

Decree on “Extraordinary Radio Measures” (September 1939)

Abstract

Joseph Goebbels recognized the power of radio early on, and gaining total control over this new medium thus became a top priority. Therefore, in addition to its low price, the National Socialists’ “People’s Receiver” [*Volksempfänger*] also had a limited range, which prevented listeners from tuning in to foreign broadcasts. In 1939, there were already more than 12 million radios in the German Reich. Only three years later, 16 million households, or about 70% of the population, had access to radio reception—and not just over the “People’s Receiver.” When war broke out, foreign broadcasts—unlike the foreign press—could not be silenced with a simple ban. So, on the day the war began, Goebbels composed a draft law that made listening to foreign broadcasts and spreading any information contained in them punishable as a “radio crime.” Punishment ranged from seizure of the radio to multiple-year prison sentences. In some cases, death sentences were even issued for treason. The Gestapo was charged with tracking down violators of the radio decree. To do so, however, it had to depend heavily on public informers. In the first 10 months after the decree went into effect, the Gestapo made more than 2,200 arrests.

Source

Date of issue: September 7, 1939

Decree on Extraordinary Radio Measures

From September 1, 1939

In modern warfare the opponent does not only use military means but also methods which influence national morale and are intended to undermine it. One of these methods is radio. Every word which the opponent broadcasts is of course a lie and intended to damage the German people. The Reich Government knows that the German people are aware of this danger and, therefore, expects that every German will have the sense of responsibility to consider it a matter of decency to refrain from listening to foreign broadcasts.

For those national comrades who lack this sense of responsibility the Ministerial Council for the Defense of the Reich has issued the following decree.

§ 1

It is forbidden to listen to foreign broadcasts with intent. Contraventions will be punished with penal servitude. A prison sentence may be substituted in less serious cases. The equipment used will be confiscated.

§ 2

Anyone who intentionally disseminates information gleaned from foreign radio stations which is liable to threaten the defensive capability of the German nation will be punished with penal servitude, and in particularly serious cases, with death.

§ 3

The regulations of this decree do not apply to actions which are carried out in the performance of a duty.

§ 4

The Special Courts are responsible for dealing with and passing judgment upon contraventions of this decree.

§ 5

Prosecutions under §§1 & 2 are only to be initiated by the agencies of the State Police [Gestapo].

§ 6

The Reich Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda will issue the requisite legal and administrative regulations for the implementation of this decree and, insofar as penal regulations are concerned, will do so in consultation with the Reich Minister of Justice.

Chairman of the Ministerial Council for the Defense of the Reich
Göring, General Field Marshall

Deputy of the Führer
R. Heß

Plenipotentiary for Reich Administration
Frick

Reich Minister and Chief of the Reich Chancellery
Dr. Lammers

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