

“Total War”: Excerpt from Goebbels’s Speech at the Sportpalast in Berlin (February 18, 1943)

Abstract

On February 18, 1943, Joseph Goebbels delivered the most famous speech of his career at the Berlin Sportpalast. The German army had just suffered a massive defeat at Stalingrad, and he called upon the population to commit to “total war.” Like none other, the speech shows Goebbels’s talent for using rhetoric to totally manipulate reality.

Source

[...] Let me, to establish what the truth is, ask a number of questions of you, my fellow Germans, which you must answer me to the best of your knowledge and convictions. When my listeners indicated their spontaneous approval of my demands of January 30, the British press the next day claimed that it had been a propaganda spectacle, and was not representative of the true mood of the German people.

Well, to this meeting today I invited a cross section, in the best sense of that word, of the German people. In front of me there sit, row on row, wounded soldiers from the eastern front, men with scarred bodies, with amputated legs or arms, men blinded in action who have come here with their Red Cross nurses, men in the prime of life whose crutches are standing in front of them. In between, I count as many as 50 wearers of the Oak Leaf Cluster and of the Knight's Cross, a splendid delegation from our fighting front. Behind them, there is a block of armaments workers, from Berlin's armored car factory. Behind them, there sit men from the various party organizations, soldiers from our fighting forces, physicians, scientists, artists, engineers, architects, teachers, officials, civil servants from their offices and studies, proud representatives of our intellectual life on all its levels, to whom the country at this time of war owes miracles of inventiveness and human genius. Distributed over the entire auditorium of the Sports Palace I see thousands of German women. Youth is represented, and so is venerable age. No estate, no profession, no age group was overlooked when our invitations went out. Thus I can properly say that facing me is a cross section of the entire German people, at the front and at home. Is that correct?

Then you, my listeners, are representing the nation at this moment. And it is you whom I would like to ask ten questions. Give me your answers, along with the German people, before the whole world, but particularly before our enemies.

The British claim that the German nation has lost its faith in victory. I ask you: Do you believe, with the Führer and with us, in the final, total victory of the German people? I ask you: Are you resolved to follow the Führer through thick and thin in the pursuit of victory, even if this should mean the heaviest of contributions on your part?

Second. The British claim that the German nation is tired of the struggle. I ask you: Are you prepared to continue this struggle with grim determination, and undeterred by any circumstance decreed by fate, to continue it with the Führer, as the phalanx of the home front behind our fighting armies, until victory is ours?

Third. The British claim that the Germans are no longer in a mood to accept the ever-increasing amount of war work demanded of them by the government. I ask you: Are you, and the German nation, resolved to work ten, twelve, and if need be fourteen or sixteen hours a day, if the Führer should command it, and

to give your all for victory?

Fourth. The British claim that the German nation is resisting the government's measures of total war, that what the Germans want is not total war but surrender. I ask you: Do you want total war? Do you want it, if need be, even more total and radical than we are capable of imagining it today?

Fifth. The British claim that the German nation has lost its confidence in the Führer. I ask you: Is your confidence in the Führer more passionate, more unshakable than ever? Is your readiness to follow him on all his paths, and to do whatever is necessary to bring the war to a successful conclusion, absolute and unlimited?

I ask you my sixth question. Are you prepared henceforth to devote your entire strength to providing the Eastern front with the men and materials it needs to give Bolshevism its mortal blow?

I ask you my seventh question. Do you swear a solemn oath to the fighting front that the country stands behind it, its morale high, and will give it everything necessary to achieve victory?

I ask you my eighth question. Do you, especially you, the women yourselves, want the government to see to it that German women, too, give all their energies to the pursuit of the war, filling jobs wherever possible to free men for action and thus to help their men at the front?

I ask you my ninth question. Do you approve, if necessary, the most radical of measures against a small group of draft-dodgers and blackmarketeers, who play peace in the midst of war, and mean to exploit people's sufferings for their own selfish purposes? Do you agree that a person who interferes with the war effort shall lose his head?

As my tenth and last question I ask you: Is it your wish that even in wartime, as the party program commands, equal rights and equal duties shall prevail, that the home front shall give evidence of its solidarity and take the same heavy burdens of war upon its shoulders, and that the burdens be distributed equitably, whether a person be great or small, poor or rich?

I have asked you. You have given me your answers. You are a part of the nation; your response has thus shown the attitude of the German people. You have told our enemies what they must know lest they abandon themselves to illusions and misinformation. [...]

Source of English translation: Joachim Remak, ed., *The Nazi Years: A Documentary History*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969, pp. 91–92.

Source of original German text: Excerpt from Goebbels' Speech at the Sportpalast (February 18, 1943), *Frankfurter Zeitung*, February 20, 1943, p. 7; reprinted in Helmut Heiber, ed., *Goebbels Reden 1932–1945*. Bindlach: Gondrom Verlag, 1991, pp. 203–05.

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