

World & Nation

Vatican Radio embroiled in airwave war

By John Thavis
Vatican City (NC) — Listeners who spin their dial toward the middle of Rome's FM radio band can be forgiven these days for thinking they've just tuned in to Radio Tower of Babel.

What they're really getting is a war of the airwaves, with the Vatican right in the middle.

Through the overpowering signal of Vatican Radio — which broadcasts a steady stream of liturgical events, papal talks and "easy-listening" music — a discordant audio mix fades in and out. It includes strident political harangues, anti-nuclear appeals and reports on the free-love gospel of the Radical Party's newly elected parliamentarian Ilona Staller, a pornographic entertainment star.

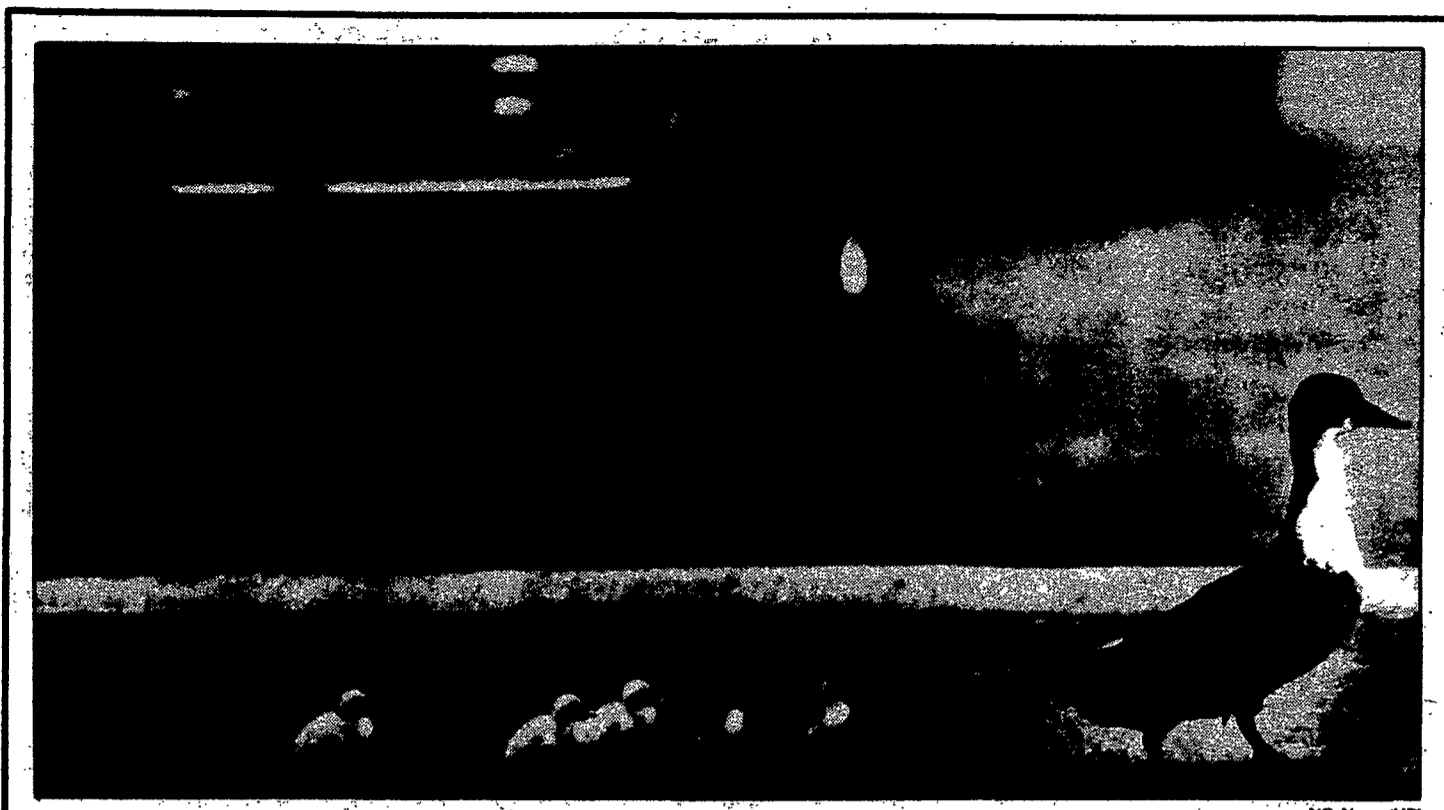
Since July 1, when Vatican Radio shifted its frequency to comply with an international radio accord, four smaller stations have been fighting a self-declared "war of the airwaves," claiming that the change has resulted in their weaker signals being jammed by the stronger Vatican broadcast.

An editor at one station vowed a battle of "reciprocal interference."

The skirmishing revolves around 105 on the FM dial, but the cause has been taken up in Rome's newspapers, on wall posters, in public protests and even intermittent vandalism.

A national organization of radio transmitters has appealed to the Vatican's Secretariat of State for a return of Vatican Radio to its old frequency. So far, the answer has been a polite "no" — Vatican Radio officials explained that they are simply following the realignment agreed to by members of the International Union of Telecommunications.

The public reaction has not always been so closely reasoned. Dozens of cartoon posters appearing in downtown Rome depict a youth kicking an irate Pope John Paul II in the shins, under the slogan: "Hands off our radio!"



DOWNY CONVOY — Making her own right of way, a mother duck acts as crossing guard for her six offspring on a busy Gainesville, Fla., street.

In suburban Rome, a church door was set on fire, and rocks were thrown at the pastor's residence at another church. In both incidents, spray-painted messages were left, criticizing Vatican Radio and warning, "don't touch Onda Rossa."

"Onda Rossa," which means "Red Wave," is the station of Italy's "autonomy" movement, a leftist political association with a small but faithful listening audience.

The debate has touched a nerve in the country, where private radio stations number more than 3,000 and have replaced the soapbox as a forum for political and cultural opinions. Though many are unlicensed, the stations are considered an expression of free speech — and to the ears of many, that makes Vatican Radio, with its powerful transmitters, the bully of the airwaves.

But while most listener wrath has been aimed at Vatican Radio, some officials at the other stations place the blame elsewhere — on the Italian legislature for dragging its feet

on station licensing and frequency allocation.

"The blame lies with the Italian law, or lack of it. This has been a serious omission," said Giancarlo Loquenzi, director of Radio Radicale, the station of Italy's small Radical Party. He noted that a 1984 Geneva agreement to end international FM airwave chaos was never followed up in the Italian legislature. As a result, in Rome alone more than 200 private stations continue to operate as they have for years, with no legal limits on their broadcasts.

But Loquenzi and others added that Vatican Radio could have chosen to wait until a new law had been passed before changing frequencies. "Instead, it wanted to impose the change," he said.

Radio Radicale and the other stations have a kind of "squatters' rights" approach to the problem. "We've had this frequency for 10 years. In our view, it's the pope who's

talking on Cicciolina's airwaves — not the other way around," said the station director.

"Cicciolina," which roughly translates as "cutie," is the stage name of Staller, once famous for her hard-core pornographic shows, who this year won a seat in Parliament on the Radical Party ticket. While her public breast-baring during the election campaign was not exactly made-for-radio, Radio Radicale has opened its microphones to her philosophy on free love and sex.

Measured on home receivers, however, "Laudetur Jesus Christus," Vatican Radio's theme song, seems to be prevailing. The smaller stations say their signal has been eclipsed in many neighborhoods and weakened in others.

But one Radio Radicale editor vowed a fight of "reciprocal interference" to the bitter end. "No one has any intention of shutting down their stations," he said.

Irish Catholic Church offers aid to emigrants in United States, Germany

By Patrick Nolan
Dublin, Ireland (NC) — The Irish Catholic Church said it will send priests to the United States and West Germany to help provide services to young Irish who have fled Ireland's faltering economy.

Father John Gavin, secretary of the Irish bishops' Commission for Emigrants, said July 6 that six priests will be sent to Boston and New York to replace Irish priests working in U.S. dioceses, so that those priests, who are familiar with immigration problems, could concentrate on welfare and advisory services for the youths.

Father Gavin estimated that there are approximately 140,000 young Irish working illegally in those two U.S. cities. Many could be expelled under tough new U.S. immigration laws, he said.

In Munich, West Germany, a new Catholic chaplaincy to serve about 5,000 Irish immigrants was expected to be opened by Bishop Seamus Hegarty of Raphoe on July 11. Two

Irish priests, Father Kevin Raferty and Father Joe Walsh, were assigned to the chaplaincy.

In Britain, the Irish church has already established a special ministry for the young Irish.

On July 6, Frank Fahey, Irish minister of state for youth affairs, said in a radio interview that his government supports a bill introduced in the U.S. Congress that would allow several thousand Irish to legally enter the United States each year.

The official, however, also accused senior American politicians of "not doing all that they should" to help Irish immigrants. He singled out Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., saying that despite his Irish background, the senator had shown little or no interest in the problems of the young job-seekers.

Ireland was badly hit by the global recession of the late 1970s. The government's attempt to stimulate the economy through

heavy international borrowing failed, leaving a large foreign debt comparable in effect to those carried by Third World countries.

Potential workers under 25 years old are said to have little chance of finding jobs in Ireland. Unemployment, which averages 18 percent, has left 74,000 youths jobless.

Large numbers of Irish youths have since emigrated to other countries. In 1985 alone, more than 30,000 Irish citizens emigrated, and 27 percent of university graduates left the country, according to Irish government statistics.

The young Irish are mainly concentrated in the United States, Britain, West Germany, France and Belgium, where local Irish communities provide support and employment.

Most who came to the United States obtained tourist visas and then stayed illegally after the visas expired, U.S. and Irish officials say.

U.S. State Department data shows a rapid increase in the number of tourist visas issued to Irish citizens beginning in the late 1970s. In 1978, 34,059 visas were issued. The numbers rose to 44,302 in 1979; 64,707 in 1980 and peaked at 68,633 in 1981. In 1985, 47,200 Irish obtained U.S. tourist visas.

The new immigrants, though far better-educated than the poor and often unskilled Irish who came to the United States in the mid-19th century, are mostly working in bars, hotels or as domestic servants to wealthy families who are aware of their immigration status.

"Many are doing casual, manual, lowly paid work," said Father Gavin. "They are open to exploitation. If they have accidents at work or if they become ill, they receive no compensation, because they are not covered by insurance."

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