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Saving Free Voices FEB 21 1972

For a generation now, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty have contributed enormously to enlarging the market place of ideas in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Their transmissions have made available to those countries factual news of the outside world that the governments involved would have preferred their subjects did not know. In addition, these stations have broadcast the writings of such dissidents as Nobel Prize-winner Aleksandr Solzenitsyn, whose masterly novels and stories are prohibited in the Soviet bloc. A Library of Congress study of these stations, made at the request of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has paid high tribute to these organizations' contributions toward liberalization of the Soviet world.

But now both these stations are threatened with extinction tomorrow unless House and Senate conferees end a Congressional stalemate. This situation arose because each chamber voted a different bill authorizing the continuation of these broadcasts.

If the deadlock kills Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, the chief gainers will be the Soviet bloc's hardliners who hate the two radio stations as allies of the liberal and progressive elements in the Communist world. Moreover, the demise of these broadcasts because of the inability of House and Senate conferees to agree would hardly project a flattering view of the American legislative system, nor would it add to American prestige for Europeans to see an important political question decided by a mere technical stratagem.

We believe the work of these two stations has a lasting validity and importance, but even those of a different view must realize that the existence of these organizations provides potential bargaining counters for President Nixon's Moscow visit next May. At the least, all concerned should be able to agree that a final decision on the future of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty cannot be made until Mr. Nixon has returned from the Kremlin and Congress can take a hard look at the post-Moscow situation of American foreign policy.