

Jane Ellis

Mar. 31

Brockenhurst at 2.30 p.m.

Apr. 9

Christ Church Bromley, Youth Club at 8.00 p.m.

14

United Bible Society Missions meeting.

Memorandum

Religious Broadcasting into the Soviet Union

There has been a great deal of publicity resulting from the report on Religious Broadcasting into the Soviet Union which we published in *RCL* (Vol. 3, Nos. 4-5, pp. 43-48) this year. The purpose of the report seems to have been widely misunderstood and I am issuing this statement to clarify the situation.

Some of the publicity in the press has given the mistaken impression that Keston College has conducted a survey on Christian radio broadcasts and found them inadequate. This impression is totally untrue. We have begun to collect evidence but do not yet have a sufficient basis to draw conclusions one way or the other. The introductory paragraph of our report makes this clear, stating that the work has only "begun" and that the report which followed was only a "summary" of the very limited progress made so far.

We undertook the survey in response to a strongly-felt need expressed to us over a period of time by people involved with religious broadcasting. The report set out the brief on which we had undertaken it. This included the collection of "official" and "unofficial" Russian reaction to the broadcasts, obviously a point of great importance to the broadcasting stations themselves. It was our publication of our first findings on their reactions which has provoked the most critical comment.

We should have made the purpose of publishing at this stage clearer.

1. We wished to stimulate discussion and reaction from the radio stations and sponsors of religious broadcasts. Progress in the first part of the research was hampered by the limited response which we received to our initial enquiries. This discussion has now at last begun, though we regret that some have taken the interim report to be the finished product.

2. We had reached an impasse in the project. The initial enquiry was conducted by one member of staff on a part-time basis. The reason for this was quite simply the continued lack of support for any serious research into Eastern Europe from which Keston College has suffered since its birth. Nevertheless, I was so impressed with the work done by Jane

Ellis, even in this unfinished state, that I wanted to stimulate general interest in the subject, in the hope that much more financial support for a proper continuation of the project might be forthcoming.

3. Though I personally disagree with a number of the Russian views expressed on the quality of the Christian broadcasts in the interim report, it has always been the policy of Keston College to allow people to speak for themselves, especially those who are barred from doing so for political reasons. The last page and a half of the report carefully balanced favourable views against unfavourable views, by length roughly half and half. Keston College refrained from any judgement on these views, and the last paragraph read: "Clearly it is difficult to make general statements on the basis of such conflicting views. What is not in dispute is that the programmes are vitally important for spreading the Christian Gospel and providing a whole Christian background for believers in a country where no information on religion (except negatively slanted information in atheist publications) has been published for over 50 years. Those who criticize the foreign Christian broadcasts do so because they feel a priceless opportunity is being wasted." This strikes me as a balanced conclusion. To single out critical statements published above as though they were the conclusion of the report is to give a quite misleading impression of the whole.

4. Certain factual errors in the report have been pointed out to us, which we greatly regret. These found their way into it only because of the limited response to the letters of enquiry which we sent out. We plan, when we can, to publish a more complete list of radio stations and hours of transmission time. The much-criticized statement: "We know of no missions who broadcast their own programmes", though open to misinterpretation, was correct as far as our information went at the time of writing, because the missions had not provided the information we requested. We are glad that, since they read this, some have done so, and we are happy to publish David Benson's letter in this issue of *RCL* (p. 56).

We trust, that, despite these errors of fact and the criticism our report has aroused, we have demonstrated the need for it to be done and to be done well. Whether this can happen or not depends entirely upon getting adequate financial support for this project. We hope that this will be forthcoming and that in due course we can present a full report, including an analysis of the actual broadcasts, as well as the Russian reactions to them, in a private conference of people involved.

5 February 1976

MICHAEL BOURDEAUX