

Haas, Susan D.: Communities of Journalists and Journalism Practice at Radio Free Europe during the Cold War (1950-1995).

Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations, Paper 869 (2013), URL <http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/869>

This University of Pennsylvania dissertation (262 pages) is available free of charge by download. The reviewer, who spent more than 25 years in senior positions with the American external radio stations in Munich, would like to compliment the author for her thorough grasp and interpretation of the complicated structure and functioning of the multinational broadcasting organization, which was one of the very few genuinely successful Western external radio broadcasters during the Cold War. In many respects the dissertation is also a useful supplement to the monographs published by former RFE directors A. Ross Johnson (2010) and the late James F. Brown (2013), as well as to the history of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty by Arch Puddington (2000).¹

Ms. Haas, a former journalist who currently teaches at the University of Pennsylvania, spent several years interviewing approximately one hundred former employ-

¹ *Johnson*, A. Ross: Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. The CIA Years and Beyond. Stanford 2010. – *Brown*, J. F.: Radio Free Europe: An Insider's View. 2013. Washington/D.C., 2013. – *Puddington*, Arch: Broadcasting Freedom: the Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. Lexington, Kentucky 2000.

ees as well as former executives of the radios. Most of the interviews took place approximately ten years after the move of RFE/RL from Munich to Prague in 1995, which obviously and unavoidably affected the selection of available personnel. Their comments are quoted extensively and provide candid insights into the varying motives, preferences and prejudices of the interviewees. The author is also the first scholar who deals extensively with the principles and individuals involved that played a major role in the stations' Central News Department (CND), the in-house information supplier (and quasi internal news agency). This important department provided and verified much of the material used by the newscast staff of the various broadcasting departments and also, to a lesser degree, by the research department. RFE's ten-minute newscasts on the hour were the most popular and successful part of the broadcasts. Noteworthy for the reviewer were, inter alia, comments by Czechoslovak Service Director Pechacek concerning broadcast content during the tense days of the Velvet Revolution in 1989. He did not want his Service to add to the difficult internal situation in his home country and preferred factual information over opinion that could easily be misinterpreted (p.154). On the same page Haas quotes a Polish staff member who emphasized that his "first loyalty was not to the Polish or the American director, but to the Polish listener" – again evidence for why the Polish Service was the perhaps most successful broadcasting department of the organization, but also a conclusion transcending the scope of the text under review.

Rather interesting to the reviewer have been the author's findings concerning the Current Affairs Unit created within Central News around the time of the collapse of communist totalitarianism in Eastern Europe. In this context Haas reports reactions of "disdain" and "resentment" by journalists within the organization and quotes one staff member who was embarrassed to admit that "building up Havel" had become a mandatory part of his job (p. 253). Apparently Havel's invitation to the radios to move from Munich to Prague had an effect on the objectivity of RFE's journalism after 1989.

Last, but not least, the author provides evidence for and against RFE's assertion that it merely wanted to provide a "surrogate free press" for the communist-dominated societies in East Central and Eastern Europe. As has been mentioned, the Central News Department succeeded in providing factual and reliable information for the popular hourly newscasts as well as for other programming – but overall success and popularity among the listeners in home or target countries was primarily achieved by those services which emphatically editorialized and provided opinion – like the Polish and the Romanian Services. In this context, the author quotes former research head and RFE director James F. Brown, a liberal leader who was one of the architects of RFE's successes in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite his liberal world view, Jim Brown appears to have questioned the efficiency of the limited "surrogate press" concept. He thought that "people forget what the Cold War was like. It really was a war, and we were a weapon in that war" (p.35). In any case, the dissertation is a valuable source for anyone researching the internal functioning and the differing types of journalism in operation at the once Munich-based American broadcaster.