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Minutes of the Politburo Meeting on October 8, 1963

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MINUTES

Of the meeting of the Politburo on October 8, 1963

ATTENDED BY: comrades Antal Apró, Béla Biszku, Lajos Fehér, Jenő Fock, Sándor Gáspár, János Kádár, Gyula Kállai, Zoltán Komócsin, Ferenc Münich, Sándor Rónai, István Szirmai, and furthermore: comrades Miklós Ajtai, János Brutyó, Lajos Cseterki, Pál Ilku, Rezső Nyers, and comrades Károly Németh and Árpád Pullai.

AGENDA:

1. Report on the bread-grain situation in the country.
Presented by: comrade Rezső Nyers
2. Report on the progress of agricultural work in the fall.
Presented by: comrade Károly Németh
3. Incentives for railroad workers to enhance freight transport.
Presented by: comrade Rezső Nyers
4. Report on the situation concerning the protection of the radio.
Presented by: comrade István Szurdi
Invited participants: comrades Tibor Tarcsai, László Orbán, István Kossa and János Pap
5. Proposals for lectures to be presented at the Political Academy in 1963-64.
Presented by: comrade László Orbán
Invited participant: comrade István Balló
6. Proposals for appointments.
7. Miscellaneous.

4. Report on the situation concerning the radio-protection

Comrade István Kossa:

The Ministry of Transportation and Postal Services endorses the first variant and proposes that the Politburo should adopt this position. We do not see any sense in supporting the second variant. Even if the jamming capacity were to be concentrated in certain areas or at certain times, we could only jam fractions of the programs broadcast by Radio Free Europe and Patrol. We need to get the equipment ready, and if the Ministry of the Interior deems it necessary, we can start jamming the station periodically. By the way, even if we jam the station, most of the jamming will be concentrated on the Budapest and Pécs regions. Otherwise, even if jamming were to be maintained, the hostile radio programs could be heard freely almost in the whole of Hungary.

Comrade János Kádár:

Does anybody have any information as to how this thing is handled in our friendly countries? What is the real difference between the first and the second variant from a technical and financial aspect?

Comrade István Szurdi:

Some comrades in this office had a chance to monitor for a few days how jamming was done in some friendly countries. The results of monitoring are as follows: the broadcasts of state-owned radio stations are not jammed in the Soviet Union, but the programs of private stations, including Radio Free Europe, are. In Czechoslovakia every Western station is jammed, even hostile programs targeting Poland in cities near the Polish border. Bulgaria also jams every Western station, so does the GDR, though they mostly jam broadcasts from West Berlin. In Poland only certain hostile programs are jammed that are broadcast in the Polish language. No broadcasts are jammed in the People's Republic of Romania.

Comrade Gyula Kállai:

At the moment I believe the second variant is to be favored. As for the arguments that are brought up by the comrades to support the first variant – our system is stable, the political atmosphere is good in the country –, I agree, but I think we should not underestimate the effects of these hostile radio programs. The international political situation is rather unstable, and we need to take into account that they could cause some trouble. The Soviet Union, where the system is more stable politically and the people can resist more firmly than in Hungary, stopped the jamming of state-owned stations only.

Whichever variant will be adopted by the Politburo, I propose the following two things to consider before one of the two variants is implemented: 1.) We should consult with our friendly countries on this issue. What we are going to decide on is a very important political issue and it emerges as such in every country, as an extremely important political issue. The consultation I am proposing would be important also from the point of view of following a uniform procedure. 2.) If the jamming of state-owned radio stations is going to be stopped,

we should perhaps start negotiations with the BBC and the USA; that is, we should not stop jamming their stations without a “price”. We should tell them that we will stop jamming their stations, and in return they should give up broadcasting hostile programs to Hungary. I think this is a feasible proposition.

Comrade István Szirmai:

I propose that the Politburo should adopt the first variant and make a resolution of it. My arguments supporting this variant are as follows. It has been established that the efficiency of jamming in the periods most frequently listened to by people is 10% even with maximal efforts using all the apparatus at our disposal in our country, including foreign assistance. So anybody who wants to listen to these Western stations can do so even on a small radio. The whole thing has only political significance, and the Politburo should consider whether this political impact is positive or negative. In my view it is negative, so there is no point in jamming with an efficiency of 10% as far as our political power is concerned.

The fact that the Soviet Union also jams stations is a different matter, for their efficiency is not 10% but much higher. However sophisticated technology were to be installed in Hungary, we would not be able to jam these station entirely. The territory of Hungary is small; this is why we made an agreement with the Czechs, the Poles and, the Romanians that they would jam the broadcasts from an appropriate distance.

In case we decide to adopt the second variant – and here I am answering comrade Kádár’s question –, it would not involve any budgetary deficit or require special austerity. It would simply mean that the available equipment would be used to jam only certain predetermined broadcasts. Currently 143 wavelengths are used for such broadcasts but the available equipment is capable of jamming only 22. That means we could jam only 22 of the 143 wavelengths.

We have eight jamming stations with a 15 kW capacity and one with 100 kW. These are not used to jam broadcasts targeting Hungary but rather Russian language programs targeting the Soviet Union on the basis of mutuality. These stations must be maintained in the future too. However, if possible, it would be a good idea to free this middle wave station and use it for broadcasting our own programs. In this context I would like to call the attention of the Politburo to the fact that – as has been amply demonstrated in the introduction to the report by the comrades – enormous technical development is taking place in Western countries, while Hungarian radio technology is lagging behind and the capacity of the available radio stations is fully utilized. We have two 100kW broadcasting stations transmitting propaganda programs in 9 languages by the Hungarian Radio. So I want to urge you to devote more attention to development.

One more thing that I want to add. I also believe that if the Politburo, and as a result, the government adopts the first variant, we should call the attention of the editors and the owners of hostile radio stations to this fact. Perhaps we should not enter into negotiations with them, but we should let them know when jamming will be stopped and make it clear to them that in return we expect them to strike a more objective tone in their programs. By the way, the Poles are in the same situation, and the broadcasts targeting them are much more objective now.

There is another proposal on the table that the jamming apparatus should be transferred to the Ministry of the Interior. I believe this is not a political issue, and it should

belong to the Ministry of the Interior. It would be important to involve the leaders of the radio and the television in this work.

Comrade Béla Biszku:

This proposal was submitted to the Politburo in 1957. The situation was different at that time. Then the apparatus was overseen by the Ministry of the Interior.

I suggest that we should conduct consultations before we make a decision. We have to inform the relevant friendly states that such a problem arose in our country and that we would like to consult with them on this issue. We should not underestimate this problem even if efficiency is only 10%. Whenever the situation gets more difficult, the enemy broadcasts immediately jump on rumors and it costs more to the country than the HUF 40 million mentioned in the report. I propose that we should adopt the second variant.

Comrade Miklós Ajtai:

There are at least two reasons why we need to consult with them: on the one hand we should ask them of their opinion about the situation, and on the other we should ask them what to do with the 100kW station if we stop using it for jamming, since it practically works for them at the moment.

Another question concerns Section 4 on page 8. What is contained here is that we should work out a proposal by the middle of next year to develop the technical background for foreign language programs together with the leaders of the Hungarian Radio and Television and the Ministry of Transportation and Postal Services. I do not think the Politburo should accept this proposal in its present form. The preparation of a complex development plan of the Hungarian Radio and Television is underway which also includes the development of domestic and foreign language programs. This issue should be dealt with in this framework rather than separately. Final decision can only be made when the third five-year plan is approved, for extra investment is not feasible in the remaining two years of the current plan.

Comrade Rezső Nyers:

I endorse the first variant. The adoption of the second variant would entail that the current situation would be maintained, and this is inconsistent. At the moment we are capable of jamming the stations in the central areas of Budapest, but even in such areas there are broadcasts that can be easily tuned to and freely listened to by anybody.

I agree with negotiating our plan with the socialist countries, though we have not conducted any such negotiations before. The Soviet Union did not discuss the issue with us either when it decided to partially stop jamming. Neither did Romania, they simply wrote a letter.

The way the second variant is described is rather inaccurate, for the efficiency of jamming can not be enhanced without investment. The adoption of the second variant only makes sense if we make a decision on some investment. If we fail to do so, we can still say that any capacity that can be freed should be used to strengthen the existing capacity, but that will not make jamming any more efficient.

Comrade János Kádár:

All the time I was thinking how ignorant the Politburo is of some very important issues. The things contained in the report are an integral part of our propaganda campaign. When I read the report I was amazed to see what is going on in this respect. And I am sorry to have to say this, comrade Szurdi, but instead of tapping phone lines for getting the required information negotiations should have been conducted with our friendly countries.

I cannot comment on this issue because the actual situation is very different from what we all believed to be the case. This issue was raised first in 1957, and then we were told that we should jam these stations. We voted for it because that was proposed to us, though it cost a lot of money. Now it turns out that practically we are not jamming their stations. The present situation is – and this is the political significance of this issue – that listening to foreign radio stations is not forbidden by law in Hungary. However, the common view is that these broadcasts should better be listened to in secret.

What we need to decide on now is whether we are going to maintain the current situation or not. The comrades are telling us that it essentially involves only Budapest and Pécs; that is, we can only jam the stations in these regions. Making jamming more effective in the Budapest region would really be a substantial development, for it is a long-lasting lesson from the past that if we can have a hold over Budapest, we can control the whole country. Budapest is the center, and everything starts from here.

There is another thing that I do not understand. I wonder why the results of surveying the efficiency of jamming show that the least effective period is from 3 PM to midnight, right when the most people listen to these programs.

Comrade István Szirmai:

That is because external assistance is stopped during this period, for they are all engaged in doing their own jamming.

Comrade János Kádár:

Comrade Szirmai mentioned how intensive a development was carried out in the West. This should caution us, for if it is worth for them spending so much on it, it would also be worth for us being able to jam their broadcasts. So the issue is that either we jam the stations, and allocate the required money to it, or we do not continue with jamming. Common sense tells me we should not.

There is another issue here concerning Hungarian radio programs targeting foreign countries. However, this is not the same issue. Of course, these programs should be improved and developed, it is a good thing. But it is a totally different issue. Let us separate the two issues. In principle we should endorse the expansions of these broadcasts, for our sister parties also say that they are useful for them. However, we cannot make a decision on this issue now.

Consultation should be given priority in the resolutions. The Poles stopped jamming at the end of 1957 but they asked us to continue jamming. We should consult with every country with which we collaborate: the Soviet Union, the Poles, the Czechs and the Romanians. We have to tell them honestly: the Politburo discussed a report on jamming and concluded that

hostile stations could only be jammed – even with external assistance – with an efficiency of 10% in the most frequented periods. It incurs enormous costs and it seems that there is no point in continuing with the jamming. Therefore, as of January 1, 1964 jamming will be terminated and we will no longer need the assistance that they provided for us. At the same time we are ready to provide assistance for them in the same framework in the future too.

The issue of political supervision has also been raised. If the resolution of the Politburo holds the above, then it is only of secondary importance. The apparatus, the technical equipment should stay where it is now, and political supervision should be provided by the press subdivision of the party center.

Shall we stop jamming for free or for money, shall we set a low or a high price for it? What would be a sensible thing to do? We should talk with the English and the USA, or rather we should send them a statement in which we say we have decided to terminate jamming temporarily, and if you are willing to broadcast programs with at least some sings of objectivity, we will not resume it either. If you fail to do so, we will resume it.

The consultations should be conducted within six weeks and the results should be brought to the Politburo for further discussion. The Politburo should then confirm its position and the statement should follow. The consultation should be conducted with the sister parties by comrade Szirmai by phone or in writing.

Dated as above:

Record made by:
(Margit Fehér)