

**Background:** This article is dated 11 March 1939, and was published originally in the official Nazi newspaper the *Völkischer Beobachter*. It was in the midst of the Czech crisis as Goebbels turned to one of his favorite themes: denouncing those who complained in any way about what was happening in Germany. Goebbels actually wrote the article a month earlier, according to his diary entry of 5 February 1939. He claimed to “attack these creatures energetically.”

**The source:** “Kaffeetanten,” *Die Zeit ohne Beispiel* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1941), pp. 64-69.

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## The Coffee Drinkers

by Joseph Goebbels

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We feel it necessary to take up a current issue. The problem is the shortage of coffee that recently surfaced in several parts of the Reich, and has not yet been entirely overcome.

It is actually rather depressing that one must speak of this matter in public. However, there is a certain category of our contemporaries who take pleasure in exploiting every German shortage to amuse themselves or discredit the National Socialist regime.

Coffee is hardly a necessity of life, or an indispensable pleasure. It is certainly a pleasant thing. Conversation flows over a pot of coffee, yes? Limiting coffee consumption, or even giving it up entirely for a while, however, hardly damages one's health. The opposite, in fact. It is true that, as Mussolini said in his speech at the May Field, National Socialism and Fascism share a dislike of a comfortable and pleasant life.

If coffee is in short supply for a while, it is hardly a necessity of life. It would be something different if potatoes or bread were lacking, things that are necessary for daily life. Coffee is a pure luxury item that one enjoys when one has it, but can easily give up when necessity or economic pressures require.

If coffee is in short supply, every German must know that it is not because of the government's ill will that is unwilling to let the people enjoy a cup of coffee, but rather because of a national need, an economic requirement given Germany's situation, one that people have to accept.

The duty of every loyal person in such a situation is to reduce or entirely give up the luxury item in question, and to resume it only when sufficient supplies are again at hand, when the problem is overcome.

The reasons for the coffee shortage, which is still not entirely overcome, are clear enough. They have to do with foreign currency reserves and exports. The situation became evident early in January. One must remember that coffee consumption in Germany has increased about 50% since 1933. 2,160,000 sacks of coffee were imported in 1933, 3,290,000 in 1938. Coffee consumption in Germany has not decreased, but rather increased greatly since the Führer took power; the difference is that more people are drinking coffee.

That is a socialist development. In 1932 only the prosperous drank coffee. The unemployed had no money to buy coffee, so there was no shortage. But now the seven million who were unemployed in 1932 are working. They are now and again able to enjoy life's pleasures. That inevitably leads to occasional shortages in certain areas of our food and luxury goods supplies.

It should really please every German that increasing numbers of our people can enjoy life's pleasures,

even if the result is an occasional personal inconvenience.

The fact that we have to limit our coffee consumption somewhat and cannot import more coffee is the result of shortages of foreign currency, which everyone knows we need for things more important than coffee. It is not a matter of “guns instead of coffee,” but given the current world situation it seems to us more important to build up our military forces than to supply our coffee drinkers with all the coffee they desire. We hardly need to say that we have no desire or ability to pay for the coffee we import in cash. We must pay for our imports with German goods that we export.

Coffee in Germany is only a pleasant beverage. It is not a daily drink for the broad working masses, for whom it is too expensive. Still, the economic barometer shows that there has been a dramatic increase in coffee consumption since the pre-war period. *Per capita* consumption in 1913 was 2 kilograms, 1.6 in 1932 and 2.3 in 1938. Things are absolutely in order.

But for a few weeks one saw lines of coffee lovers outside the shops in big cities. A certain sort of person who never drank coffee before suddenly felt it necessary to announce his taste for it. That was not only disgraceful, it was a scandal.

A few weeks ago a prominent foreigner who is sympathetic to National Socialism noted the lines outside the shops in the streets of Berlin. He thought they must be in line for potatoes or bread. When he discovered that these people were waiting in line for coffee, he could only shake his head.

There is no doubt that some people have taken pleasure in hoarding coffee. They did this in part to ensure their own supply — as if coffee were a necessity of life — but also in part to make difficulties for the National Socialist government. For example, a woman from Berlin’s better circles in the Wilmersdorf district was caught with eight quarter pounds of coffee that she had bought from various shops. She explained she wanted to be sure she had enough. Well, that’s one way of looking at it.

Such people are naturally only a ridiculous minority, but they are in the position to damage our people’s good name. And it is always the same people. They give reluctantly to the Winter Relief drive, they abuse the National Socialist government and the National Socialist movement, oppose everything that we do, lose heart in every crisis, find the party block warden in their building an annoyance, are convinced adherents to confessional movements, love political jokesters, and get their news from foreign radio stations or newspapers.

Naturally they do not think it beneath their dignity to enjoy the benefits of the National Socialist state. Their thanks is to cheerfully vote no in the referendum to approve Austria’s joining the Reich. They have no idea what national discipline means. Their political behavior is disgraceful. Everything that comes from abroad is chic, everything that we do is shocking.

It is of course self-evident for party members not only to reduce, but to eliminate their consumption of foodstuffs or luxury items that are in short supply in Germany. Old party members have learned in the long years of struggle to pay heed to the health of the people. These old party members, however, become outraged when they see that the beneficiaries of their consideration are these thoughtless and inconsiderate people who had as little to do with National Socialism’s rise to power as they do in its current endeavors.

These people do not have the intelligence to see that Germany today is fighting for its economic existence that will decide its very future. If the battle brings even a few annoyances, these people see enough reason to criticize the National Socialist state, forget its previous successes and cry about their missing cup of coffee. A few weeks ago, the hostile foreign press ran pictures of lines of these coffee drinkers and their friends outside of the shops. The hostile press naturally did not say that they were waiting for coffee, but rather claimed they were waiting for potatoes or bread and spread to the world fables that famine had broken out in Germany.

We do not consider these stupid and thoughtless people worth taking seriously, except when their behavior harms Germany's prestige in the world. That is what happened here.

These people, by the way, have no reason to complain about the economic difficulties that Germany is facing. They made no protest in 1919 when the Treaty of Versailles forced us to give up our colonies. We were the ones who protested. They did not oppose in any way the Dawes Plan or the Young Treaty, which devoured our last economic reserves. In fact, they branded us traitors when we opposed them.

Their cowardly acquiescence explains why Germany has no colonies, and therefore cannot cover our needs from our own resources. There is no question that if the return of Germany's colonies suddenly became a hot issue, these people would grouse, complain, criticize, and predict a new world war. I do have to tell these intellectual souls that we have no intention whatsoever of taking heed of their tender sensibilities by changing our economic policies, which serve the interests and needs of the entire German people, and particularly the working people.

These dear people simply will have to learn patience and adjust to things as they are. At the worst, they will less frequently enjoy complaining about the party and the state over a cup of coffee, saying things like: "Did you hear, Frau Meyer, that our new block warden is our doorman? What does one say? My husband says that is Bolshevism. But don't pass it on. We don't want any unpleasantness!"

We old National Socialists pay no attention to people who talk and bitch like that. We cannot ignore the fact, however, that these coffee drinkers are using a ridiculous shortage of coffee that decent people do not worry about in the least to stand in line outside the shops as if famine had broken out in Germany. That is distressing and dreadful, and we do not want to see such pictures in the future.

We have seen to it that these coffee lines have vanished from German cities. Decent people, when coffee is in short supply — as it is today — either reduce their consumption or stop drinking it entirely. The coffee drinkers can wait until there is once again enough coffee. Then they can return to their coffee parties and say things like "Well, Frau Meyer, what do you think about that? Things are pretty bad, they are pretty bad!"