

Background: The Nazis were convinced of the power of the spoken word. In this speech given on 18 August 1933, Goebbels develops his thinking on the directions German radio would take. The occasion was the opening of a radio exhibition. As Goebbels notes, a cheap radio receiver, the *Volksempfänger*, had just been introduced as a way of making the radio affordable for the average citizen.

The source: Joseph Goebbels, “Der Rundfunk als achte Großmacht,” *Signale der neuen Zeit*. 25 *ausgewählte Reden von Dr. Joseph Goebbels* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1938), pp. 197-207.

The Radio as the Eight Great Power

by Joseph Goebbels

My fellow people's comrades!

Napoleon spoke of the “press as the seventh great power.” Its significance became politically visible with the beginning of the French Revolution, and maintained its position for the entirety of the 19th century. The century's politics were largely determined by the press. One can hardly imagine or explain the major historical events between 1800 and 1900 without considering the powerful influence of journalism.

The radio will be for the twentieth century what the press was for the nineteenth century. With the appropriate change, one can apply Napoleon's phrase to our age, speaking of the radio as the eighth great power. Its discovery and application are of truly revolutionary significance for contemporary community life. Future generations may conclude that the radio had as great an intellectual and spiritual impact on the masses as the printing press had before the beginning of the Reformation.

The November Regime [**the Nazi term for the Weimar Republic**] was not able to understand the full significance of the radio. Even those who claimed to have awakened the people and gotten them involved in practical politics were without exception almost blind to the possibilities of this modern method of influencing the masses.

At best, they saw it as an easy way to distract the masses from the difficulties of our national and social life through games and entertainment. Only reluctantly did they think of using radio for political purposes. As in all other things, they viewed radio through the mildew of an ostensible objectivity. They left the radio and its development to its technical and administrative experts, limiting their own use of it for partisan purposes to times of particular domestic crises.

It goes without saying that the National Socialist revolution, which is modern and intent on action, as well as the popular upheaval we have led, must change abstract and lifeless methods in the radio. The old regime was content simply to fill empty offices or change the faces, without however changing the spirit and content of public life. We on the other hand intend a principled transformation in the worldview of our entire society, a revolution of the greatest possible extent that will leave nothing out, changing the life of our nation in every regard.

This process, which has been visible to the layman in the last six months, was naturally not random. It was systematically prepared and organized. We have used our power in the last six months to carry out this transformation. We spent the period before 30 January in winning power, having then the same goals that we have carried out in the six months since we took power.

It would not have been possible for us to take power or to use it in the ways we have without the radio and the airplane. It is no exaggeration to say that the German revolution, at least in the form it took,

would have been impossible without the airplane and the radio.

It is in fact a modern revolution, and it has used the most modern methods to win and use power. It therefore does not need saying that the government resulting from this revolution cannot ignore the radio and its possibilities. To the contrary, it is resolved to use them to the fullest extent in the work of national construction that is before us, and in ensuring that this revolution can stand the test of history.

That means a series of important reforms in the organization and content of the radio. On the one hand, these reforms will assure the organic continuation of the radio and its further development both in the near and long term. They will also mean a transformation of its whole nature, bringing it in tune with the modern community of our people.

As in all other areas, the changes are primarily spiritual in nature. The radio must be brought out of the stubborn emptiness of its technical limitations into the lively spiritual developments of our age. It is not possible for the radio to ignore the times. More than any other form of public expression, it has the duty to meet the needs and demands of the day. A radio that does not seek to deal with the problems of the day does not deserve to influence the broad masses. It will soon become an empty playground for technicians and intellectual experimenters. We live in the age of the masses; the masses rightly demand that they participate in the great events of the day. The radio is the most influential and important intermediary between a spiritual movement and the nation, between the idea and the people.

That requires a clearly expressed direction. I have spoken of this often with regards to various areas of our spiritual life. There can be no lack of direction, either with people or with things. The moral value or lack thereof depends not on words, but on content. The direction and the goal always determine whether something is good, useless or even harmful for our people.

A government that has determined to bring a nation together so that it is once more a center of power in the scales of great world events has not only the right, but the duty, to subordinate all aspects of the nation to its goals, or at least ensure that they are supportive. That is also true for the radio. The more significant something is in influencing the will of the broad masses, the greater its responsibility to the future of the nation.

That does not mean we want to turn the radio into a spineless servant of our partisan political interests. The new German politics rejects any partisan limitations. It seeks the totality of the people and nation, and the reconstructive work it plans or has already begun includes all who are of good will. Within the framework of these great tasks, the radio, if it is to remain living, must hold to and advance its own artistic and spiritual laws. Just as its technical methods are modern and distinct, so too are its artistic capacities. It is only distantly related to the stage and film. It is rarely possible to bring a powerful stage or film presentation to the radio with no changes. There is a style of speaking on the radio, a style of drama, of opera, of radio show. The radio is in no way a branch of the stage or film, but rather an independent entity with its own rules.

It faces particular demands to be contemporary. It works with the tasks and needs of the day. Its duty is to give immediate events lasting meaning. Its actuality is both its greatest danger and its greatest strength. It gave impressive evidence on 21 March and 1 May of its ability to reach the people with great historical events. The first event acquainted the entire nation with a major political event, the second with an event of social-political significance. Both reached the entire nation, regardless of class, standing, or religion. That was primarily the result of the tight centralization, the strong reporting, and the up-to-date nature of the German radio.

Being up-to-date brings one close to the people. We call our revolution a popular one for good reason. It came from the depths of the people. It was carried out by the people, and done for them. It dethroned absolute individualism and put the people once again at the center. It broke with the weary skepticism

of our intellectual leadership, which in the end turned out to be only a thin layer of morbid big-city intellectualism that left the masses alone in their hopeless misery.

The problems that we in the government face today are the same problems that face the man in the street. The problems we treat over the ether in plays, speeches, addresses and dramas are the problems that directly concern people. The better the radio recognizes them and treats them in fresh and varied ways, the better it will fulfill its tasks and the more the people will resolve to deal with these problems.

Before we reach this ideal situation in our radio policies, there are a series of preparations and problems to deal with. These are primarily organizational. Probably as a result of the period behind us, which ignored spiritual and political responsibilities, the art of organization developed to an intolerable degree. This disease of the age infected radio stations as well. Here too one organized not what had to be organized, but whatever could be organized. A hundred cooks spoil the soup, a hundred bureaucrats spoiled any spiritual accomplishments. The more committees, review committees, bureaucrats and higher offices there were in the German radio system, the less its political accomplishments. Here more than anywhere else, there were no personalities who took pleasure in responsibility. The spiritual energy, the flexibility necessary to reach the people in changing times, may not be the responsibility of boards, commissions or committees. They only get in the way. Here, too, faster than is generally believed, we will clearly and resolutely introduce the leadership principle.

Excessive organization can only get in the way of productivity. The more bureaucrats there are, the more obscure the internal structures, the easier it is for someone to hide his inability or incompetence behind some committee or board. And not only that. Excessive organization is always the beginning of corruption. It confuses responsibility and thus enables those of weak character to enrich themselves at public expense.

That is what formerly happened in the German radio system. There were huge salaries that lacked any justification given what was accomplished, outrageous expense accounts, generous insurance policies, usually inversely related to any positive achievements. There are some today who claim to have been the "fathers of radio." One can only say to them that they were not the ones who developed radio, but rather that they made no productive use of it in hard times. They only knew how to exploit it for their own benefit. It would surely be good for those who really built the German radio if they did not have to stand beside these fortune hunters with their fat wallets and empty consciences. As the saying has it: "Tell me your friends and I'll tell you who you are."

I need not say that the government of the National Socialist revolution will not be moved in its resolve to bring order here. We will eliminate excessive organization as quickly as possible, replacing it with Spartan simplicity and economy. We will also systematically increase productivity in all areas. We will bring to the microphone the best spiritual elements of the nation, making the radio into the most multifaceted, flexible means of expressing the wishes, needs, longings, and hopes of our age.

We do not intend to use the radio only for our partisan purposes. We want room for entertainment, popular arts, games, jokes, and music. But everything should have a relationship to our day. Everything should include the theme of our great reconstructive work, or at least not stand in its way. Above all it is necessary to clearly centralize all radio activities, to place spiritual tasks ahead of technical ones, to introduce the leadership principle, to provide a clear worldview, and to present this worldview in flexible ways.

We want a radio that reaches the people, a radio that works for the people, a radio that is an intermediary between the government and the nation, a radio that also reaches across our borders to give the world a picture of our character, our life, and our work. The money produced by radio should in general go back to it. **[German radio listeners had to pay a radio license fee.]** If there are surpluses, they should be used to serve the spiritual and cultural needs of the whole nation. If the stage

and publishing suffer from the rapid growth of radio, we will use the revenues not necessary for the radio to maintain and strengthen our intellectual and artistic life. The purpose of radio is to teach, entertain, and support people, not to gradually harm the intellectual and cultural life of the nation. One of my main tasks in the near and more distant future will be to keep a reasonable balance in this regard. I am convinced that the radio as well as the stage, publishing, and film will benefit.

With the opening of this exhibition, a systematic campaign to advertise for new radio receivers begins. We will use the knowledge of propaganda we gained in the past years. Our goal is to double German radio listenership. That will result in a financial foundation that will not only enable radio to carry on its mission, but also will support the entire intellectual and cultural life of the nation. We will strengthen the stage, film, music, and publishing, providing a firm financial foundation.

This year's radio exhibition opens in this spirit. Its keynote is the People's Receiver [**a cheap radio receiver**]. Its low price will enable the broad masses to become radio listeners. Science and industry have done what they could, earning the thanks of the government and of the whole nation. May the radio leadership now do its part. Then we will together accomplish our goal. If science, industry and intellectual leaders work hand in hand, and if their common efforts are supported by a steadfast sense of the highest political responsibility, then we will leave behind the many mistakes and errors of the past and open a new era of German radio. It will open new paths not only for Germany's political life, but for the work of radio throughout the world.

This exhibition stands in the shadow of this great task. It is a start, a beginning, an expression of German courage and German confidence.

It is our dearest wish that science, industry and the intellectual leadership of German radio from now on will follow a new path, at the end of which stands our common, great goal:

One People, one Reich, one will, and a glorious German future!

In this sense I declare the 10th German Radio Exhibition open.