviet Union had already been doing for decades (Nelson 1997: 195–196).

In conclusion, it is very hard to ascertain how far Soviet people were affected by the broadcasts of Radio Liberty. Especially any direct impact is very hard to prove. What is easier to reconstruct are the measures Soviet officials took to counter RL's broadcast: jamming, improvements in Soviet media, comprehensive campaigns to discourage people from listening. KGB reports and Western surveillance also suggest that, as a consequence of Western broadcasts, people started to question their own media and party officials. Information that was provided for them in RL and other Western stations made people suspicious, but also indifferent. It was precisely this that was lethal for Soviet ideology, since no ideology can survive without true believers. After losing its credibility, it was only a matter of time before the collapse of the ideology would take place.

Thus one could argue that instead of an Eastern manifestation of Western conceptions of freedom of the press, democracy or any other such ideal, there came a void of ideas. Consumerism was indeed embraced by the Soviet population, but otherwise what emerged in post-Soviet Russia was an ideological void.

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