

Background: This is Goebbels' new year address to Germany, delivered on 31 December 1940. 1940 had been a good year for the Nazis, and Goebbels does not hesitate to boast. He makes few predictions of what the new year will bring, though he is clearly confident that German victories will continue.

The source: *Die Zeit ohne Beispiel* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1941), a collection of Goebbels's speeches and writings from January 1939 to September 1941.

The New Year 1940-41

by Joseph Goebbels

One of the most significant years in German history ends today. Not only the Reich, but Europe as a whole changed greatly during its course. States, nations, and peoples have been transformed, and changes in the balance of power occurred that one would not have thought possible over decades, much less one short year. People would have thought me a fool and a dreamer, certainly not a politician to be taken seriously, had I prophesied in my New Year address last year that we would now have a front reaching from Kirkenes to Biskaya, that German soldiers would be standing watch along this 5000 kilometer long front, that Norway would be under German protection up to the Arctic Circle, that France would be militarily destroyed, that England would be suffering under the German counter blockade, that it would be receiving attacks by day and night on its centers as revenge from the German Luftwaffe, that it would be reeling from the blows of our army and struggling for its very existence, and that London would be begging for help from the rest of the world to survive even a few months longer. I would have been asked: "How are you even going to get to Kirkenes? Where are the ships you will need? And France has tough and brave soldiers. Its army is well-equipped and armed. It is rich, it has much support, and do not forget the Maginot Line! We have painful memories of the World War, in which we fought for weeks to gain a half a kilometer of land and soaked the French soil with streams of German blood." I would have heard all that and more.

Today such comments are long forgotten. We hardly remember them. We can hardly recall that they were once made seriously. Time passes quickly, and we have all gotten used to accepting our unprecedented successes and historic victories.

Being a prophet is a thankless task. Things always exceed what we prophesy. Things are on the move, transforming the prejudices, obscurities, and complexities of the past with a hard, but orderly hand. How can we even begin to say what tomorrow will bring when we can hardly understand what is happening today!

It is however an important principle of clear political judgment that one must be able to understand the future in terms of the past. One must not cling to yesterday, but think about tomorrow, to research, but also to act. Only respect for the past gives one the strength to recognize what is coming. The bourgeois is afraid of action, but is impressed by past successes and victories. He easily forgets the battles that have been won and the things that have been accomplished, since he generally had little to do with planning and executing them. Before something happens he cannot have too much fear, afterwards he has all the courage he needs.

As we reviewed 1939 a year ago, the first four months of this gigantic war were over. We could look back on big, proud, and unprecedented victories by the German army. Poland was no more. The German army stood on the border of the present General Government. The threat to the Reich from the east was over, and worries about a two-front war were a matter of the past.

Still, the central question of the military situation remained unresolved. With uncertain expectation the people heard the rumblings of distant thunder. The West was armed, and its dark and threatening speeches rolled over the Reich. If one had believed French statesmen at the time, it was only a matter of weeks before the Reich fell apart. A Paris newspaper wrote that we would be standing in lines outside French field kitchens.

Are Mr. Churchill and his satellites speaking any differently today? In their wild desperation and helplessness they are using the same silly language to conceal their fear of coming events. They are grasping at straws that will fail as soon as they are really believed.

Our opponents have always talked more than we do. Before something happens they talk a lot, only to grow suddenly silent when it actually happens. When things did not seem to be happening, they made the grandest threats against us. It has always been their fate to make the same mistake our enemies did during our struggle for power — they failed to take the Führer seriously. They ignored his warnings and when he was silent concluded that he did not know what to say or do. Three weeks before Hitler became chancellor, the then chancellor said that Hitler's day was over. Schuschnigg railed against the Reich two hours before he was driven in shame from the chancellor's palace in Vienna. Benesch had already packed his bags when he maintained that he had a plan to deal with the apparently hopeless situation. Polish statesmen dreamed of a victory at the gates of Berlin as German guns were already shelling Warsaw. Two months before France's collapse Monsieur Reynaud innocently showed diplomats a map of how Germany would be divided into separate parts. Is Mr. Churchill doing any different today? In his speeches and in the newspapers he explains the peace conditions for Germany once the war is over, while the British Isles in fact are bleeding heavily and gasping for breath. From our beginnings to the present, National Socialism's enemies seem determined to prove the accuracy of the old proverb: "The Lord makes blind those whom he wishes to punish."

Might I ask what Monsieur Reynaud would have done a year ago had he known what 1940 would bring France, or what Mr. Churchill would do now if he knew England's fate in 1941? We National Socialists seldom make prophecies, but we never make false ones. Had one believed the Führer back then, the world would have been spared much misery. Things probably had to happen as they did, however, since a new order of the coming proportions can be born only with pain, and the historic sins of the western democracies must find their historic recompense.

Whatever they may want, the new Germany is the instrument of fate. At the front and at home we have a community of 90 million, ready for any danger or threat. We have the good fortune to have a Führer who has led us down a straight path from the earliest beginnings onward. He can depend on his soldiers, workers, farmers, officials, and professionals. They understand him as he understands them. During the hard months of the war we have had but one thought: victory. We will work and fight for it until the last foe is conquered.

In these last hours of the old year we recall with thanks the great victories given us by fate, and celebrate them before the world. We will never flag nor fail. We bring the sacrifices the war requires with good cheer. No power in the world will make us deny our duty, or forget even for a moment our historic task of maintaining the freedom of our people.

I greet the entire German people at the end of this great and eventful year. I greet the men at home whose hard work supports the war, the workers at the wharves and munitions factories. I greet the women who accept all the difficulties and challenges the war brings, who have jumped in everywhere to replace the men who have gone to the front, who in the midst of it all still give birth. I greet the children, the countless German children who are touched by the hard facts of war, who often have left their parents' homes in regions threatened by air attacks. I greet our workers, our farmers, our professionals, who together are a people who have proven worthy of the time in which we live.

Are warmest and most grateful greetings go to our soldiers. I express the wishes and greetings of the homeland. From the depths of our heart to think of our brave army, our glorious Luftwaffe, and our victorious German navy.

The homeland and the front form a big family as we bid farewell to a year that was full of challenges, but also of big historic victories. The German people bows in praise before the Almighty, who has so clearly blessed us in the past year by standing by us in battle and crowning our weapons with victory. He knows that we are waging this war for a better peace, that we are fighting for the happiness of people who have so often been oppressed by their governments.

The entire German nation, at home and at the front, joins in a warm thanks to the Führer. 90 million glowing hearts greet him. It is with him both in good times and bad, just as it knows that the Führer is always with his people. We Germans wish him happiness and blessing for the new year, a strong, firm and sure hand, health and strength in all his efforts. Long may he live, long may he protect the people as the first fighter for a true and real peace and for the happiness, honor, and fame of his people. The world admires him, but we may love him. We all extend our hands to him and hold firmly and inseparably to him.

The old year is over. A new one comes. May it be no less full of happiness, blessing, and proud victory than the last!