

# Radio and soft diplomacy. German presence in Argentine radio. 1934-1943

## Radio y diplomacia suave. Presencia alemana en radios argentinas. 1934-1943

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### Abstract

This article examines the German presence in Argentine radio broadcasting between 1934 and 1943 as a form of cultural diplomacy and symbolic propaganda of the Third Reich. Based on the analysis of press, diplomatic, and legislative sources, it reconstructs the communication strategies of the German government and their articulation with local radio stations, particularly Radio Prieto, which served as a site for Germany's technical and cultural projection in the country. The study shows how this form of "soft diplomacy" operated within a field of tensions in which its effectiveness depended on local intermediaries, the commercial interests of radio broadcasting, and the degree of tolerance of an Argentine state committed to neutrality.

*Keywords:* Argentine radio broadcasting; Cultural diplomacy; Nazi propaganda; World War II.

### Resumen

Este artículo examina la presencia alemana en la radiofonía argentina entre 1934 y 1943 como una forma de diplomacia cultural y propaganda simbólica del Tercer Reich. A partir del análisis de fuentes periodísticas, diplomáticas y legislativas se reconstruyen las estrategias de comunicación del gobierno alemán y su articulación con emisoras locales, haciendo foco en Radio Prieto, que funcionó como un espacio de proyección técnica y cultural de Alemania en el país. La investigación muestra cómo la "diplomacia suave" operó en un campo de tensiones en el que su eficacia dependió de intermediarios locales, de los intereses comerciales de la radio y del margen de tolerancia de un Estado argentino comprometido con la neutralidad.

*Palabras clave:* Radiofonía argentina; Diplomacia cultural, Propaganda nazi; Segunda Guerra Mundial.

## Introduction

The German presence in the Argentine radio space during the 1930s manifested itself in multiple ways, in a fragmented manner and mediated by local interests.

The radio landscape in Argentina was heterogeneous and pluralistic. The radio system had been built on an open model, following the North American model. By the 1930s, one of the most prominent stations was Radio Belgrano with a network of repeaters. By 1935, Radio El Mundo had been inaugurated, with a radio system similar to the BBC in London, and there were also medium-sized stations, such as Radio Splendid, which were equally competitive (Matallana, 2006).

Studies on radio broadcasting have focused on its constitution, social presence, and political aspects (Lindemboin, 2018), but the analysis of the medium's use as a soft-diplomacy strategy remains a relatively unexplored field. By "soft diplomacy," we understand a foreign policy strategy that seeks to influence the perceptions and cultural frameworks of other countries through symbolic means. In this sense, this policy was structured to build cultural affinities and political legitimacy in Latin America, although its implementation revealed limitations and misunderstandings among both cultural managers and target audiences.

The purpose of this article is to analyze how German propaganda and cultural diplomacy were expressed in Argentine radio broadcasting between 1934 and 1943, through various stations and transmission methods, with special attention to the case of Radio Prieto, which functioned as a space for the symbolic and technical dissemination of the ideology of the Third Reich. Based on an examination of journalistic, diplomatic, and legislative sources, the study seeks to reconstruct the German government's communication strategies, evaluate their reception in the local context, and explore the Argentine authorities' response to the expansion of these influences in the country in a framework of political neutrality and state control over the media.

One text that has contributed to the analysis of the impact of Nazism on Argentine society before 1939 is Ronald Newton's *The Fourth Side of the Triangle* (1995), in which he attempts to demystify the idea of deep Nazi penetration in the country. Based on rigorous research in international archives and testimonies from captured Nazi agents, Newton reconstructs the landscape of the 1930s and shows that the German-Argentine community experienced strong internal tensions between its loyalty to the Argentine government and the pressures of the Third Reich. His study demonstrates that the German community's support for Nazi ideology was fragmented and that positions of rejection coexisted with minority sectors sympathetic to the regime. The author concludes that the influence of Nazism was more political than ideological and was fully controlled by the State before the outbreak of World War II. While some nationalist groups showed sympathy for German order and power, Nazism had little doctrinal resonance in Argentine society. Nevertheless, the state's response to these influences was not uniform.

During the presidency of Roberto Ortiz (1938–1940), measures were implemented to strengthen political and cultural control, which helped neutralize attempts at ideological penetration by Nazism in a context of growing international tension that would ultimately lead to the declaration of war. Under the government of Ramón Castillo (1940–1943), however, the policy of neutrality took on more ambiguous characteristics, modifying relations with the powers in conflict and establishing a different framework for foreign diplomatic and propaganda strategies (López, 2018).

Studies on German propaganda, such as Laura Monacci's (2008), analyze how National Socialism organized itself in Argentina during the 1930s. Her research shows that it found support in sectors of the German-Argentine community affected by the economic and social crisis fo-



Following World War I, which fostered the Nazification of cultural and educational institutions. In contrast, Argentine society did not adopt National Socialist ideology as a doctrinal system, but it did show partial affinities with certain elements—such as anti-communism, order, and discipline—that were not exclusive to Nazism and instead circulated within a broader ideological repertoire during that period. Monacci underscores the tension between the German state and the Nazi Party. While the embassy prioritized economic interests and diplomatic relations, the local NSDAP and Goebbels's Ministry of Propaganda promoted ideological mobilization. Through events such as the Anschluss rally at Luna Park (in 1938), the article demonstrates how Nazism adapted its totalitarian strategies to the Argentine context, combining state, party, and cultural propaganda to sustain its symbolic influence.

Among the studies addressing these topics, Gisela Cramer's stands out. She provides a fundamental analysis of the German government's influence on radio, noting that its strategy to influence public opinion in Argentina by focusing on the media was largely unsuccessful. Her research demonstrates that German shortwave efforts reached a limited audience and were outperformed by Allied broadcasts, especially those from the United States and Great Britain. Ultimately, the German strategy of collaborating with small local stations had a marginal impact, as the major radio networks aligned themselves with the Allies and faced increasing Argentine government censorship.

This limited the influence of both sides (Cramer, 2008). Likewise, Pia Clemens's analysis (2020) coincides with the writings of Cramer and Newton, noting that Nazi radio propaganda in Argentina had a very limited reach. From 1934 onward, Germany broadcast in Spanish and Portuguese via shortwave radio to Latin America, initially with musical programs and later with educational ones, seeking to present a positive image of the Reich and discredit the United States through messages extolling Argentine neutrality from 1939 onwards.

Another way to analyze the German presence in the media is through the lens of cultural diplomacy. Galván and Moguillansky (2020) study the circulation of Nazi propaganda films in Buenos Aires before World War II and show how Hitler's regime used the UFA film company as an instrument of ideological influence in Latin America (Romero and Guelbert, 2017). In Argentina during the 1930s, film became an effective means of disseminating values such as discipline and unity. Although the market was dominated by American productions, German films achieved some relevance—accounting for approximately 5% of releases—until the war and Allied boycotts drastically reduced their presence.

Broadcasting in Latin America played a central role in Nazi propaganda efforts. By early 1934, German transmissions to the region were underway, revealing a project aimed at influencing public opinion. This was complemented by the cooperation of Spanish, Italian, and Japanese media, which demonstrates a transnational strategy aimed at expanding the dissemination of propaganda through various channels, among them, radio (Kris, 1942, p. 59).

German news services, such as the Transocean News Service, had some difficulty establishing credibility in the region, especially given the changing attitudes toward National Socialism. Overall, broadcasting was part of a broader strategy aimed at promoting Nazi ideology and influencing public opinion in Argentina and other Latin American countries (Kris, 1942).

Among the research advancing on the implementation of a German identity through different strategies, Friedmann (2019; 2022) analyzes the cultural, social, and propaganda mechanisms of National Socialism in Argentina, aimed at instilling a sense of *Volksgemeinschaft*, or people's community, among German speakers. His analysis shows how the local party and its organizations integrated a diverse group of immigrants through symbolic celebrations and cultural activities, reinforcing a transnational German identity that also facilitated their partial integration into Argentine society. His studies delve into how the National Socialists in Argen-



tina developed a series of mechanisms aimed at constructing a sense of collective belonging among German-speaking sectors by appealing to the idea of an organic and culturally cohesive community (Friedmann, 2024).

Finally, Gabriela Jäkel (2016) examines state control policies towards migrants of German origin during the Second World War, highlighting the work of the Special Investigating Commission of Anti-Argentine Activities (CEIAA), created in 1941 to investigate Nazi activism in cultural and educational spheres.

The article is organized into four sections. First, it presents the context of Argentine radio broadcasting in the 1930s and the conceptual framework of soft diplomacy. Second, it analyzes the German presence in the local radio system, with particular attention to the case of Radio Prieto. Next, it examines the role of shortwave broadcasts and transnational broadcasting networks, which are fundamental to understanding the expansion of the communication strategy. Finally, it analyzes the actions of the Commission for the Investigation of Anti-Argentine Activities and the strengthening of state control over radio.

## The Radio System in Argentina and the German Presence

In analyzing German propaganda, Gisela Cramer (2008) points out that it sought to convince listeners of the military, economic, and cultural superiority of the Third Reich. Its narrative in Latin America combined an anti-Allied warning—presenting the region as a victim of U.S. imperialism—with praise for Argentine neutrality, extolled as a sign of independence. On the cultural front, it used popular and classical music to attract Latin American audiences, such as the 1934 broadcast from Berlin of a Beethoven symphony, an example of how Germany subtly and symbolically disseminated its cultural prestige.

In the Argentine context, where around 1936 there were 19 radio stations nationwide and at least three networks with repeater systems covering much of the country, Radio Prieto stood out from the rest. (Matallana, 2006; Radiolandia, 1936). While most offered varied programming without a sustained international focus, Prieto established itself as a space where German culture and politics were prominent. The regularity of its broadcasts from Berlin, programs like “La Hora Alemana” (The German Hour), and its coverage of the 1936 Olympic Games demonstrate its active role in promoting German culture. Founded in 1925 by Teodoro Prieto and Alfredo Schroeder, the station emerged from a company that sold radio equipment and evolved into a medium with technical and cultural ties to Europe (Matallana, 2006).

Alfredo Schroeder, born in the province of Buenos Aires and of German descent, began his career at the Argentine Light Company after finishing high school. In 1923, he partnered with Enrique Telémaco Prieto to import radio components, which soon led to the founding of Radio Prieto. According to Robert Claxton, during the 1930s, they both made several trips to Europe, where they forged strategic agreements to develop radio broadcasting in Argentina. From the 1940s onward, Schroeder diversified his investments into the real estate and film sectors: he was the main shareholder of Emelco Industrial y Comercial and Cine Propaganda, and also served on the board of Establecimientos Filmadores Argentinos (Claxton, 2007). In this sense, they were simply adopting similar diversification strategies developed by other entrepreneurs in the sector, such as Jaime Yankelevich at Radio Belgrano, although, in the case of Radio Prieto, these strategies were on a smaller scale than those of the large broadcasters (Matallana, 2014).

Some aspects of his personal profile and cultural interests are evident in an interview published by Radiolandia in May 1937, following the tragic accident of the German airship Hindenburg. Schröder, who had traveled on the airship twice—in 1934 and 1936—evoked those ex-



periences as examples of modernity and comfort. He remembered Captain Max Pruss and his personal relationship with Hugo Eckener and Captain Lehmann, central figures in the history of German aviation. In the interview, he clearly expressed his admiration for German technological advancements. The tragedy, he noted, was felt at Radio Prieto as a personal loss, due to the station's close ties to the history of airships: they had not only broadcast live the arrival of the Graf Zeppelin under Eckener's command but were already preparing special coverage for the Hindenburg's upcoming arrival in Argentina (Radiolandia, 1937).

In the early 1930s, the station was one of the most important broadcasters, both in terms of its artists and broadcast hours. In 1933, it acquired a powerful German transmitter, which it installed in the city of Remedios de Escalada, and also began operating a station in Paraguay under the same name. Although on a modest scale, the station celebrated its technological acquisitions at a time when Jaime Yankelevich's radio station dominated the broadcasting market. For example, the specialized press noted: "We can share some details about this transmitter: it is a purely Paraguayan-made piece, built by the subsidiary of S.A. Radio Prieto, B.T.W. (Bard-Tagliaferro, Windus)." With a power of 30 kilowatts and an antenna of 128 meters, it hoped to make a mark on transmissions" (Antenna, 1934; Matallana, 2014; Martínez-Almudevar, 2023).

As the quality of its equipment improved, it was able to transmit to Europe and receive broadcasts from Berlin and other German cities. A review of programming in previous years and the relationship between the stations reveals a greater formal presence of content linked to Germany. In December 1933, via the Transocean International agency, it transmitted a greeting from Rudolf Hess, Reich Minister, addressed to Germans residing in Argentina, which demonstrates the use of radio as an instrument of international political propaganda, especially aimed at foreign communities (Caras y Caretas, 1934).

From that moment on, a program called "The German Hour," financed by the Transocean agency, aired Monday through Saturday at 10:00 AM and Sunday at 9:00 AM. It was a newsletter for the German community, featuring news and cultural commentary.

It was common for the German ambassador, Edmund von Thermann, to be present at these broadcasts. In 1934, for example, a broadcast was made with him and the Buenos Aires fire chief, who, along with the Federal Police band, had given a performance in honor of the German police, which was rebroadcast to Berlin. The following year, in a conference broadcast by LR8 Radio Paris, the ambassador highlighted the complementary potential of the German and Argentine economies, presenting the bilateral relationship as an example of natural cooperation. According to him, "Germany, with the countless varieties of its production, can supply Argentina with all manufactured goods, so that these two countries seem from the outset destined for close economic collaboration and an intense and profitable exchange" (Musacchio, 2006). This vision reflected a diplomatic and economic strategy consistent with German policy in the 1930s: to foster intensive bilateral trade that would strengthen economic ties with neutral or allied countries.

Taken together, these references allow us to observe how, in practice, radio operated in a triple dimension: as a vehicle for political propaganda, articulating messages aligned with political-state projects; as a scenario for cultural legitimation by establishing a repertoire of programming, media formats, and messages; and as a means of social cohesion by constructing an imagined audience, based on simultaneous and shared experience (Matallana, 2006).

The year 1936 was pivotal for German culture and sport, thanks to the Olympic Games. That year, a group of Argentinians traveled to Germany with the support of the Argentinian-German Cultural Institution and various entities within the Reich. During their journey, the Reich Radio Broadcasting Service allowed them to send radio messages to Argentina from

cities such as Nuremberg, Dresden, and Berlin (Caras y Caretas, 1936a). In February, Radio Prieto announced Spanish-language broadcasts of the Garmisch-Partenkirchen Winter Olympic Games, with exclusive coverage of the ceremonies and competitions. For this purpose, Alfredo Schröder traveled to Berlin along with Enrique Schmidt and the journalist Alfredo Arostegui, known as “the Olympic commentator,” thus solidifying the station’s role as an intermediary between the Argentinian public and a global event with strong political undertones.

On the eve of the Olympic Games, an agreement was announced between Radio Splendid and Radio Prieto to ensure their broadcast in Argentina. The agreement, initiated two years earlier following negotiations with Carl Diem, the secretary of the German Olympic Committee, resulted in an exceptional authorization: each station was granted permission to broadcast. According to Benjamín Gache, director of Splendid, the negotiations began in 1934 and culminated in 1935 with the granting of both permits (Radiolandia, 1936). The decision was driven by propaganda and diplomatic interests, as Germany sought to expand its influence in Latin America. Allowing two broadcasts guaranteed favorable coverage and strengthened ties with the Argentine public.

Furthermore, the scale of the event entailed high costs that could only be covered through business alliances and commercial sponsorship, thereby deepening collaboration among sport, business, and broadcasting in interwar Argentina. The broadcasts began on August 1st with several daily airings and later settled into five fixed time slots across the morning, afternoon, and evening. The Olympic coverage revealed two key dimensions: radio as a medium for internationalization, capable of bringing live European competitions to the Argentine public, and the connection between sports, politics, and the media, since the broadcasts formed part of the Third Reich’s propaganda apparatus, adapted to the local audience. This episode constitutes an early example of how radio in the country was becoming integrated into international information and entertainment circuits, while revealing the strategic function of broadcasting as a disseminator of political and cultural imaginaries in the 1930s (Caras y Caretas, 1936b).

It is interesting to note that, although advertised as “live” broadcasts of the Berlin Olympic Games, this was not actually the case, making it an illustrative example of the limitations and contradictions of Argentine radio broadcasting at the time. While Prieto and Splendid announced with great fanfare that they would offer real-time results, presenting the partnership between the two stations as a supposedly selfless contribution to the medium’s progress, the “contribution” proved to be a failed experiment. Indeed, the “exclusive” coverage was financed by commercial advertisers, not by the station owners, confirming once again radio’s structural dependence on advertising. Similar practices had been common in the early days of radio, as in the Firpo-Dempsey fight in 1923. But in the 1930s, they began to be criticized by the specialized press. Publications like Antena and Radiolandia questioned the simulation of live broadcasts, particularly in sporting events like Turismo Carretera, and reported on complaints between stations as part of the competition for legitimacy and audience share.

What happened was that Radio Excelsior, which was not among the exclusive stations, re-broadcast news from the newspaper La Prensa, informing its listeners of the result of a heavyweight boxing match—the defeat of the Argentine boxer—at 5:30 p.m., while Radio Prieto and Splendid, which claimed to be broadcasting “live,” only aired a detailed account an hour later as if the fight were happening at that very moment. In practice, they were not broadcasting live, but rather playing recordings made with a delay. This situation surprised the audience, who even speculated about technical errors or “magical predictions” on the part of Radio Excelsior (Antena, 1936).

The episode revealed, on the one hand, that the immediacy of information was guaranteed by traditional journalistic channels and not by costly radio ventures, and, on the other hand, it highlighted a recurring rhetoric in the discourse of the concession holders: an appeal to



economic sacrifice, technical effort, and a vocation for service as a way to legitimize the projects they were undertaking. In reality, the system depended on advertising funding, the main source of support for the broadcasts. Far from being a contradiction, this narrative marks the coexistence of the commercial nature of radio, placing the role of advertisers second in favor of an image of civic commitment and technological modernization. The failure in terms of speed and scoops called into question the veracity of these stations' self-promotion campaigns and exposed the tensions between entertainment, business, and public service in Argentine radio broadcasting during the 1930s.

After the Olympics, Radio Prieto added other programs featuring German artists and professionals, marking a shift from high-impact topics to more everyday and established forms of low-intensity diplomacy. An example of this is the series of piano lessons, combining theory and practice, conducted by a specialist from the Stuttgart Conservatory. The program combined the transmission of technical knowledge with a modern pedagogical approach, analyzing musical studies and the interpretive challenges of piano playing. The lessons aired on Tuesdays at 2:45 p.m., offering radio listeners an educational experience that blended German academic tradition with cultural dissemination through radio (Caras y Caretas, 1936c). In this sense, the episode can be interpreted as an example of soft diplomacy, the dissemination of specialized knowledge throughout the broadcasts, creating a more subtle presence than mere political propaganda.

According to Ronald Newton, between 1938 and 1939, Radio Prieto and other local stations broadcast a total of 48 hours and 22 minutes of German propaganda. By August 1940, Radio Splendid and Radio Cuyo had already joined the network subsidized by Germany, regularly broadcasting Transocean press reports along with locally produced propaganda material. In the early years of the war, Callao, Cultura, Stentor, Del Pueblo, and Municipal joined, expanding the reach of this radio network linked to the interests of the Third Reich (Newton, 1995).

In the case of Radio Prieto, we can observe a bias toward nationalist programming, for example, in the inclusion of General José Millán Astray, founder of the Spanish Legion, as a lecturer for about three months on Tuesdays. He had arrived in Buenos Aires at the beginning of the year, after the Spanish government granted him leave. Radio Prieto hired him to speak about his experiences in Africa, which he did over the course of ten interviews. When Francisco Franco staged his coup, Astray was in Buenos Aires. Apparently, a month after the start of the Spanish Civil War, he left for his native Spain to reunite with his comrade, Franco.

These appearances overlapped with other, less controversial ones. The station had an exclusive contract with the writer Ramón Gómez de la Serna. The political situation in Spain had clearly resonated with Argentine society, and Radio Prieto proposed a series of lectures featuring some of the most notable Argentine intellectuals: Victoria Ocampo, Arturo Capdevilla, Ricardo Rojas, and Leopoldo Lugones, as well as international figures like José Ortega y Gasset and Gregorio Marañón; in addition to broadcasting a speech by President Manuel Azaña.

In the late 1930s, Teodoro Prieto partnered with Philips, a company dedicated to the construction of radio transmitters, to expand both the technical business and broadcasting activities. This alliance provided him with greater technical and artistic resources. In April 1940, the station inaugurated a new live stage, conceived as a venue for the "Philips Galas," programs featuring a live audience and renowned artists, which were simultaneously broadcast on the radio (Martínez-Almudevar, 2019, p. 64). Consequently, in 1940, Alfredo Schroeder left the management of the stations "due to personal reasons," according to Radiolandia. Prieto, Juan B. Domenech Gilart, and Roberto Gil, the long-time managers, along with Wolter Wolthers, vice president of Philips, then introduced Enrique Yuste, considered an advertising expert, in his new position. Yuste told the press that Radio Prieto would have a different programming schedule than Radio Argentina and that the former would remain under the direction of



Teodoro Prieto. In other words, both would operate separately, giving LR2 greater autonomy. Meanwhile, Wolthers remained in charge of the radio production company Radio Prieto S.A., which was later acquired by Philips<sup>1</sup>.

## Shortwave emissions

Shortwave radio stations occupied a strategic place within the international broadcasting policy of the 1930s. Given their technical specificity, transnational reach, and distinct function relative to local commercial radio broadcasts operating within the Argentine radio system, it is pertinent to examine these stations separately. Unlike local stations that operated on medium or long waves, shortwave stations transmitted on higher frequencies, enabling reception thousands of kilometers away. This technical resource transformed radio into a transnational communication tool, capable of simultaneously connecting listeners on different continents. In the German case, these broadcasts formed part of a cultural and diplomatic projection strategy that sought to bring the voice of the Reich closer to the Latin American public. As Gisela Cramer (2008) explains, Germany pioneered the systematic use of shortwave radio in Latin America, although its impact was limited by technical problems and the restricted audience with access to suitable receivers: not all receivers could pick up the band, and the signal suffered frequent fluctuations. Shortwave listeners constituted a specific segment of the public, primarily from the middle and upper classes, with higher levels of education and a sustained interest in international events. Despite these limitations, shortwave represented an early attempt to construct a global radio space in which propaganda, culture, and technology were intertwined as tools of international influence.

These broadcasts reveal the German broadcasting industry's relentless pursuit of a presence in Latin America during these years. Through content that combined light entertainment and travelogues, the aim was to establish a cultural connection with the Spanish-speaking public. At the same time, the use of shortwave radio allowed Germany's voice to be projected beyond its borders, positioning radio as a medium for cultural diplomacy and international propaganda. Programming was often geared toward cultural appeal rather than direct ideological persuasion. For example, programs such as "A Quarter of an Hour of Good Humor" or "A German Sees Colombia," broadcast on shortwave stations, combined entertainment with first-person narratives. This type of content appealed to curiosity, empathy, and cultural identification, seeking to strengthen symbolic ties with the Latin American public (Caras y Caretas, 1937).

It is important to note that while the German cultural presence in this environment developed within a framework that could be described as relatively tolerant until 1937-1938, from 1939 onward—particularly with the start of the war—these practices came under greater state control. This indicates, therefore, a series of transformations in the strategy of soft diplomacy in the Argentine context.

Before 1939, the reference to neutrality operated mainly as a discursive resource in German propaganda; only with the outbreak of war was it consolidated as the official position of the Argentine State.

In June 1939, A.M. Delfino & Cía. S.A., the German Radio Broadcasting Company's representative in Argentina, organized a series of medical lectures in Spanish in conjunction with the Buenos Aires Oral Journal of Medical Sciences. The station facilitated Dr. Rieper's trip and

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1 This is shown in the statement made earlier by the Investigating Commission on Anti-Argentine Activities in 1941.

coordinated activities with Georfried Sandstede, while similar broadcasts were being planned in Brazil. Dr. Poppe and Professor Gauss also participated, lecturing on biological therapy in gynecology. The broadcasts were transmitted via shortwave by German Radio Broadcasting at 11:00 PM, demonstrating how the station combined technical innovation with strategies of scientific legitimation to expand its influence (Special Investigating Commission on Anti-Argentine Activities, 1941–1943a). As analyzed by María Inés Tato (2015), the actions of this parliamentary commission were part of a policy of political and cultural surveillance, in which the Argentine government sought to set the limits of neutrality and regulate the presence of foreign influences in the public sphere.

In 1942, at the request of the Ministry of the Interior, the Postal Service prepared a document containing the official records and investigations carried out between 1939 and 1942 regarding unauthorized radio transmissions. This document included a list of the owners of the illegal stations. The report covered both verified cases and complaints that were dismissed after radio direction-finding checks throughout the country (Ministry of the Interior, 1942). Among the individuals identified were both Argentine fans and citizens of German or Italian origin, especially in coastal provinces, Córdoba, Santa Cruz, and Buenos Aires. The records highlighted suspicions of transmissions linked to foreign propaganda (German and Japanese) and to former crew members of the battleship Graf Spee, although most cases were dismissed due to lack of evidence or because they involved simple shortwave receivers.

The report reflected the Argentine government's growing concern about radio espionage during World War II and its efforts to control the communications spectrum within the context of political neutrality. A total of 27 clandestine stations were identified and officially sanctioned. The file also contained approximately 35 additional complaints, which were subsequently dismissed after investigation due to a lack of evidence or because they involved simple home receivers or antennas without transmission capabilities.

The spread of propaganda from countries involved in the international conflict was a problem for the Argentine government. In 1943, a document from the Free German Movement (Frei-Deutschland-Bewegung), an organization of German exiles and active anti-fascists in Latin America during World War II, compiled a list of over one hundred stations, frequencies, and names linked to Reich interests or pro-German groups (Special Investigating Commission on Anti-Argentine Activities, 1941a). This information should be considered with caution, given that a list of amateur radio operators about whom there is insufficient information appears as shortwave stations linked to the Nazis.

## **The actions of the Investigating Commission on Anti-Argentine Activities in the context of broadcasting control**

With the escalation of international tensions, the situation of Argentine broadcasting became increasingly complex. From 1938 onward, various projects were promoted to create a regulatory body for the medium. Although these projects did not come to fruition, they generated intense parliamentary debates. That same year, the Executive Branch created a commission to study the service's operations, which submitted its final report in 1939. In this context, concern about the possible infiltration of ideas considered anti-Argentine took center stage in the National Congress, as the need for agencies to supervise broadcast content and for radio stations to be monitored for connections with foreign powers involved in the conflict was discussed.

As Mariana González-Lutier (2019) points out, the Commission of Inquiry into Anti-Argentine Activities emerged in a context of political polarization and reaffirmation of national identity in the face of foreign nationalisms. Promoted by Representatives Enrique Dickmann,



Raúl Damonte Taborda, and Juan Vilgré de Madrid, the initiative complemented the Ortiz Decree (1939), which aimed to culturally integrate immigrants. Unlike the latter, the Commission broadened its scope into the political sphere, monitoring groups considered contrary to the national interest, thus becoming an instrument of ideological control in a turbulent international landscape.

The Investigating Commission's purpose was to investigate "the activities of organizations and individuals with ideologies and methods adverse to our republican institutions and directed against our sovereignty" (Irisarri, 2009, p. 2). Its work extended until the 1943 coup. The documentation produced by the Commission must be read within the context of an anti-fascist mobilization and war propaganda, which leads us to consider the possibility of biases and limitations as a source.

The increase in state control of radio broadcasting can be interpreted as a reaction to the impact of the event organized by the German Embassy in April 1938.

Commemoration of the Anschluss. The magnitude of the celebration provoked shock and indignation in sectors of the Argentine press and politics; newspapers as dissimilar as *Crítica* and *La Nación* reported on the political nature of the event and warned about the government's tolerance of these demonstrations, which led to a demand for greater state intervention in the face of the growing presence of foreign political forces (*Crítica*, 1938; *La Nación*, 1938).

The government responded by intensifying its control over broadcasters. Although it had operated LRA Radio del Estado as its official communication channel since 1937, it was unable to prevent the dissemination of opposing political discourse. This case reveals the dual nature of state broadcasting policy: on the one hand, the creation of a national network with its own reach; on the other, the need to strengthen censorship and political control over content, especially content related to the powers in conflict during World War II.

According to an article by the American journalist Carleton Beals, in 1938, the German news agency Transocean broadcast up to sixteen hours a day in Latin America, spreading Nazi ideals and presenting Germany as a model of prosperity, while describing North America as a continent mired in crime and unrest (Beals, 1938). This type of propaganda reinforced suspicions about the penetration of foreign influences and helped legitimize the creation of state control mechanisms over Argentine broadcasting.

With the outbreak of war, the General Directorate of Posts and Telegraphs exercised greater oversight of broadcast content. Between 1939 and 1941, several stations were scrutinized by the Argentine government, revealing the magnitude of the problem of retransmitting foreign news in a context marked by the policy of neutrality during World War II. In the Directorate's reports, Radio Splendid (LR4) appears repeatedly for retransmitting foreign news without authorization, as does Radio Prieto (LS2), which was cited for broadcasting news that "falls outside the scope of current regulations" (Special Investigating Commission on Anti-Argentine Activities, 1941–1943b), including direct warnings to its director, Teodoro Prieto.

During those years, Radiolandia celebrated the sanction imposed on a broadcast by Radio Municipal that had aired messages contrary to Argentine neutrality, while questioning why similar measures were not applied to other stations with pro-belligerent biases. The weekly magazine pointed out the contradiction between punishing a minor broadcast and tolerating popular news programs that lacked strict neutrality. It maintained that those who spoke to the public should maintain an institutionally neutral stance and warned that deviating from it would drag the country into the "horrible bonfire" of war, reaffirming neutrality as a patriotic duty (Radiolandia, 1939).

During the same period, Radio El Mundo (LR1) was flagged for broadcasting offensive comments about belligerent heads of state and disseminating information about ships in the port

of Buenos Aires, which—according to the Directorate of Radiocommunications—compromised national security. La Voz del Aire (LS9) and Radio Cultura (LR10) received warnings for news programs that did not comply with regulations, and Radio Belgrano (LR3) was urged to ensure the use of reliable sources and accurate reporting. These sanctions highlight the tension between large commercial broadcasters, with their significant public influence, and the state's policy of information control, in a context where the lines between propaganda, business, and neutrality were becoming blurred.

One of the topics investigated was the financing of German propaganda. The testimony of Walter Von Simons, director of Transocean and an Argentine citizen of German origin, revealed that the agency operated with a significant deficit: monthly expenses were approximately 12,000 pesos, compared to income of only 1,000 pesos, indicating the need for external support. His predecessor, Emilio Tjarks, stated that the company allocated about 6,000 pesos to broadcasts on Radio Prieto and Radio Callao. He clarified, however, that he had only authorized the dissemination of news bulletins on the latter, considering them useful for promoting the agency.

In his testimony, Von Simons confirmed the use of various radio stations to broadcast Transocean's bulletins. He explained that he had rented advertising space on Radio Callao with the intention of attracting advertisers, and when this failed, he allocated it to messages from his travel agency, broadcast under the slogan "You are Argentinian, get to know your country." According to his testimony, he paid 2,000 pesos to Radio Prieto, a similar amount to Radio Callao, and 1,000 pesos to Radio Cultura. The broadcasts were also aired on Radio Stentor and Radio El Pueblo, the latter through the news service Agencia Velox. The payments, always in cash, reveal the extent of the network and the systematic nature of the propaganda campaign.

Once the investigation began, the radio stations canceled their agreements with the news agency. However, Transocean continued to contribute 250 pesos monthly to support the program known as "Hora Alemana" (German Hour), which was then broadcast on Radio Callao.

The Commission examined Radio Prieto's accounting records and found an agreement dated January 2, 1941, in which Teodoro Prieto confirmed that the station would broadcast three-minute news bulletins every hour, with "objective news, without commentary," for a monthly payment of 2,000 pesos. The service continued until June 1941. The accounting records reveal regular payments between February and July, ranging from 1,250 to 2,362 pesos, transferred by the German Transatlantic Bank to beneficiaries such as "Prieto," "Cultura," and "Callao." The regularity and precision of these transactions demonstrate systematic financing by Transocean, which combined propaganda strategies with meticulous accounting to legitimize its activities before the Argentine authorities.

In September 1941, Wolter Wolthers, who had become the owner of the company that produced radio equipment in the country, addressed a letter to the president of the Investigating Commission, Deputy Raúl Damonte Taborda, with the purpose of informing him that he "is totally and absolutely detached from the commercial and advertising activities" of Radio Prieto.

The investigation by the Commission on Anti-Argentine Activities revealed that the Transocean Agency not only distributed news wires with a marked pro-Nazi slant, but also directly financed radio stations in the country. In 1941, Radio Callao (LS10) acknowledged receiving three checks drawn on the German Transatlantic Bank, for \$2,362.50 each, which were then deposited in the Banco Nación. Radio Cultura, for its part, reported similar payments of \$1,250 each, in addition to broadcasting advertisements for the "Rápido Español" on behalf of Transocean. In the case of Radio Stentor (LS8), its administrator reported that the news program had been hired through the pro-Nazi newspaper El Pampero, revealing the role of the print media as an intermediary for placing radio content (Monacci, 2012). Taken toge-



ther, these documents show that the German strategy in Argentina combined regular financial support, the purchase of advertising space, and friendly journalistic networks, forming a legal and commercial framework that masked Nazi propaganda in the local broadcasting system (Special Investigating Commission of Anti-Argentine Activities, 1941–1943b).

Finally, a sanction was applied to Radio Callao (LS10). Unlike the routine warnings issued to Radio Splendid (LR4), El Mundo (LR1), and Belgrano (LR3) for rebroadcasting foreign news or phrases considered offensive, this time a 48-hour suspension was imposed. The sanction stemmed from the station's omission of the National Anthem on May 25, 1941, an act interpreted as a serious offense. The station's reaction deepened the conflict: instead of complying with the sanction, it published a public statement insinuating that the Post and Telegraph Office was involved in selling airtime to foreign communities and in the prior control of news, accusations the agency dismissed as "deceptive" and "inaccurate." The episode illustrates how the government's policy of neutrality not only translated into control of war-related content but also into demands for symbolic gestures of national allegiance. The suspension of Radio Callao, due to its repeated broadcasts of international commentary contrary to neutrality, reveals the extent to which the radio station was subject to a dual system of surveillance: administrative, in its formal aspects, and political, in its symbolic ones, where the omission of the national anthem could be considered as serious as the dissemination of foreign propaganda. It is interesting to note that while the Investigating Commission characterized Transocean as an instrument of nationalist propaganda, an analysis of its intervention in radio programming reveals a more complex dynamic. Far from systematic doctrinal propaganda, a strategy of cultural diplomacy prevailed, combining cultural, sporting, and scientific content aimed at building symbolic affinities rather than disseminating explicit ideological slogans.

## Other broadcasters

So far, we have shown how, in the years leading up to the war, German cultural presence intensified on Argentine radio, especially through Radio Prieto. This was not overt anti-Semitic propaganda or the glorification of the regime, but rather the dissemination of German language, science, and culture. However, this orientation was not uniform: some smaller stations or those without institutional oversight occasionally broadcast nationalist or anti-Jewish rhetoric. Thus, while the main stations maintained an appearance of cultural neutrality, others more clearly reflected the prejudices and rhetoric of Nazism.

According to historian Robert Claxton, the trajectory of Radio Paris illustrates the tensions and challenges of Argentine radio broadcasting in its early decades. Claxton points out that, despite its innovative nature—with the dedication of a large part of its programming to radio dramas, the formation of a sports corporation, and simultaneous transmission with Uruguayan stations—the station was unable to consolidate itself as a stable project (Claxton, 2007).

From 1935 onwards, Radio Paris broadcast radio lectures by Father Virgilio Filippo, a parish priest who espoused an openly anti-Semitic and anti-communist discourse. As Daniel Lvovich (2003) points out, from his very first radio appearances, Filippo disseminated a wide variety of anti-Semitic speeches, employing the style of an agitator seeking the effectiveness of his preaching (Lecture on LR8 Radio Paris, April 2, 1935). In his addresses, he used all kinds of materials—pamphlets, rumors, distorted quotations—to construct a virulently Judeophobic rhetoric, in which he mixed religious, moral, and political elements. What is striking, Lvovich observes, is that the nationalist media did not object to these statements, and even publications such as *Criterio* went so far as to praise his preaching while denouncing the "communist monster", thus reinforcing the confluence between conservative Catholicism, anti-communism, and anti-Semitism in the radio discourse of the time (Lvovich, 2003, p. 142).



State control over Argentine broadcasting was extensive and not limited to Radio Prieto, although the latter was notable for its international connections. During the war, oversight extended to commercial and cultural stations such as Radio Excelsior. Its owner, Alfredo Dougall, was accused of acting as a “fifth column” by broadcasting a bulletin sponsored by a company linked to the Axis powers. In response to criticism, he canceled advertising from Italian and Japanese companies after their alliance with the bloc. He was also criticized for mentioning the Cineac, a theater on the blacklist, in a program about women’s cinema, an incident he attributed to an unintentional error and replaced with a British newsreel (Dougall, 2005, pp. 231–235). Radio Excelsior, part of the multimedia group that included the newspaper *The Standard*, was also denounced for broadcasting advertisements from German companies, highlighting the tension between commercial interests and political control (Pelosi, 2002).

These episodes highlight the tensions between state regulation, corporate interests, and foreign influence in Argentine radio. Radio was a terrain of symbolic and political struggle, where alliances, censorship, and diplomatic pressure determined which voices could be heard. Within this context, analyzing the statistics on airtime allocated to international broadcasts allows us to understand the magnitude of these power dynamics and the unequal presence of different broadcasting centers on the national radio network. London accounted for the majority of connections, with a daily average of 1 hour, 2 minutes, and 56 seconds, reflecting its central role as an information hub in the global radio network. Berlin followed, with 47 minutes and 20 seconds daily, a figure that demonstrates Germany’s importance in the political and sporting landscape of the 1930s. New York’s presence was much smaller, with just 18 minutes and 16 seconds, and Rome’s was only 3 minutes and 7 seconds per day. Overall, the total time of international broadcasts amounted to 2 hours, 11 minutes, and 39 seconds per day, but the internal distribution reveals a marked bias towards Europe—and in particular towards London—as a privileged source of information and stories for the Argentine audience (Cramer, 2008).

In retrospect, it can be observed that the Argentine government gradually moved toward increasingly strict control of the radio spectrum. From the late 1930s, these oversight measures responded to the international climate of suspicion and the need to maintain neutrality amid the warring powers. However, this process took on a qualitatively different dimension after the military coup of June 1943, when the State began to intervene more directly and systematically in broadcasting. As Lindenboim (2018) points out, the new regime conceived of radio not only as a medium for entertainment or information, but also as a strategic instrument of political pedagogy and national cohesion. From then on, control was no longer limited to monitoring content considered anti-Argentine or foreign, but was instead geared toward constructing an official narrative around the identity, morality, and values of the new order. In that sense, the 1943 coup marks the transition between a stage of preventive censorship and a model of structural state intervention in the media, anticipating the type of relationship between politics and broadcasting that would characterize the years of the first Peronism.

## In conclusion

Taken together, the analysis of the German presence in Argentine radio broadcasting between 1934 and 1943 reveals that radio was a central instrument of the Third Reich’s cultural diplomacy in Latin America, although its actual reach was limited. Through stations like Radio Prieto, the regime sought to project an image of technical modernity, cultural prestige, and scientific superiority, combining news, music, and sports content in a symbolic propaganda strategy that was more persuasive than doctrinal. However, experience shows that this soft diplomacy operated in a field of tensions: German initiatives depended on local intermediaries, the commercial structure of radio, and the margin of tolerance of a state that, under a policy



of neutrality, gradually strengthened its mechanisms of control and censorship. More than a deep ideological penetration, what emerges is a process of negotiation between culture, power, and communication, where radio functioned as a privileged space for symbolic dispute and international projection in interwar Argentina.

In short, although it is difficult to fully reconstruct the scope and effectiveness of the German propaganda in interwar Argentina, a careful reading of graphic and documentary sources allows us to delineate the contours of a soft diplomacy deployed through radio broadcasting. More than an explicit political operation, it was a set of symbolic strategies—cultural, scientific, and sporting broadcasts, musical programs, and institutional messages—aimed at projecting a modern, orderly, and culturally prestigious image of Germany. These initiatives sought to win favor through aesthetic and technological seduction rather than direct ideological imposition. Radio, with its mass appeal and transnational reach, offered a privileged channel for this form of indirect influence, while also revealing the limitations of a project dependent on local intermediaries, the advertising market, and state control. Within this web of political, diplomatic, and commercial interests, German diplomacy found in radio a medium of ephemeral but significant visibility, the study of which illuminates the tensions between culture, power, and communication in Argentina during the 1930s and early 1940s.

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