



**Propaganda
and the
German Cinema
1933–1945**

David Welch

I.B.Tauris

Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933–1945

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DAVID WELCH

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*Domination itself is servile when beholden to
opinion: for you depend upon the prejudices of those
you govern by means of their prejudices.*

Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*

GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

When David Welch's *Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933–1945* was first published in 1983, it was instantly hailed as the definitive account of the use of film by the Nazis for propaganda purposes. We are delighted to be able to include it, suitably revised and updated, in our series of reprints of classic works of film history.

Professor Welch shows how cinema was utilized as part of an all-out cultural and ideological onslaught on the German people. His careful and systematic study draws on extensive research amongst the documents of the period to provide a convincing context for his detailed interpretation of the key films.

The evil genius of this insidious campaign was of course Doctor Joseph Goebbels, Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda. He placed particular value on films in influencing popular beliefs, declaring in the party newspaper in 1933 that the German cinema had the mission of conquering the world as the vanguard of the Nazi troops.

Professor Welch meticulously charts the process of legislation, bureaucratization and progressive nationalization by which the Nazis took control of the German film industry. Initially Goebbels preferred to work through an indirect method of control, centred on the provision of finance and the vetting of scripts. So Welch examines in detail the complex process of film funding and the comprehensive structure of censorship under which the film-makers operated.

Finally, Professor Welch expertly analyzes 30 films that dramatize the themes the Propaganda Ministry most wished to emphasize: the concepts of 'Blood and Soil', the need for *Lebensraum*, the doctrine of the Master Race, the glorification of health and strength, the romanticization of war and comradeship, the importance of blind obedience and heroic sacrifice and the central concept of Führer-worship. This was all invaluable in cementing the Nazi ideology firmly into the German consciousness. Altogether, Welch's book adds up to a major contribution to our understanding of both cinema and propaganda.

Jeffrey Richards

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

This book is intended to be as much about the meaning of propaganda as it is about the Nazi cinema. When it was first published in 1983, it was very much in the vanguard of research in film and history, and particularly the relationship between a cinema industry and a totalitarian police state. My aim was to examine the way in which the Nazi regime used film propaganda to disseminate key themes in its political and cultural *Weltanschauung*. Since its first publication, the historiography of the Third Reich has moved on at a remarkable pace. I have contributed to the debate with a number of publications that have attempted to explore the wider relationship between politics, public opinion and propaganda in the Third Reich and the role of Hitler in the decision-making process.*

Much has also been published on the subject of film and propaganda. I have taken full account of recent scholarship in this revision of the original book. However, I remain convinced that what I wrote in 1983 has stood the test of time. I have therefore resisted changing the substance of the book. I have revised some of my observations where appropriate in the light of recent literature and I have substantially updated the bibliography.

I would like to thank once again my family and all my friends and colleagues who have contributed to the writing of this book and to its subsequent revisions. Since the first edition, the work (and friendship) of Ian Kershaw and Jeremy Noakes have had a profound effect on my thinking about the nature of the Third Reich. Gerhard Schoenberner has also forced me to think more critically about Nazi film propaganda. Finally, I would like to thank my research students who, over the years, have inspired me with their determination and extended my knowledge still further.

* See in particular Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (London, 1993) and *Hitler* (London, 1998), revised second edition published as *Hitler. Profile of a Dictator* (London, 2001).

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I should like to acknowledge my debt to the staff of the institutions where my doctoral research was undertaken for making relevant material available. I would also like to express my gratitude to Friedrich Kahlenberg, Eberhard Spiess, Erwin Leiser, Lutz Becker and Marcus Phillips for their valuable assistance in drawing my attention to material that I might otherwise have overlooked. I owe a special word of thanks to Richard Taylor for his criticism and stimulation. I am also indebted to the staff of the British Film Institute and the Institut für Filmkunde for their help in the location of stills.

Over the years I have incurred debts to many individuals in the preparation of this work, and none more so than to James Joll, whose kindness, forbearance and scholarly integrity encouraged my research during the inordinately long period it took for my ideas to develop. My great debt, however, is to my wife Anne, to whom this book is dedicated. It could not have been completed without her continual support and encouragement.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BA	<i>Bundesarchiv, Koblenz</i>
Bavaria FK	<i>Bavaria Filmkunst GmbH (founded 11 November 1930)</i>
BDC	<i>Berlin Document Centre</i>
BdM	<i>Bund deutscher Mädchen</i>
DACHO	<i>Dach-Organisation der Filmschaffenden Deutschlands e.V.</i>
DAF	<i>Deutsche Arbeitsfront</i>
DFG	<i>Deutsche Filmherstellungs- und Verwertungs GmbH (founded 1937)</i>
DFV	<i>Deutsche Filmvertriebs GmbH</i>
DIF	<i>Deutsches Institut für Filmkunde, Wiesbaden</i>
DNVP	<i>Deutschnationale Volkspartei</i>
DVP	<i>Deutsche Volkspartei</i>
FiFi	<i>Film Finanz GmbH (founded 10 August 1937)</i>
HJ	<i>Hitler Jugend</i>
HJFRT	<i>Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television</i>
IFK	<i>Illustrierter Film-Kurier</i>
IfZ	<i>Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich</i>
JCH	<i>Journal of Contemporary History</i>
KdF	<i>Kraft durch Freude</i>
KfdK	<i>Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur</i>
KPD	<i>Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands</i>
LBB	<i>Licht-Bild-Bühne</i>
LFS	<i>Landesfilmstellen</i>
NSBO	<i>Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellen Organisation</i>
NSDAP	<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei</i>
OKW	<i>Oberkommando der Wehrmacht</i>
PK	<i>Propaganda Kompanie</i>
RFI	<i>Reichsfilmintendant</i>
RFD	<i>Reichsfilmdramaturg</i>
RFK	<i>Reichsfilmkammer</i>
RFS	<i>Reichsfilmstelle</i>
RGBI	<i>Reichsgesetzblatt</i>
RKK	<i>Reichskulturkammer</i>
RLG	<i>Reichslichtspielgesetz</i>
RM	<i>Reichsmark</i>
RMVP	<i>Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda</i>
SA	<i>Sturmabteilung der NSDAP</i>
SD	<i>Sicherheitsdienst der SS</i>
SHAEF	<i>Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force</i>

Terra FK	<i>Terra Filmkunst GmbH</i> (founded 17 January)
Tobis AG	<i>Tobis Tonbild Syndikat AG</i> (founded 1929)
Tobis FK	<i>Tobis Filmkunst GmbH</i> (founded 1938)
Ufa	<i>Universum Film AG</i> (founded 1917)
Ufa FK	<i>Ufa Filmkunst GmbH</i> (founded 17 January 1942)
Ufi	<i>Ufa-Film GmbH</i> (founded 28 November 1942)
VB	<i>Völkischer Beobachter</i>
ZD	<i>Zeitschriftendienst</i>

INTRODUCTION

No doubt the effects of history are always easier to seize than the causes. But one thing makes another clearer; these effects fully brought to light by the cinema will provide clear insights into causes which heretofore have remained in semi-obscurity. And to lay hands not on everything that exists but on everything that can be grasped is already an excellent achievement for any source of information, scientific or historic.

Boleslas Matuszewski, *Une Nouvelle Source de l'Histoire* (Paris, 1898)

THE aim of this book is to examine Nazi film propaganda as a reflection of National Socialist ideology. Although Nazism is often thought of as a temporary aberration in the history of a nation, it was in fact based on a body of intellectual doctrine that goes back for at least a century. This was the *Völkisch* tradition, which was essentially a product of late eighteenth-century romanticism. I have attempted to trace various components of the ideology which recur in the cinema of the Third Reich, in order to discover what this reveals about the nature of propaganda in general and the ideology of National Socialism in particular.

Totalitarian police states aspire to absolute control of all media of mass communication in an attempt to control the opinions of the masses.¹ And of all the means of exerting such covert and psychological influences, none was as highly esteemed by the Government of the Third Reich as the cinema. In one of his first speeches as Minister for Popular Enlightenment Joseph Goebbels declared that the German cinema had the mission of conquering the world as the vanguard of the Nazi troops.² As Minister for the dissemination of state propaganda, Dr Goebbels believed in the 'power' of the cinema to influence people's thoughts and beliefs, if not their actions. Although his *Filmpolitik* would eventually assume an important role in the implementation of the Nazis' New Order (*Neuordnung*) in Europe, I have confined myself to films produced in Germany for German audiences. Neither is it my specific intention to quantify the effect of these films. The precise way in which the mass

media influence society is still not clearly understood. In a totalitarian police state such as Nazi Germany there was even less interest in public opinion, although the Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda did attempt to evaluate the feedback of their more prestigious films by means of the weekly SD (*Sicherheitsdienst der SS*) Reports which appeared for the first time in 1940. There is some disagreement over the value of these reports as a scientific indicator of public opinion.³ Initially Goebbels appears to have welcomed the reports as a more objective source of intelligence than the Party's local agencies. After Stalingrad, however, they ceased to make such agreeable reading and he took steps to limit their circulation and ultimately to have them suppressed as defeatist.⁴ However, they remain the best source of public opinion within the Third Reich and I have included their assessment of audience reaction to films wherever they have been available.

The vast majority of these SD Reports was concerned with the so-called *Staatsauftragsfilme*, films commissioned by the State and generally given a disproportionate amount of time, financial assistance, and publicity. These films were not always overtly political but were invariably classified at the time as *Tendenzfilme*. This was a term employed during the Third Reich to describe a certain type of film that exhibited 'strong National Socialist tendencies'.⁵ In other words, without necessarily mentioning National Socialism, these films advocated various principles and themes identifiable with Nazism which the Propaganda Ministry wished to disseminate at intermittent periods. However, the following seven chapters include not only these *Staatsauftragsfilme* but a wide range of film propaganda from short cultural films to full-length documentaries and the famous *Deutsche Wochenschauen* (German newsreels). I have analyzed certain films which are representative of a particular theme of *Völkisch* thought rather than simply providing a list of film titles. As almost every film discussed is easily available for hire, readers have the opportunity of seeing them for themselves.

If such a policy of ideological indoctrination was to work effectively, it obviously required careful direction and coordination. I have therefore included a chapter on the history and organization of the Nazi film industry, for our understanding of the films cannot be divorced from the wider economic and social framework in which they were produced. But I must stress that this investigation still excludes the majority of 'escapist' films that were produced during the Third Reich principally for entertainment purposes.

In 1970 Professor Grenville pointed out in his inaugural lecture on 'Film as History':

It might appear curious that serious attention of historians has been drawn so late to a medium which after all has been around for more than half a

century, for a length of time in fact that coincides with some definitions of contemporary history. . . .⁶

Grenville concluded his lecture by declaring that 'film evidence is important . . . and if properly handled will illuminate and enrich the study of the twentieth century.'⁷ Professor Grenville's main contention was that historians had repeatedly failed to recognize the richness of film as a source of evidence. It would seem unnecessary to argue that film is an overwhelming cultural influence today, and has been since the 1920s at least, however it is only in recent years that historians have come to accept that film can be regarded as a reputable source in just the same way as the more traditional written documents.⁸

One of the many problems confronting the historian is to consider the ways in which films make their impact, and whether or not that influence is substantial enough to warrant serious consideration by the student of that period. Taking an example that is related to this work, one could ask whether films made during the Weimar Republic reveal anything of interest about the nature of that period. Siegfried Kracauer, in his *From Caligari to Hitler*, argues that German films of the 1920s foreshadowed the Nazi period and laid bare the psyche of the German nation.⁹ His premise is that films, whether fictional or documentary, can reveal the inner life of a people. By looking at the plots, characters and style of films, Kracauer believes that one can discover the inner consciousness of the people who made the film and a particular mode of thought and life that govern the inner soul of a nation. Kracauer's method of 'hidden history' is open to abuse and his conclusions are occasionally pursued to absurdity, but, even conceding some conceptual weaknesses, his research has proved a seminal work for both students of history and film and remains un superseded in its attempt to relate film and the society which created it.

Despite a few similar attempts in more recent years, much of the work that exists today in this field is undertaken by film critics, media sociologists and journalists. Historians as a profession have been slow to utilize the new source material. There is considerable need for qualified historians to grapple with the still unsolved problems of methodology and conceptualization before film archives yield their resources. The historian of the twentieth century has in his grasp a primary source material, which historians of other periods could not hope to possess but which is only now being understood and utilized. Only if historians are prepared to broaden the scope of their professional dialogue can they hope to discover ways of dealing with the problem of film as evidence. This work is offered as a contribution to that dialogue.

NOTES ON INTRODUCTION

1. For example, the very need of the Bolsheviks in the 1920s to create for themselves a new historical legitimacy led them to utilize the cinema as a propaganda weapon. Cf. Lenin's famous remark: 'The cinema is for us the most important instrument of all the arts.' Quoted in V.I. Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting* (New York, 1958), vol. II, p. 44.
2. *Völkischer Beobachter*, 20 May 1933. Goebbels repeated the claim a year later, *Völkischer Beobachter*, 9 February 1934.
3. Dr Hans Boberach of the Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, argues that they were excellent for this purpose. See *Meldungen aus dem Reich: Auswahl aus den geheimen Lageberichten des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1939–44* (Berlin, 1965).
4. On 17 April 1943, Goebbels wrote in his diary: 'The SD report is full of mischief. Its recent issues displease me deeply. It is entirely unpolitical and is sent to the various offices unsifted. . . . The nature of the SD report must be quickly changed.' L. Lochner (ed.), *The Goebbels Diaries* (London, 1948), p. 258.
5. An excellent account of *Tendenzfilme* can be found in G. Eckert, 'Filmintendenz und Tendenzfilm', *Wille und Macht, Führerorgan der National-sozialistischen Jugend*, Jahrgang 6, vol. 4 (15 November 1938), pp. 19–25.
6. J.A.S. Grenville, *Film as History: The Nature of Film Evidence* (Birmingham, 1971), p. 3
7. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
8. For an interesting collection of articles on this subject, see P. Smith (ed.), *The Historian and Film* (Cambridge, 1976). In 1981 *The Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* was established as a forum for current research in these fields.
9. S. Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, 1947).

I

THE HISTORY AND ORGANIZATION OF THE NAZI CINEMA

Let the world learn to look upon our films as a herald of the German way of life and a messenger of our ideology. There can be no art but that which has firm roots in our ideology.

Hans Steinbach (Press Chief in RFK), 19 March 1937

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST FILM BEFORE THE TAKEOVER OF POWER

THE film activities of the Nazi Party before 1933 can be described quite briefly. They were of little relevance to the film industry of the time, but they illustrate the Party's growing awareness of the importance of a well-coordinated organization, and an opportunism for learning and adapting new propaganda techniques.

The first official film produced by the NSDAP (*National-sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei*) was a reportage of the 1927 Nuremberg Party Rally and it was financed by the Party leadership from Munich.¹ This film consisted of a few amateurish shots of the rally, together with a number of SA (*Sturmabteilung der NSDAP*) parades, and from this year onwards every Party rally was filmed. Films produced at this time were not made for commercial distribution but were to be shown at closed Party gatherings. The knowledge that film was an important propaganda medium was present from the early beginnings of the Party. But at this stage they had little finance and even less experience in their propaganda department of the complexities of film.

From 1927 this situation began to change. Alfred Hugenberg, press baron and leader of the Nationalist Conservative Party (DNVP), had

bought the largest and most prestigious German film company, Ufa (*Universum-Film-Aktiengesellschaft*). From now on the political and social activities of the NSDAP were captured by Ufa newsreels (*Ufa-Tonwochen*) and shown to the German public on the large network of Ufa cinemas. Until this time, National Socialist propaganda had been characterized by the skilful use of rhetoric and controlled manipulation of meetings that depended for their success on the reliability of local organizations.

Towards the end of 1930, Joseph Goebbels, who had been steadily building up the Party following in Berlin since 1926, decided to establish the NSDAP-*Reichsfilmstelle* (RFS) in the capital for the purpose of distributing films throughout Germany.² However, the project proved to be optimistically premature, as the Nazi leadership was not convinced of its necessity and refused to supply the necessary capital. Instead *Gauleiters* (Regional Party leaders) were encouraged to make their own films of Party rallies, parades and so on and distribute them through their own local organizations. Eventually, in 1932, ten NSDAP *Landesfilmstellen* (LFS) were created. The LFS were responsible for the distribution of Party films while the NSDAP Film Service (*Filmamt*), which had its headquarters in Munich, was put in charge of film production. Goebbels was therefore still sharing Nazi film-making with his rival Gregor Strasser. In the Autumn of 1932, when Strasser's position in the party became an issue, Goebbels seized the opportunity to undermine his opponent and strengthen his own position by centralizing propaganda even further. Thus, by October 1932, all NSDAP film activities were finally transferred to Berlin under Goebbels's control.³

During this period the film industry in general was still recoiling from the continuing effects of the recession in world trade and the advent of sound films, which involved considerable expenditure at a time when total receipts were falling, companies were going bankrupt, and cinemas were changing hands at an alarming rate.⁴ The German film industry responded with the so-called *SPIO-Plan* of 1932. SPIO (*Spitzenorganisation der Deutschen Filmindustrie e.V.*) was the industry's main professional representative body, and its principle concern was to strike a satisfactory relationship between the production, distribution and exhibition sectors while at the same time retaining the traditional structure of the industry.⁵ Significantly, SPIO was dominated by the large combines (particularly Ufa), and it was no surprise that they should produce a plan that discriminated so blatantly against the German Cinema Owners' Association (*Reichsverband Deutscher Lichtspieltheater e.V.*), whom they accused of flooding the market with too many cinemas, price cutting and retaining a disproportionate share of total receipts. SPIO did not discount the possibility of securing state aid in order to protect sections of the industry by maintaining stable entrance prices and controlling programme planning.

The Cinema Owners' Association retorted by complaining, quite justifiably, that they were expected to exhibit films they were given regardless of their suitability or box-office appeal.

This conflict within the film industry placed the NSDAP in a rather delicate position. On the one hand the Nazis did not have to worry about making their own propaganda films at this stage, as Hugenberg had acquired Ufa to 'preserve it for the national outlook', which in practice meant producing overt nationalist films; but on the other hand, they had believed for some time that the cinema owners were an important element in their future operations. Indeed, the first success of the Nazi *Weltanschauung* in the film industry was the founding of the Nazi Film Theatre Cells (*NSDAP-Lichtspieltheaterzellen*). This professional organization with National Socialist aims was under the supervision of the RFS of the NSDAP in Berlin. Their greatest success was registered in Thuringia under the patronage of Wilhelm Frick, the Thuringian Minister of Education. Within a few months of the Nazi seizure of power, this group of cinema owners would undermine the German Cinema Owners' Association by getting their own leader, Adolf Engl, elected as head of the Association, thus immediately securing the Party's influence in all sectors of the industry.

There were also at this stage divisions within the NSDAP itself over the nature of the German film industry. The more radical elements called for immediate nationalization, while other sections were committed to reorganization within the traditional capitalist structure. The most radical suggestion was a manifesto published by the Berlin Nazis before the Prussian elections of 24 April 1932. What was required, they argued, was the production of genuine *Völkisch* films reflecting the true aspirations of the German people. In order to encourage such films, production needed to be centralized to control rising costs, and, by no longer pandering to the 'decadent' tastes of the international market, such films would be expected to break even solely on returns from the domestic market. The manifesto reflected both an antipathy towards 'modern art' and a degree of ignorance that would have found little favour in the *Filmwelt* except perhaps by the owners of the small independent cinemas, who might have been attracted by this document.⁶

In their desire to show solidarity with the small cinema owners, the Nazis felt compelled to show a token hostility to the two major film companies, Ufa and Tobis (Tobis Tonbild Syndikat AG). But towards the end of 1932 the LFS were unable to supply enough films. Moreover, even at this stage Goebbels realized that enthusiasm could not be maintained purely on a diet of Party propaganda, and so he arranged to supplement their film shows with Ufa *Kulturfilme*.⁷ These presented aspects of German cultural activity, often in a highly nationalistic manner. But this did not

prevent the NSDAP and the small cinema owners from launching a vitriolic assault on the proposed *SPIO-Plan* in the Party's own newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*.⁸ They declared that it was an attempt to create an Ufa-Tobis monopoly that would eventually eliminate the small, independent film-makers. The struggle between these elements, both within the industry and the NSDAP, and the questions they posed for the future of the German film industry would be answered by the new Nazi government in less than a year after assuming power.

GLEICHSCHALTUNG AND THE GERMAN FILM INDUSTRY

As early as the 1920s, the National Socialists had infiltrated their members into many spheres of public life.⁹ The entire organization of the Party, the division into administrative sectors, and the structure of leadership were built up as a state within a state. The Nazis were therefore well placed to take control of a film industry which had to a large extent prepared itself to be controlled.¹⁰ The *Gleichschaltung*¹¹ (coordination) of the German cinema was affected behind the scenes by a process of which the ordinary citizen was largely unaware. To achieve this end, a plethora of complex laws, decrees and intricate state machinery was instigated to prevent any form of nonconformity. Pursuing a policy that was to become traditional in the Third Reich, the Party organization was kept separate from state administration at both national and regional levels, while at the same time remaining closely linked.¹²

In the months following Hitler's appointment to Chancellor in January 1933, the divisions within the Party that had flared up in 1932 became an issue again. Certain organizations, such as the Nazi 'Trade Union', the *Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellen Organisation* (NSBO) and the Fighting League for German Culture (*Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur – KfdK*) put forward radical solutions to the film industry's problems, demanding centralization and the banning of all films that offended the *Völkische Weltanschauung*. Goebbels, on the other hand, was more realistic, and appreciated that the *Filmwelt* did not welcome these forces of Nazi extremism. He was unwilling to undertake an immediate nationalization of the industry, not only on ideological grounds, but for the pragmatic reasons that Hugenberg, who owned Ufa, was in the new cabinet as Minister of Economics, and that the Party in general depended on big business for its finances.

However, on 9 February 1933, at the German Cinema Owners' annual conference, the Nazi elements demanded that their leader Engl should be elected to the Association's board. Their argument that the small cinema owners faced bankruptcy in the face of unfair competition from the large combines seemed to be confirmed when the *SPIO-Plan* was published

nine days later.¹³ On 18 March, the entire board of the Cinema Owners' Association resigned, thus giving Engl and the NSDAP complete control. They responded by demanding that all cinema owners express unconditional loyalty to Engl's leadership within two weeks.¹⁴

Cinema owners were not the only sector of the industry to be effectively 'coordinated' in this manner; throughout March and April, the NSBO had been active in all spheres of film production – from cameramen to film actors and composers. When the Nazis banned all trade unions in early May, the industry's 'official' trade union, DACHO (*Dach-Organisation der Filmschaffenden Deutschlands e.V.*), was dissolved and absorbed initially into the NSBO,¹⁵ which was itself transferred automatically to the German Labour Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*), the only permissible trade union. DACHO therefore had little chance to prevent its own dissolution, though there is no evidence of any united stand being organized.

It was during these months that Goebbels was making final plans for a Propaganda Ministry that would assume control over all aspects of mass communication. However, because Goebbels was working on NSDAP propaganda for the forthcoming election on 5 March, it was decided to delay announcing the creation of this new Ministry until after the Nazis' success was guaranteed.¹⁶ Eventually Goebbels was appointed Reich Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda (*Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda – RMVP*) by Presidential decree on 13 March.¹⁷ In June Hitler was to define the scope of the RMVP according to which the new Minister would be responsible for 'all tasks of spiritual direction of the nation'.¹⁸ Not only did this vague directive give Goebbels room to manoeuvre against the more radical elements within the Party, it also gave the mark of legality to what was soon to be the Ministry's complete control of all that mattered most in the functioning of the mass media in the Third Reich.

The film industry presented a number of structural, economic, and artistic problems for the builders of the new German society. Corresponding to its importance as a medium of propaganda, film was immediately reorganized after the takeover of power. The Propaganda Ministry was already established when a provisional Reich Film Chamber (*Reichsfilmkammer – RFK*) was set up on 14 July 1933.¹⁹

Shortly afterwards, on 22 September 1933, Goebbels decided to extend the idea to the whole of German life and form the Reich Chamber of Culture (*Reichskulturkammer – RKK*).²⁰ The RFK became one of the seven Chambers (*Kammern*) which made up the RKK, the others being literature, theatre, music, fine arts, press and radio.

THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF THE *REICHSFILMKAMMER*

The creation of the *Reichsfilmkammer* is an excellent example of the process of coordination in that it allowed the RMVP to exert its control over both film-makers and the film industry as a whole. As Propaganda Minister, Goebbels acted as President of the seven Chambers, and through him their jurisdiction spread down to both the nation's regional administrations (*Länder*) and the Party's own specifically political areas (*Gaue*). This not only facilitated the RMVP's control over individual Chambers but, equally importantly, it allowed the Ministry to coordinate its propaganda campaigns.

The structure of the RFK was scarcely changed after it had been incorporated into the Reich Chamber of Culture (RKK). Its head and all-responsible President was subordinate only to the President of the RKK, that is, the Propaganda Minister. The first President of the RFK was Dr Fritz Scheuermann, a financial expert who had been involved in secret plans to implement the recommendations of the *SPIO-Plan* that had been merged with the RFK in July. Scheuermann was assisted by a Vice-President, Arnold Räter, who was also head of the Film Office of the NSDAP Propaganda Office. There was an Advisory Council (*Präsidentialrat*) consisting of financial experts from the RMVP and the banks; and specialist advisory councils taken from the individual *Fachgruppen*, as the former SPIO elements were now called.²¹ The various sections of the industry were grouped together into ten departments.

These ten departments controlled all film activities in Germany. The centralization, however, did not lead to what the Propaganda Minister claimed – the harmonization of all branches of the industry – but it did harm the substance of the German film by limiting personal and economic initiative and artistic freedom.

It must also be remembered that the *Filmwelt* greeted the Nazis with some misgivings. The industry was not entirely convinced that it could expect much constructive assistance from the new regime. To offset these fears and also to gain control over film finance, a *Filmkreditbank* (FKB) was established. It was announced on 1 June 1933 as a provider of credit and help for a crisis-ridden film economy. In his address to film-makers on 19 May Goebbels had already hinted that the Nazis were about to propose a new means of finance for the industry.²² The idea of a *Filmkreditbank* had originally been proposed in the *SPIO-Plan* with the aim of encouraging independent production by lending money to approved film-makers at highly competitive rates. In practice, the FKB was to create the beginnings of the National Socialists' disastrous film policy and to result in the dependence of the private film producers on the Nazi state.

However, at the time, the FKB was greeted with great enthusiasm from all sides of the film industry. The Nazis' popularity was further enhanced a week later when they reduced the entertainment tax on the average earnings of films from 11.5 per cent to 8 per cent.²³

The *Filmkreditbank* took the form of a private, limited-liability company formed out of the *Reichskreditgesellschaft*, SPIO (acting as a cover for the RFK), the Commerzbank, Deutsche Bank (with substantial interests in Ufa) and the Dresdner Bank (with interests in Tobis). However, within a year the banks transferred their shares to the RFK, and on Goebbels's personal initiative the President of the latter became the *Filmkreditbank's* chairman.²⁴

The FKB functioned to all intents and purposes as a normal commercial undertaking (as envisaged in the original *SPIO-Plan*) except that it was not expected to make large profits. By 1936 the *Filmkreditbank* had actually made a profit of just over RM 9,000,²⁵ which appeared to substantiate this claim. The procedure for securing finance from the Bank was that a producer had to show that he could raise 30 per cent of the production costs as well as convincing the FKB that the film stood a good chance of making a profit. The film then became the property of the Bank until the loan was repaid. Thus, private finance was excluded from all freedom of credit and opportunities for profit. Within a short time this financial body would also become an important means of securing both economic and political conformity. The Bank, acting on behalf of the government, could refuse all credit at the pre-production stage until a film reflected the wishes of the new regime. Significantly, there is no evidence to suggest that the film industry was unwilling to accept this form of self-censorship.

Originally the FKB was inaugurated to assist the small independent producer. However, by 1936 it was financing over 73 per cent of all German feature films, dealing almost exclusively with distributors who could guarantee that a film would be shown nationwide.²⁶ The result was that the smaller companies' share of the market continued to decline as the process of concentration was relentlessly increased. This was a further step towards creating dependence and establishing a state monopoly in order to destroy any form of independent initiative.

Apart from regulating the financing of films, one of the main purposes of establishing the *Reichsfilmkammer* was the removal of Jews and other *entartete Künstler* (degenerate artists) from German cultural life, since only racially 'pure' Germans could become members. Whoever wished to participate in any aspect of film production was forced to become a member of the RFK. Goebbels was, however, given the power to issue exemptions to these conditions (*Sondergenehmigungen*) should he require to do so.²⁷ By 1936, the *Kulturpolitische Abteilung* of the NSDAP film

department had published its new illustrated magazine, *Der deutsche Film*. Its main aim was to spread the Party policy relating to the film industry through consciously anti-Semitic film propaganda. Statistics were published in film magazines and books which purported to expose an overwhelming Jewish influence in film production. Curt Belling, a virulent Nazi sympathizer, purported to show the situation on the eve of the Nazi seizure of power: 70 per cent of all scripts were written by Jews; almost 50 per cent of directors working in Germany were Jewish; and 70 per cent of all production companies were owned by Jews.²⁸ Although the German film industry had been heavily dependent on Jewish artists and executives, these figures were a gross exaggeration. However, because Nazi propaganda identified Jewish influence with the downfall of German culture, it was only to be expected that they would use the struggle in the film industry to stir up racial hatred. The man entrusted by Goebbels with the *Entjudung* (removal of Jews) was Hans Hinkel, who in May 1935 was given overall responsibility for all matters relating to RKK personnel policy. Hinkel brought about a radicalization of the RKK policy. Eventually, by arranging for the Jews to have their own separate cultural organization, Hinkel justified the total elimination of Jews from German cultural life.²⁹ Not surprisingly, the result of such policies was the emigration of all those who either could not or would not submit to these conditions. The loss of talent was naturally severe, but the Nazis were able to retain the services of many highly qualified technical and artistic staff, and a veritable reservoir of talented actors.

On 28 March 1933, only two months after Hitler became Chancellor, Goebbels introduced himself to the *Filmwelt* at a SPIO-DACHO function at the Kaiserhof. Goebbels presented himself as an inveterate film addict (which he was) and showed considerable ingenuity in mitigating many of the industry's fears caused by the already extensive exodus. He spoke about the attitude of the government to films and the industry which produced them. Films, he said, were to have an important place in the culture of the new Germany.³⁰

Goebbels went on to mention four films that had made a lasting impression on him. They were *Battleship Potemkin*, *Anna Karenina*, *Die Nibelungen* and *Der Rebell*. All films, Goebbels argued, had a potential power to influence people's beliefs and hence their behaviour. However, the German cinema was in a state of spiritual crisis which 'will continue until we are courageous enough to radically reform German films'. He assured his audience that having gained power, 'we shall not leave . . . the film industry therefore has every reason to feel secure'. Of *Battleship Potemkin*, Goebbels remarked:

This is a marvellous film without equal in the cinema. The reason is its power of conviction. Anyone who had no firm political conviction could become a

Bolshevik after seeing the film. It shows very clearly that a work of art can be tendentious, and even the worst kind of ideas can be propagated, if this is done through the medium of an outstanding work of art.

Goebbels's speech presumably explains why the Nazis had continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s to disrupt screenings of the film in German cinemas. However, Goebbels warned film-makers that if they wished to produce National Socialist films 'they must capture the spirit of the time'. What was not required in these films was 'parade-ground marching and the blowing of trumpets'. In calling for the industry's cooperation in this new venture Goebbels concluded by stating that with this new conviction, 'a new moral ethos will arise', allowing it to 'be said of German films, as in other fields, "Germany leads the world!"'

The full text of the speech was not published until 1936, although a shortened, carefully censored version was published in the *Völkischer Beobachter*.³¹ By omitting his promises to retain artistic freedom and his strictures against merely showing parades and trumpets, the published version reported a speech calculated to appeal to the rank-and-file Party member. Nothing illustrates more vividly the cynical opportunism with which Goebbels exercised his authority: on the one hand the published speech would appease the more radical elements in the Party who were calling for wholesale changes in the film industry; and yet at the same time he had managed to comfort the film industry and lure them into a false sense of security by confidentially imparting his 'true' intentions, which he could not afford to make public.

FILM LEGISLATION: THE REICH CINEMA LAW 1934

To consolidate his position, Goebbels still desired more power than he had hitherto secured through the RKK legislation. He also needed some form of legal confirmation to be able to supervise films in the early stages of production. Goebbels settled both these issues by creating a revised version of the Reich Cinema Law (*Reichslichtspielgesetz*), which became law on 16 February 1934 after long and careful preparation. This decree attempted to create a new 'positive' censorship by which the State undertook to encourage 'good' films instead of merely discouraging 'bad' ones. The *Völkischer Beobachter* commented:

Hitherto film censorship has been negative. Hereafter, the State will assume complete responsibility for the creation of films. Only by intensive advice and supervision can films running contrary to the spirit of the times be kept off the screen.³²

The new Cinema Law saw three ways of achieving this positive censorship: a compulsory script censorship, an increase in the number of

provisions under which the Censorship Office (*Filmprüfstelle*) might ban a film, and a greatly enlarged system of distinction marks (*Prädikate*).

The most significant innovation of the new Cinema Law was the institution of a pre-censor (*Vorzensor*) undertaken by an RMVP official called the Reich Film Director (*Reichsfilm-dramaturg*). The duties of the Dramaturg, who was appointed directly by the Propaganda Minister, were laid down in paragraphs 1–3 of the film law.³³ The first *Reichsfilm-dramaturg* was a critic, Willi Krause, a former journalist for Goebbels's newspaper *Der Angriff* and a reliable member of the NSDAP. If a producer wished to make a film, he had first to submit a 'treatment' (synopsis) to the *Dramaturg*. If this was passed, the full scenario could be written, and this would have to be approved before shooting could begin. In most cases the *Dramaturg* could supervise every stage of production. The orders issued and the changes suggested by him were binding. As the representative of the RMVP, he could even interfere with the censorship exercised by the Censorship Office (*Prüfstelle*) in Berlin.

After the 1934 Cinema Law had been in operation for just ten months, the law was changed to make the submission of scripts optional instead of compulsory.³⁴ The day after the new law was announced, however, the President of the RKK explained that this applied only to scripts, and that 'treatments' still had to be submitted to the Reich Film Director. If he considered the film 'worthy of encouragement', the script could then be submitted to him and he would then arrange for the film to be financed by the *Filmkreditbank*.

The new film legislation greatly extended the powers of censorship, which it prescribed in some detail. It replaced the original Law of 12 May 1920, which had regulated films during the Weimar Republic.³⁵ Although Weimar censorship was initially a democratic one – 'films may not be withheld out of political, social, religious, ethical or ideological tendencies' – the intervention of the censor was permitted when 'a film endangers public order and safety . . . or endangers the German image or the country's relationship with foreign states'. The examination of films was delegated to two Censorship Offices (*Prüfstellen*) in Berlin and Munich. Each office had two chairmen who examined films with the aid of four assessors drawn from the teaching and legal professions and the film industry itself. However, the 1934 Law joined the two *Prüfstellen* together and incorporated them as a subsidiary office of the RMVP. The procedure by which the Censorship Office reached its decisions was also revised. Under the 1920 Law, decisions were arrived at by means of a majority vote, and if a film was banned its producer could appeal to the Supreme Censorship Office (*Oberprüfstelle*). After 1934 the power to decide whether or not a film should be exhibited rested entirely with the chairman.

According to Paragraph 4 of the 1934 Cinema Law, all kinds of films were to be submitted to the censor. Public and private screenings were made equal in law. Even film advertising in the cinemas was censored. For each print of a film, a censorship card had to be issued which contained the official report on the film together with an embossed stamp of the German Eagle. All film stills had to be embossed in a similar way before they could be released for publicity purposes. In all matters concerning censorship, the Propaganda Minister had the right of intervention. He could either appeal to the *Oberprüfstelle* or, by circumventing the *Prüfstelle*, he could forbid the release of various films directly. In the Second Amendment to the Cinema Law of 28 June 1935, Goebbels was given extra powers to ban any film without reference to the *Prüfstelle* if he felt it was in the public's interest. Not only was the entire censorship apparatus centralized in Berlin, but the previous rights of local governments to request a re-examination of films was now the exclusive prerogative of the RMVP.

In addition to direct censorship, the film industry depended on a system of distinction marks (*Prädikat*), which was really a form of negative taxation. As film allegedly improved, the range of the *Prädikat* system was extended. Previously, the awarding of these distinction marks had been the responsibility of the Chamber for Film Evaluation (*Kammer für Filmwertung*) which, although attached to the Central Institute of Education (*Zentralinstitut für Erziehung und Unterricht*), was independent of the Censorship Office. However, the new legislation gave complete responsibility for awarding these *Prädikate* to the RMVP *Prüfstelle*. Before 1933 the distribution of *Prädikate* was an honour and an opportunity to gain, according to the degree of the distinction mark, tax reductions, but now every film had to obtain a *Prädikat* not only to benefit from tax reductions but to be allowed to be exhibited at all. Films without these distinction marks needed special permission to be shown. A further incentive was that producers with a *Prädikat* now received an extra share of the film's profits. By 1939, the law provided for the following distinction marks:³⁶

- (a) Politically and artistically especially valuable (awarded from 1933) (*Staatspolitisch wertvoll und künstlerisch besonders wertvoll*)
- (b) Politically especially valuable, 1933 (*Staatspolitisch besonders wertvoll*)
- (c) Artistically especially valuable, 1933 (*Künstlerisch besonders wertvoll*)
- (d) Politically valuable, 1933 (*Staatspolitisch wertvoll*)
- (e) Artistically valuable, 1933 (*Künstlerisch wertvoll*)
- (f) Culturally valuable, 1933 (*Kulturell wertvoll*)
- (g) Valuable for Youth, 1938 (*Jugendwert*)
- (h) Nationally valuable, 1939 (*Volkstümlich wertvoll*)
- (i) Film of the Nation, 1939 (*Film der Nation*)

- (j) Instructional, 1920 (*Lehrfilm*)
- (k) National education, 1924 (*Volksbildend*).

The highest distinction mark (a) meant that the entire programme would be exempt from entertainment tax, while the lower *Prädikate* reduced the tax proportionate to their value. Film of the Nation (*Film der Nation*) and Valuable for Youth (*Jugendwert*) differed from the others in that they carried no tax relief. However, these were special awards that greatly enhanced a film's status. Furthermore, they were decisive for selection in schools and Nazi youth organizations. After 1938 no cinema owner was allowed to refuse to exhibit a film with a political distinction mark if a distributor offered one.³⁷

The *Prädikate* system not only produced certain financial advantages but also helped to establish the appropriate expectations and responses on the part of cinema audiences. These *Prädikate* were naturally a key to the political and propaganda content in the description of films. 'Politically valuable' was clearly a film which completely reflected the aims of the NSDAP. This title was not only given to documentaries like *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will*) but also to feature films with a political message such as *Ich klage an* (*I Accuse*). The combination of 'politically and artistically especially valuable' signified a special quality and credibility. The distinction marks 'artistically valuable' were understood in the sense of cultural propaganda and were given only to prestige films and those reserved for export.

Under the pretence of discarding all the old hypocrisies surrounding the film industry, the Cinema Law assumed powers which in fact only served to create the formation of a film monopoly controlled by the Party and the State. The result was the adjusting of cinema terminology to fit the ideas of National Socialism, both in terms of the language used in Nazi films and the phrasing of the film law which was kept as ambiguous as possible so that it could be applied according to the wishes of the moment and the official viewpoint.³⁸ The producer was informed of the current aims of the government by having his particular film project checked by both the *Filmkreditbank* and the *Reichsfilm dramaturg*. It will be seen during the course of this book that a film was often passed by the Censorship Office only one or two days before its première. This suggests that within a short period of time legal censorship became a mere formality, the real censorship being done elsewhere at an earlier stage in the process of the film's production.

When discussing the implementation of the Nazi Cinema Law, it is important to consider the attempts to control film criticism at this time. It is surprising to discover that Goebbels's Ministry did not start to formulate a specific policy regarding film critics until the end of 1935 when Dr Hans Schmidt-Leonhardt, chief of the RMVP's Legal Division,