

Background: In this blunt speech, Goebbels addresses Czechoslovakian artists and journalists who were visiting Berlin. Goebbels tells his audience that they had better get used to the fact of German rule. The speech was given on 11 September 1940. Goebbels credited himself with a rhetorical masterpiece. His diary entry for 14 September 1940 notes: “My speech to the Czechs was a tremendous success. It entirely changed their outlook. Even I hadn’t expected that to happen.”

The source: “Das kommende Europa. Rede an die tschechischen Kulturschaffenden und Journalisten,” *Die Zeit ohne Beispiel* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1941), pp. 314-323.

The Coming Europe

by Joseph Goebbels

I welcome the opportunity to speak to you on a number of questions that in my view must be openly discussed if relations between the Reich and the Protectorate are to be improved. I believe it necessary to do so now, despite the war. I fear that once the war is over, we will not be able to discuss these matters as calmly as we now can.

As intelligent people, you know that the greatest events in the history of Europe are now taking place. I am firmly convinced — how could it be otherwise! — that things will turn out to our advantage.

When England falls, we will have the chance to reorganize Europe in a way that befits the social, economic, and technical possibilities of the twentieth century.

Our German Reich went through a similar process about a hundred years ago. It was splintered into larger and smaller entities, just as Europe is divided today. This collection of small states was possible as long as the transportation system was such that it took considerable time to travel from one small principality to the next. The invention of the steam engine, however, rendered this situation untenable. Before the development of the railroad, one needed 24 hours to go from one place to another, but only three or four hours were necessary thereafter. Before the steam engine one could travel 24 hours before reaching a customs boundary, but even the most fanatic proponents of federalism found it intolerable once it took five hours, then three, then two, and finally only half an hour.

There were also forces in the Reich back then who attempted to remedy the situation through negotiation. History proved that their way was false, and in a rather common way. History follows harder laws than those that usually prevail at the negotiating table. You will recall perhaps Bismarck’s words from those years. He said that German unity would come not through speeches and decisions, but through blood and iron. This was controversial at the time, but history proved its correctness. The unity of the Reich was established through battles. A large number of the peculiarities of the individual areas, along with their prejudices, narrow-mindedness and limited horizons were overcome. They had to be overcome, since the Reich otherwise would not have been able to compete with the other powers in Europe. Our unification was the foundation of our ability to overcome these problems.

Naturally there were Bavarians or Saxons or Wurtembergers or people from Baden or Schaumberg-Lippe who were unhappy about developments, but in the end their prejudices vanished and their attention turned to the greater goal, the new Reich.

Of course, the Bavarian remained a Bavarian, the Saxon a Saxon, the Prussian a Prussian. But they saw beyond their provincial origins to a larger community, and in the course of the decades learned that a whole series of economic, financial, foreign, and military problems could be resolved through the

community.

The greatness of the Reich was the result of this process — a process that seems obvious to us today, but which many back then some could not or would not understand. They were the prisoners of their prejudices, and lacked the strength to overcome them and imagine a better world. Only a few could look beyond their own age.

The railroad is no longer the most modern method of transportation, having been replaced by the airplane. A modern airplane covers a distance in an hour or an hour and a half for which a train needs twelve hours. Technology has brought not only tribes, but also peoples closer together than could even be imagined in the past. In the past one needed 24 hours to speak from Berlin to Prague through a newspaper. Today I only need a second. Standing before this microphone, one can simultaneously be heard in Prague, Slovakia, Warsaw, Brussels, and Den Haag. I once needed twelve hours to travel from Berlin to Prague by train. Now I can fly in an hour. Technology has once again brought people closer together. It is certainly no accident that this technology has developed only recently. The population of Europe has grown, presenting Europe with entirely new problems in agriculture, the economy, finance, and the military. And the continents, too, have grown closer as a result of new technology. Europeans are more and more realizing that our differences are only family squabbles when measured against the vast problems that the continents must solve.

I am convinced that, just as we look back with some amusement on the narrow-minded conflicts between German provinces in the 1840's and 1850's, our posterity in fifty years will look back with similar amusement on what is going on today in Europe. They will see the "dramatic battles between nations" of small European states as family squabbles. I am convinced that in fifty years we will no longer think in terms of nations, but of continents, and that entirely different, and perhaps much larger, problems will concern Europe.

Do not think that, as we bring about a certain order in Europe, we do it to harm individual nations. The freedom of individual countries must be brought in harmony with the conditions of the present and with simple questions of practicality. Just as a member of a family does not have the right to disturb everyone else's peace, an individual nation does not have the right to resist the larger order.

We have never intended to promote this ordering or reordering process by force. Although we are Germans, we do not wish to injure the economic, cultural or social characteristics of the Bavarians or Saxons. It is no more in our interest to injure those, say, of the Czech people. However, the two peoples must understand each other. We must be either friends or enemies. As I believe you know well from history, the Germans can be terrible enemies, or good friends. We can extend our hand to a friend and work with him. We can also destroy an enemy.

The peoples who have joined this ordering process, or who will join it, have to decide if they will participate whole-heartedly and loyally, or if they will resist it. That will not change the facts. You may be sure that once the Axis powers have defeated England, they will not allow major political, economic or social changes in the re-organized Europe. If England cannot stop it, neither can the Czech people. If you have understood recent history, you will know that today's political power situation cannot and will not be altered.

Therefore, gentlemen, I speak realistically, with no appeal to sentiment. It makes no difference whether you like this or not. Whether you applaud it or not, the facts remain the same. I believe that when one cannot change a situation and must accept certain disadvantages because of it, one would be foolish not to accept its advantages as well. Since you have become a part of the Reich, I do not see why the Czech people would prefer to oppose the Reich rather than to accept its advantages.

You have had to accept a series of political changes. I know that they were not pleasant. No one knows

that better than I. I know that you have had to give up things that you enjoyed in the past, and I know that one does not adjust to such a situation overnight. There are certain matters that are much more unpleasant than they seem from the perspective of the Reich.

Nonetheless: If you have to accept the disadvantages, I believe you should also accept the advantages. Let me give an example.

In 1933, we faced the Jewish Question. Everyone in the world knew that we opposed the Jews. We discovered the disadvantages of anti-Semitism, but we also got the benefits. We had to accept the fact that we were slandered and attacked throughout the world. We also got the advantages — namely excluding the Jews from theater, film, public life, and the government. When we were later attacked as enemies of the Jews, we at least could say: It was worth it. We got something for it.

You, gentlemen, have had a chance to visit the Reich. I made sure that you had done so before speaking to you. You have seen the Reich in the middle of a war, and will be able to imagine how it will look in peace. Our well-populated Reich and Italy will lead Europe. That will happen. There is no changing it. For you, this means that you are part of a large Reich that will give a new order to Europe. It will put an end to a situation that clearly cannot satisfy people. We are about a work of reform that I am sure will be a major chapter in European history. Can you imagine the importance of the Reich after the war?

You know that we have made energetic efforts not only in politics, but also in the cultural and economic spheres. You know that we want the people to join in these measures and their results. Let me give an example: Formerly, German films had an audience of 86 million. In the future, the audience will be much larger. It is up to you whether you want to participate, or stand aside. You can be sure that in the latter case, we have the ways and means to eliminate Czech films. We do not want to do that. We would rather you join with us. Nor do we want to suppress your cultural life. On the contrary, we want a lively cultural exchange. But that can happen only on the basis of loyalty. You must accept the present situation without leaving a back door open and thinking that if things go wrong, you will have a way out.

Take the history of the National Socialist movement as an example. Some members of our party carry a special badge with a gold wreath around it. That says: “I was a National Socialist when there was no advantage to it. I fought for this movement before it came to power.” They affirmed the movement at a time when its victory was not at all certain. Affirming a cause when it has won takes no great intelligence. But if you announce your loyalty before the victory is gained, gentlemen, you will give us full confidence in your loyalty.

I believe that you have to work through this matter. I have done the same thing myself. Recently I have read quite a number of Czech books and seen quite a few Czech films. I have read numerous reports about Czech cultural activities. I really regret that I cannot recommend most of the products of your cultural life to the German people. Things must first be cleaned up. I would for example like to have the German people see a number of Czech films. Do you want to be satisfied with the Czech market, or would you like your films to be shown throughout the Reich? Does it not fill you with pride to go to Hamburg and say: “That is my harbor?” Would you not like to look at the German fleet and say: “That is the fleet that protects us,” or see the heroic German army and say “That is the army that also protects our people with iron strength?” I think that is more beneficial than saying: “Oh well, I guess we have to go along!,” but only half-heartedly.

You and the Czech people will have to make up your minds. Do not tell me that the Czech people wants this or that. I think I know something about leadership. A people thinks the way its intelligentsia teaches it to think. It has the ideas of its intellectual leaders. It is your intellectual duty to make clear to the Czech people the decision they should make. Should you not tell them that the Czech people have

chosen the right side? You have seen Rotterdam. That should enable you to properly evaluate the decision your president made **[to accept German occupation]**.

No one should say: "Well, perhaps one could have avoided that." We do not act according to whim. We, too, are servants of fate, and cannot act any differently than we do. We are only the instruments of history. One should not say: "Without National Socialists, there would be peace in Europe." No, there would have been others to act in our place. When the time is ripe things must happen, just like an apple falls from the tree when it is ripe. We cannot stop fate; it would roll right over us.

In other words, you have the choice of making these facts clear to your people, of giving them a broader perspective than they formerly had. I believe that if you look back on the war's development so far, you will conclude: "We have chosen the better side. Things could not continue as they were. That would have been possible only by holding Germany down, which is unthinkable."

Today you have the opportunity of accepting all the advantages that the German Reich has to offer. You have our protection. No one can attack you. You have the opportunity to tell all of Germany of your virtues. You have the opportunity to send your music to Germany, your films, your literature, your press, your radio. You know that the German people have a great interest in culture. We cannot and do not want to change that. We are not dictators, but rather instruments of the will of our people.

As I said, we offer you cooperation. I have offered you here a foundation for understanding. We do not ask anything dishonorable of you, or that you become parvenus or lackeys, or whatever.

That gives no pleasure in the long run. But I do not believe that it is asking too much that, in this dramatic moment in European history that will lead to new forms of human community, we come to an understanding about these matters, to create clarity and decide if we will be friends or foes.

We want to know if we are friends of foes of another people's intelligentsia. Over the past few years, we have proven our abilities as enemies. If you display a positive and active loyalty, you will see what kind of friends we can be. Friendship between the German and Czech peoples will result.

My task today has been to make that clear to you. I believe we could work together, and that we will. I am firmly convinced that if you are willing to show loyalty, you will do us and your Czech people a big favor. One cannot go by what people say today. The average man does not see very far. The task of the intelligentsia is to help him see further, to help him imagine things that will be. The role of the intelligentsia is to open the way to coming events, not be blind servants of the present.

I therefore urge you to speak of these matters to the Czech people. If we did it, the Czech people would not believe us. We are National Socialists, and they might think we were speaking egotistically, even though our only goal is to establish clear relations between two peoples who have to get along with each other. You live there, we live here. Only a vast natural catastrophe that destroyed our people could change the present situation. Since that is not likely, we will have to get along. Whether we like each other or not is irrelevant. What is relevant is that we want to give the millions of Europe a common basis and a common ideal. England has until now resisted this ideal. England has attempted to keep Europe in disorder, since it saw that as the best defense of its island existence. But it is falling under the gigantic blows of our army. Once it falls, we will have the chance to bring peace to Europe. You are warmly invited to join us.