Broadcasting in the Soviet Union*

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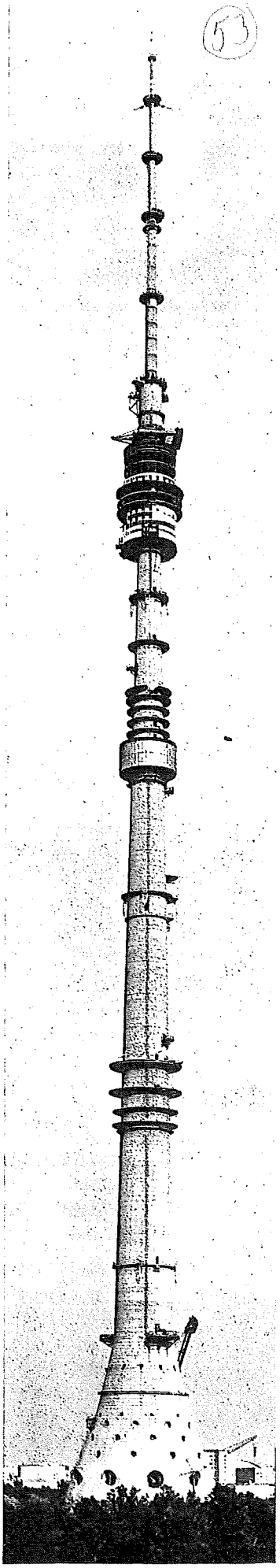

The new television tower in Ostankino, a suburb of Moscow, is over 500 m high and includes a restaurant called 'The Seventh Heaven'. The tower stands beside Moscow's TV Centre with its 21 studios and 13 floors of administrative offices

History

THE HISTORY OF radio in Russia is considered to go back 75 years, to the pioneering work of Alexander Popov in 1895. Before the October Revolution, however, radio was not used for public broadcasting; it functioned as a telegraph for transmitting information. The first actual radio broadcast in the Soviet Union is considered to be Lenin's appeal from the cruiser 'Aurora', announcing that the Bolsheviks had won the Revolution. Regular broadcasting began in 1924, and since then radio has been an essential part of the Soviet political system, as Lenin originally intended it to be.

The first mention of television in the Soviet Union occurs in 1920. Experimental transmissions began in the early 1930s, and a regular television service in 1939, at first of course only in a very small geographical area.

The present state of radio

It is estimated that there are 75-80 million radio sets in the Soviet Union, divided evenly among the whole population; thus in principle everybody has an opportunity to listen to the radio. Over half these receivers are for wired broadcasting, which distributes Soviet programmes only.

Radio in the Soviet Union is divided into three sections: the *central radio*, functioning from Moscow; the independent *regional radio* operating in each of the autonomous Republics, and *external programmes*. The central and regional radio stations together broadcast over 1300 hours of programmes daily.

Central radio includes four different channels:

The First Programme is general in content and is intended for all sections of the population; it can be followed throughout the country and broadcasts 20 hours of programmes a day. Since there are 11 time zones in the USSR, the programme is not broadcast simultaneously everywhere but is adapted to local time.

The Second Programme is a current events and news channel called 'The Lighthouse', which is transmitted around the clock. This can be heard by almost the entire population, and it is broadcast live to the whole country. 'The Lighthouse' has been running since 1964, and it is characterized as a light programme for the transistor age: it consists of half-hour periods of music, interspersed with short news bulletins.

The Third Programme is a cultural programme intended for an aca-

* This article is based on the writer's experiences in Moscow, Leningrad and Tallinn in May 1969 when he was studying research and planning in the Soviet broadcasting system.

Reprinted from the *EBU Review*, No. 117B, September 19 69
European Broadcasting Union, Geneva, Switzerland

demic, ' demanding ' audience, which corresponds in concept to the BBC's Third Programme. It contains altogether 16 hours daily of symphonic music, radio plays and literary programmes, etc.

The Fourth Programme is intended for Soviet citizens abroad (e.g. sailors) and for Russian-speaking foreigners; it can be received all over the world. It broadcasts 24 hours a day, and consists of news, political and cultural programmes and varied music.

The **regional radio programmes** total over 1000 hours daily. They are transmitted in all the languages of the Soviet Union (67 altogether), and their content is mostly related to the area in question. There are in all about 500 such regional centres, producing and broadcasting their own programmes.

External programmes are broadcast in 68 foreign languages, in addition to ten of the languages of the Soviet Union.

The present state of television

There are about 25-27 million tv sets in the Soviet Union; this means that approximately 30% of homes own a set. One fourth of the population (60-70m. people) live in an area not yet covered by television.

As in the case of radio, operations are divided among the *central television* programmes broadcast from Moscow and the *regional programmes.*

Central television consists of six channels, of which one is a satellite channel and cannot be received in Moscow.

The First Programme corresponds to the general radio programme: it is intended for all sections of the population, it can be seen in all Republics (i.e. over the entire viewing area), and its broadcasts are adapted to local time (four time zones receive the programme simultaneously). It begins on normal weekdays (except Thursdays) between 9 and 10 am and ends at midnight. Thus there are altogether about 90 hours of transmission weekly.

The Second Programme of central television is transmitted only in the Moscow area, which has a population of about 12 million. There is a certain Muscovite stamp about it, and it maintains a high cultural level (the standard of education of the Moscow population is far above the average). Both the First and the Second Programmes contain advertising, altogether about 10 minutes a day.

The Third Programme includes educational television. Its broadcasts extend into the afternoon and evening and are intended for students in secondary and high schools as well as for those with regular daytime jobs. Professional courses for doctors, engineers and others are also included. The programmes consist primarily of televised classroom lectures. For the time being educational tv can be viewed in the same area as the Second Programme.

The Fourth Programme corresponds to the radio cultural channel; it has an academic character, although unlike educational tv it does not aim at systematic study but at informative and theoretical programmes outside the sphere of education proper. These broadcasts are also restricted to the Moscow area.

The Fifth Programme is actually part of the First: it consists of colour broadcasts, which can be seen in many autonomous Republics and in the largest cities. The ' colour channel ' has operated since October 1967, and broadcasts about two hours of programmes a day.

Regional television programmes are transmitted by 126 centres in various parts of the country. Of these, 31 (in the largest cities) have two channels. Only a few regional centres have more than two channels (in addition to Moscow—for example, Leningrad).

The Estonian tv programme in Tallinn (which can be received also in southern Finland) is representative of the choice of programmes available to viewers outside the Moscow area and in the outlying districts of the Soviet Union. Three channels can be received in Tallinn: the First Programme of central television, Tallinn's own regional programme (Eesti Televisioon) and the evening broadcasts of the Leningrad regional programme. The Estonian regional programme runs for roughly 90 hours a week; it normally begins at 9 am and ends about midnight.

In practice, central television and the regional centres do not operate independently of each other; the regional centres produce a certain amount of material to be broadcast through central television.

Development prospects in television

The television system is still incomplete. The first objective is to extend the coverage of central television's First Programme to the entire population; this will be achieved in the early 1970s and includes making broadcasts available to very large and sparsely inhabited regions. An important role will be played here by communications satellites, which have been used for tv transmission in the Soviet Union in recent years. By means of the Orbita system, 20 million people have been brought within reach of television during the last two years.

The final goal is to have at least five different channels available to every Soviet citizen. This presupposes the construction over the whole country of the same kind of system as that now available in the Moscow area. Five-channel regional centres are already being built; the

first three are at present in the final stages of construction in Tashkent, Frunze and Vilnius.

This construction programme also depends on development in the area of communications satellites. At present satellites are available for television use only four days a week, 11 hours each day. The objective is to achieve continuous synchronous satellite contact for tv use by the end of the 1970s.

Administration

Broadcasting in the Soviet Union is administered by the Radio and Television Committee connected with the government council of ministers. The directors of the Committee are nominated by the government, and the appointments are permanent. The leadership of the Committee is in the hands of a chairman, four vice-chairmen and 12 members of the management collegium. The chairman, who is responsible to the government, corresponds to a president or director-general in the western systems. The vice-chairmen are responsible for radio and television in the whole country, for external programmes and for technical and construction work. The members of the management collegium, for their part, represent various areas of programme and service operations (technology, finances, etc.). The leaders of the Committee, corresponding to the board of directors in western systems, meet at least once a week to decide on questions concerning various aspects of broadcasting.

The Committee is divided into three relatively independent sectors according to the sphere of activity of three of the vice-chairmen: television, domestic radio and external broadcasting. Each unit is directed by a council consisting of the vice-chairman together with the leading staff and 'chief editors' of the unit. The sector units are further sub-divided into programme departments (for instance, news, society and politics, literature, children, youth, music). The departments serve the various programme channels in such a way that within each department editorial groups are organized to produce programmes for a particular channel only. In this way production is arranged both according to topic and to channel, and there is a certain degree of competition between the different programmes.

This Soviet Radio and Television Committee formally controls only Moscow central radio, central television and external programmes. The regional radio and television centres are under the control of the autonomous Republics' own administrative organs, and they are directed by a regional radio and television committee organized on the lines of the Moscow Committee.

This latter Radio and Television Committee includes two departments concerned with long-range planning: one for scientific programming and the other for forecasting trends. They came into existence in 1966 with the start of multi-channel and colour broadcasting, and their task is to outline tv development up to 1975. The planning concerns the entire country, including regional programmes. These research departments are responsible only for planning and not, for example, for research on programmes and audiences.[1] In their work the planning departments rely as much as possible on the results of scientific research and try to use modern methods of prediction (for instance, the 'Delphi' method). The focus of planning activity is not so much on outlining the content of broadcasts—programme policy—as on the programming 'machinery'.

The technical equipment—radio and tv transmitters—belongs not to the Radio and Television Committee but to the Post Office Administration. Until 1933 the entire broadcasting field came within the competence of the Post Office Department.

In contrast to earlier years, there are at present no radio or tv licence fees in the Soviet Union. The whole operation—national, regional and external—is financed from the state budget.

Programme policy

No detailed programme of activity has been laid down for Soviet broadcasting. In general its task is defined according to what Lenin and the Soviet Communist Party programme say about mass communication as a tool of the Revolution: to function as 'agitator, propagandist and organizer' (the meaning of the first two terms in Marxist language is different from that in other languages). This task can be briefly defined: to promote communist awareness. On this basis, broadcasting can be characterized as socialist in form and nationalist in content. The nationalist point of view seems to be prominent in programme policy. Thus the aims of programming are expressed, for example, in the following terms:

> ... to maintain a patriotic spirit ... so that every inhabitant feels himself to be a citizen of the great Soviet Union ... If an individual feels himself to be a citizen of the country he feels solidarity with the country's politics ...

Regarding specific programmes, the guiding policy is usually to further intellectual and cultural interests and to aim at a 'high level', which means more or less improving the taste of the audience. Radio and television are seen as educators and stimulators; programmes are produced with the hope of interesting people in the topics treated. On the other hand, there is an obvious need to take into account the present taste and expectations of the audience. Quite often considerations of audience popularity seem to lead to rather commercial thinking in programming. This is especially the case with light programmes and those with artistic aims. It seems that a socially relevant programming policy is followed fairly

[1] This activity has been described in detail in another article to be published in *Gazette, International Journal for Mass Communication Studies.*

inconsistently, and that instead a rather vague concept of ' aesthetic values ' is usually applied in evaluating programme material.

At the 23rd Congress of the Soviet Communist Party radio and television were given a specific task: to bring urban and rural culture closer to each other. This task has been put into practice within the framework of a two-year plan designed to make available to the rural population information it would not otherwise receive. Thus, for instance, the First Television Programme has a special broadcast once a week, presenting information on the development of science (' The Rural Hour '). Again, a ' People's University ' has been founded, in which well-known scientists lecture on various aspects of science and culture; it will probably also incorporate a system of examinations and degrees. In addition, this cultural programme transmits plays direct from the theatre.

Another task of television is considered to be the hastening of social development by criticism of defects and failings. One example is the programme ' Nucleus ', produced by a writer, which among other things has discussed the improvement of beaches and the student examination system. In the latter case, the problem was the immoderate value placed on certain fashionable professions among young people at the expense of other kinds of work; it was considered necessary to boost the less favoured occupations.

One current goal of programme policy is the international programme exchange system. The Soviet Union has taken the initiative in a recent plan in the sphere of Intervision, the aim of which is considerably to increase the exchange of tv programmes both within Intervision (where set weekly times for international programmes have been suggested) and between Intervision and Eurovision (primarily exchange of news material).

There is no attempt at timing coordination between particular broadcasts; this is made practically impossible by the size of the country and the large number of regional programmes. In drawing up the permanent basic timing patterns, however, the parallelism of different programmes is taken into account. For the sake of shift-workers, broadcasts are often repeated the following morning. Choice between different channels is not seen as an especially important problem; each is considered to have its own stable audience. It is admitted, however, that the interests of various family members often differ; this problem will be solved in the future as families begin to have more than one television set, and as the taping and preservation of programmes at home becomes possible. □