

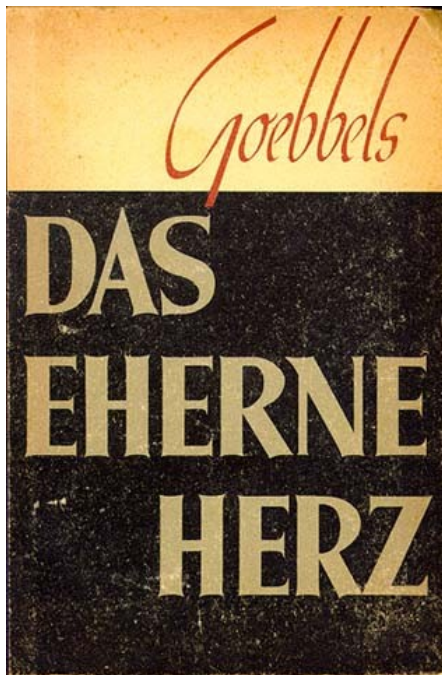
Background: Goebbels began a weekly newspaper called *Das Reich* in 1940. He generally wrote the lead article each week, in which he took special pride. This essay is dated 1 March 1942. Goebbels discusses German radio policy. In his diary entry for 22 May 1941, he is more honest on the reason for changes in German programming: “Relaxation of radio scheduling to take effect immediately. Our people and our soldiers want light music. Otherwise they will listen to English stations. I do not intend to listen to the killjoys any more. Better light music than foreign propaganda.” For a good discussion of Goebbels’s wartime essays, see Bramsted’s book [*Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda*](#).

The source: “Der treue Helfer,” *Das eherne Herz* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1943), pp. 229-235.

The Good Companion

by Joseph Goebbels

We speak today to the countless listeners to German radio at the front and at home, or better said, to the entire German people, since there is probably no one in this war who can get along without the radio. There is no particularly urgent reason, but we believe that it is now and again necessary to discuss openly the general lines and directions of our radio policy with the public. Our extensive interest in the radio before and particularly after the seizure of power has taught us that radio programming is a matter of practice, not of theory, and that there is no program that satisfies everyone. The numerous proposals that we receive from the public lose much of their usefulness in that they apply to widely different parts of our programming and often contradict one another. One thinks that our broadcasting is too serious, another thinks it is much too light. A third wants more news and commentary, a fourth none at all. A fifth wants programming to end at 10 p.m., a sixth is just ready to get started then. One cannot keep everyone happy.



It would be much easier if we had twelve or fifteen stations, as we did during peace time, and could use them to meet the various preferences. But it is difficult enough today to keep one station going. We know that many listeners are unhappy when we interrupt evening programming to broadcast the news in English. We cannot do much about that. In war more than in peace, government requirements have priority even over reasonable private wishes. Energetic letters and suggestions from lovers of serious music tell us that light and entertaining music is gradually taking over. Some even see a sign of general cultural decline, to be resisted firmly. Soldiers at the front, on the other hand, report that it was a pleasure after a difficult day to return to their cold and inhospitable quarters to at least hear something from German radio that is, as they say, decent (i.e., entertaining and light).

Who is right and who is wrong? Each has a right to his own taste! Still, one cannot dispute the fact that the great majority of our people, at home as well as at the front, are working so hard because of the war that when they get home in the evening they no longer have the energy to listen to a two-hour concert. It is not because people are trying to repress

the seriousness of the war. We hardly need the radio to remind us of the earnestness of the situation; we encounter that rather more than we would like in any event. Even if one has worked as a professional for 12 or 14 hours, returning home dead tired, one may want to browse through a book or a paper with no music at all, or at least music that makes no demands on one. That is not an injustice to Beethoven or Bruckner, who can be injured only if one attends to their music carelessly. It is no different for workers or soldiers. Let us have no talk of cultural decline. We can best serve occidental culture today by winning the war. Given the heavy burdens we all bear today, a nice source of relaxation, whatever the source, is like balsam on our wounds.

We also want to speak openly about the question of whether the German radio should broadcast so-called jazz music. We can flatly reject jazz, if by it one understands a kind of music that entirely ignores or mocks melody and depends only on rhythm, and in which the rhythm is carried primarily by unpleasant sounding instrumental squawks that pain the ear. This so-called music is despicable, because it is really not music at all, but rather only an untalented, random playing with tones. On the other hand, we can hardly maintain that the waltz of our grandfathers and grandmothers is the pinnacle of musical development and that everything following is bad. Rhythm is one of the foundations of music. We no longer live in the Biedermeier era, but rather in a century whose melodies are governed by the thousand-fold hum of machines and the sounds of motors. Our war songs today are different than those of the World War. The radio must take account of this if it is not to run the risk of being stuck in frock coats. We do not want to offend anyone, but do feel obligated to consider the reasonable requests of our fighting and working citizens.

Of course, there will always be occasional detours. The German radio broadcasts from early in the morning to late at night. The normal person may speak two or three hours a day, and does not always reveal the wisdom of the ages. At least he has the advantage that only his wife or work mates hear him. The radio always speaks to a broad audience. If an announcer happens to put things in an unfortunate way, the telephone calls and letters pour in. Our desk, so to speak, is in the public square and everyone can look over our shoulder. We are not unhappy about that, the very opposite indeed. We are happy to be in the eyes of the whole public. Mr. Public, however, should not forget that the radio, unlike him, stands before the entire public and has the right to make an occasional mistake.

After considerable effort, we have succeeded in broadcasting two programs during prime listening hours. We will not take the time to go into the difficulties that involved. But we are now in the fortunate situation of making both sides happier. The Deutschland station will primarily broadcast serious classical music, while the other station will provide light entertainment in the evening. We have secured a wide range of leading musicians. Some of them are giving up their previous engagements to devote themselves almost full time to the radio. They are following precise guidelines to meet as many reasonable requests as possible. Listeners to German radio should know that we understand what they want. They tell us that openly, thank God!, and we do not take it amiss, indeed we welcome it.

We are not so far removed from the concerns of the people that we do not know where the shoe pinches. Our soldiers too are blunt in their letters or visits and tell us exactly what they want and do not want. We will do our best. We will spare no effort, no means, no expense. Good humor is important to the war effort. To maintain it, particularly where the burdens are high, is an urgent requirement of successful war leadership both at home and at the Front.

There are some who go too far. Recently, for example, an unhappy listener complained that an officer from the northern front had given a radio talk in which he used a certain expression from Goethe's "Götz von Berlichingen." The listener was most unhappy to hear the phrase in the presence of his wife. "The fact that Goethe put this dubious character with his vain coquetry on display is not an excuse in my eyes. I wonder what pleasure the army or the Propaganda Ministry thinks it is giving when it springs material of a morally objectionable nature on an unsuspecting public, and this in an institution

supervised by the government.”

We do get such letters. We cannot make them happy, I fear. Shall we ask General Dietl to send his soldiers on leave to an institute for good manners? Their language may have become a bit crude up there on the northern front. He would laugh at us, and rightly so. We listened for an hour to this splendid officer, and were proud to hear that our soldiers to the north bravely do their duty and more despite snow, ice and eternal night. When he tells us that their only contact with the homeland, which they have not seen for months and which is many thousands of kilometers distant, is German radio, it reinforces our desire to broadcast things that will cheer our soldiers up, dispel their sadness, and raise their spirits.

War is a tough business. If our soldiers had not stood their ground this past winter, the writer of this letter and his wife might have been not only unprepared listeners, but also the viewers or the objects of things very different than he complains about.

Practicality is important. The German radio cannot satisfy everyone. It should do as much as it can, paying most attention to those with the greatest need. They are our soldiers and all those who must work hard in the service of the fatherland. They are thankful for pleasant and entertaining hours. The radio brings them pleasure, it is a good friend and comrade in these difficult times, it cheers them up, it urges them on, it is a constant comrade through the events of the war. It should educate and clarify the great questions of the day. When necessary, it should raise the hearts and touch the conscience. It should attack the enemy wherever he may be. It should defend the interests of the fatherland when that is necessary. One cannot always be in the best possible mood. We need a love of the fatherland, enthusiasm and a sense of duty. The big events happen anyway, we do not need to be reminded of them all the time. We have to deal with the things of everyday life, which are often gray and not at all lovely.

The German radio should be a good companion.