

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 1 March 1942. Goebbels claims to be delighted that Churchill is in charge of the English war effort. For a good discussion of Goebbels's wartime essays, see Bramsted's book *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda*.

The source: "Churchill's Trick," *Das eherne Herz* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1943), pp. 222-228.

Churchill's Trick

by Joseph Goebbels

The neutral press has been asking recently how it is that Mr. Churchill has such influence on the English public and British public opinion. Despite the worst reversals and the most demoralizing defeats, regardless of initial suspicion, in the end they are captivated by this clever wordsmith and accept his foolish policies and military leadership. The question is both easy and hard to answer. The answer to the riddle is probably that although Mr. Churchill lacks all strategic sense in both politics and military leadership, he is an extraordinarily capable tactician. He is a virtuoso at democratic party and press leadership, and therefore is the best of the current English politicians, who as it is known are not gifted with any great intelligence. His methods are as primitive as one can imagine. His ideas are hardly original, and one can usually predict exactly what he will say or do. It is always the same thing with him.

When he began as British prime minister, he proclaimed the slogan that he has held to regardless of political or military events, through setbacks and defeats. It protects him against all criticism: "Blood, sweat and tears." One can fight a war to its bitter end under that slogan without running the danger of being proven wrong. The people will hardly recall the slogan in the midst of victory, and in defeat he can pretend to be a prophet. Mr. Churchill is like a doctor who stands by the bed of a seriously ill patient and says: "He will die." If the patient worsens, or even dies, he is proved right. He will not hesitate to remind people of his excellent prognosis. And if the patient gets better or even recovers, will one reproach the doctor that the patient got better despite his bad condition?

One cannot call such a practice particularly intelligent or original, but it does have its public. Up to the present moment, Mr. Churchill has carried it off. One does not need to be a prophet, one needs only to see through his trick to predict that, after the British Empire's grave defeats in the past four weeks, he will say that he had expected and predicted nothing else. His farsightedness will be admired.

We can predict what Mr. Churchill will say in about two months, and thus predict what he will have to say today. One of his methods is to paint the past in the blackest possible terms, then to discover a silver lining in the present. No one will be able to find a speech of his from, say, last August in which he sees gray. One can only see how serious he thought the situation was then by seeing what he says about it today. His practice is to make the past look worse than it was in order to make the present seem better than it is. He confesses things are going poorly, but claims they were even worse before! That is not true, but he depends on the public's forgetfulness. They will not take the trouble to see what he actually said last August, and then compare it to what he says today.

He claims that time is a traditional ally of his side. No one will claim that time has been a reliable ally of the English over the last two and a half years. England's situation is far more precarious in 1942 than it was in 1939 or 1940. One also cannot imagine time working more in England's favor in the future

than it did in the past. Every month, indeed nearly every week, England loses one of its important holdings, and one must be remarkably foolish to think that England will have the strength during or after the war to regain its lost possessions.

In 1939 Mr. Churchill looked forward to 1940. In 1940 he looked forward to 1942. In 1942 he was thinking of 1945 as the year things would finally go England's way. One can see the constantly changing dates, and see that the British prime minister clearly knows that Britain's hands are tied. It can no longer be saved by its power, only through a miracle.

It was characteristic that in his last radio speech, Mr. Churchill was unable to find even a single argument that referred to the British Empire. He referred to the United States, the Soviet Union, and Chiang Kaishek. He hardly mentioned Great Britain. The empire is apparently no longer able to contribute to its own defense, despite the fact that it is a war for its very existence, and that its prime minister provoked it without any reason and without making the necessary preparations. This is clear from the contributions London has made to the war, both in terms of blood and labor. There is general displeasure among England's allies at its wholly inadequate contributions. Mr. Churchill had to respond, for example, to public criticism in Australia by inventing some statistics. No one believes him. One has to be amazed at the thoughtlessness, not to mention cynicism, that began and carries out the war.

That is fine with us. Our polemics are not intended to improve anything, only to make clear to the public that the riddle of Churchill is really not a riddle at all, but only a primitive conjurer's trick. We realize that this unfortunate man is England's last hope in its present situation. Despite all the concealed and open opposition in the House of Commons, he cannot be deposed because there is no one to take his place. He is the embodiment of the curse of the evil deed, which has to keep doing evil. If he falls, a good part of the British will to resist falls too. The man on the street in England probably senses dimly that this war is Churchill's war, that he began it and is the one who has to carry it on to a bitter end for the Empire. That explains his appeal to national unity. He has a parliamentary vote of no confidence as his last resort, to be called upon when he is in deep trouble.

He has a remarkably clever way of dealing with public unhappiness with himself, his policies or his war leadership. He allows a kind of pseudo-criticism. When the empire staggers under some blow, he retreats for a time to the background and lets people complain. He opens the release valve, one might say, to let the people's rage dissipate.

One should not think that happens against his will. He knows how to play the game. He figures the loudest voices will shout themselves hoarse. When a so-called Churchill crisis is at its peak, he pulls out a *deus ex machina*. He smooths the waves, adds water to the wine, minimizes the defeats and explains that he had predicted it all. Even more, he had expected even worse, which thank God has not come to pass. One should rejoice that it only rained, not hailed. Singapore may have fallen, but he was expecting to lose India. He sees it as to England's advantage that German ships sailed through the English Channel. He lies so well that the gullible might almost believe London's claims that 600 Royal Air Force planes chased our ships back to German harbors, losing only 49 of them in the process! And if things look bad in East Asia, which no one doubts, they look good in the East. 1942 will be a difficult year, as he predicted — though of course he actually had predicted the opposite! — better days may come in 1943, or maybe in 1945. National unity must be preserved, and he of course is its guarantee. Anyone who attacks him proves that he is not English.

Such behavior would be unthinkable in any other country. A prime minister with so many failures, so many false predictions and windy promises, of which none came true, would be thrown out anywhere else. The English people like Churchill. He is its curse, its evil spirit, a man who has all the abilities to be Great Britain's gravedigger.

We could not wish for anyone better. If there is no way for the Axis powers to win other than through the collapse of the British Empire, Mr. Churchill is fine with us. The war's first round did not end with a sudden knock out punch; there will be further rounds. We have to slowly but surely pound the enemy until he becomes groggy. Now and again the enemy will hope to be saved by the bell, but a new round will follow. The decisive moment will come when he is knocked down by a lightning blow. We do not know when that will happen, we only know that it will happen. A prime minister who leads an empire into such danger is a considerable advantage for the other side.

We are happy Mr. Churchill is there. We certainly do not want to be rid of him. We want to keep him around, since he is the pathfinder for our total and radical victory.