

Background: This article is dated 19 September 1943. The Allies had landed in Sicily in July, and Mussolini had been deposed by the Badoglio group on 25 July 1943. This caught the Germans by complete surprise. Goebbels failed to produce his weekly article for *Das Reich*. The new government began making peace feelers. Shortly before this essay was written, Nazi forces rescued Mussolini and restored him to power. Goebbels here puts the best possible light on the situation.

The source: “Das Schulbeispiel,” *Der steile Aufstieg* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1944), pp. 456-463.

A Classic Example

by Joseph Goebbels

It attracted some notice when the author of these lines failed to provide his usual weekly lead article on the Friday following 25 July. Some unfriendly souls even believed that the events surrounding the fall of the Duce and the establishment of the Badoglio regime in Rome rather took his breath away. The falsity of that belief needs no proof today. It would naturally have been possible to speak during the week in question just as it is in any other week, and the situation was such that there would have been more to say than usual about the war and international affairs. However, regard for our national interest kept us silent. We did not want to say what we could say, and we could not say what we wanted to say.

We do not need to say that the treason of the Badoglio clique, which first became evident when Mussolini was deposed, was recognized immediately by the German military leadership. It nonetheless had to put a good face on things while they developed. Just as the traitors worked in secret, so did we. To paraphrase Machiavelli, it was a point when it was a sign of great wisdom to look the fool. Only thus could the disgraceful plans of the traitors in Rome be resisted and ruined.

It was a classic example of the necessity of silence during war. We were not willing to say anything that conflicted with our knowledge and beliefs, and that we knew would be contradicted by the facts within a few weeks. But we could not discuss the true situation without revealing the plans and intentions of the German war leadership. And in the middle of one of the most dramatic moments in the war, we did not want to take up some peripheral issue, leaving us open to the charge of dodging the issue. We had no alternative but to remain silent. We were firmly convinced that developments would soon reveal the reason for our silence.

This happened more rapidly and dramatically than even we could have expected. The German military leadership assumed after the Duce was imprisoned that the Badoglio regime intended to take Italy out of the war as quickly as possible. All the protestations by the reactionary clique of traitors in Rome about their loyalty and dependability were not able to convince us of the contrary. One does not replace a strong man with a weak one in order to wage war more energetically, as the lying Badoglio clique told us. The actions of the clique in Rome proved that they were committing treason on a large scale. Their goal was not only to deceive us, but also to give our soldiers in the south over to the enemy. This treacherous betrayal was to be the payment for a better armistice agreement.

The Badoglio regime did not want to leave the war in an honorable way, but rather at the cost of the Axis partner that Italy owes so much to since 1940. The king made the most pompous calls to continue the war and hold to Italy's obligations, while military and political actions demonstrated treason of the most disgraceful and degrading sort. Spare us the necessity of going through the Badoglio regime's treachery. Even thinking about it sickens us. There has never been a greater example of treachery in all

of history. But it was a treachery that backfired, as the proverb has it.

The German leadership naturally drew cold and rational conclusions at the beginning of developments. The failure of the Badoglio regime's treachery resulted from the German leadership's countermeasures. Had it succeeded, the Reich would have faced the greatest danger of the war. Speaking from direct knowledge, we can say that only the Führer's clear vision and wisdom is to thank for overcoming the danger. Despite all the hypocritical assurances of a treacherous king and his cowardly marshals, who even gave their word of honor as soldiers, measures were taken to defend German interests, despite scandalous disloyalty.

The public knows the outrageous nature of these treacherous events. Not only did they conceal their measures from their loyal, reliable and generous ally, they continued to do so even in the midst of their activities. They made military demands of us that, had we fulfilled them, would have led to the worst possible disaster for our troops in Italy.

One can understand why the Führer was not able to speak to the German people in the midst of these breath-taking events, despite the widespread wishes of the public. The resulting uncertainty had to be accepted as events continued to develop. We presumed that the traitorous clique in Rome would continue their activities, displaying more stupidity than lack of character. That was our plan. We had to play dumb in order to act intelligently.

The German people read with horror the account of the deposing and imprisoning of the Duce. We knew this earlier, without being able to reveal it to the public. If one can make any reproach against Fascism, it is that it believed in a king's loyalty. His throne was rescued in 1922 by the march on Rome, and like most modern kings, he repaid the strong policies of his most loyal servant by deserting him in the hour of danger by running to those who opposed and hated him. Kings generally are not characterized by thankfulness. Wilhelm I, whose loyalty to Bismarck is an exception, earned the title "the Great." The Duce was good enough in 1922 to protect the corrupt court in Rome from execution by the Bolsheviks. They deposed him in 1943 because they blindly thought they could get along without him. Recent events have shown how wrong they were. The violent removal of a strong man leads to anarchy. The Italian royal house quickly learned the result of replacing a personality of historic stature with a cowardly, treacherous marshal, one who held breaking his word of honor as a soldier to be the height of political wisdom.

One can only pity the Italian people, who were the victims of these revolting developments. Just as a nation benefits from the deeds and accomplishments of strong governments, so too they suffer from the mistakes and failures of weak, amateurish and disloyal governments. It was unavoidable that the Italian people had to suffer at the beginning of the darkest chapter of their history. They have the peace-hungry cowardly elements of Roman society to thank. The thirteen points of the capitulation treaty will have given them a foretaste of what was coming. World history is the world court. Italy's citizens can learn from the international press what friends and enemies think about the treachery of the king and his clique of generals. Even the English and Americans gag. Their motto at the moment is: "Love treason, hate the traitor." One does not need to wonder about the judgment of history on the royal house and those around it. That is already clear.

London and Washington are amazed at the German reaction to the Badoglio regime's treachery. They expected things to turn out differently. The German troops in the south of Italy were to be cut off and destroyed. We would not be prepared to deal with Churchill's amphibious landing. Air terror would increase. The German people would be so depressed that on 9 November a repetition of the tragedy of 1918 would be possible, even likely. Nothing like happened, or will happen. The English and the Americans have a long way to go to get to Rome, not to mention Berlin. The German army is master of events in Italy. And as for German morale, it has never been stronger than it is today.

The Italian example is not encouraging for we Germans, but rather a warning. We see it as a classic example of what not to do. No one here wants to follow in the footsteps of the Badoglio clique. To the contrary, the consequences that followed the royal house's betrayal of the nation's great leader and his powerful friends is a lesson for every German. It has opened the eyes of even the dumbest among us. A flood of letters has reached us recently. In some, the writers regret that this or that annoyance of the war had put them in a bad mood. In the face of what has happened in Italy, they regret it. A university professor writes that he is normally a peaceful man, but after reading the capitulation demands on the Italian people, he is firmly resolved to punish anyone who in his hearing even hints at opposing the war or doubts victory. Everyone in Germany thinks the same way. The threat has not robbed us of courage, but brought us closer together.

None of the English-American hopes have been realized. They shot a poisoned arrow at us, but it boomeranged off the wisdom of our leadership and the firm morale of our people. A danger that first seemed deadly has been averted, and a national misfortune has been turned to our good. How can we doubt final victory in the face of such a wonderful and improbable turn of events? The war brings so many surprises that one cannot predict its course. One must hold to the virtues with which its dangers and difficulties are mastered.

Courage, steadfastness, and confidence in a just fate are always with the brave in the end. Their loyalty is unshakable, they stand by their friends and allies. The treacherous Badoglio clique sinned shamefully against all of these virtues, and they have their reward. A band of treacherous cowards misused their high offices, forgot their honor, and followed a false wisdom that wants to escape danger, but falls victim to it. Their names are covered with shame and disgrace in the book of history.

We bow in admiration before that great personality, the Duce. He neither caused, nor could he hinder, the misfortune that came upon the Italian people, but now has even greater claim on our admiration. The whole German nation admires him. It found spontaneous expression when news of his rescue reached us. We are happy that our people think this way. It has a natural feeling for thankfulness and loyalty, and will stand even more fanatically by a man whose lifework is threatened. No one knows what the future of the Italian people may be. Perhaps it is undergoing a hard and painful process that will bring new life. Italy will have to decide for itself. We made a clear choice after 1918: it was for struggle, sacrifice, devotion and hard work. That led us upward. Each nation is responsible for itself.

We Germans in recent weeks walked a narrow path along the abyss. Not everyone saw the abyss, but we all followed the Führer, who even in his silence showed us the way. More than ever, we sense the blessing of his great personality that watches over the life and future of the nation. Giving to him our full confidence is not only our national duty, but also our proud right. We want to be hard and strong, to fight bravely, to work untiringly, to believe and trust unshakably, until the hour of victory comes.

All of us will then be able to say that we have not gained victory unworthily, but rather that it is the reward for struggle, work, and loyalty.