

Background: Goebbels began a weekly newspaper called *Das Reich* in 1940. He generally wrote the lead article each week, in which he took special pride. This essay is dated 29 March 1942. Goebbels discusses the forthcoming cut in food rations for the German population, forced by two years of bad harvests and the need to feed the military, the German population, and millions of foreign workers. The *Sicherheitsdienst* report for 2 April 1942 found this article was well received. People generally favored the harsh action against the black market that Goebbels calls for. They were, however, shocked by the seriousness of the situation. Food rations were already tight, and further reductions were a major worry. Berliners thought his reference to seeing weary workers on trams and subways was “well-meaning,” but doubted that he or other leaders were speaking from first-hand observation. And people were suspicious of Goebbels’ claims that things were just as bad in England.

Through a combination of ruthlessly sending food from the occupied territories to Germany and a good harvest, food rations were significantly increased in fall 1942.

The source: “Offene Aussprache,” *Das eherne Herz* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1943), pp. 257-262.

An Open Discussion

by Joseph Goebbels

The new cuts in food rations that take effect on 6 April will have a big impact in the household of every citizen. It would be foolish and incorrect to ignore it or make it seem better than it is. The relevant offices have thought long and hard about both the size and necessity of the cut. They agree unanimously that the cuts are necessary now, and in the planned amount. Had they not done so, it is likely that in six to eight months we would have even greater problems with our food supply that would require even larger cuts than are needed now.

In contrast to the last war, German food policy has taken care to guarantee that the available food supplies are fairly distributed. Because of war conditions, the supply is not sufficient to meet everyone’s desires. Surely no one will hold it against the government if it does not allow food to be consumed today that may be absolutely necessary tomorrow to maintain our existence. We must manage our food supplies with a view to the long term, one that will permit us to wage war to its victorious conclusion. The government knows better than anyone else that reductions in food supplies affect directly the whole population. When it decides they are necessary, one may be sure that there is no other possibility.

The reasons leading to this decision are well known. They have been thoroughly discussed in the press and radio and do not need to be repeated here. The size of our army, the increase in the number of workers in heavy industry as well as those working overtime and nights, the 2.5 million workers from abroad active mostly in German armaments production, the many millions of prisoners who work for us, but who also have to be fed, assistance for occupied regions supporting our military economy, help for our ally Finland in its heroic struggle, the abnormal weather conditions of the last two years that upset our plans and produced only average harvests, and the chronic shortage of agricultural labor were together too much for us to maintain the old ration levels.

We, of course, know that it is not exactly a good time for a reduction in rations. Potatoes are in short supply. The long-lasting frost has made it impossible to get them to market. They will arrive in larger quantities when spring finally arrives, but the long winter still has upset some of our plans that looked

good on paper. Vegetables are in short supply, particularly in big cities. In short, we would have preferred to postpone this tough measure for a few months. It was not possible. We do not determine our food policies during the war on their popularity, but rather according to what is reasonable under the conditions, even if it sometimes requires unpleasant decisions. They may hurt, but we will maintain them until the war ends victoriously. Most importantly, we cannot foresee the size of the coming harvest, and must guarantee sufficient reserves. Depending on the next harvest, we may later be able to consider improvements in rations.

No German doubts any longer that we must win the war. What we accept voluntarily today is child's play compared to what would happen to us if we lose. We do not even consider such a possibility. The government does not only want to win, it is working and fighting for it, and has after all the ultimate responsibility for victory as well. It has the duty to do what the situation requires.

The people, however, have every right to insist that the burdens of the war be shared fairly. No one is exempt from the sacrifices that the nation as a whole must bring to win the war. Anyone who interferes with or threatens our war effort deserves the harshest penalties, even the death penalty. So many fine soldiers and officers risk their lives for their fatherland that one simply cannot allow someone at home to hurt our chances of victory, whether intentionally or not. It is also clear that the harder the sacrifices at the front, the heavier must be the burdens at home, and the more stringent the insistence that order and fairness prevail at home. Those who break the law must be ruthlessly called to account. Our soldiers understandably demand that of us, and indeed the entire people surely gives such a policy its full support.

It is a matter of complete indifference to us what the enemy thinks about it. They are advised to look to their own affairs. The gentlemen in England are welcome to consider it a sign of our weakness that in this third year of war we maintain order in public life and refuse to tolerate that anyone profits from the general problems of our people. They are making the same cuts in rations as we. Unlike the English food minister, we do not tell the German people that meat is bad for them and that grass makes a good, tasty salad. The English claim we are autocratic, but when we make so critical a decision we turn confidently to the people, explain the situation without covering anything up, and know that they will understand.

We also protect the people from profiteers. Unlike the situation in England — the London newspapers complain nearly every day rather strongly about it — we would not hesitate to hang such people. Our consciences would not bother us in the least.

It is therefore no accident that the Council for National Defense has released a new directive recently that says in its first paragraph that he who destroys, withholds, or hoards raw materials or foodstuffs important to the population will receive a jail or prison term, or even in particularly serious cases the death penalty. Those who in the course of their business or trade give special preference to others in supplying goods or services, or offer the same, will receive prison sentences.

That is very clear. The state's attorney has been instructed to prosecute such cases firmly, and if perhaps here and there these crimes have been treated mildly in the past, that is to stop immediately. The black market trading of certain irresponsible and unscrupulous elements who seek to make a profit from the war is over. We are speaking plainly, and in the interests of our entire people, both our soldiers at the front and those working at home. They all have a right in the face of the difficult conditions of the war to be guaranteed by the government their basic necessities.

There may be certain people who are willing to pay horrendous prices for rationed goods and luxuries. This is their final warning. Soon it will no longer be worth the risk to take such loving care of one's belly. No one enjoys war. Neither do we want a few drones to enjoy or profit from it. We all want to fight this historical battle in a clean and spotless manner. When victory comes, each German man and

each German woman must be able to say that they have done their part. Those who do not understand this, who have no conscience, who do not know what to do and not to do during a war, will have to learn through other, more drastic ways.

During war, all goods and foodstuffs belong to the whole nation. They must be distributed fairly. He who sins against this principle harms the community.

The farmer's crop belongs to the whole people. He should turn scavengers away from his door.

What German soil and labor produce passes through the hands of the merchant. He is the middleman. He distributes them fairly. Bartering will bring heavy penalties.

The work of the craftsman also has its fair price. It is dishonest and criminal to demand or accept special benefits. The average person's sense of fairness is the best guarantee of a satisfactory distribution. The German housewife expects and demands from the shopkeeper only what is her due. Paying black market prices or bribes is not only unworthy of her, it is criminal.

Black marketeering, bribery, bartering, or excessive prices and bribery will be punished.

In particularly serious cases, property will be seized or the death penalty imposed.

Everyone, whether producer, merchant or buyer is honor bound to act in an exemplary way. Each is satisfied with his fair share. That too serves the war effort and prepares for victory. It depends on each one of us.

We cannot imagine that anyone among us would want to ignore our appeal to decency and fairness. He who does so takes a big risk. There may be an occasional person who has not taken the war with the proper seriousness. This was most shortsighted, since it endangers not only our food supplies, it also gives a bad example to decent citizens and threatens in the long run their sense of fairness and their belief in the integrity and decency of public life. That is far worse.

In these difficult times, we all need our optimism and our deep, almost holy faith. He who abuses them, who tries the patience and decency of our people, deserves to be rapped on the knuckles until he learns his lesson. The leadership feels more tightly bound to the people during the war than ever before. We see the great sacrifices it brings for victory, how patiently and bravely it accepts all that is demanded of it. We suffer along with each mother who loses her son, each woman who loses her husband, each child that loses its father. We know how hard farming women are working in the stalls and fields. We sometimes see the dog-tired workers sitting in the streetcars or subways. We listen to our soldiers on leave in Berlin as they speak about their enormous sacrifices for the fatherland. We wish we could sing a song each day in praise of the whole people that is so brave and modest, that does its duty as it works and fights for victory without making a fuss about it.

We are bound to these people. They expect from the government that, when sacrifices are necessary, they will be shared fairly and equally by all. A government that failed to do this would no longer deserve to be called a government of the people.

We all know how things stand.

He who ignores the necessities of the war will pay a high price. The German people as a whole has behaved in an exemplary way, and deserves respect. We are convinced that harsh treatment of criminals will be greeted with enthusiasm.