

Voice of America — journalism or diplomacy?

Associated Press
WASHINGTON — Criticism is not new to the Voice of America. The government's overseas radio network often has been described by

Group wants less control

"The form of government is not nearly as important as the amount of government," said Terry Hunt Tooley, chairman of Students for Responsible Expression.

SRE is a conservative organization which promotes the ideals of less government with more individual responsibility. Its members oppose any form of government which involves 100 per cent control of human or property rights.

The group recognizes a spectrum ranging from anarchy on the far right to totalitarianism on the far left, said Tooley. It believes that along with too much government goes control of people and their property. SRE believes that the United States is a republic situated right in the middle.

"That mid-point where men are free to do what they want and be governed by laws is the best point," said Tooley.

The main purpose of SRE at Texas A&M University is to help balance the liberal view. "We have been successful in the sense that we have provided the means for students to see this type of thinking," said Tooley. "The key is the education of people."

The program for the organization includes films, speakers and book sales. At each function, interested students may sign up as new members. Meetings are called when assignments need to be handed out. Two more speakers are scheduled for this semester and a book sale is planned.

SRE was formed in 1974 by Tooley and the present executive director, Rodney Deschamps, and now has 15 members.

The organization encourages people to be with others in order to discuss and share ideas. "Spheres of influence are bigger than people realize," said Tooley.

Diana Totah

Malpractice suits increase dramatically

Associated Press
AUSTIN — The Texas Medical Association said Monday it has documented what it knew all along — the number of malpractice suits against doctors has jumped dramatically along with the size of claims and judgments.

Dr. N. L. Barker, president, said the TMA survey was the most comprehensive made in any state.

A. S. Pickens, TMA counsel, said 5,300 of some 10,000 physicians in private practice returned questionnaires sent out by the association.

The findings: — Six times as many malpractice suits and claims were filed in 1974 as in 1968.

— Of all the malpractice suits and claims in Texas history, 60 per cent were filed between January 1972 and August 1975.

— Eighty-one per cent of all the million dollar malpractice suits or claims ever filed in Texas were filed since 1972.

Pickens said the findings confirmed the TMA in its legislative program to alleviate the malpractice crisis. This includes a two-year time limit for filing a claim, starting with the date of treatment, a ceiling on recoveries in malpractice suits, and arbitration of claims by panels of doctors.

Moscow as a Western propaganda tool whose newscasts stretch the truth.

Today the criticism strikes much closer to home. Serious questions are being raised on Capitol Hill about VOA's broadcasting and whether it may be too tightly under the control of the State Department.

While the Soviets accuse VOA of airing antidefente views, some congressional critics claim that within recent years VOA has adopted too soft a tone and has shied away from reporting on Soviet dissidents and other touchy topics.

The rising criticism, however, is only part of VOA's problems. The network is beset with problems involving its basic organization and aims, funding, high-level administration disputes and poor broadcast reception because of aging transmitters.

The basic problem, according to NBC's John Chancellor, a former chief of VOA, is that the Voice "has been placed at the intersection of journalism and diplomacy" — at-

tempting to report the news fully while at the same time actively suppressing U.S. foreign policy.

One major Soviet newspaper charged that VOA deliberately concentrates on airing anti-Soviet statements by former Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger and others "who use any reason to blacken detente."

Shrugging off the latest Moscow media barrage, officials note that Soviet propaganda aimed at VOA and other Western shortwave broadcasting goes through frequent cycles.

"It has its ups and downs," remarks VOA's USSR Division Director Eli Flam.

On Capitol Hill, however, Sen. Charles H. Percy, R-Ill., has contended that VOA last spring presented a "totally misleading" picture of developments during the last days before the fall of South Vietnam by failing to report adequately on American evacuation plans.

Percy, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said

this kind of "censorship" — responding to administration pressure — violated a provision of VOA's charter requiring that its news coverage be "accurate, objective and comprehensive."

He noted that "through the years, I have listened to BBC the British Broadcasting Corp. and the Voice of America and discussed them with a great many people in our embassies, as well as other embassies."

"Almost universally there has been a feeling that BBC is a more credible and accepted news reporting service," Percy said.

Both the Senate committee and a House International Relations panel overseeing VOA's budget are undecided about proposals to remove the station from the U.S. Information Agency, as part of a plan to reorganize American overseas information and cultural programs.

VOA's current chief, Kenneth Giddens, concedes that the station tends to be "a little more restrained" in its reporting than BBC.

But he adds that "I really believe

... that the Voice of America puts out as objective, balanced, unbiased a news product as you'll find anywhere on the face of the earth. I'm very proud of it."

However well the Voice may compare with other Western overseas broadcasting, VOA officials estimate that it has a regular Soviet audience numbering "in the millions," providing them an alternative to government-controlled media.

"To some degree it's fashionable, it's vogue to listen to VOA," one official commented, noting that VOA has been carrying more popular music and feature programs aimed to appeal to Soviet young people.

The anti-VOA broadside published last month in the newspaper *Sovietskaya Rossiya* contended that the U.S. station has been airing statements "by people known for their hostile attitude toward the resolutions adopted in Helsinki."

The Soviet Union had pushed strongly for the 35-nation accords signed last summer in Helsinki, in effect ratifying Europe's post World

War II boundaries as permanent. At Western insistence, the accords also included provisions intended to promote freer East-West contacts.

Flam said he believes the Soviet attack is "way off base" in alleging that VOA has skimped on reporting about U.S.-Soviet cooperative research projects and other positive aspects of detente.

At the same time, he noted, "as the Voice of America reflect the American press" through editorial opinion roundups.

"I think it's fair to say that during the last year, for various reasons, the American press has raised more questions about detente, has been more critical about some of the developments with detente than previously," Flam said.

An examination of VOA program logs and transcripts covering Russian language broadcasting for a week-long period in mid-December tended to substantiate the officials' contention that VOA news reporting is balanced and not slanted toward anti-dente views.

Extensive coverage of the issue included regular items and correspondent reports on the fighting as well as developments in Congress and at the White House.

Even the best programs, however, is of little value unless they can reach VOA's listeners in the United States and abroad.

But according to one official, of VOA's transmitters are "over-taxed." As a result, he said, "try to listen to the Voice and you hardly hear it."

VOA chief Kenneth Giddens believes the network should have 30 to 40 new transmitters.

Giddens also pointed out that while VOA broadcasts about 10 hours a week in 35 languages, Moscow's output amounts to 1,950 hours a week in 84 languages. "I don't think that we are doing an adequate job for this nation," he said.

However, the prospects appear to be dim for any significant expansion of VOA or upgrading transmitter facilities.

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