

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 6 September 1942. Goebbels suggests that Germans need to learn to hate. For a good discussion of Goebbels's wartime essays, see Bramsted's book [*Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda*](#).

The source: "Seid nicht allzu gerecht!", *Das eherne Herz* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1943), pp. 451-457.

Don't Be Too Fair!

by Joseph Goebbels

We Germans are still a young nation, with the virtues and weaknesses as well as the advantages and disadvantages of youth. Our national sense is a recent development, and still under attack. We identified too long with our tribal origins for our sense of nationhood to be self-evident. In England a statement like "My country — right or wrong!" is an incontestable principle of public life, but it is still difficult for us Germans.

We have a highly developed individual sense of justice, indeed we suffer from a kind of super-objectivity that mostly benefits our worst enemies and harms our own interests. An appeal to our decency always works, and we do not think too much about whether it is honestly intended or only exploits our good nature. Were one to leave the German people without clear leadership for a few years, it would soon return to being a colorful conglomerate of individuals. Nothing is more characteristic of our national character than that many millions of German-Americans maintain their social connections in bowling clubs, singing groups, and homeland associations, but soon lose their patriotic feelings.

National Socialism gave us Germans a kind of national consciousness for the first time. It gave at least a part of today's generation a sense of what it means to be a people. But that feeling is still so young and fragile that we must always guard it.

Our enemies know that better than we do, and use it in their propaganda. One can hardly imagine another nation falling prey to such a grotesque bluff as we fell for in 1918. We could not imagine that our enemies did not have the same ideas and concepts as we do. We believed their phrases of world brotherhood, and it took years before we saw through the swindle. And we Germans are not the kind of people with long memories. Indeed, we love to extend our sympathies to other nations that do not even want it. Even Versailles did not keep us from thinking the French were our friends within a few years, and not even this war, instigated not only in London but in Paris and directed against our very existence, has had an impact on our friendly attitudes toward the French.

One cannot imagine what our people would do with a government that practices swindles on such a scale as Mr. Churchill's in England. Yet there are people among us who see some sort of political style in it. It does not concern them in the least that it is directed entirely against us and that it is the real cause of the troubles and concerns of the war. We are so afraid of doing an injustice to others that we prefer when uncertain to do ourselves an injustice. One really cannot maintain that the German leadership has made many mistakes in this war. By and large we have always analyzed the situation accurately. Still there are those among us who work to forget everything we have predicted that came to pass and with the same energy remember those cases, and repeat them incessantly, in which we supposedly made a mistake.

No one will say that is fair. It is even more distressing, however, when these same people grant a kind of super-correctness to the enemy that is entirely out of place. They find any sign of self-interest on our side objectionable, while viewing the most primitive demagoguery on the other side as originality. It really does not take all that much intelligence to see through Mr. Churchill's tricks. He certainly has demagogic abilities of the highest order. But that is all he has. We find it an insult to compare him with the Führer. One cannot imagine that the English would grant the Führer any trace of justice at all, even though all that he is and has accomplished is the result of his own efforts, though he lives a life of almost legendary simplicity, and has shaken the entire world with his ideas. The English are saving their sentimentality for after the war, when it will not cost them anything.

We are different. If one of our newspapers says something crude about a statesman on the enemy side (the kind of expressions, by the way, that are common every day even in the serious British papers), the German sense of justice is suddenly awakened and our Michel feels the need to protect this statesman, to point out his good sides, and to defend his weaknesses.

We Germans must still learn to hate. We do not incline to chauvinism, and when one wants to heat up our national soul he must proceed carefully. There are supposedly even German soldiers who, after marching 1000 kilometers through the horror and spiritual desolation of the Eastern wilderness discover somewhere an atlas in a village school. They ponder it and ask doubtfully if perhaps there may not be something to Bolshevism after all.

The English destroyed a whole valuable ancient culture in India, and never even thought about studying its history and values. They are English, after all. They think that the world was created for the English, while we think that we Germans were created to serve the world. That is the difference between us. It is certainly the case that the British standpoint is better suited for practical political life, and that we are always at a disadvantage. Many of us would hardly want to have those English characteristics, but that does not stop us from admiring the English. The English find it obvious that one speaks English with them. We would hardly expect a foreigner to speak German. We break our heads learning French or English and look for Americans to explain the mysteries of slang to us so as not to inconvenience them by speaking proper English.

Are these traits appreciated? Not at all! These German traits are held in contempt rather than admiration. Certain people who spent six months in England before the war thought it their duty upon returning home to add an English accent to their speech. They wanted English clothing, ate English, drank five o'clock tea instead of coffee, did not use their umbrella even when it rained, regardless of the grins of their fellow countrymen, and sneered at the homeland from which they came but which they tried to forget as soon as they encountered a different world.

We Germans still have a lot to learn if we finally want to come out ahead spiritually and socially. Some of us, particularly those proud of their good education and breeding, suffer a sudden inferiority complex abroad. They behave as if they always need to apologize, looking like someone attending a formal dinner for the first time who is not sure which utensil to use for the fish. We are wholly free of such an inferiority complex, and can therefore speak about it openly. When before the war some English or American journalist came to us and impudently asked whether we understood English, we did not feel distressed and embarrassed, but rather told the boor in German that even if we could speak English, we would not speak it with him, and showed him the door. He usually got the idea.

We do not want to be misunderstood. We certainly do not underestimate the enemy. The best way to avoid that is to know him and study him. We realize that England is not a nation of devils. They have admirable characteristics. But we will not speak of them as long as they see no good in us. And there is a war on. We hate them from the bottom of our souls because they threaten our very life, because they oppose our national existence out of envy, jealousy, and ill-concealed national pride.

Why are we fairer to them than they are to us? We are fighting the war according to purely pragmatic principles. We do not want a second catastrophe along the lines of 1918. We depend not on the grace of our enemy, but rather on military might. That has nothing to do with objectivity. We easily reject the charge that we are prejudiced. We are not interested in a purely objective decision when our very existence, our very life is at stake. We are on our side, prejudiced, stubborn and selfish in this regard. Do not tell us that is not German. It may be that the opposite is German, but if so it is a bad and dangerous side of our national character that we must fight. Should we be so objective and fair that in the end we do ourselves an injustice? Even Klopstock assailed this German national weakness when he told our people not to be too fair, for our enemies are not noble enough to see how lovely a mistake that is.

Lovely or not, it is a mistake. Over our history it has done us more damage than we can bear. Our present situation is indeed a consequence of it. At vital moments in our history, we have lacked sufficient national egotism to enable us to rise above objectivity and fairness to give full service to our national interest, undeterred by any false sentimentality. If the German people suddenly became leaderless today, they probably would wander around the world as so often in the past spreading morals, culture, civilization, and education, but entirely forgetting to bring food and fuel along. The German people are the heart of humanity, and our mission today is to give it a broad foundation for its existence. That is an ideal, but a realistic one worthy of the greatest sacrifices.

If we once again stood with empty hands at the end of the war, we should be ashamed before the mothers who lost their sons, the children who lost the fathers, and the women who lost their husbands. We therefore warn against any danger we see, and particularly against those with roots in our national character. The bourgeois era with its false and lying idea of humanitarianism is over. We are in the middle of a hard century. It will be won not by good nature, but by manliness and strength. The world is divided by love and hate. To be on firm ground, one must know whom to love and whom to hate.

There is only one thing that is objectively incontestable for us: We must win. That must guide us!