

Saglay Doc - Sagalaya Interview June 26, 1989

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Secondly, the question of how to communicate policy to the relationship of television. There is no simple answer. Sometimes we initiate. Sometimes we talk to the Ambassador to China, Chinese experts. We work out the most eloquent positions with as much fact as possible. We try not to show emotions or quick opinions or jump to instant conclusions.

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Question about change.

I watched the 1982 program that we thought at the time was quite forward looking. It was a nightmare! People forget to quickly. They repeat the slogan "Stagnation." This 1982 program was about Breznev giving metals, about high government officials going in and out of the airport, was it really that way? Could we really react normally to that kind of news?

Television changes every day. Every evening I try to have something we couldn't have had yesterday. Perhaps there is some backlash. A new informal group has been formed called "Breznev's Friends." This includes even young people. It recalls a time when everything was quiet and clam.

Two months ago we had a submarine incident but it did not occur to us to send a reporter to interview the navel commander. Two days ago we had another atomic reactor nuclear submarine incident in the north sea. A reporter flew out to interview the commander. The commander rejected an interview. The reporter called the secretary of the central committee to complain. The secretary ordered the commander to give the interview. The same with the events in Uzbekistan. We had instant objective reporting.

We act in two roles. We report the facts and we are also seen as the voice of the government. We find a good way to combine these roles. We have programs to represent different points of view. In fact, our youth program is called "View Points." It usually expresses a completely different view from the official point of view. For example, the war in Afganistan. There is a discussion going on in television about the possibility of the different channels being headed by different people in order to diversify the point of view of coverage. Our coverage of Western countries is much more balanced then it has been before. Even famous dissidents are now interviewed on television, much to the consternation of many people.

Question: Is there pressure from above?

The pressure is mostly psychological. Every time I consider something sensitive I think of my job. Is this cowardness? I don't know. All I know is that I try to have something everyday that we could not have done the day before. If I am replaced, maybe the new head would not be able to do that. (he is the head of news and public affairs.) However, in a sense we are protected. We are protected by the general belief that we have a direct pipeline to Gorbchev. For example when we interview a dissident, most people think that that has been sanctioned by Gorbchev, even when it hasn't.

Is there a backlash? We get about ten thousand pieces of mail a month (vremya) we meet with audience members, students, works in small cities around the countries and answer their questions. So we think we are in tune with what people want. I think they want us to go even faster. Thursday June 29, Interview with Lazutkin (?) Depute Director of Gostel.

The most important changes in Gostel are in the concept of broadcasting. We are part of our society, a most active part. We do not just reflex but also form values. We are at the threshold of the democracy. The last year was most difficult. We had many problems, tragic events. Problems are accumulating. Parastroyka and Glasnos brought them out, made them more visible.

How do we cover them? Not as in the past. We need objective information, to step over stereo types of the past, no half trues. But also need to comment on events.

There are qualitative changes. We try to go deeper. Not all the way of course, but the quality is on the rise. We are getting closer to the mass media journalism we want. Of program structure? For us, news aate what doesn't exist. Pluralism is a nation wide dialog expressing alternative views prevalent in our nation. We need to give a balance few. Not to manipulate public opinion. It is a thin line to walk. Parastroka is drama!

Three billion rubles are spent on broadcasting. One third is on television.

What are changes in program structure? For us, news and public affairs are the most important. We have urgent problems. Parastroka is revolution. We must convince our audiences, awaken people, this is not a fade, it is a necessity. What society will be like tomorrow? Neither Marx nor Lenin anticipated our situation. Reality far exceeds drama.

All this conception goes at the detriment of the entertainment and other types of programing. There is a hunger for seeing politics, government in action. Our priorities reflect that.

Of course, formally our priority has always been education. But we also want entertainment, music, sports, children, culture.

Gagarkin. We are in a crisis. We have rejected the things of the past. Like quiz shows. We have new "video channels" which mixes entertainment, news, drama, science, technologies, etc. Maybe we have too many of these. But we are combining music and entertainment for about one hundred and twenty minutes before and after midnight.

Entertainment remains one of our weakest points. Our research shows that most people prefer western entertainment.

Back to Laskin, discussing dramatic programing. The truth is drama. We don't have many drama programs, despite the fact that western drama is most popular. Our reasons are that our real life is more rich then any attempt to imitate it. Political theory is also drama. We have a show called View Point which features debate and different points of view that is drama also.

Fictional dramatic programs are not dominant on our television. It is not yet fully developed. We are buying some western movie, and we have had a Brazilian soap opera which was very successful. But that is expensive. We try to get what our press speaks about. That is world wide popular programs and films. But basically we believe watching our government is drama. After seeing Gorbchev, who wants to see a fictional drama?

Glasnos is different in different regions. Parastroka was born in Moscow. The main opposition comes from middle level bureaucrat, conservative regions, and officials. They want to keep their privileges and power. Not all but many. Most of the opposition comes from them.

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