## Introduction

Few political operators in the modern world have had as high a regard for propaganda as the German National Socialists. Certainly the Nazis regarded themselves as unrivalled masters of the art of modern political propaganda, and this image was perpetuated by their friends and enemies before, during and long after the period in which they dominated the German and European political landscape. And when Britons of a certain age hear the word 'propaganda', the name which often comes to mind is 'Lord Haw-Haw', the English voice of wartime Germany, the laughable Nazi traitor, who supposedly kept everyone amused during the blackout with his ridiculous propaganda broadcasts from Germany. 'Lord Haw-Haw' of course was merely a gimicky nickname for German wireless broadcasts in English dreamt up by a tabloid journalist in 1939 to poke fun at the humourless Germans at a stage of the war when the two sides threw insults at one another but not much else. The nickname caught on, and one publicity-loving fascist exile from England, William Joyce, happily let it catch on to him. It was Joyce's good luck and ultimately his misfortune that almost by chance he was given the opportunity to display his particular talents for vituperation and his obsessive anti-Semitism on a world-wide stage in historical circumstances in which political propaganda, and especially radio propaganda, had assumed an extraordinarily heightened significance. The 'twenty years' crisis' had exploded into a European and then a global war of terrifying proportions and possibilities, a war in which it seemed for a time that the 'totalitarians' - the Nazis, the Fascists and the Soviets, with their machine-men armies and blaring propagandists, had the tide of history upon their side. These were the circumstances which lifted William Joyce from the margins of political fanaticism and obscurity in Britain, and transformed him into a world-wide propaganda celebrity whose fate was inexorably linked with the fate of regime which he served so assiduously.

And of course, in the end it was Joyce's fame which was his undoing. Captured by the British in 1945, and after a series of high-profile trials and unsuccessful appeals, he was hanged as a traitor in 1946, in spite of the fact that he wasn't British and never had been. No doubt the quite widespread and even guilty feeling in Britain that Joyce was hanged more for the sake of vengeance than for the sake of justice has contributed to the longevity of the myths which surround him. And it is at least arguable that Joyce and his one-time colleague John Amery, also executed for broadcasting from Germany, were scapegoats whose deaths performed a sort of catharsis for many Britons. Both men, and large numbers of the lesser known British individuals who worked with them,

held political views which most people today rightly find reprehensible. Nevertheless, sixty or seventy years ago their views were widely held to a greater or lesser extent throughout Europe. So what had these men done to deserve execution, while others escaped whose guilt as traitors was much more real? What message had they broadcast over the ether from Germany at Britain, to what purpose, with what effect? What lessons can historians learn about Nazi Germany from the story of her anti-British wireless propaganda campaign? As important, what lessons can they learn about Britain and the British in the Second World War, a conflict which they continue to regard as their finest hour? These are the questions to be addressed here.

To my knowledge, this book represents the first monograph devoted exclusively to the analysis of the Nazis' radio war effort against the United Kingdom. The task is to present the propaganda in context, to determine the purpose or purposes which lay behind it, to identify the changing patterns, themes, styles and techniques over the whole period of the war, and to assess the impact upon the target audience and upon its morale. The issue of morale and its connection with the receptivity of the audience is crucial. For in a sense, propaganda operates like a gas introduced deliberately into a particular environment. But it is a gas which depends for its potency upon the presence of suitably reactive elements in the atmosphere, and in the weakness or absence of counteracting material. Otherwise, it is harmless and inert. In the end, the British failed to succumb to the stupefying effects of Nazi propaganda, and they traditionally congratulate themselves upon the national unity which immunised them against it. It will be argued here that this traditional view disguises a more complex, less appealing reality.