

ANTÓNIO COSTA PINTO

Edited by



RULING ELITES AND DECISION-MAKING IN FASCIST-ERA DICTATORSHIPS

SOCIAL SCIENCE MONOGRAPHS

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AND DECISION-MAKING
IN FASCIST-ERA
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Nazi propaganda decision-making: the hybrid of ‘modernity’ and ‘neo-feudalism’ in Nazi wartime propaganda

Aristotle Kallis

So much has been said in recent decades about the ‘polycratic’, chaotic, un-bureaucratic and ad hoc nature of the Nazi regime. This interpretation has had a long academic ancestry, dating back to the years of the Second World War. It was Franz Neumann who in the early 1940s suggested a ‘behemoth’ analogy to describe a Nazi decision-making network without rational unity of purpose or direction—and effectively ‘without the mediation of that rational though coercive apparatus hitherto known as the state’. In this chaos of competences and jurisdictions, only ‘the charismatic power of the leader’ was capable of providing a cohesive operating principle to the entire institutional and political framework of the Nazi system of rule in Germany (1944: 381–4). Around the same time Ernst Fraenkel coined the description ‘dual state’ in order to highlight the deliberate administrative confusion, duplication, and overlapping in the structures of Nazi rule. The complex interweaving of multiple party and state competences led Fraenkel to a similar conclusion to that of Neumann about the multifaceted nature of decision-making in Nazi Germany, where traditional bureaucratic expertise was being consistently eroded by the ‘charismatic’ features of Hitler’s leadership and where the continuity of state structures were constantly subjected to ad hoc law produced in a haphazard manner, in order to accommodate the interests of the various competing groups (Fraenkel 1969; Sørensen 2001). For Fraenkel, the Nazi state was a system in a permanent state

of crisis, resulting in a (self-)destruction of civil order. Since then, substantial work has been done to shed light on the problematic relation between leadership, state bureaucracy and party elites (Caplan 1988: 321–81, esp. 331–2; 1993: 98–102). In his closing address to the Nuremberg military tribunal, Albert Speer—the figure who had epitomised more than any other Nazi leader the excessive, cold-blooded modernity of Hitler's regime—used the following words:

Hitler's dictatorship differed in one fundamental point from all its predecessors in history. His was the first dictatorship in the present period of modern technical development, a dictatorship which made complete use of all technical means in a perfect manner for the domination of its own nation... The totalitarian system in the period of modern technical development can dispense with them; the means of communication alone make it possible to mechanize the subordinate leadership (Marrus 1997: 224–6).

Speer's aphorism placed 'totalitarianism' at the heart of any understanding of the devastating power and brutality of Nazi Germany. In the 1950s the so-called 'totalitarianist' interpretation advanced a similar analytical framework for understanding power and decision-making in the Nazi system. In presenting this 'totalitarian state' as one of the fundamental novelties of the 20th century, two of the most influential theorists of totalitarianism, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Carl Friedrich, stressed that:

[t]otalitarian dictatorship then emerges as a system of rule for realising totalist intentions under modern political and technical conditions, as a novel type of autocracy...[M]odern technology is mentioned as a significant condition for the invention of the totalitarian model... The citizen as an individual, and indeed in larger groups, is simply defenceless against the overwhelming technological superiority of those who can centralise in their hands the means with which to wield modern weapons and thereby physically to coerce the mass of the citizenry (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1965: 15–21).

The vision of a fully coordinated and controlled society, inspired by and channelled towards the realisation of a single will amounted to a revolutionary project based on new, radical operational principles and facilitated by equally revolutionary novel devices of power and control. In his masterly study of the relation between modernity

and extermination in Nazi Germany, Zygmunt Bauman underscored how modernity conceptualised new opportunities and new technologies of control that rendered such a vision not simply more feasible but far more likely, in terms of both inception and practical realisation (Bauman 1989: 191). Anthony Giddens described modernity as a 'juggernaut', a complex sum of disparate forces that often evades the control or intentions of human agency:

The juggernaut reflects the image of a runaway engine of enormous power which, collectively as human beings, we can drive to some extent, but which also threatens to rush out of our control and which could render itself asunder... [It] crushes those who resist it, and while it sometimes seems to have a steady path, there are times when it veers away erratically in directions we cannot foresee (Giddens 1990: 40).

Albeit in very different ways, both Giddens' and Bauman's analyses of modernity attempt to demystify a central paradox in every discussion of modernity—namely, that the latter contains such a plethora of possibilities that may be shaped in contradictory or wholly anti-diametrical terms. Jeffrey Herf's ground-breaking study of the utopian visions formulated by scientists and engineers in interwar Germany demonstrated for the first time how a supremely 'modern' force such as technology facilitated a alignment of scientific/technological modernism with the attainment of seemingly 'atavistic goals' (such as the quest for wholeness and purity) in what he described as 'reactionary modernism'. This hybrid situation of extreme modernity of means and seemingly regressive goals, according to Herf, epitomised the incongruity of the Nazi state's fundamental operating principles: the cult of technology and efficiency, on the one hand, and the almost irrational belief in mission, destiny, loyalty, and charisma, on the other (Herf 1984).

In the context of this seemingly self-contradictory 'hybridity' of the Nazi system of rule, one of the earliest approaches to the Nazi system of power and decision-making merits a fresh look. In 1960, Robert Koehl attempted to provide an overall interpretative framework for the absence of a clear bureaucratic structure in the Nazi regime. His idea focused on the notion of 'neo-feudalism', whereby the

un-bureaucratic polyocracy of the Nazi state depended on a retreat to medieval notions of faith (*Ehre*), commitment (*Gefolgschaft*) and loyalty (*Treue*) that bound together the pandemonium of competing forces, strategies and personal agencies. Koehl found a correlation between the proceeding disintegration of the regime after 1942 and the strengthening of these 'neo-feudal' tendencies:

In the last years of the Nazi era there is the most striking evolution along feudal lines. Göring, Goebbels, Himmler, and the newcomers, Speer and Bornmann, had constructed virtually impregnable appanages. The more dependent Hitler became upon their empires for German victory, the more easily they looted the power of [their] rivals... made their systems independent of the central authorities and even of the Führer's support by absorbing some vehicle of power, usually economic, though Goebbels also used the mass media and Himmler the secret police (Koehl 1960: 927).

More than three decades later, Ian Kershaw contributed an elaborate model for analysing the way in which disparate forces within the Third Reich (both personal and institutional) became at the same time an extension and a categorical affirmation of Hitler's 'charismatic' authority. His notion of 'working towards the Führer' underlined the exceptional nature of decision-making in Nazi Germany, whereby an array of diverse—often contrasting or even incongruent—political initiatives emanated, not directly from the leadership, but from individuals or agencies that could successfully claim a derived legitimacy from him (Kershaw 1997: 88–107; Kirk and McEligott 2004). The implication here is that 'charismatic' authority neither can nor seeks to be bureaucratised; instead, the directly derived legitimacy from the 'charismatic' authority of the leader results in a system where every political initiative emanates from, and elaborates upon his singular will. Perhaps the most significant cohesive force was the leader's capacity to forge and maintain—through emotional means—a truly charismatic community (*Gemeinde*) around him (Kershaw 2000a: 187–95).¹ The members of this community, according to Kershaw, influenced as they were by their leader's overall vision and

¹ On the notion of 'charismatic' legitimation see Weber (1985) and Lepsius (1986).

broad guidelines, interpreted his often cryptic will and implemented strategies that in their opinion could advance his vision in the most effective and unadulterated form. Thus, a series of political ‘laboratories’ were established—both within the state structure and as adjuncts to the party—through which prominent members of the charismatic community worked towards fulfilling their impression of their leader’s will. In this crucial respect, Kershaw’s interpretive model and Koehl’s ‘neo-feudalist’ analysis intersect: the existence of individual power-bases in the institutional structure of Nazi Germany enabled a concurrent drive to work out different strategies for the realisation of the leader’s vision; and the very ‘charismatic’ nature of Hitler’s authority encouraged the *de facto* institutionalisation and constant—unchecked—expansion of this polycratic structure.

‘Working towards the Führer’ was not an easy task in itself. Hitler was notoriously vague in his specific political pronouncements and essentially unreliable in his choices, especially when he was performing the supremely charismatic function of institutional mediation between competing forces in his system. For some, he deliberately refused to draw definitive administrative lines, lest the margins of his charismatic power should become curtailed; for others this was simply the result of either: weakness, confusion or ineptitude (Kershaw 2000a: 69–92). In many cases his verdict had an *ad hoc* validity, restricted to the case adjudicated; attempts by those involved to project a wider institutional significance to other related realms of jurisdiction were often thwarted by a new Hitlerian mediation to the contrary effect. Performing this role as erratically as he did, ever since January 1933, produced an ever-expanding web of interdependencies, duplications and overlaps that appeared to become even more tangled with each new arbitration. By September 1939 the situation had already spiralled out of control, fuelling new clashes and grey zones of jurisdiction that required urgent attention if the war was to be conducted through a sound system of institutional division of labour. However, skirmishes continued unabated and indeed escalated: somewhere in the previous six years there was a Hitler adjudication that one or the other Nazi figure could invoke to improve his posi-

tion relative to his internal state or party opponents; the latter would retort with a similar appeal to another pre-existing settlement for the same reason but to the contrary effect. This in turn encouraged an even fiercer competition for authority and jurisdiction amongst the various branches of state and party, and the more secluded Hitler's position was becoming after 1939 (due to his focus on war) and after 1942 (because of his disillusioned retreat into his inner circle), the more the institutional and personality struggle was turning into an all-out struggle.

It is my intention to show that the hybrid nature of the Nazi system of decision-making found perhaps its most eloquent expression in the context of the regime's propaganda machinery. It was here that the extreme modernity of the Nazi revolution and the sheer scale of the Nazi totalitarian ambitions intersected with the most strikingly neo-feudal elements of elite party-state relations and the forces of charismatic domination. The domain of Nazi propaganda—supremely polycratic, incongruous, often chaotic and uncoordinated, but also, *ad extremis*, sophisticated and ambitious in terms of bureaucratic structures, operating principles, and overall objectives—illustrates the juggernaut qualities of modernity Giddens talked about. In fact, as I will argue, it was precisely because of the existence of such an advanced 'modern' framework and vision for the execution of propaganda tasks under Nazi rule that each personal fiefdom (network) continued to expand, acquiring even more complex and far-reaching modern functions. Both the sophistication of the system that the regime's minister of propaganda Joseph Goebbels envisioned in 1933, and the proliferation of parallel wide-ranging propaganda projects in an array of other regime and party institutions, were astounding modern experiments. The problems that plagued the Nazi propaganda decision-making framework and execution were not caused by either of the two contradictory operating principles of the regime separately: neither the distorted advanced modernity of the Nazi totalitarian experiment, nor the seemingly regressive obsession with personal loyalty and unbound charismatic authority that marked the relations of individual leaders with Hitler and each other is sufficient to explain

the resulting hybrid behemoth of multiple, overlapping, and often contradictory propaganda initiatives. Rather, it was the weak centre of the regime-party relations, created by a combination of Hitler's resistance to any form of bureaucratic control of his charismatic power and his increasing reclusiveness during the war years that accentuated the contradiction between the institutional and the (elite) personal dimensions of power in the Nazi propaganda system.

The role of Goebbels in Nazi propaganda: power-base and limits

Perhaps no other person apart from Hitler has suffered more from historiographic exaggerations than the Nazi regime's minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels. His role in the development and management of Nazi propaganda—important though it was—has been distorted almost beyond recognition by post-war attempts to present him as a near-omnipotent tsar of information manipulation and a deviant choreographer of every Nazi initiative in the realm of information, publicity and leisure. Undoubtedly, Goebbels wielded extraordinary power in a domain that held exceptional significance for a totalitarian system based on charismatic legitimacy in which state and party continued to dovetail until the final days of the regime. His loyalty to the Führer and his expertise in information and communication management were unquestionable. During the last years of the war—and especially after the defeat at Stalingrad in February 1943—he amassed further extraordinary, if once again ad hoc, powers (inspector-general for war damage, plenipotentiary for total war, defender of Berlin) in addition to his generic propaganda remit and his particularly close supervision of film, radio and wider cultural matters. During the victorious phase of the war (1939–42), he was a crucial component of the industry that popularised and communicated triumph to a bewilderingly blasé public opinion. When defeat started to close in on Nazi Germany, he led the effort for the psychological preparation of German society, ensuring that the 'legacy of 1918' (domestic collapse) would not re-enact itself and once more betray the German effort from within. Partly because his political and party

responsibilities were focused on Berlin, he remained in proximity to Hitler until the very end, at a time when other erstwhile Führer favourites had discredited themselves (Goering), departed from the capital (Himmler) or simply lost favour (Speer). During those last months, Goebbels earned a new lease on Hitler's attention and credit, staying with him until the end and choosing to terminate his (and his family's) life a day after his leader had done the same.

Yet in many ways this was the meteoric zenith of Goebbels's relationship with his Führer, not its logical culmination. In 1933 he secured unprecedented powers for his new Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (RMVP—Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda) under Hitler's decree of 13 March (IMT Doc 2315/2319-PS; Diller 1980: 77–84). As both state minister and leader of the party's propaganda machinery (RPL—Reichspropagandaleitung) he became responsible for a broad array of matters, ranging from information to party events and from press to entertainment and broad cultural matters. In September, he oversaw the establishment of the Reich Culture Chamber (RKK—Reichskultukammer) as an umbrella organisation for separate 'chambers' in art, film, radio, press, music and theatre (RGB 1933: I-661; Diller 1980: 154–9; Abel 1990: 3ff.).

Goebbels maintained a firm grip over state affairs in Berlin, but he also correctly diagnosed his leader's unwillingness to resolve the party-state dualism. He therefore ensured that both his RPL and RMVP empires expanded both horizontally and vertically, in tandem. The party model of *Gau*-, *Kreis*-and *Ort*-division of power (already present of course in the structure of the RPL) was replicated in the case of the RMVP; significantly, local representatives of the RPL also held the same remit as officials of the RMVP and/or the RKK. For example, *Gau*-, *Kreis*-and *Ort*-representatives of the press division of the RPL doubled up as regional/local delegates of the same division of the propaganda ministry (Zeman 1995: 178–9).

The arduous task of propaganda coordination between state and party was performed officially by the Reich Ring for National Socialist Propaganda and Public Enlightenment (Reichsring für Nation-

alsozialistische Propaganda und Volksaufklärung), originally created in 1934 to replace the Konzentration office of the RPL and granted autonomous status in May 1941 (BA/NS 18/1390: 46). Its official remit was to manage all national propaganda agencies, crowning the decentralised RPL structure: Ring I encompassed the bulk of party activity in this field, while Ring II extended to cover all other organisations operating within the Third Reich (BA/NS 18/1229: 1). It also supervised the various propaganda activities (*Aktionen*) and, after its institutional elevation in 1941, acted as the clearing house for all propaganda matters, including correspondence and liaison between the various party and state agencies (BA/Die Entwicklung des Amtes). Goebbels entrusted this crucial position to one of his most reliable and trusted allies, Walter Tiessler, and a few weeks before Hess's flight to the United Kingdom, he issued a directive that designated him as his personal liaison with both the RPL and the office of the Führer's representative (BA/NS 18/1390: 21 April 1941). Beyond the Reichsring, however, coordination was promoted unofficially through the web of personal allegiances through contacts that led back to Goebbels himself. This was, in fact, a mini-charismatic community that was meant to be held together by a peculiar neo-feudal network centring on the propaganda minister and Reichsleiter.

The reality was different, however. By the time the war broke out, Goebbels had witnessed his head start in 1933 being constantly eroded through a plethora of organisational amendments, Hitler interventions, hostile bids by his adversaries in both party and government as well as through his own personal failings. His control over the regime's cultural policy was questioned by equally powerful contenders. Alfred Rosenberg put himself forward as the movement's ideological supremo (also appointed Führer's commissioner for the supervision of the entire intellectual and doctrinal training and education of the Nazi Party), even if he effectively discredited himself through a series of unfortunate (and crass) initiatives. Robert Ley fought doggedly for control over the working masses' 'enlightenment' through his powerful German Labour Front (DAF—Deutsche Arbeitsfront) and would have wished to inherit the extensive powers of Gregor Strasser prior

to 1933, but had also to concede defeat and crucial institutional space to the RMVP (Herzstein 1979: 155 ff.). In the field of press, Goebbels had to fight his way amidst Max Amann's almost de facto prestige as the main party publicist and owner of an ever-expanding press empire on the one hand, and the intrigues of the Reich's press chief (Reichspressechef) Otto Dietrich, who saw press as his near-exclusive domain, on the other.

From the autumn of 1937, a new contender appeared on the scene of the Nazi 'neo-feudal' map, eager to carve up for himself a new empire: Joachim von Ribbentrop. A champagne-merchant with a dubious reputation in diplomacy (he had served as ambassador in London) and no real party standing, Von Ribbentrop succeeded Konstantin Freiherr von Neurath in the foreign ministry. Von Ribbentrop, although almost universally detested within the government and the party, was fast becoming Hitler's favourite at the time. As Goebbels' standing with the leadership was rapidly sinking to an all-time low (and neither his high-profile affair with the Czech actress, Lida Baarova nor the way in which he masterminded and handled the *Kristallnacht* earned him any favours with Hitler [Dietrich 1957: 238]), this meant that no accumulated power could be taken for granted, especially if Von Ribbentrop decided to plea with Hitler for the extension of his own remit.

When Hitler gave his authorisation for Wehrmacht troops to invade Poland on 1 September 1939, most of the personal empires within the Nazi regime had already established their legitimacy and power-base. Nominally, Joseph Goebbels occupied the heartland, controlling the RPL, the RMVP and the RKK—whose separate chambers reported directly to him from 1938 onwards. However, in practice the domain of 'propaganda' had become overcrowded, inhabited as it was by disparate state and party agencies that continued to 'work towards the Führer'. During the war, new stars complicated the power struggle even further. Heinrich Himmler's amassing of titles and power—in particular his control over domestic affairs as interior minister, which meant primary access to a sophisticated network of 'public opinion reports'—earned him a de facto voice and stake in the propaganda

domain. Rosenberg at last received a ministerial portfolio for the occupied eastern territories—a power base that afforded him an institutional platform from which he could meddle in the affairs of every other ministry or agency. As for Martin Bormann, his elevation to the position of head of the party chancellery enabled him to dominate the party apparatus, while in his capacity as Hitler's private secretary he earned for himself the privilege of controlling the all-too-important access to the leader. With the approach of war, the institutional role of the armed forces high command (OKW—Oberkommando Wehrmacht) in propaganda matters was also enhanced: in April 1939 its traditional office of press officer for military matters (held by Major Hasso von Wedel) was elevated to the status of division of Wehrmacht propaganda (OKW/WPr—Oberkommando Wehrmacht/Wehrmacht-Propaganda) under the control of the chief of staff (Dietrich 1955: 154; Martin 1973: 22 ff.; Balfour 1979: 105).

From September 1939, 'facts' were unfolding on the military front and the OKW was the instigator of the process. Goebbels, however, was anchored in Berlin and so was his political powerhouse, the RMVP. His ministry was the recipient of the OKW communiqué (intimated in person by the OKW-RMVP liaison officer), the German news bureau's (DNB—Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro) report and a stream of ad hoc instructions from the Führer headquarters for press, radio and wider propaganda matters. Dietrich, by contrast, was inside Hitler's inner circle—a position especially valuable in the first four years of the war when the Führer used to travel to the front and was far more involved in the drafting of the final reports to be sent back to Berlin. Furthermore, due to the exceptional significance of foreign policy matters, Von Ribbentrop too was closer to the leader, and so was the leadership of the armed forces, obliged as they were to coordinate their strategy on the basis of Hitler's personal whims. This meant that by the time Goebbels could nominally exercise his powers over every aspect of the regime's propaganda output, the raw material of information had already been accumulated and mediated by his main adversaries in the party and government (Uzulis 1995: 313, 356–7). Far from functioning as the command centre of

a vast, centralised and coordinated information empire, the Goebbels network resembled a weak administrative centre for a collection of semi-independent, uncoordinated and often contradictory propaganda initiatives generated elsewhere—a miniature copy of the wider ‘neo-feudal’ nature of the entire Nazi system.

**The erosion of Goebbels’s propaganda domain:
competing ‘networks’ (1933–43), Otto Dietrich**

Although Rosenberg failed to curb the institutional and political expansion of Goebbels’s power in the longer term, largely because he soon managed to discredit himself on a personal level in the eyes of their leader, others experienced notable success. Perhaps the most successful in this respect was Otto Dietrich—a Reichsleiter (and, in this respect, of the same party currency value as Goebbels) who had been Reichspressechef for the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP—Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei) central press office since August 1931 and Hitler’s de facto personal advisor on relevant matters.

Technically, a German chancellor was meant to possess the specialised services of a Reich government press chief (Pressechef der Reichsregierung)—a position filled by Walther Funk after the Nazi assumption of power. However, with the establishment of the RMVP in March 1933, the chancellor acquired a fully dedicated state institution for the supervision of all propaganda matters, with its press jurisdiction shared between the ministry’s division and its RPK organisation. In theory—and according to Goebbels’s plans—the RMVP would fuse the functions of the Pressechef, as well as of other press-related bodies within the foreign ministry and the party’s political organisation (PO—Politische Organisation der NSDAP) under Hess, thus creating a virtual monopoly over press matters. However, Hitler took heed of the objections of both Dietrich and the foreign ministry: on 23 May 1933 he decided to divide press responsibilities, with the RMVP maintaining its grip over propaganda matters, Dietrich keeping his Reichspressechef post, and Funk maintaining the role of Pressechef, now attached to President Hindenburg, while also becoming state sec-

retary to the RMVP. With the creation of the Reich press chamber (RPK—Reichspressekammer) in September, the kaleidoscope of Nazi control over press was complete: Goebbels, Dietrich, Funk and now Max Amann (president of the RPK) presided over a muddled organisational structure with uncertain and clearly overlapping normative functions. Even worse, both the PO and the foreign ministry ensured their right to maintain their press offices with restricted jurisdiction over matters pertaining to their ministerial duties.

When in November 1937 the then finance minister, Hjalmar Schacht, resigned and was replaced by Funk, a new battle began. Goebbels argued in vain that since the position of Pressechef under Funk had remained effectively vacant, the office should lapse: predictably Dietrich had serious objections. In an act of mediation that presaged the chaos still to come in subsequent years, Hitler simply duplicated the functions without defining each remit: Dietrich retained his position as Reichspressechef, also absorbing the erstwhile functions of the Pressechef der Reichsregierung that Funk had allowed to fade, largely in favour of the RMVP (Dietrich 1957: 237ff). In 1938, the institutional arrangement became even more complicated: as a result of another feud between Goebbels and Dietrich over control of the press, Hitler appointed the latter as state secretary to the RMVP, thus inserting him in a subordinate position within the ministerial hierarchy, while allowing him to exercise direct control over the German press through his parallel position as Reichspressechef. To make matters worse, three types of hierarchy seemed to clash in the press domain of Nazi Germany. Goebbels, Dietrich and Amann shared the same party rank, but were inserted at different levels in the state structure: Dietrich was subordinate to Goebbels in the RMVP, as both state secretary and vice-president of the RPK; Amann, as president of the RPK, theoretically took orders from Goebbels and had Dietrich as his assistant; Dietrich, however, benefitted from an important Hitler decree since 28 February 1934, which gave him overall control of the Nazi press as Reichspressechef (Abel 1990: 7ff).

The three men were meant to meet and coordinate their actions, but Dietrich refused to share his remit, often dealing directly with

the RPL press office, whose loyalty to Goebbels depended on who was in charge. Dietrich's control over information dispersal to national, regional and local press originated from a further accumulation of responsibilities in the DNB and as editor of *Nazi-Korrespondenz*. He thus held a dominant position where it really mattered: where information was produced and then distributed to press and radio networks throughout the country.

The Dietrich network expanded between 1933 and 1939 to occupy pivotal positions in both the administration and the party pillars of the network, while taking advantage of its figurehead's physical presence next to Hitler. During his brief spell on the front in 1941, he ensured the appointment of his trusted deputy Sündermann as liaison with the ministry. It was actually Sündermann who, in November 1940, introduced the *Tagesparolen des Reichspressechefs* for the press—an official summary of the Reichspressechef's directives to the press that was intended to prevent independent instructions from reaching journalists and regional propaganda offices (Abel 1990: 51ff.; Balfour 1979: 106–7). This constituted a direct assault on Goebbels's capacity for using informal channels of press information to convey guidelines to newspapers, independent of Dietrich's official press conference. In 1941, Dietrich succeeded in removing first Ernst Braeckow (a Goebbels loyalist), who had been one of Dietrich's favourite targets ever since the outbreak of the war, thus further weakening the minister's ability to supervise the radio.

The first test: Nazi propaganda and Operation Barbarossa (1941)

With the launch of Operation Barbarossa in June 1941, the already problematic coordination between Goebbels and Dietrich in the domain of information management was put to a further crucial test. Hitler's decision to impose (for the first time) a block on information for a week after the initial assault afforded time for the regime's propaganda apparatus to adjust to the new political and military landscape, modifying its discourses in order to accommodate the new focus on anti-Bolshevism after almost two years of complete silence on

the subject. Yet, the absence of information, in conjunction with the magnitude of the task itself, added to the atmosphere of nervousness (Boberach 1965: 4 March 1943; Steinert 1977: 184ff). It is no coincidence Goebbels instructed his press associates to emphasise that the military objective of the operation (total victory against Bolshevism) was not just realisable but also attainable within a short period of time (Stephan 1949: 226ff). Then, on 29 June—with German forces having advanced an incredible distance towards Daugavpils, Minsk and Bialystok—the news block was eventually lifted. What followed was a supreme instance of the polycratic confusion and lack of internal co-ordination that was endemic in the Nazi propaganda domain. At the same time Goebbels counselled restraint with regard to the reporting of the military situation, Hitler and his press chief, Otto Dietrich, bypassed the RMVP and arranged the broadcast of 12 special announcements (*Sonderberichte*) on the radio at hourly intervals. Goebbels was furious: not simply because he had seen his authority undercut by the Dietrich network in association with the Führer and the OKW, but mainly because he considered ‘highly unfortunate’ the abuse of the *Sonderberichte* that he had so meticulously planned in the past as an extraordinary propaganda device (Balfour 1979: 227–8; BA/NS 8/1193: 117; BA/ZgS 101/20: 30 June; Fröhlich 1997: 30 June 1941).

However, from 15 July the growing realisation that the initial confident predictions of the Soviet Union’s imminent military collapse had been exaggerated confronted Nazi propaganda with a complex dilemma. On the one hand, it was difficult to abandon the initial triumphalist line—largely driven by Dietrich, but with crucial input from Hitler himself—without risking either a severe blow to the regime’s credibility or indeed a depression of public mood (*Stimmung*). If indeed the fighting and mobilisation potential of the Soviet Union had been underestimated—and this was an admission that was now muttered in the corridors of the RMVP as well as in various circles of the Wehrmacht (Balfour 1979: 233ff)²—then the prospect of pro-

² Hitler and his entourage believed that after the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s, the Red Army had lost most of its fighting potential (Boog et al. 1987: 38–97).

longing the war into 1942 was extremely difficult to sell to a population that neither desired it nor had been entirely convinced about the unavoidability or necessity of Barbarossa in the first place.

On the other hand, continuing to portray the collapse of Bolshevism as imminent was becoming an unsustainable strategy that nurtured unfounded hopes and left German society unprepared for any adverse developments. Goebbels was clearly trapped between the initial over-optimistic line pursued by Dietrich, the OKW and Hitler himself without prior consultation with the RMVP, and his overall belief in the principle of realism. His subsequent handling of the regime's communication policy with regard to the progress of Operation Barbarossa was largely qualified and compromised by the independent working of other networks inside the state and the NSDAP, over which he had little control at that stage.

Hitler spoke in Berlin on 3 October 1941, presenting the Soviet military power as 'broken' and the war in the east as 'decided' (Domarus 1963: 1760-1). In fact, on 9 October Dietrich organised a special press conference with the greatest possible publicity in order to announce that the military operations in the east were all but finished and that the main task from then on was restoring order and implementing plans for the long-term re-organisation of occupied territories (Dietrich 1957: 101 ff.; Semmler 1947: 54-5). It did not really matter that three weeks earlier Hans Fritzsche had conveyed a very different picture to press representatives, stressing that Soviet reserves in the area surrounding Moscow were 'substantial' (Boelcke 1970: 181-2). Prominent figures within the Wehrmacht leadership (including the commander-in-chief, General Walther Brauchitsch, and the chief of general staff, General Franz Halder) voiced their protests to Hitler about this new line of reporting, but could achieve nothing other than poison their relations with the Führer and precipitating the December crisis that led to the dismissal of Brauchitsch and Hitler's assumption of command of the armed forces (Murawski 1962: 61-3).

Confusion and lack of coordination continued unabated in 1941-2. Rudolf Semmler provided a candid description of the chaos that internecine jurisdictional fights caused in the corridors of the

RMVP (Goebbels 1943: 77–84). Room 24 of the ministry was, in theory, the coordinating centre for every press activity throughout the Reich; but the reality was very different—as Dietrich bypassed Goebbels and vice-versa, Ribbentrop and Rosenberg complained, Bormann intervened and the officers of Room 24 had to make choices between contradictory instructions. More often than not until Stalingrad, Dietrich's line would prevail to the intense irritation of the propaganda minister (Domarus 2000: 1175–8; Kershaw 2000b: 436–7). But as Semmler pointed out, the result was that a single event could be 'commented upon quite differently by the press [controlled by Dietrich] and by the radio [where Goebbels had far more leeway]' (BA/NS 18/242: 36). Even in the case of the execution of routine information functions, Dietrich had insisted that the daily RMVP press conference (which he controlled) and his *Tagesparolen* would set the tone for all media in the Reich.³

This afforded him a disproportionate degree of influence on broadcasting too, even without technically holding any official relevant position in that domain. This confusing arrangement was sustained until 1942, thanks to the flexibility of Hans Fritzsche, who at the time was in charge of the DNB, but had been a chief editor (*Hauptschriftleiter*) in the radio service (DD—Drahtlosen Dienstes), and had experience as director of the radio's news service (BA/NS 18/80: 13). Fritzsche had excelled in serving the two masters concurrently until—as he testified at the Nuremberg trials in 1946—he grew weary of Dietrich's interference in propaganda affairs and resigned. When he returned from his brief spell on the front to head

³ The *Propagandaparolen* were introduced in the second half of 1941 as a general statement of strategy for the short-term conduct of propaganda by the RMVP. They were issued by the ministry's propaganda division (HM—Hauptamt Pro), initially every fortnight, later on in the war less frequently (BA/NS 18/1193: 1). While the intended function of the *Parolen* was to supply binding overall principles for the bulk of regime and party propaganda activities, they merely reflected the RMVP's (and Goebbels's) ideas; therefore, they were neither binding for, nor truly representative of, the propaganda output of other agencies in the polycratic structures of wartime NS propaganda.

the RMVP's broadcasting division, the situation tipped in the propaganda minister's favour, to the intense irritation of Dietrich. But the fact the Reichspressechef could still claim jurisdiction over radio matters through the indirect channel of news policy attests to the legacy of previous developments at a time when Goebbels had lost ground within the Nazi hierarchy (and within Hitler's inner circle). For this situation Goebbels could do very little beyond vent his frustration privately and wait for a more favourable conjuncture.

Towards Stalingrad

With the passing of the 'crisis winter' of 1941-2 and the first signs of improvement in the weather situation in the east came renewed expectations for the resumption of the offensive against the Red Army. Goebbels avoided giving specific dates for the commencement of the new offensive: 'spring' and 'summer' allowed ample space for strategic manoeuvre, especially in view of the unpredictable Russian weather. Towards the end of March 1942, the propaganda minister went even further in this cautious approach by prohibiting the use of the phrase spring offensive in the German press and communiqués (Boelcke 1970: 213-4, 219). He was perfectly aware of the crucial test of credibility that faced Nazi propaganda in the coming months. He noted that:

We will have to change our propaganda and policies in the east as already arranged with the Führer. These were hitherto based on the assumption that we would take possession of the east swiftly. This hope has not been realised, however. We... are therefore compelled to change our slogans and policies fundamentally (Lochner 1948).

As the propaganda plan for the winter of 1941-2 covered the period until March 1942, the RMVP and RPL worked extensively on the formulation of a coherent propaganda strategy for the following spring and summer (the period of expected intense military activity). The new campaign used the slogan, 'Everything for victory. Only victory is significant'—and it is obvious from the wording the main intention of the Nazi propaganda authorities was to displace concerns

about the duration of the conflict to the magnitude and significance of the expected victory. The restraint shown towards the launch of the attack on Sevastopol in early June, the banning of any concrete reference to long-term geographic aims of the summer offensive (the Caucasus) and the cautious line with regard to the Battle of Rostov indicated the inroads that Goebbels's line of 'realism' had made into the culture of Nazi propaganda (Boelcke 1970: 236-7, 242, 251, 262). Repeatedly, in the late spring and summer of 1942, Goebbels instructed his subordinates to avoid the mistakes of the previous year. 'No illusions' (*keine Illusionen*) became the basic principle Nazi propaganda was meant to uphold throughout the year when faced with exaggerated public expectations for a swift victory or a peace falling short of total victory (BA/NS 18/80: 62). Even Hitler's confident prediction that this would be the year of decision (*Jahr der Entscheidung*) resulting in the 'military annihilation of the Soviet Union by the following autumn', came with the caveat that 'it would be wrong to awake the expectation among the people that the war will end this year'. The same pessimistic impression about the possible continuation of the war into 1943 was restated even more categorically in the instructions issued to party propagandists in August (BA/NS 18/80: 71; BA/NS 18/1193: 146). The timing of this internal admission is even more significant, as by the end of the summer the military situation in the east had improved dramatically; but even after the advances in the southern sector of the front (i.e. towards Stalingrad and the Caucasus), Goebbels felt the German population should be served a diet of restrained optimism and sombre realism (Boelcke 1970: 262).

However, the successes of the Wehrmacht offensive in the east had generated new hopes that stretched from the highest echelons of the Nazi leadership to the majority of civilians. As German troops continued to advance throughout the summer and early autumn of 1942, reaching the outskirts of Stalingrad in August, the city bearing the Soviet leader's name acquired a totemic status in both Nazi military planning and propaganda. Goebbels was heartened by the impressive array of victories in the military build-up to the final assault, but he was also aware this was a project on which Hitler had gambled his

political credibility (Semmler 1947; Beevor 1998: esp. 266ff.). In this vein, on 18 September 1942 he instructed his subordinates to divert attention from the Stalingrad battle:

The question about the fall of Stalingrad has been asked amongst the people for some considerable time now, but military progress is not such that a final capture of the city can be expected as yet. For this reason other subjects will now be brought to the fore (Boelcke 1970: 279).

Triumphalist propaganda also came from other sources the RMVP was still incapable of controlling: Otto Dietrich, who as early as 15 September had declared the full occupation of the city as a matter of hours; the OKW's own communiqués also nurtured a dangerous illusion of an approaching and decisive German victory at Stalingrad; and Hitler himself, whose address at the opening of the winter relief campaign on 30 September 1942 contained the unabashed prediction that:

The occupation of Stalingrad, which will also be carried through, will deepen this gigantic victory and strengthen it, and you can be sure that no human being will drive us out of this place later on (Domarus 1963; PRO/FO371/30928).⁴

According to Hans Fritzsche, Goebbels felt distinctly uncomfortable about the way the military situation in the east had been communicated to the German public, allegedly even criticising Hitler for the blunder (Fritzsche 1948: 220–1). However, with regard to the emerging battle for Stalingrad the propaganda minister also committed serious mistakes that contradicted his new style of information. On 24 August he referred to the 'favourable development of the military situation at Stalingrad' as a licence to talk more optimistically about the occupation of the city. He was to go even further 20 days later, by presenting the final victory at the Volga as 'almost certain' (Boelcke 1970: 271, 278). Against the backdrop of his comments at the RMVP press conferences on 12 and 21 September—again warning

⁴ Note Dietrich's post-war assertion that the communiqué about the city's capture had been on Hitler's desk since mid-August (1957: 95–6).

against excessive optimism—this uncharacteristic spell of buoyancy appears as a non sequitur. The fact that during the last ten days of the month he was once again exhorting the German press to bring new topics to the fore so as to divert public attention from its apparent psychosis with Stalingrad raises eloquent questions about the minister's own consistency or clarity of vision.

However, such was the momentum created over the preceding weeks from reports of the rapidly advancing Wehrmacht troops in the east that public expectations could not be diminished by any form of propaganda realism or containment. In fact, the only public disappointment from Hitler's 30 September speech originated from the frustration of the hope he would announce the capture of Stalingrad (Kershaw 1989: 185–6; cf. Ruth 1947). Now, official OKW reports broadcast through the German radio claimed in November that the city had already been taken (Kris and Speier 1944: 112ff.). October and November were indeed 'difficult' months for Nazi propagandists, as Goebbels himself admitted (Boelcke 1970: 298). His instructions at the ministerial meetings oscillated between random injections of optimism and fury at the cultivation of illusions. By mid-November—and with the Soviet offensive in full swing—he had effectively run out of positive diversionary themes: in these circumstances, too much 'realism' risked causing an irreversible depression in public morale. Yet, he had no solution to this problem.

The months before the Stalingrad disaster constituted the last, painful stage of a distinct phase in the history of Nazi propaganda, during which the Goebbels network could not coordinate effectively either the output or the strategies involved. The war of attrition among prominent Nazi leaders over control of different slices of the regime's propaganda empire left its various functions in a state of self-destructive disarray. In spite of the RMVP's and the RPL's efforts to coordinate activities with coherent plans, campaigns and activities, the result was often confusion, blunder and reactive damage limitation. At the same time as many newspapers issued special editions with the breaking news, the radio broadcast noticeably more restrained accounts of the developments in the east.

The tragic fate of the Sixth Army, encircled since 22 November and desperately running out of both supplies and time, could not be undone by any wishful thinking or propaganda distortion. Hitler's first reaction to the news of the Soviet counter-offensive was to ban any reference to it, but news filtered through on 24 November after a sensational communiqué from the Soviet high command reported the German defence line in the southern sector of the front had been comprehensively breached (Fredborg 1944: 152–3). For his part, Goebbels prohibited press and radio reports from using the adjective 'defensive' with regard the Sixth Army's battle (Boelcke 1970: 287), but the subsequent virtual disappearance from the regime's propaganda discourse of any references to Stalingrad in December and January proved a flawed and heavy-handed response to the deterioration of the military situation and the certainty of the impending crushing defeat. Following a lengthy meeting between Hitler and Goebbels on 13 January, the first oblique admission of the impending defeat crept into the regime's propaganda discourse three days later—again through the Wehrmacht communiqué, describing the German fighting in Stalingrad as 'defensive'. On the anniversary of the Nazis taking power (*Machtergreifung*), Goering (in the absence of Hitler, who refused to face the public despite a ten-year tradition of personally addressing the large audience in celebration of the 1933 *Machtergreifung* [Kershaw 2000b: 550; Domarus 2000: 1976–80]) addressed a large audience of party followers, speaking of the 'sacrifice' of the Sixth Army in terms of a historic analogy with Leonidas' 300 Spartans at Thermopylae. Finally, the official declaration that the battle of Stalingrad was over came on 3 February to the sound of Beethoven's Heroica Symphony (Berndt and Von Wedel 1943: 52–3).

Joachim von Ribbentrop and Martin Bormann

The Von Ribbentrop network was also based institutionally in Berlin and, unlike both its Goebbels and Dietrich counterparts, had no real footing in the party structure. However, war had enhanced the significance of his ministerial portfolio as well as his direct contact with Hitler. Indeed, before he totally discredited himself during

the latter stages of the war, Von Ribbentrop had successfully repatriated a series of functions from the RMVP, blurred the boundaries with regard to others and thrived on the institutional duplication Hitler had tolerated and even encouraged. Under Neurath, the foreign ministry had gradually lost influence and succumbed to institutional incursions from other government and party bodies—not least the RMVP, which had a clear interest in controlling propaganda functions abroad.

During the first months following the establishment of the propaganda ministry, Neurath had protested again the usurpation of his office's press, intelligence and radio functions by Goebbels (Bergmeier and Lotz 1997: 179). In 1938–9, however, the situation had changed dramatically. The RMVP's foreign press section had remained a small office attached to the press division, taking a back seat not only to the foreign ministry's operations, but also to those of the PO under Hess, whose interest in the *Volksdeutsche* (ethnic Germans living abroad) had brought it into direct competition with Ribbentrop's new empire.⁵ Now, alarmingly, Von Ribbentrop ensured his ministry (rather than the RMVP) held the conference for foreign press, in spite of Goebbels' protests. Taking advantage of Goebbels' isolation in 1938, the foreign ministry's press office under Paul Schmidt cooperated with Dietrich in order to dictate policy to the RMVP during the August–September 1938 Czech crisis (Herzstein 1979: 173ff). Furthermore, given the growing significance of foreign policy in the remaining months until the outbreak of the war, Von Ribbentrop continued to add insult to injury by using his ministry's foreign press division to issue directives independent of the RMVP. Then, in May 1939, a new Hitler decree awarded the foreign ministry the right to establish its own press division, even if the primary role of the RMVP was also vaguely acknowledged. At the same time, Hitler permitted the creation of a similar division for radio, based in the RRG—at the heart

⁵ Hess could also rely on the Foreign Organisation (AO—*Auslandsorganisation*) and on the earmarked Council of Ethnic Germans (VR—*Volksdeutscher Rat*) that he had established in 1933, much to the foreign ministry's exasperation.

of the RMVP and RRK (Bergmeier and Lotz 1997: 178ff.; Balfour 1979: 103). The new department was called the Culture Policy Division–Radio Unit (KAR—Kulturpolitische Abteilung–Rundfunkreferat). As a result, and to Goebbels’ dismay, a large foreign ministry contingency appeared on the doorstep of the RMVP and inserted itself in the ministry’s radio and press staff. Claiming direct authorisation from the Führer, Ribbentrop presented his opponent with a decree that allowed the foreign ministry to engage in propaganda activities and consolidate its institutional gains of the previous year (DGFP 8 September 1939; Diller 1980: 316–34).

In spring 1941, the foreign minister’s star continued to shine after the successes in Poland, France and the Balkans. Thus, when it was revealed the foreign ministry had acquired (in cooperation with the OKW) a radio station in occupied Yugoslavia, which it intended to use for foreign propaganda broadcasts to the region, the RMVP hierarchy was mortified. Goebbels saw this initiative—without prior authorisation from either his ministry or from Hitler—as a violation of all prior arrangements between the two institutions. Again, there were many issues at stake in this episode: the relative position of the two ministries in the institutional chart of the Nazi regime; Von Ribbentrop’s growing appetite for cashing in on his prestige with the leadership at the expense of the RMVP; and, perhaps more importantly, the cooperation between the foreign ministry and the OKW that amounted to a total by-passing of the propaganda ministry, and which could set a dangerous precedent with regard to who controlled broadcasting. Goebbels pleaded twice with Hans Lammers—head of the chancellery—for clarification from the Führer, but the response was predictably non-committal, urging both sides to work out a new compromise solution (Bergmeier and Lotz 1997: 186–9).

Sometime during the summer of 1941, Hitler decided to reward his old companion, Alfred Rosenberg, with an ad hoc portfolio for the eastern occupied territories: with it came a typically vague responsibility for propaganda activities. Thus, the compromise reached between the two ministers in October 1941 resulted from a desire to consolidate the new boundaries of jurisdiction, to ensure at least the

management of foreign broadcast (including Inter-Radio) as a condominium and to arrest further incursions by the emerging Rosenberg network. It was a typically muddled affair: Ribbentrop's coups were confirmed, as was the RMVP's overall central role in broadcasting in the greater Reich: Von Ribbentrop added a further piece of legitimacy to his radio business; Goebbels elicited a tentative agreement for joint management of the new structure (Bergmeier and Lotz 1997: 190-1; Diller 1980: 326-9; Boelcke 1977: 95-7). Neither was in full control, nor was the settlement reached in 1941 dependent on normative bureaucratic delineation. Unsurprisingly, competition for authority, overlaps and contradictory initiatives continued until one of the two leaders (and it was Von Ribbentrop) had lost Hitler's trust.

By contrast, Martin Bormann's authority increased meteorically in the final years of the war. If Goebbels' ministerial office was just a few yards across the street on Wilhelmstrasse, Bormann found himself at the heart of the Führer's official headquarters in Berlin. His organisational talents and ideological fanaticism had propelled him to a pivotal role inside Hitler's charismatic party mechanism; but it was Hess's departure in June 1941 that offered him the ultimate opportunity for political power. His designation as secretary to the Führer in February 1943 simply confirmed a trend of empowerment vis-à-vis both state and party that was set to continue unabated until the final day of the Third Reich. The Bormann network had an exclusively party basis, but his secretarial functions (even being granted the official title) placed him in an institutional position from which he could also command state activities. In fact, as Hitler's inner circle became smaller after 1942 (gradually Dietrich, Ribbentrop and Speer lost favour) and the Führer became increasingly confined to Berlin or Obersalzberg, it was Bormann who came to control access to the Führer. At the same time as the leader became more and more reclusive, desisting from his earlier wartime involvement in the day-to-day affairs of the state, Bormann was in a position to express 'Hitler's will' and, as we said earlier, to work for the Führer in spite of him.

The relation between Goebbels and Bormann was emblematic of the unpredictable nature of personal power-bases in the Third Reich.

The propaganda minister, fully aware of Bormann's power derived through his direct access to, and empowerment from Hitler personally, had tried to co-opt him in his fight against other party and state adversaries. In the aftermath of the Stalingrad debacle, he suggested to Hitler the establishment of a committee for the supervision of total war. As this was a concept he had pioneered and tried to impress upon the leadership, he found it logical to put himself forward for one of the three positions, but he also included both Bormann and Lammers in the proposed triumvirate. However, to the propaganda minister's utter frustration, Hitler decided to substitute Goebbels with Wilhelm Keitel, head of the OKW.

On 26 July 1944, and with the committee having run aground—not least because of Bormann's unwillingness to liaise with the other two members, Goebbels succeeded in claiming exclusively for himself the previously shared responsibility: this time as plenipotentiary for total war. Yet, the following September he was appalled by a new regulation stating that every RMVP document had to bear Bormann's prior approval and signature (Orlow 1973: 470). He duly obliged, as he did on a number of other occasions—to override Bormann one needed Hitler's direct authorisation, which in turn was largely controlled by the Führer's secretary himself. Thus, Goebbels accepted he had to placate him, to show deference to most of his orders and at least try to harness the benefits of a good relation with him in order to weaken the rest of his competitors for power.

The practicalities of coordination between the Goebbels and Bormann networks were managed by a complicated web of intermediaries. The Reichsring under Tiessler was bestowed with the monumental task of acting as a liaison between the two. At the same time, Goebbels also delegated increased powers to the RPL's head of staff (Stabsleiter), Eugen Hadamowsky, as his overall representative in the party's propaganda direction and recipient of all information about decisions in individual departments. These changes were reconfirmed during October 1942 (BA/NS 18/1403: 7 October 1942; cf. BA/NS 18/1403: 2 January 1942), but by that time coordination had already landed in trouble.

In November 1941, Bormann complained that the new head of the RMVP's propaganda division, Alfred-Ingemar Berndt, could not be competent to engage in all forms of propaganda, as he apparently did on the basis of the wealth of material that was channelled through his office (BA/NS 18/1403: 20 November 1941). Goebbels decided to retaliate, informing Bormann that Berndt was acting perfectly within his jurisdictional domain. He finished his long defence of Berndt (which was also intended as a protection of the RMVP's jurisdictional domain) stating that his ministry, through Tiessler, should always be informed first on matters of propaganda and then divulge relevant information to other bodies (including the party chancellery) (BA/NS 18/1403: 30 November 1941).

Tiessler continued to tread a delicate path between the two institutions and masters, as well as to direct the avalanche of traffic between RMVP and party chancellery as effectively as he could. However, he was operating in one of the awkward grey zones of the Nazi jurisdictional structure, and was often reprimanded by Bormann for not conforming to the opaque procedural guidelines of his office. During May 1943 a seemingly minor issue of jurisdiction over cultural radio broadcasts provoked a major jurisdictional crisis: Bormann demanded through the Reichsring a delineation of authority in this domain, stating clearly that all cultural matters, except those of pure administration, be decided by the party and not the state institutions (i.e., the RMVP) (BA/NS 18/1403: 6 May 1943). By that time, Tiessler clearly had had enough. In a personal letter to Goebbels he drew attention to a long list of violations of administrative protocol by Hitler's private secretary. After quoting examples of secret reports from the country that were withheld by the chancellery's officials, he recounted how Bormann referred to him as 'the most fanatical Goebbels-supporter' and concluded that 'in such an atmosphere of mistrust it is impossible for me to work any further' (BA/NS 18/1403: 19 April 1943). A few months later, his request to be relieved of his duties and be assigned to a different task was granted (BA/NS 18/1403: May 1943).

The case of the Bormann network is indicative of the potential inconsequence between institutional position and political power in

the Nazi system of rule. The blurring of the distinction between party and state did not simply mystify administrative processes and muddy jurisdictions, more significantly, it created parallel hierarchies that inter-twined horizontally. The only steadfast anchor in this structure was, of course, the Führer, in line with the charismatic nature of his authority. The firm grounding of Bormann's authority on the basis of exactly this special access to the Führer and his institutional ability (as his personal secretary) to divulge Hitler's wish as his representative or in spite of him reflects the most fundamental reason for the RMVP's relative weakness until 1944 at least. Put simply, after a head start in 1933-4, Goebbels had serious and increasing problems in ensuring direct legitimacy from the Führer for his actions. In fact, the institutional distance between Hitler and Goebbels was constantly expanding until 1943-4, with the strengthening of the authority of the likes of Dietrich, Bormann and Von Ribbentrop. The nature of the Nazi regime meant the diffusion of the 'Führer's wish' from his inner circle outwards and downwards to the rest of the regime and party resulted in the creation of ad hoc hierarchies and directives that the recipients had to implement without further ado. This is exactly where Bormann's immense power lay—and how it came to represent a major threat to the control exercised by the Goebbels network over propaganda matters.

1943-5: the return of the king, but without a horse...

It becomes evident that the various networks within the Nazi polycratic structure did not fall neatly into the categories of state and party: instead, they intersected, overlapped and often contradicted each other, subjecting any normative pattern of decision-making to ad hoc, always extremely volatile and often incongruous arrangements based on personalities rather than institutions. On many occasions Goebbels deplored the arbitrary insertion of layers of jurisdictional obstruction to his ministry's authority or to his personal access to the Führer. Once he realised that his initial dream of single-handedly controlling the gargantuan propaganda domain in Nazi Germany had eluded him, he became convinced that every single

aspect of his domain had to be defended individually, strengthened pre-emptively or reclaimed piece-by-piece. What mattered most was control of crucial administrative intersections and, where possible, infiltration of rival institutions. This, rather than an attempt to defend the whole structure on a normative basis, was the only effective device of political empowerment in the polycratic confusion of Nazi Germany. The strategy was dictated by the very operating principles of the Nazi system of rule: charismatic authority of the leader who resisted normative bureaucratisation; personality-based 'neo-feudal' empires with highly modern structures and apparatus that contrasted sharply with their institutional legitimisation on the basis of atavistic principles of personal loyalty and preference; and unplanned expansion and/or revision of jurisdictional allowances determined by the relative standing of the individual in charge of particular slices of the regime's propaganda machinery.

The dependence of the Goebbels network on a small number of loyalists, or at least trustworthy experts, extended over the whole propaganda network. Hans Fritzsche was the sort of skilful, but careful, operator who was both invaluable to the minister and difficult to be dismissed by his foes. His importance for the Goebbels network cannot be exaggerated, as he was not only trustworthy, but was also capable of carrying out a plethora of crucial assignments within the news, press and radio domains. Walter Tiessler, as head of the Reichsring and liaison to the party chancellery, attempted to promote the RPL/RMVP's interests through careful mediation. Alfred-Ingemar Berndt, whom Goebbels had appointed first to the RRG and in 1939 to the RMVP's radio division, proved instrumental in effecting the desired centralisation over broadcasting structures. He resembled Fritzsche and Tiessler in that he could be at the same time responsive to Goebbels's strategies and maintain good relations with his opponents—particularly Dietrich. In recognition of his service, Goebbels hastened to offer him control of the ministry's propaganda division, where he succeeded Braeckow. The propaganda minister also relied on the services of Leopold Gutterer, who reached the pinnacle of his career within the RMVP network in May 1941 when he became

state secretary. An entirely dependable aide, since 1933 he had, as head of both the RMVP's staff division and of the section dealing with the organisation of mass events, been instrumental in ensuring the smooth functioning of the ministry. In this capacity he also ensured, from the very first days of the ministry, that a relatively clear delimitation of jurisdictional spheres existed between the RMVP, the RPL and an array of other party agencies (including DAF, Rosenberg's Dienststelle and Hess's PO) that claimed some degree of involvement in the organisation of party events.

What was as astounding as the erosion of the institutional position and jurisdiction of the Goebbels network during 1938-42 was the success the propaganda minister had in recovering his authority in the extended propaganda domain during the last two years of the Third Reich. During the latter period, Goebbels ensured that the array of jurisdictional slices he had seen appropriated by his internal rivals were repatriated into his RMVP-RPL empire, taking advantage of a combination of his increasing personal kudos (not least in Hitler's own eyes) and the gradual discrediting of his erstwhile opponents.

Von Ribbentrop continued to inundate the propaganda minister with insulting letters of ten pages or more, but the foreign ministry's loss of influence and its boss's disgrace meant Goebbels could afford to file them and ignore them (Semmler 1947: 70-2). In reality, after an eventful initial period of antagonism between the RMVP's divisions that were involved in foreign activities and the foreign ministry's propaganda offices, there was a trend towards smoother cooperation between the staff of the two institutions. The reorganisation of the RMVP's foreign broadcast under Toni Winkelkemper entailed a substantial boost to the ministry at the expense of the foreign ministry (Diller 1980: 304ff).

Otto Dietrich (who retained his position as Reichspressechef until early 1945, but who had lost the privilege of the immediate contact with Hitler towards the end of the war) failed to prevent Fritzsche's return to the helm of broadcasting: in the summer of 1944, he even proved unsuccessful in his bid to repatriate the DD to the press domain. Rosenberg's and Ley's attempts to maintain a stake in the propa-

ganda domain were easily brushed aside by Goebbels. The press never fully succumbed to a Dietrich monopoly—in fact, in 1943 Goebbels himself noted with satisfaction that he had managed to achieve an ‘excellent cooperation’ with Dietrich (Lochner 1948), control over news agencies was recovered to the extent that Goebbels was able to obtain relative autonomy in the management of information (in fact, during 1944 the propaganda minister had insisted that the editors of all news agencies attend his ministerial conference and take instructions directly from him [Abel 1990: 56–7]); broadcasting largely remained at the core of the Goebbels network: cinema had never ceased to be its proud monopoly.

Even Bormann had to occasionally bow to the RMVP. Since the beginning of the war, the weekly newsreel copy was edited in Berlin and sent to Hitler’s headquarters by the beginning of the week for approval. The established routine was that a private screening for Hitler took place on Monday evening, offering him the opportunity to make changes; these—bearing the hallmark of Hitler’s decision (*Führerentscheid*)—had to be communicated back to the editing offices and be implemented immediately. By the spring of 1944, however, it had become known within RMVP circles that Hitler no longer watched the newsreel. In spite of this, a stream of changes continued to pour out of his headquarters bearing the same *Führerentscheid* stamp (Herzstein 1979: 226–7).

Later in the year, there was also a noticeable delay in the communication of the changes, pushing the overall schedule for newsreel production from Monday to Tuesday—and this happened at a time that military setbacks and damage from the Allied air raids had rendered the process of compiling and editing the newsreels far more difficult than before. Thus, in December 1944 the head of the RMVP’s film division, Hinkel, confirmed his suspicion that Hitler was no longer involved in the examination of the weekly newsreel. The case involved the approval of a newsreel containing a section on the Luftwaffe’s requested evacuation of the German Alps for the week of 5 December. This section had been earmarked for deletion after being screened in the Führer’s headquarters. When the officials of

the RMVP enquired about this, they were informed Hitler had not taken part in the scrutiny and that the decision emanated from earlier declarations by both Hitler and Dietrich concerning the elimination of material featuring the Alps from the regime's propaganda output. As a result, the RMVP reasserted its authority over the production of newsreels, demanding that all changes be communicated by the previous deadline of Monday evening and—more importantly—that any changes introduced by the Führer's headquarters screening could no longer bear the legitimacy of a *Führersentscheid*, given that the Führer himself was no longer participating in the vetting process. This effectively meant the RMVP was not obliged (as it would have been on the basis of a direct demand from the Führer) to implement the changes (BA/R. 55/663: 92).

What was at stake in the last stages of the war had less to do with control of propaganda or 'working towards the Führer': overall authority over the regime's political direction, winning the war and even Hitler's succession were the far more lucrative rewards by then. From his secure propaganda empire and his new 'total war' power base, Goebbels was clearly vying for total power over party and state against the remaining few—and fast diminishing—contenders. From 1943 onwards, the RMVP-RPL network was actually becoming the sort of all-encompassing state-party 'total' empire Goebbels had dreamt of commanding since 1933, albeit by then overseeing a crumbling, defeated enterprise. Ideological and political coordination of propaganda had proved far easier than its centralisation and effective supervision; however, even the latter goal had drawn considerably closer towards the end, even if mainly by default: the Goebbels network was the only propaganda institution that kept functioning until the very last days of the regime, adapting in the face of mounting adversity and keeping the propaganda noise loud and clear through well-managed channels. Thus, after an impressive, if belated and still-born, bounce-back, the propaganda minister had come full circle: during the dying stages of the Nazi regime (autumn 1944–spring 1945) the Nazi propaganda domain became a fully-working hybrid of modern technological and administrative apparatus held together by

the overall personal authority of a single individual—Goebbels—and empowered through the latter's eventually privileged relation and access to the charismatic centre of the Nazi system: Hitler.

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