

NAZI PROPAGANDA: THE PRESS

To ensure the regime control over the press three main policies were pursued: first, publishers and journalists were subjected to strict controls; secondly, the Party's publishing house, the Eher Verlag, acquired ownership—either direct or indirect—of the bulk of the German press; thirdly, the Propaganda Ministry maintained a continuous control over the content of the press through the state-controlled press agency and via a stream of directives issued at daily press conferences.

1) The Editors' Law (4 October 1933)

§1. Participation in the shaping of the intellectual content of the newspapers or political periodicals published within the area of the Reich, whether by written word or by dissemination of news and pictures, and whether carried out as a main employment or based on an appointment to the position of editor-in-chief, is a public task, of which the professional duties and rights are regulated by the State through this law.

§2. 1. Newspapers and periodicals are printed matter, appearing in regular sequence at intervals of at most three months, not limiting its circulation to a certain group of persons.

2. All reproductions of writings or illustrations, destined for dissemination, which are produced by means of a mass reproduction process, are to be considered as printed matter.

§3. 1. The provisions of this law relating to newspapers are also valid for political periodicals.

This law does not apply to newspapers and periodicals published by official order.

The Reich Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda will determine which periodicals are to be considered as political within the meaning of the law. In case the periodical affects a specific vocational field, he will make the decision in consultation with the highest Reich or state agency concerned.

§4. Participation in the shaping of the intellectual content of the German newspapers is also considered as such, even if it does not take place in the management of a newspaper, but in an establishment which is to supply newspapers with intellectual content (the written word, news, or pictures).

§5. Only those persons can be editors who:

possess German citizenship; have not lost their civic rights and the qualification for the tenure of public office; are of Aryan descent, and are not married to a person of non-Aryan descent; have completed their 21st year; are competent at business; have been trained in the profession; have the qualities which the task of exerting intellectual influence on the public requires [...].

§14. Editors are especially obliged to keep out of the newspapers everything [...] which is calculated to weaken the strength of the German Reich abroad or at home, the community will of the German people, German defence, culture or the economy, or to injure the religious sensibilities of others [...].

§20. 1. Editors of a newspaper bear the professional responsibility and the responsibility before the criminal and civil law for its intellectual content in so far as they have composed it themselves or have accepted it for publication. 2. The chief editor is responsible for the general stance of the text [...]

§22. The editorial group as a whole will watch over their individual professional colleagues' fulfilment of their duty and will look after their rights and their welfare.

§23. Editors are legally combined in the Reich Association of the German Press. Every editor belongs to it by

virtue of his registration on the professional roster. By virtue of this law the Reich Association becomes a public corporation. It has its headquarters in Berlin.

§24. 1. The Reich Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda will appoint the head of the Reich Association who will issue a charter for the Reich Association, which will require the approval of the Minister. The head of the Reich Association will appoint an advisory council [...].

§30. A publisher may only dismiss an editor because of his intellectual stance if it contravenes the public professional duties of an editor or the agreed guidelines [...].

§35. Apart from the proceedings before the professional courts the Reich Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda can order the removal of an editor from the professional roster if he considers it for urgent reasons essential for the public good.

§36. Whoever works as an editor despite the fact that he is not registered in the professional rosters, or despite the fact that he has been temporarily prohibited from exercising his profession, will be punished with imprisonment of up to one year, or fined [...].

2) Joseph Goebbels's first press conference (15 March 1933)

[...] As I have emphasized already, the press is not only there to inform but must also instruct. In saying this I am directing my remarks above all to the national press. You will also recognize that it is an ideal situation for the press to be a tremendously important instrument for influencing the masses, which in the hands of the Government can be used in the areas for which it is responsible. It is possible for the Government and the press to cooperate with one another on a basis of mutual trust. I regard it as one of my principle tasks to achieve that. I am aware of the significance of the press. I recognize what it means for a government to have a good press or a bad press. I regard myself, therefore, so to speak as the senior link man between Government and press. I will make sure that the contact is never interrupted. For this reason I see in the task of the press conference held here daily something other than what has been going on up to now. You will of course be receiving information here but also instructions. You are to know not only what is happening but also the Government's view of it and how you can convey that to the people most effectively. We want to have a press which cooperates with the Government just as the Government wants to cooperate with the press [...] We do not want a state of daily warfare, a state of continual bans, rather we wish Government and press to work together with mutual trust. You need not be afraid of making statements with obvious bias. There is nothing unbiased in the world. Anything unbiased is sexless and thus worthless. Everything has a bias whether acknowledged or concealed. In my view it is better for us to acknowledge our bias rather than conceal it. There is no absolute objectivity. Everyone who as a contemporary contributes to the formation of this epoch carries an enormously heavy responsibility in so far as he is shaping not only his own opinion but an article he writes in the press may communicate that opinion to hundreds and thousands of others.

3) Official instructions issued at the daily press conferences in the Propaganda Ministry

6.vii.33: The Propaganda Ministry once again points out that announcements about future journeys and visits of the Reich Chancellor must not be published under any circumstances, not even if local National Socialist

offices give out these announcements. [...]

6.iv.35: The Propaganda Ministry asks us to put to editors-in-chief the following requests, which must be observed in future with particular care: Photos showing members of the Reich Government at dining tables in front of rows of bottles must not be published in future, particularly since it is known that a large number of the Cabinet are abstemious. Ministers take part in social events for reasons of international etiquette and for strictly official purposes, which they regard merely as a duty and not as a pleasure. Recently, because of a great number of photos, the utterly absurd impression has been created among the public that members of the Government are living it up. News pictures must therefore change in this respect.

10.xi.38: With regard to last night's events throughout the Reich [i.e. the Reichskristallnacht], Bareckow declared that papers [...] could state that here and there windows had been broken and that synagogues had gone up in flames. He requested that the reports should not be exaggerated—above all, no front page headlines. He also asked that no photos should be published yet. Nor should collective reports from the Reich appear. Of course the papers could mention in their reports that there had been understandable indignation and corresponding actions by the population in other parts of the country.

4) Press conference directives

23.5.1938: Make a big thing of any incidents. The Line is: Germany is peaceful, but the others [i.e. the Czechs] go in for reckless terrorism [...].

28.5.1938: From now onwards incidents must be downplayed.

14.9.1938: The press must take the line: peaceful coexistence between different ethnic groups in the same state is inconceivable.

17.9.1938: General line: This state i.e. Czechoslovakia is a disgrace to Europe. It must be erased from the map, only then will there be peace. Gentlemen, you are the heavy artillery of the Reich. You must bombard the position ready for the final assault. Use every means possible to hold out for a few more days. At this moment the Reich has no other weapons but you. No paper must appear without major coverage. Even the front page must be striking. Up to now everything has worked well.

5) Report on the sale of foreign newspapers

The main administration of the Reich railways has been informed that station bookshops have been offering travellers foreign papers even though they had not been asked for. Such a promotion of foreign papers is not approved by the Reich railways as it is laid down in a decree that it must be the first duty of station booksellers to spread German ideas. The leaseholders of station bookshops must be instructed to desist from everything that could promote the distribution of foreign papers. In the case of serious offences, the lease will be cancelled without notice.