

Joseph Goebbels: Two Speeches on the Tasks of the Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (March 15 and 25, 1933)

Abstract

After the new Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda was established on March 13, 1933, Joseph Goebbels was charged with “coordinating” and controlling the content of the press, art, film, music, and literature. To put radio in the service of the regime, Goebbels dissolved the independent broadcasting corporations that had existed up until then and replaced them with a Reich station. In the following speeches of March 15 and March 25, 1933, the new Reich Minister explained that his aim was the spiritual mobilization of the general population and that this, when achieved, would be tantamount to a national revolution. Goebbels regarded radio as the most important vehicle for the propaganda that would help him along the way. For this reason, he arranged for the mass production of the “People’s Receiver” [*Volksempfänger*], a cheap radio that would allow even the poorest strata of the population to be included in his propaganda revolution.

Source

I. Speech to the Press on the Establishment of a Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (March 15, 1933)

I see in the setting up of the new Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda by the Government a revolutionary act in so far as the new Government no longer intends to leave the people to their own devices. This government is in the truest sense of the word a people’s government. It arose out of the people and will always execute the will of the people. I reject most passionately the idea that this government stands for reactionary aims, that we are reactionaries. [...] We want to give the people their due, though admittedly in another form than occurred under parliamentary democracy.

In the newly-established Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda I envisage the link between regime and people, the living contact between the national government, as the expression of the people’s will, and the people themselves. In the past few weeks we have seen an increasing coordination between Reich policy and the policy of the states, and in the same way I view the first task of the new Ministry as being to establish coordination between the Government and the whole people. If this government is determined never and under no circumstances to give way, then it has no need of the lifeless power of the bayonet, and in the long run will not be content with 52 per cent behind it and with terrorizing the remaining 48 per cent, but will see its most immediate task as being to win over that remaining 48 per cent.

[...]

It is not enough for people to be more or less reconciled to our regime, to be persuaded to adopt a neutral attitude towards us; rather we want to work on people until they have capitulated to us, until they grasp ideologically that what is happening in Germany today not only *must* be accepted but also *can* be accepted.

[...]

Propaganda is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. If the means achieves the end then the means is good. Whether it always satisfies stringent aesthetic criteria or not is immaterial. But if the end has not been achieved then this means has in fact been inadequate. The aim of our movement was to mobilize people, to organize people, to win them for the national revolutionary ideal. This aim—even the most hostile person cannot dispute this—has been achieved and that represents the verdict on our propaganda methods. The new Ministry has no other aim than to unite the nation behind the ideal of the national revolution. If the aim has been achieved then people can pronounce judgment on my methods if they wish; that would be a matter of complete indifference, for the Ministry would then by its efforts have achieved its goal. If, however, the aim is not achieved then although I might be able to prove that my propaganda methods satisfied all the laws of aesthetics I would have done better to become a theatre producer or the director of an Academy of Art, not the Minister of a Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda.

[...]

The most important tasks of this Ministry must be the following: first, all propaganda ventures and all institutions of public information belonging to the Reich and the states must be centralized in one hand. Furthermore, it must be our task to instill into these propaganda facilities a modern feeling and bring them up to date. We must not allow technology to run ahead of the Reich but rather the Reich must keep pace with technology. Only the latest thing is good enough. We are living in an age when policies must have mass support [...] the leaders of today must be modern princes of the people, they must be able to understand the people but need not follow them slavishly. It is their duty to tell the masses what they want and put it across to the masses in such a way that they understand it, too. [...]

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Source of original German text: “Rede vor der Presse über die Errichtung des Reichspropagandaministeriums (15. März 1933),” in Joseph Goebbels, *Revolution der Deutschen: 14 Jahre Nationalsozialismus*. Oldenburg, 1933, pp. 135–50.

II. Address to the Officials and Directors of the Radio Corporation, Berlin, House of Broadcasting (March 25, 1933)

[...]

The Ministry has the task of achieving a mobilization of mind and spirit in Germany. It is, therefore, in the sphere of the mind what the Defense Ministry is in the sphere of defense. Thus, this ministry will require money and will receive money because of a fact which everybody in the Government now recognizes, namely that the mobilization of the mind is as necessary as, perhaps even more necessary than, the material mobilization of the nation. The proof is: in 1914 we were mobilized in material terms as no other nation was—what we lacked was the mobilization of the mind within the country and in other countries which provided the basis for the material mobilization. We did not lose the war because our artillery gave out but because the weapons of our minds did not fire. Because people who knew nothing about it were employed to explain Germany to the world. Because people believed that any old privy councilor could do it, without his having any contact with everyday life. No, this is a task for men who have come from the people and understand the people.

[...]

I consider radio to be the most modern and the most crucial instrument that exists for influencing the masses. I also believe—one should not say this out loud—that radio will in the end replace the press.

[...]

First principle: At all costs avoid being boring. I put that before *everything*.

[...]

So do not think that you have the task of creating the correct attitudes, of indulging in patriotism, of blasting out military music and declaiming patriotic verse—no, that is not what this new orientation is all about. Rather you must help to bring forth a nationalist art and culture which is truly appropriate to the pace of modern life and to the mood of the times. The correct attitudes must be conveyed but that does not mean they must be boring. And simply because you have the task of taking part in this national enterprise you do not have *carte blanche* to be boring. You must use your imagination, an imagination which is based on sure foundations and which employs all means and methods to bring to the ears of the masses the new attitude in a way which is modern, up to date, interesting, and appealing; interesting, instructive but not schoolmasterish. Radio must never suffer from verbiage—the intention is clear and it irritates listeners.

[...]

I am placing a major responsibility in your hands, for you have in your hands the most modern instrument in existence for influencing the masses. By means of this instrument you are the creators of public opinion. If you carry this out well, we shall win over the people and if you do it badly, in the end the people will once more desert us.

[...]

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Source of original German text: Deutsches Rundfunk Archiv (DRA), Nr. C 1117 (77' 50"); reprinted in Helmut Heiber, ed., *Goebbels-Reden*. Volume 1, 1931–1939. Düsseldorf, 1971, pp. 90, 94, 95, 106–07.

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