

**Background:** This article was originally published in *Das Reich* on 27 September 1942. The war situation still looked moderately promising. The Germans expected to capture Stalingrad. Using the standard Nazi argument that the Allies planned to destroy Germany should they win the war, Goebbels works to build up enthusiasm for the war effort.

**The source:** “Was auf dem Spiele steht,” *Der steile Aufstieg* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1944), 3-9.

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## What is at Stake

by Joseph Goebbels

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There is probably no one in the warring nations who has not, either publicly or privately, thought about what his people, our part of the world, and the world itself will be like after this war is over. For most, their ideas are more the result of fantasy or wishful thinking than of sober and realistic consideration of reality. Those who bear no responsibility have the prerogative to think about life and the world however they wish. Those in government are different. They must represent the whole interest of their people, not only the interests of the present, but even more importantly those of the future. Their wishes and actions must follow rules that take account of the most varied factors affecting the life of their nation, as well of the nations in their sphere of influence. The deeper significance of the war is to bring about a new arrangement in the fundamentals of existence of the peoples. All its actions must be guided by this fact, if it is not to lose its foundations and its goals.

One cannot accuse the German government of ever violating this principle in the course of the war. It has carefully avoided laying out broad theoretical war goals, always limiting itself to fighting for the freedom, independence, and vital living space of its people. Most of its military actions were forced upon it. Its offensives always had their origins in a desire to defend the nation. After defeating an enemy, it made reasonable demands that were both practical and absolutely necessary.

That also explains why Germany has waged, and is waging, the war without any desire for revenge. Super-fanatic patriots are never heard here. For us, the war was and is too serious a matter to want to entrust it to crazy hot heads. No one could prove that we have proclaimed as our war goal the dissolution, destruction, or economic or physical liquidation of a people that our weapons have defeated. For example, though the French along with the British were responsible for forcing us into the hardest war of our history, and although the Treaty of Versailles gave us reason to settle some accounts with our western neighbor, our terms at the second Compiègne were so moderate as to be almost the opposite of what friend and foe had expected of us.

The reasons for that are clear. Aside from the fact that any other approach would have been inconsistent with our national character, we also feel that during war we are in a certain way responsible for the coming peace. We never forget that after this drama, the European peoples will have to live next to each other, even after a complete re-ordering of their interests. War is not normal, but rather abnormal. The less one allows it to be diverted into pure resentment, the more clear and transparent its course will be. Anger and revenge are usually bad counselors. One can hate without being overcome by hate. He who loses his nerve and falls into war polemics is almost always wrong. This is what separates our Anglo-Saxon opponents not only from us, but from the entire civilized world.

One can argue about whether the English and Americans, along with their Jewish blowhards, were forced by domestic political reasons to reveal so openly their secret intentions toward us. Whatever the

reason, it hardly needs to be said that their propaganda has done them serious harm, both in the world and above all with respect to our own people. It may be that, given their eternal military defeats, the English and Americans need to let off steam occasionally with outbursts of rage and revenge. No one can doubt, however, that we can only welcome their revelations.

Several months ago, the British public was occupied with the well-known theses of the notorious Lord Vansittart, which maintained that Germany had been treated too mildly by the Treaty of Versailles, and that it must be entirely beaten down after this war. People in London discussed whether it was advisable to proclaim these plans in public, within hearing range of the German people, or whether one could bend the Germans to submission through infamous propaganda like that of the past. No one realized that this discussion was unprofitable at the moment, and hardly advisable given the current propaganda aimed at the German people. One did not argue about Vansittart's doctrines themselves, but rather only when and how they should be publicly discussed. Has anyone ever seen anything like that on our side? Our debates about the war focus only on critical matters. We discussed only what was useful and necessary, without ever falling into overheated considerations of revenge.

A few days ago, the official English news agency Reuters carried a cable from an overseas émigré newspaper supported by the British government. It proposed that all German children between two and six years of age should be taken from their mothers and sent abroad for 25 years. This would lead the Germans, it said, to forget their nationality. A mixed ethnic brew would result that could no longer be called German. Had Reuters not carried this nonsense, one might have done the English government the favor of assuming that this outrageous proposal was the result of a deranged mind.

In view of what we have discussed, that is no longer possible. Rather, an organ subject to the British government let slip in a careless moment what the opposite side really thinks and plans. Nor should one assume that it is not as bad as it looks. The German people learned what are enemies are capable of after the Treaty of Versailles. The blood of even the last German froze in his veins when he learned what would come of the so-called peace promised by Wilson's humanitarian phrases.

We are firmly convinced that the English and the Americans, and above all their Jewish rulers from behind the scenes, plan an even more grotesque intensification of what they did before if they succeed once more in overcoming us. If German propaganda had done nothing else during the war than to make that clear to the whole German people, it would have done great service. It may be that there is still some stupid fool or another on our side who, because he is so dumb, thinks himself smart enough to believe that such monstrosities are only the result of overheated British war fantasies. We must admit we lack the ability to believe that. It is enough for us that our people fell prey to it once before. No German wants a repetition of that dark chapter. We prefer to trust German weapons rather than British promises. We are convinced that Lord Vansittart, not Mr. Churchill, is speaking the truth. We think the Atlantic Charter and empty Reuters dispatches are English diversions. In any event, we do not want to see history repeat itself for the German people. We are persuaded that that would mean its end.

We naturally know full well that the English will never have the chance to carry out their plans of revenge against us, but do think it our national duty to at least make our people aware of their intentions. It is good when one knows not only what will happen if one wins, but also what will happen if one loses. That does not make one a coward, but rather courageous. We can only be thankful to those British circles who betray so openly and plainly their intentions. They do much of the work for us. We do not need to remind our people of what happened at the end of the World War. The English are kind enough to tell us frankly and openly what they plan to do to us should German stupidity enable them, contrary to all expectations, to win once again.

When this war began, we were aware of where it would lead. Just as during our fight for power, we burned all the bridges behind us, looking only forward, never to the rear. When a people is fighting for

its national life and its ethnic future, it must be prepared to throw everything it has on fate's balance. That may sound hard, but harder still is the phrase "too late!" that follows a missed opportunity. People with no sense of history may think that we are cursed by history; we think that we enjoy its blessing, since the door is open to our people's great national future, and thus the path to a broader scope for our future life. That takes sweat, work, and blood. But when did victory ever come without them?

We are in the fourth year of war. It has reached previously unimaginable dimensions. Its prospects and possibilities have also increased. It has been hard and pitiless, giving us nothing as a gift. More than ever, we are gripped by its ever-increasing demands, from which only the most brutalized spirits try to escape. We have become a community in the best sense of the word. We know exactly what our opportunities are. We must also learn to see the dangers we face. We have the strength to overcome any crisis, if we only use that strength. The more radically we face the demands of the war, the sooner we will master them. We face an opponent who will use every means to defeat us. We therefore must use every means to defend ourselves. What does it matter what we lose when everything is at stake! Peoples, like individuals, are strongest when they are fighting for their lives. That is our situation today.

We do not take the occasional outbursts of British-Jewish rage all that seriously, giving them no more attention than they deserve. Over the past 20 years, our opponents have so often prophesied our dreadful end that we have become perfectly immune to them. We see such outbursts not only as expressions of rage and a desire for revenge, but also of impotence. We have always seen through our opponents. But perhaps there may be one person or another who, in a careless moment, is inclined to take their humanitarian phrases more seriously than their Old Testament outbursts of hatred. Such people will be brought back to reality by the Reuters dispatch mentioned above. The enemy himself has made it clear to them that war is the worst of all possible times for stale sentimentality.

In the live of nations, justice is always the result of power. Weapons are the best defense against rape. The leadership of a nation should entrust the fate of the nation only to its own strength. We have sinned against this fundamental principle often enough to avoid wanting to repeat it.

Our women know what their sons are fighting for, and our wives know what their husbands are fighting for. Each worker and each farmer is more certain than ever before of why he is swinging his hammer or standing behind his plow. Millions of children look to us. The enemy sees our future in them, and wants to destroy them.

So let us get to work! The enemy has told us what is at stake.