

THE LITHUANIAN SECTION OF THE VOICE OF AMERICA

On February 16, 1951 — the anniversary of the Declaration of Lithuanian Independence — Longinas Kublickas, a captain in the Soviet fishing fleet, was listening to foreign news broadcasts at the home of a friend. For a while, nothing but the usual programs reached him, the BBC and Voice of America, in Russian, newscasts. Upon turning the dial, he was struck by a voice speaking in Lithuanian, and later by the playing of the Lithuanian National Anthem. The Lithuanian fisherman, who told of this event after his escape from behind the Iron Curtain, had heard the first Voice of America broadcast in Lithuanian. Since that day, six years ago, Lithuanian has been one of the 43 languages used by the Voice in its daily broadcasts.

Two half-hour programs are now prepared each day by the Lithuanian language section of the Voice of America for broadcast behind the iron curtain. One originates in Washington, D. C., the other in Munich, Germany. The European broadcast makes it possible to use medium length waves, thereby lessening atmospheric interference. Each program is rebroadcast three times daily, except during a serious world crisis, at which time rebroadcasting time is used for original programs.

A special Lithuanian language service, located on both continents, prepares the daily programs. The service is primarily interested in newscasts, with the American program covering American events, and the European — those taking place in Europe. It receives the usual copy of news and commentary prepared by the Voice for all its language services. This information is supplemented through the use of American, Lithuanian and Russian newspapers, and the wires of the major news services. Taped recordings of the radio at Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, are made and utilized by the service. Both programs receive the same information. Both are informed of each others plans for the day, besides receiving each others broadcasts.

About a third of the time, not used for world news, is devoted to Lithuania and Lithuanians in exile. On the Sixteenth of February, on Christmas and on other occasions, Lithuanian diplomats and other prominent Lithuanians in the West speak over the Voice. On occasion, a live signatory of the Act of February Sixteenth, a clergyman, a writer, or a worker, will be heard over the Voice of America. Whenever possible, the service sends its reporters to the more significant conventions or meetings, and later broadcasts recorded excerpts or interviews. Often it will present a survey of the Lithuanian press. Experts in the field sometimes will write historical papers, reviews of new publications, or prepare commentaries on the latest events in occupied Lithuania.

A religious program is prepared each weekend in Washington. For three programs a Roman Catholic priest will be the speaker, on the fourth, a minister of either the Lutheran or the Reformed churches. On important religious occasions, representatives of all three churches will participate.

As is usual with the language services, the general direction of the broadcasts is in the hands of the director of the American Information Agency. Each language service maintains daily contact with the agency. The details of each days programing are controlled by the director of the service, who for the Lithuanian section is Dr. K. R. Jurgela.

The programs are heard not only throughout occupied Lithuania, but in many parts of the Soviet Union itself. And, they are avidly received. On the occasion of the first anniversary of the broadcasts, a miniature ship, made of amber, was received and presented to then president Truman. Many of those escaping from occupied Lithuania, among them the fisherman mentioned above, have been regular listeners of the programs. Several refugees, after listening to the details of a successful escape, quickly followed suit.

The programs do not go without comment from officials of the Lithuanian Communist Party. There are the usual derogatory comments in the party press. Several short prose works have appeared on the subject. One prominent party official has even felt the need to write a poem on the Voice of America.