

Characters and personalities of the airwaves re-assessed

**THE MAN WHO WAS LORD HAW-HAW**  
**The Life and Death of William Joyce**

Courtney Hilliard

Fifty years ago on the third day of January, 1946, William Joyce suffered legal execution—or was murdered—by the British Establishment, according to the point of view of his supporters. And perhaps not his supporters alone, for at the time many ordinary people who detested his politics, and in general supported the death penalty, believed that he should have been spared. Read the facts and decide for yourself whether or not Justice was done.

There can hardly have been anyone with access to a radio receiver who had not heard William Joyce's broadcasts from Germany to England which took place virtually throughout the Second World War, right up unto the last days before the Allies won complete victory. For as "Lord Haw-Haw" Joyce had exercised a curious and paradoxical fascination for his listeners—the more they loathed and derided his excesses at the microphone the more his inverted popularity grew, and with it grew up the legends concerning his alleged extraordinary prescience concerning the localised effects of Nazi bombing from the air. And much of what Joyce did remains legend, despite (and perhaps because) of the millions of words that must have been written about him during the war, at the time of his trial, and afterwards. Even the fact that he was not the first broadcaster to be given that derisive nick-name is largely forgotten; the man whom Jonah Barrington referred to in the Daily Express as Lord Haw-Haw was the British renegade officer Bailey-Stewart, Joyce "inheriting" the title later.

Legend has it that Joyce would make references to such parish-pump news items as the church clock in such-and-such a village being a few minutes slow, and as what small buildings had been damaged in another, thus fostering the impression that a well-organised ring of Nazi spies was operating throughout the length and breadth of the British Isles. Furthermore, he was supposed to make mocking predictions as to future Luftwaffe targets. "We shall spread Hartley's Jam on Crawford's Cream Crackers" was one that was repeated to the present writer by a clergyman who was resident in Liverpool during the war. A few days after this broadcast Liverpool was blitzed and the factories making those commodities received hits. But did Joyce really foretell the event? Doubtless there are still many people willing to swear that he did. On the other hand, it is said that transcriptions of his broadcasts made at the time they were put out contain no references to such prophecies. There again, how many people heard the broadcasts compared with the number of persons who have seen or read the transcriptions? You pays your money and you takes your choice.

Even if we accept the legend rather than the supposed facts, it makes no difference to the question of whether Joyce's broadcasts advanced the Nazi cause by so much as a whisker, and the answer to this is quite categorically that they did not. People listened to him to scorn, not to be converted. He was a source not so much of fear as of amusement. It is this that made so many ordinary folk disagree with the sentence passed upon him at his trial. He had done no real harm, so why hang him? Why indeed? Especially as he was an American citizen until 1940 and had German nationality thereafter. How could a charge of treason lie against him when he owed Britain no allegiance?

The answer lies in the ability of the Establishment to locate and employ arcane or archaic snippets of Law to meet virtually every conceivable circumstance. In fact, the Treason Act of 1351, under which he

was charged (“by adhering to the King's enemies elsewhere than in the King's realm, to wit in the German realm”) itself had been passed nearly 600 years before the time of his trial in 1945. Evidence given and accepted in that trial showed that his father, who originally hailed from Ireland, had been an American citizen at the time of Joyce's birth in 1906, and therefore the son was born an American too. Although Joyce senior had returned to Ireland three years later and served in the Royal Irish Constabulary, he never applied to revert to British citizenship. Moreover, due to not registering himself as an American citizen he eventually lost this as well, and for the latter years of his life was stateless.

When Ireland had been granted independence Michael Joyce left for England, eventually to set up a small grocery shop in Clapham, London. William, then 17, joined the British Fascist Party but after no more than two years transferred his political allegiance to the Conservatives. During this time he had entered the University of London and was soon to take his degree with honours in English and history. He had married and was supporting himself and his wife by teaching. He then set up a correspondence school which not only brought him an income but also permitted him enough spare time to engage in political activities, including leaving the Conservatives and joining Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. He worked his way up in the BUF until he was Mosley's right hand man, only to break with him around 1936 due to differences of opinion over ties with the German Nazi Party; Joyce wanted stronger links, Mosley to remain distanced. Joyce may have lost this battle but went on to better things from his point of view.

By now divorced and with a new wife, Joyce suddenly acquired enough wealth to move to an expensive flat in South Kensington and to found a fascist news sheet called *The Helmsman*. All this was apparently financed by the funds of his new British National Socialist League, but in reality the money came from Dr. Goebbels in Berlin, who seemed to consider the expense worthwhile to have a Nazi party apologist in Britain. The deal would appear to have been struck whilst Joyce was on a visit to Germany in 1933. Now, in order to make that visit he had to have a passport, and to get that passport he made false declarations on the application, including claiming British citizenship. The passport was valid for five years; it was renewed in 1938 for one year and again for the same period in 1939—significantly, just one week before Hitler marched on Poland. The fact that this renewal went through is rather odd, since it is reported that the authorities were keen to keep him in Britain in the event of hostilities between ourselves and Germany, even to the extent of having trumped-up motoring offence charges lodged against him. Perhaps it was a classic case of one hand not knowing what the other was doing. Just how Joyce and his wife did leave the country is not known, but it is recorded that by mid-September 1939 he was signing a contract in Berlin to broadcast for the Nazis.

All this came out at his trial. Or was it a trial in the accepted term? It is perhaps not too perverse to suggest that had it taken place in a totalitarian state it might well have been dubbed a show-trial by outside observers. For the most important charge levelled against Joyce, that which would cost him his life, was decided not by a jury but *by the judges direction* (my italics). This ruled Joyce guilty of treason due to the fact that when his last British passport was (again illegally) obtained on 24th. August, 1939, Joyce had automatically placed himself in the position of owing allegiance to the British Crown. Furthermore, even though he had fled to Germany and subsequently acquired German nationality in 1940, he still owed allegiance during the validity of the passport, due to what is summed up by the legal maxim *protectio trahit subjectionem, et subjectio protectionem* (protection attracts allegiance, allegiance attracts protection).

Although this resounding phrase was coined rather more than five centuries before passports had been invented, it was conveniently adapted to infer that, as the holder of a passport enjoys the protection of the Crown, so does he himself owe allegiance to the Crown. This is fair enough, but since it must have been patently obvious that Joyce had no intention whatsoever of claiming the protection of the Crown after

arriving in Germany, what happened surely should have been regarded as only a technical offence. In fact, had he forgotten to take his passport he would not have been guilty of treason. But the fact is that after the judge's direction on the matter Joyce was doomed, whatever the jury may have thought about the rights or wrongs of the matter. From that point onwards the trial became little more than a formality. Should Joyce have forfeited his life for a technicality? I think not.

The affair was not over with Joyce going to the gallows. Another and deplorable outcome of the passport wrangling was the fate of the hapless Mrs. Joyce. British by birth, she became an American citizen by marriage, and when her husband became a naturalised German she automatically assumed that nationality as well. She was brought over to England with Joyce after his arrest in 1945 and not only had to contend with the trauma of his trial and execution, but immediately after was deported, as a technical alien back to Germany to fend for herself in the horrors of the post-war conditions there. Her only offence seems to have been loyalty, however misplaced, to her husband, and surely, as an innocent party, in her case justice could have been tempered with mercy. But then the quality of mercy seems somewhat to have been strained in the Britain of 1946.

## **GERMAN PROPAGANDA RADIO OF WW2**

*As a postscript, Andrew Emmerson offers a brief introduction to this fascinating subject*

The subject of radio in warfare is one that fascinates many people and has been covered by a number of writers over the years. This brief article is a summary only and for further information I would direct you to the material in the reading list.

As far as straightforward propaganda broadcasts from Germany were concerned, these were advertised as the English language European Service of the Reichsrundfunk (German Imperial Broadcasting) and schedules were printed in magazines such as *Signal*, a German version of *Picture Post* or *Life* which was published in several languages. Whether many copies reached these shores, I cannot say. No doubt people found the transmissions by tuning along the dial or by word of mouth.

The transmitters used for propaganda transmissions were normal broadcast ones, in Germany and in the occupied countries. They included the Deutschlandsender Calais (191 kHz), Bremen (785 kHz), Breslau (950 kHz), Cologne (658 kHz), Friesland (160 kHz), Luxemburg (232 kHz) and short-wave transmitters DJL (15,110 kHz), DXJ (7,240 kHz), DXM (6,200 kHz).

Programming included news broadcasts, political commentary by Lord Haw-Haw (Wolff Mittler and later William Joyce) and other information. There were also some swing records using the tunes of hits of the day but with new, satirical words.

As well as these outright propaganda broadcasts, there were also more clandestine (though not very subtle) transmissions which purported to be 'pirate' British transmitters or the voice of the people. One was Radio Caledonia, appealing to Scots who were not particularly enamoured with the English, and the New British Broadcasting Station. Unlike British attempts to fool the Germans (Soldatensender Calais, Atlantiksender), these broadcasts were soon abandoned.

There have been a number of programmes on propaganda broadcasting in recent years on BBC Radio Four and on Radio Netherlands. Two cassette/CD albums of excerpts from German wartime propaganda broadcasts have been released in America and other recordings are in circulation. I can provide further details to anyone interested.

A reading list follows.

*Reading List*

BERLIN CALLING, by John Carver Edwards. Published 1991 by Praeger, New York, Westport and London. Subtitled "American Broadcasters in Service to the Third Reich", this book looks at the personalities of the individuals who took to the microphone for Germany. Some coverage of the short-wave stations used.

FILM AND RADIO PROPAGANDA IN WORLD WAR II, edited by K.R.M. Short. Published 1983 by Croom Helm, London and Canberra. Chapters include *Propaganda at Radio Luxembourg 1944-45* by Eric Barnouw (and *Japanese Domestic Radio and Cinema Propaganda 1937-45* by Gordon Daniels).

HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING, by James Wood. Published 1992 by Peter Peregrinus Ltd, London at £30.00. A substantial part of this book covers propaganda broadcasting during and before the last war.

HITLERS AIRWAVES, by Horst Bergmeier and Rainer Lotz. Published 1997 by Yale University Press, New Haven and London, at £22.50. Subtitled "The Inside Story of Nazi Radio Broadcasting and Propaganda Swing," this hardback book and accompanying compact disc makes the first detailed study of the complete subject.

LORD HAW-HAW AND HIS BRITISH AUDIENCE DURING THE PHONEY WAR, by Terry Charman. Published in *Imperial War Museum Review*, no. 7. A detailed and fascinating article.

RADIO GOES TO WAR, by Charles Rolo. Published 1953 by Faber & Faber Ltd, London. Nearly 250 pages devoted to propaganda broadcasting during the last war.

RADIO WARFARE, by Lawrence C. Soley. Published 1989 by Praeger, New York, Westport and London. A full-length study of USA subversive propaganda, with some coverage of other countries' efforts. (Original price £22.50, but a small stock of copies of this book priced at £8.50 may still be found at Judd Street Books, 102 Judd Street, London WC1H 9NT, telephone 020-7833 1900).

THE WAR ON THE SHORT WAVES, by Charles Rigby ("Northerner" of World Radio). Published 1942 by Lloyd Cole, London. Interesting book but not a lot about propaganda broadcasting.