

Erich Mende Remembers His Family's First Radio (Retrospective account, 1990)

Abstract

Erich Mende (1916–1998) was a prominent politician with the Free Democratic Party (FDP) after the Second World War and served as West Germany's Vice Chancellor from 1963 to 1966. Born in Groß-Strehlitz (today: Strzelce Opolskie in Poland) in 1916, Mende experienced the Weimar Republic as the son of a politically engaged Catholic school teacher who advocated strongly on behalf of ethnic Germans living in this contested region near the newly drawn border with Poland known as Upper Silesia.

In this brief passage, Mende recalled Christmas of 1926, when his family got the first radio in his entire city district. It apparently got great reception, too, since he and his family could hear broadcasts in Russian, French, Polish, and English, as well as pick up stations from as far away as Andorra, located in the Pyrenees Mountains, between France and Spain.

Source

[...]

The family was in for a special surprise at Christmas 1926. The first radio set was installed in the living room. To compensate for the one-off big expense, we four children had to do without individual presents. We were happy to do so. After all, it was the first radio set in the entire district, and we were looking forward to showing it off to our classmates.

An assembly team of four experts arrived from Oppeln, 30 kilometers away. The set, a "Nora" four-tube set, was placed on our father's desk. The loudspeaker, an equally large box covered with yellow raw silk on the front, bore the "Siemens" trademark. The antenna was guided out of the window through an opening drilled in the windowsill and to the gutter and fixed there. After a while, the first loud music, news and more music came from the Berlin radio station – an exciting event for the whole family.

Then we children were allowed to get instructed on the controls one by one. What a miracle to bring voices from thousands of kilometers into the living room, in English, French, Russian, Polish. Malmö and Kalundborg in the far north, Radio Andorra and Marseille in the south of Europe, Beromünster in Switzerland. What a pleasure to turn the dial, avoid the whistling of the feedback and bring in the respective station clearly! During the days of Christmas and around the turn of the year, the family just sat around the miracle of technology, our first radio set!

[...]

Source of original German text: Erich Mende, „Was sagt der Annaberg?' Korfanty kam geritten...Als französische Alpenjäger in Oberschlesien polnische Politik machten“, *Alltag in der Weimarer Republik: Erinnerungen an eine unruhige Zeit*, ed. Rudolf Pörtner. Düsseldorf: ECON Verlag, 1990, p. 510.

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