

# GERMANY'S FREEDOM STATION

By ELLEN WILKINSON, M.P.

Day after day we read of the German Freedom Station, harassed, pursued, but continuing to give its brave broadcasts to the German people. In this article from "War Pictorial" Ellen Wilkinson tells the full story.

**E**ARLY in 1933, on the day the Nazis seized power and proceeded to a rapid arrest of all their leading opponents, a large car crossed the frontier near Strasbourg.

As yet the frontier officials had had no orders, and this man, one of the best known of the younger Reichstag members of the Left, was let pass out of the Reich without trouble.

Hitler has had good cause to regret that he allowed this man with his bright brown eyes, indubitably Aryan origin and clever organising brain, to slip through his fingers. For had the man delayed a day, or even gone home to get money and papers, he would have been caught. The secret police were at his flat from the word "go."

## Drew All Together

This man was the Goebbels of the Left. He had built up the great Communist publicity house in Berlin. In the early days all the brilliant propagandist coups were due to his quick wits.

He was the initiator of the Brown Book of the Hitler Terror, which months before the evidence leaked out, showed how the Nazis actually set the Reichstag on fire, and has been secretly distributed in Germany in thousands of tiny copies. It was his idea to run the counter trial in London which set the world stage for the drama of Dimitroff in Leipzig.

This man saw that no one group of *émigrés*, not even the then powerful and well-subsidised Communists, could of itself be strong enough to fight Hitler.

He got the idea of drawing all the opposing groups into one German Freedom Party—Protestants and Catholics, Communists and Conservatives, whatever creed or race, all united against Hitler.

This brought him into contact with another remarkable German, Otto Strasser, brother of the Gregor Strasser, Hitler's friend, who was shot by order of Goering in the purge of June 30, 1934.

These two men between them were able to organise something that mattered . . . until the Communists quarrelled with their former M.P.

## How it Started

The groups have changed a good deal in membership and leadership since then, but the one leading idea through all the changes has been to get at the German people across the formidable walls of the Gestapo. The idea of an illegal wireless station came early . . . but how?

In the earliest days the *Deutsche Freiheitssender* (German Freedom Station) was a very amateur affair. I sat in a cafe in Paris in its earliest days

when ways and means were being discussed. Money was raised, the technical ability eagerly available, but how were we to solve the problems of continually changing place and wavelength with the Gestapo experts on the hunt?

I have read articles describing a mobile wireless van, disguised, but moving about in the countryside, hiding in forests and sending out messages.

This idea is technically absurd. The power available was too weak. The crowded industrial centres had to be reached.

## Assembling the Bits

At one time, men and women, even a small school-girl with Gretchen pig-tails and a boy with his



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. . . She tells the story

satchel, would casually come together at an agreed house. Each would carry bits and pieces, for no one dare risk walking the streets with anything that could be identified as a transmitter. Then the pieces would be assembled and for a few minutes, the voice of German Freedom would be heard on the air.

Goebbels bitterly denounced the "station" as run by foreign government money and disgruntled *émigrés* across the frontiers.

I know personally that the men who ran the risks in the early days never crossed the frontier out of Germany. They made it a point of honour not to leave the country. In time, one by one, they were caught and taken to Dachau where special tortures were reserved for those whom Hitler really feared. But always there was someone to carry on.

Later the idea grew. As the tension with Czechoslovakia increased, the "stations" in the South of Germany were helped by the Czechs to broadcast with higher power from just inside the Czech border.

## Easy Then

At that time it was possible to get the station easily in Hitler's Munich or Streicher's Nuremberg. When the Germans crossed the frontier, the one idea was to get hold of that transmitter. Apparatus that could not be moved they did get; but the men had flown.

Headquarters have had to be maintained outside Germany, especially as the idea far outgrew the originators of it. Large amounts of money have never been available.

Obviously, after the war started, French and British funds could have been got without difficulty. But the French francs or British sterling would have damned the whole idea in the eyes of the Germans.

The *Freiheitsender* must be by Germans for Germans, financed by German money, dependent neither on Paris, London nor Moscow. There would, perhaps, not be quite the same feeling about New York.

Who broadcasts? Every message has to be short, for the German wireless experts continually range the possible wavelengths, and jam the "station" as soon as it is found.

Most often the *Freiheitsender* comments on the events of the day. "Puts the other side to Goebbels."

To us perhaps it seems unimportant when there is so much censored news that might be given out, to spend these priceless minutes answering Goebbels's cruder lies.

## Likes an Argument

But the *Freiheit* group know their Germans. The German likes an argument, an answer to every thesis. As this patient answering day by day infuriates Dr. Goebbels into hot attacks and further efforts to catch them at it, it is evidently doing the job.

Another effective method is the quick, sly joke, stabbing in its grimness, that appeals particularly to the Berliner and the Rhinelander. One priceless hit which went the rounds so quickly that it lost one famous cabaret star his liberty for repeating it, came over the illegal wireless during the pogroms that followed the death of Herr von Rath in Paris.

Question: "What is misfortune?"

Answer: "To be a Jew in 1938. To be a soldier in 1939. To be a German in 1940!"

Messages have been sent to Germany by many famous people. I was once in a hotel room at Geneva where short appeals were being recorded from men whom any wireless in the world outside Germany would have been glad to have on the air.

## Hands Across the Frontiers

The appeal to German workers by the Rt. Hon. Herbert Morrison, very moving and personal, was sent in a record. There was a fine and dignified "Hands across the frontiers" call from the British Trades Union Congress, sent during the Munich crisis, when there yet seemed time to get the message across that, as the spokesmen of the British Cabinet have said again and again, "We have no quarrel with the German people."

Most of the leading writers and thinkers of Germany from Thomas Mann to Einstein have sent direct messages right into German homes by means of these recordings.

## By Germans for Germans

Do the Germans really hear them—and how many? Messages sent in foreign languages, with translations, are very few.

It is infinitely more difficult for a watcher at the keyhole or in the next apartment to distinguish what an indubitable German voice is saying, and to know whether the set of a respected neighbour is listening in to the legal or illegal words.

Nor do the *Freiheit* group want too many foreign messages. The truth from Germans, to Germans, by German money and through German technical skill, and the daring of German men and women . . . it is because they have kept to this slogan that the *Deutsche Freiheitssender* maintains its high prestige.