



WHEN RADIO IS FORBIDDEN

by Don Jensen

Don't take too casually your freedom to listen. Tuning in international broadcasts may be safe and enjoyable . . . but not always, not everywhere.

"I remember when I started to remember," a young Chinese world band listener revealed to *Passport to World Band Radio* just before the 1989 "Beijing Spring." "My father dared, on some stifling steam bath summer nights, to tune in to certain stations on his old wireless to hear some different news."

"Every time he listened," C— Litang recalls in his letter, "my father wore a look of nervousness and excitement."

"One night, while he was at the wireless, a knock came at the door. The uninvited 'guests' intruded in and came directly over to my dad's wireless. One of them felt it with his hand and it was still warm!"

"The wireless was taken away. My dad was brought to a 'political study

class,' where he suffered a lot. For years after, he was labeled as one who tuned in to 'enemy' broadcasts.

"Later we came to know," C— writes, "that the 'reporter' was our neighbor. The puzzle then was clear. My dad, the 'eavesdropper,' had neglected to consider the existence of a real eavesdropper next door!"

This was China in the late 1960s, the time of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and the fearsome Red Guards. Mao Zedong had unleashed students in a campaign against "cultural contamination" from Western and bourgeois ideas. It became *Lord of The Flies* with an Asian twist, a precursor to the unspeakable events to come in Cambodia.

Millions of Chinese were caught up in the fury of the rampaging armies of teenagers. Mao's efforts to "purify" communist society fell heaviest on the educated, like Litang's father—those who sought knowledge beyond the world around them.

The Chinese were not the first to try to shut off free access to world band listening. Almost as early as broadcasting began, countries from autocratic Iran to democratic Great Britain have tried to stop people from hearing other points of view, particularly during war or civil unrest.

During the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s, radio received its first real wartime tryout. Franco's fascist rebels captured powerful shortwave transmitters, and soon were bombarding Republican Spain with propaganda. The programming, together with Franco's battlefield successes, forced the Madrid government to react. Prime Minister Juan Negrin banned the use of radio receivers by Republican civilians for the duration of the war.

In Nazi Germany, Hitler tried to discourage listening to foreign broadcasts in the mid-1930s by introducing a three-tube "People's Radio." It was cheap enough for everyone to afford—they were sold or given away by the millions. However, it was also, purposefully, only capable of bringing in signals from powerful nearby home service stations.

Hitler tightened the screws as only a totalitarian regime can. The Nazis decreed that any German who published, or even repeated, information from foreign stations would be punished by up to five years in prison. Soon after the outbreak of war, a total ban on listening to foreign broadcasts was imposed throughout Germany.

The Nazis fumed about the "insidiously lying rumors broadcast by the (shortwave) radio." But, despite savage persecution of violators, Germans continued to listen.

Some paid a terrible price. One war-time source discovered that in 1940, early in the War, nearly 1,500 Germans had already been sent to concentration camps or been executed for listening to foreign broadcasts. The final figure of German radio victims during the War has never been fully determined.

Russians, Poles, Slovaks and other Europeans living under the yoke of Nazi rule also were forbidden by the Germans to own radios. In occupied France, possession of radio equipment was punishable by immediate execution.

One clandestine letter from a French veteran of World War I reached the BBC in 1941. Wrote the elderly listener, "Although I am in occupied France, with the invaders in our very house, we listen to your transmissions, which are, of course, forbidden!"

In the village of La Coquille, near Limoges, France, Maquis resistance leader Edouard Brunet and his comrades listened to forbidden radio transmissions from Russia and England in the relative safety of the local graveyard.

In 1940, as world band expert Al Quaglieri's family still recalls, the American government confiscated or rendered inoperative those shortwave radios possessed by German or Italian nationals residing in the United States. In the case of Quaglieri's grandparents, the family shortwave set was disabled by a neighbor—a radio repairman hired for this purpose by the Government.

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Also during this period, Germany and Italy were trying to create pro-Axis sentiment in the United States not only by the use of direct world band propaganda, but also through foreign-language "ethnic" broadcasts within the U.S. As Arnold Hartley, a pioneer in ethnic American broadcasting, recalls, "Many station owners didn't even speak the broadcast language, and so had no idea what was going out over their transmitters. This allowed a number of announcers, who were being paid secretly by the German and Italian consulates in New York, to turn out pro-Axis propaganda."

The Federal Communications Commission brought this "world band radio without world band" to a quiet end in 1940. Foreign language broadcasts within the United States were purged of pro-Axis announcers, some of whom eventually were rehabilitated during the War and allowed to come back on the air. Multilingual censors also were hired and paid for by the stations.

A more subtle approach to discourage listening to hostile shortwave voices was

initiated by the South African government in the early 1960s, according to British author Julian Hale. The Pretoria government committed all domestic broadcasts for blacks to limited-range FM. In addition, they made it difficult for black South Africans to buy receivers able to tune shortwave.

The South African government also announced that fines and up to seven years in prison awaited anyone caught taking part in broadcasts from foreign radio stations which were deemed to be "hostile." While not directly banning world band listening, the law discouraged South African world band listeners from writing to proscribed stations, lest that be seen as offering aid to the enemy—in this case, anti-apartheid viewpoints.

In a similar vein, in the early Sixties the United States intercepted mail from abroad that was deemed to be "communist propaganda." The intended recipient was sent a notice from the Government to this effect, indicating that if he wished to receive his mail he would have to specifically request it and sign for it.

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This all took place while the McCarthy era and its blacklists remained fresh in people's minds. Consequently, until struck down by the Supreme Court, this practice had a chilling effect on listener communication with at least some world band stations.

A few world leaders want international broadcasts only for themselves. For example, Iran's late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini obsessively listened to radio news from foreign nations, but tried to prevent his people from doing the same.

"He listens to news at all hours except when sleeping or praying." Khomeini's daughter, Zahra Mustafavi, told the *Washington Post*. "He has a portable radio, which he carries even during the fast—believe me—and even during meals.

"He's careful that he himself hears the news, rather than hearing it from others."

Attempts to prevent shortwave listen-

ing by law or dictate have been universally ineffective, even when ruthlessly enforced.

But electronic jamming—deliberate interference with radio signals—has been somewhat more successful. The first recorded jamming attempt occurred in 1932, when Romania tried, unsuccessfully, to electronically block Soviet propaganda broadcasts.

Then, in 1934, Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss of Austria, desperate to combat Nazi propaganda aimed at incorporating Austria into the Third Reich, jammed German broadcasts.

The Italians, at war with Ethiopia, jammed programs from Addis Ababa and those of the BBC's Arabic Service, as well. Rival factions in the Spanish civil bloodshed jammed each other. By the time World War II began, jamming had already become widespread.

Great Britain was, then, the notable exception. The BBC, in a 1940 declaration, stated, "Jamming is really an admission of a bad cause. The jammer has a bad conscience . . . is afraid of the influence of the truth. In our country we have no such fears . . ."

Jamming has many sounds, all ear-rending: a growl, a warble, a rotary whine, an oscillating woo-woo, a bubble-machine bubbling. In the past, the Soviets, who practiced jamming more extensively than any other nation over the decades, used diesel engine-type roaring noises interspersed with Morse code signals that presumably identified the jamming transmitter.

Sometimes the interference has been musical, a non-stop playing of a single recording, such as Santana's "Soul Sacrifice," or the relaying of regular broadcast programs—notably China's CPBS-1 and Moscow's "Mayak" networks—distorted so as to enhance the masking effect.

Recent electronic attacks on foreign broadcasters have taken more subtle forms—confusing listeners or ridiculing the offending programs, rather than blocking them with noise.

For example, in Central America today, a tame phony "Radio Venceremos" often operates side-by-side with the real clandestine station of the same name, presumably to mislead listeners trying to



People's Radios were used by Nazis to discourage listening to foreign broadcasts.

hear the real Salvadorean revolutionary broadcaster.

During World War II, the Russians placed a powerful radio signal precisely atop that of a German broadcaster, allowing a mystery voice, dubbed "Ivan the Terrible," to interrupt and answer the enemy announcer with devastating sarcasm.

But attacks on radio waves have a price: jamming is incredibly expensive. In 1962, intelligence sources put the number of Russian jamming stations at 2,000, with another 500 in use in eastern Europe. The annual operating costs were estimated at \$100 to \$186 million. Before Soviet jamming ended in late 1988, it was estimated that between 2,000-3,000 jammer stations were pouring out 60 million watts worth of electronic noise daily. The shutdown reportedly saved Moscow between \$750 million and \$1 billion a year!

There is yet another price to be paid by the jamming country: the bestowing of credibility upon the jammed broadcaster. As surveys have shown, the same broadcasts tend to have higher credibility

among listeners when they are jammed than when they are not jammed.

Shortwave signals come skipping into the target zone by skywave. To jam them requires a number of noise-generating shortwave transmitters located close to the listeners. So, to get the most bang from the jamming buck, the U.S.S.R. saturated its major population centers with groundwave jamming transmitters to block incoming broadcasts. In less populated areas, only skywave—not the more effective groundwave—jamming was economical. Therefore, it was never too difficult for rural Soviet listeners to hear Western programming. Creative urbanites also cashed in on this loophole by taking weekend picnics to the countryside, transistor radios in tow.

In the postwar years, Soviets jammed Western programming until the early 1970s, when Moscow's view of foreign shortwave broadcasting began to soften. Jamming continued, but it was more selective, focusing on certain stations and language services.

But jamming cannot be laid only on



communist doorsteps. For a time, Rhodesia — today's Zimbabwe — jammed British broadcasts. Spain devoted much effort to blocking clandestine Radio España Independiente and Radio Euzkadi, a Basque clandestine. At one point, Greece opted to jam some Greek-language broadcasts of Germany's Deutsche Welle. After the overthrow of President Salvador Allende, Chile became an active jammer of certain Spanish-language broadcasts the Pinochet regime considered too far to the left, including those of Radio Sweden.

Jamming often follows in the wake of conflict — such as the "Beijing Spring" — and the volatile Middle East is no exception. Israel, using "woo-woo" oscillating heterodynes, interfered with Radio Cairo and other Arab transmissions during the October War and again during the invasion of Lebanon. More recently, the Israelis have been jamming the clandestine Al Quds Radio, while various Arab countries have sometimes disrupted Kol Israel's popular Arabic Service.

The same "woo-woo" oscillating heterodyne technique — basically, moving an open carrier back and forth over the target signal — is also used by today's second-most active jamming country, Iraq, which also has "bubble" jammers, so-called because of the sound they make. Iran has engaged in jamming both during and after the Shah's rule, but to a far lesser extent.

Even the democratic West has not been immune from the jamming virus. Back in 1956, Great Britain broke its own no-jamming rule, disrupting Greek transmissions to strife-torn Cyprus, then under British rule.

"The U.S. has never seriously contemplated jamming," an American official declared in the early 1970s. That may be true for English language broadcasts directed to the United States. But in various parts of the world, even today, clandestine broadcasts aimed at countries which the U.S. supports are being jammed. It would be surprising if at least some of that has not been supported, financially or technically, by the United States.

Indeed, such assistance is known to have taken place at least once, although it may have been inadvertent. Harris shortwave transmitters provided to Pinochet's Chile by a U.S. government assistance program wound up being used not only for broadcasting, but also to jam Radio Moscow and other stations.

Even today, the American military maintains a jamming apparatus in place to be used against broadcasts in the event of war, according to one responsible official. "Anything goes during war," he declares, citing a clause in the international radio regulations that allows those regulations to be suspended in times of armed conflict.

That jamming apparatus is known to have been used on at least two occasions, including during the American invasion of the Dominican Republic. However, claims by the Nicaraguan government that the U.S. National Security Agency has jammed broadcasts from ships off Central America don't appear to be plausible, given the interceptive nature of the NSA's mandate.

As we enter a new decade, we can take pleasure in knowing that there is less deliberate noisemaking on world band radio now than at any other time in the past forty years. The Soviet Union, the primary source of jamming since the Cold War, is no longer disrupting foreign broadcasts. Gorbachev and his policy of *glasnost* have opened the doors of the Soviet Union to world band radio — a world full of music, ideas and pleasures.

"It is a world we've lost for so long!" says C — Litang in his letter, "A world my father tried very hard to forget — a world I'm trying to find!"

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