

## TRANSLATION: Ksenia Larina on “Radio Liberty – The Liberty of Mendacity” (LJ post)

(<http://xlarina.livejournal.com/117110.html>; accessed August 15, 2009)

*Translated by Anatoly Karlin.*

My husband Rinat Valiulin, who was invited to the position of Director of the Russian service this February, abandoned the “hospitable” walls of this human rights-defending radio station Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty<sup>1</sup> on August 10<sup>th</sup>. His contract had been terminated. The presenter began the traditional midday briefing of the Moscow and Prague editorial offices with congratulations: “Colleagues! Congratulations! We did it!” What did they do? They arranged a civil execution for my husband. A ritual killing. They destroyed him.

In the last half-year, I learned many interesting things about the customs and life philosophy of the world's freest radio station. Behind the humanistic facade of this pantheon of freedom, democracy and defense of human rights, just like the painted fireplace in Papa Carlo's home<sup>2</sup>, there lies hidden a wondrous country. In this country, around the clock these partisans for liberty write denunciations against each other of the meanest substance, go through personal affairs in general meetings, indefatigably cook up intrigues and plots against each other, try their absolute best to make a good impression on the observers, whom the American administration sprinkled everywhere, like red flags. The person who denounces his neighbor first, is the one who has it made<sup>3</sup>. Making conversation in the editorial offices about work is impossible with them – they put a finger to the lips, roll their eyes in horror, and say in an icy whisper – “I'll tell you everything later”.

They think of themselves not only as pillars<sup>4</sup>, but as the authentic gurus of Russian journalism, openly and passionately detest “Echo of Moscow” and consider anyone entering their “unique journalistic collective”<sup>5</sup> as the lowest form of carrion, which they make well known to them without refraining from the most indecent methods – from open rudeness to inexcusable slander. The innocent, respectfully politically-correct post of Olga Galitskaya (<http://olgalitskaya.livejournal.com/13980.html>) unleashed a storm of furious indignation, as these offended pillars from Prague demanded the immediate convocation of a general meeting on the theme of “shameless violation of corporate ethics”.

My husband's faultless biography gave them quite a bother – you can't find any kompromat<sup>6</sup> on him: he just isn't, didn't do it, didn't participate, etc. Every time he came to Prague, he was given a pile of denunciations from Moscow, each funnier than the last. It came to such a state, that the suggestion to create a position of “producer” (an editor with respect to guests) was interpreted as an attempt to

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1 Usually shortened to “Radio Liberty” or RFERL.

2 This is a reference to the Russian fairy-tale [Buratino](#).

3 “Кто первый встал - того и тапки” - Russian slang meaning that it's best to be first, otherwise you lose out.

4 “столпы” - *pillars*, i.e. pillars / hotshots of journalism on Russia; reused several times.

5 “УЖК” - уникальный журналистский коллектив, “unique journalistic collective”.

6 Propaganda stories inserted into mass media outlets for money in order to smear another person's reputation.

introduce censorship. A Portuguese journalist, who had worked with Radio Liberty for many years, was denounced to the very President of the radio station, just because his request to travel to Grozny was approved by the new Director. In clumsy American language the former star of the Odessa gutter press squealed: “What, you mean to say, a former member of the Portuguese Communist Party can represent the interests of our liberal human rights-defending radio?”.

Any undertaking of the new Director was met not with just hostility, but outright sabotage. Hard on the heels of any suggestion he voiced, a flurry of hysterical denunciations made their way to Prague. And as for the people in Prague – they are lovely, intelligent folks who live in full contentment, arrange jobs with the radio station for their relatives and lovers, live in paid-for accomodation, and once a week scrape together something about human rights on air. Permanent contracts for these great journalists are their pass into the eternal, happy life. They don't need to prove their professional qualities on air – in fact, no-one even hears them.

I say this without any irony – the fact of the matter is, not one of the American managers of Radio Liberty is interested in it, EVER listens to it, or even knows any Russian. The supervisor of the Russian service doesn't know Russian. Neither does the chief editor of RFERL. They prefer to listen to music on the radio and to get their news from the Internet. When we spoke to an American manager over a friendly supper about the essence of radio, he replied to this simple thought of mine, what the most important things for radio are: he intoned, appeared to think deeply, and uttered: “Yes, you're right. Intonation. Igor Pomerantsev has a wonderful intonation!”. “You heard him on air?”, I asked, excited. “No, whatever for?” he exclaimed in surprise.

The presenters, it seems, have already long held their managers for idiots, for they never tire of burying them in letters – odes to their own honorable selves, to convince them of their own greatness. You call a name. “O!” exclaims the poor American, “That's an outstanding presenter! He's listened to in the Kremlin!”. “How do you know?” – “He told me so himself”.

Another surname. “O! - she's an outstanding presenter! Everyone comes to talk with her!” – “Everyone!, how come?” – “She told me so herself”.

At this point I should note that conversations with guests on air are exceptional in the servility of the presenters. In reply to the straightforward question – “Why, dear, do you not ask the guests hard questions?”, these pillars ingenuously answer – “But otherwise they wouldn't come to us!”

But the most disgusting thing – it's the atmosphere of total, all-embracing lies and denunciations, built into a cult<sup>7</sup>. They lie to each other, lie *on* each other, they communicate amongst themselves exclusively by writing – so that every word is recorded, for otherwise they can easily absolve themselves of anything they say without witnesses or microphones. On screwing outsiders, they try their utmost to put on a pained face<sup>8</sup>, as one of the supervisors in the Moscow bureau said – “We don't need any conflictual situations”. This is exactly why they deal with the inconvenient folks silently, in a Soviet way, KGB-style: decisions on dismissal are taken during the holidays. On your return from vacation, they greet you

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7 “атмосфера тотального всепроникающего вранья и стукачества, возведенного в культ”.

8 “Поедая чужаков, они изо всех сил стараются соблюсти перекошенное лицо”.

with a happy smile, throw you a big thumbs up – “Hello? How were your holidays?”, and then they quietly take you to the staff department. Hiding their eyes and clutching a manual containing prepared answers to every possible question, in arms trembling from their own baseness, they suggest you clear off. You refuse to sign – they begin a sophisticated blackmail. With a lovely smile. Don't worry, we'll find a way to get rid of you. And don't think you'll ever get an answer to the question – why? “It is not our policy to explain the decisions of the management”.

Radio Liberty had the chance to become a bright, clever, modern and dynamic radio station. To expand their circle of guests and experts, to reduce the quantity of repeats, to rework their broadcasting format, to construct an original broadcasting program for the weekend, to open up new places of discussion, to increase the numbers of listeners, to attract a young, active audience, to become a full player on the information space, instead of recycling news stories from the headlines of the information agencies...

Actually, this is the very reason a new Director was invited, one who did not intend to interfere with editorial policies, but one who wanted to just do RADIO. Few could have expected such an awful experience with absolutely reasonless hatred, rudeness, hysterical sabotage, on the part of these envious, self-worshipping gentlemen, who call themselves journalists. And from the other side, from the American management – total control over and blockage of any and all decisions. Without a written agreement with the supervisor of the Russian service in Prague, you couldn't move a chair in the Moscow office. Judging by everything that happened, Radio Liberty faces no danger of change any time soon, and the American leadership's search for an “effective manager” is in vain. Free radio for free peoples, turned out to be as much a myth as the “heroic” careers of its employees. The sole freedom which they've realized to its full potential, is the freedom of mendacity.

PS. Mario Corti, former Director of the Russian service of Radio Liberty, fired in 2005:

*“I would like to tell you, for the first time, what really happened at RFERL. Furthermore, I take full responsibility for everything I say. I can document it all. I did not leave the radio station – first I was removed from the post of Director of the Russian service, then I was fired. After my demotion I could have gone with a bang, slamming the door behind me, especially because at my dismissal I refused the compensation which was offered to me upon my agreement to certain conditions that were improper and demeaning both to me, and to the radio station itself. But I always, and still do, greatly respect this venerable institution. It's far higher and worthier than some of the folks who, unfortunately, sometimes end up there. And I also dreamed there would be changes for the better. It was all in vain. Eventually, they managed to dismiss me under the pretext of the “restructuring” of the Russian service.”*

Everything in full here: <http://www.newswe.com/index.php?go=Pages&in=view&id=1297>

Version for foreigners: <http://freediaonline.org/freediaonlineblog/2009/05/19/radio-free-europeradio-liberty-has-lost-its-uniqueness-warns-former-director-of-radio-libertys-russian-service/>