

Background: Goebbels began a weekly newspaper called *Das Reich* in 1940. He generally wrote the lead article each week, in which he took special pride. This essay is dated 19 July 1942. Goebbels explains the Soviet Union's remarkable military resistance. For a good discussion of Goebbels's wartime essays, see Bramsted's book [*Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda*](#).

The source: "Die sogenannte russische Seele," *Das eherne Herz* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1943), pp. 398-405.

The So-Called Russian Soul

by Joseph Goebbels

The hard and pitiless battle for Sevastapol, as well as the recent broad offensive operations of the German army, have reopened a lively debate, above all in the neutral press. Similar to that of the past winter, it is on the issue of the so-called Russian soul. The spiritual as well as the territorial boundaries between Asia and Europe have always interested Western Europeans. It is not to be denied that the ethnic mixture that we called Russia before 1917 and the Soviet Union thereafter has been a riddle to our part of the world. That had nothing to do with tsarism then or Bolshevism today. It simply has to do with the fact that the various peoples joined together in this monster of a nation are not a people [*Volk*] in our sense of the word.

The many sides of the Russian soul which appears so complex and contradictory to us are in reality nothing but the reflection of the various peoples who are a part of it. It would be a mistake to evaluate it by the standards of Western Europe. What we call Russia has always been a collective mass. Only a small portion of it has made history. Earlier it was the tsarist upper class, today the Bolshevik-Jewish ruling clique. The broad masses of peasants and workers were only tools, having themselves no part in historical events.

The peoples of the Soviet Union live at a level of brutish primitiveness that we can hardly imagine. An exhibition called "[The Soviet Paradise](#)" has recently visited Berlin and other large cities, trying to show the nature of life in the Soviet Union through original materials. Normal and naive people can hardly believe it. One often saw groups of civilians discussing the matter heatedly, who then had to be told by a few wounded veterans of the Eastern Front that reality in the so-called workers' and peasants' paradise was even worse than what was presented. It is significant that the campaign against the Soviet Union has not brought back any fond memories of communism. None of our soldiers has seen any evidence of an agreement between the theory and practice of Bolshevism. None has returned from the East as a communist. The veil has been removed. Bolshevism is not a danger for us any longer.

It still seems astonishing that the Soviet army has put up resistance against our troops that they have not encountered in previous campaigns. They fight with a stolid, almost bestial determination, and sometimes show a contempt of death that is more than remarkable. Participants in the Battle of Sevastopol relate stories of the resistance of the Soviet troops that need explanation if they are not to unsettle a large part of the public.

The Russians throughout their history have always shown a particularly stubborn and tough manner of defense, while never being particularly gifted at offense. Their national character has a defensive nature. They are stolid and animalistic. They are accustomed to a hard and impoverished existence, and therefore do not hold on to life all that strongly. The average person has less worth than a bicycle. A rapid birthrate quickly replaces any losses. They have a type of primitive toughness that one cannot call

bravery. It is entirely different. Bravery is a kind of spiritual courage. The toughness with which the Bolsheviks defended their bunkers in Sevastapol was more a bestial drive, and nothing could be more mistaken than to assume that it was the result of Bolshevik views or education. The Russians were always like that, and will likely always remain so. It is also easier to throw a life away when there is no promise to it than when, even at the moment of danger, a distant paradise still seems to beckon.

One does not need to speak of the enormous danger that the armed uprising of such stolid millions is for Germany and all of Europe. For attacking soldiers, the motive of the defenders is not particularly relevant. The methods the Bolshevik commissars use to drive their troops to the last measure of resistance are not really all that important for the course of battle. It is however important to know it to prevent false impressions. Bolshevism is a master at exploiting the Slavic national soul. Only in Russia was this dreadful experiment possible. It required the primitive and bestial dullness of the peoples forming the Soviet Union, as well as their limited social and economic expectations. Its methods were then implemented with a consistency that amazed the observer.

Our first images of Bolshevism were not exaggerated, but understated. They were cast into the shadows by reality. We will not even mention the so-called social achievements of the Soviet system, which in comparison with ours can provoke only laughter or shock. It has hardly a matter of taste, however, to be astonished by the fact that Bolshevik propaganda largely succeeded in sealing the masses of Russian workers and peasants off from the world and persuading them by stupid repetition that they were living in a paradise on earth. Independent judgment requires the opportunity to compare. That is ruled out for them. The workers and peasants of the Soviet Union are like the man imprisoned in a dark dungeon for 25 years, who may easily be persuaded that a kerosene lantern is the sun.

The political commissar has a function in such a system that is absolutely incomprehensible for us. He wields the whip, both among the masses and in the army. He has full power over life and death, and his own head is on the line as well. The stolid masses are at his disposal. They are forced to choose between accepting it all or facing jail at the least or bestial death at the worst. There is nothing like an intelligentsia remaining to put up any resistance. The system has the resources to eliminate it at the earliest stages. The whole country is covered by a spy system that misuses children to spy on their parents. What choice do the stolid and hopeless masses have but to obey with the fatalism that lies within their racial soul, to give themselves up to their fate? What choice does a soldier in a bunker have when the commissar is standing there with a drawn pistol, and systematic Jewish propaganda has persuaded him that becoming a prisoner means not only death, but gruesome torture?

That really has nothing to do with bravery as we understand it. Even this system, when it faces the final test, will bend before the superior force of manly combativeness. The Bolsheviks had a great advantage in their defensive positions, yet they capitulated after 25 days. In the end, their system lacks the free personal will that springs from the individual fighting spirit. It overcomes difficulty and danger not through terror and threats, but through individual bravery. Certainly international Jewry with its organized stolid and malleable human material is a dangerous enemy. Once it is used up, there will be no threat left for us to face. We would have to doubt the quality of our race, the goodness of our soldiers, and the fighting power of our worldview and principles if we even for a moment doubted that we can break this danger.

It is a part of the fate of the German race that at critical points it must defend itself against the threat from the East. It is especially dangerous today, bound as it is to the ruthless infernal goals of Jewish intellectualism. Without doubt it was a near fatal threat not only to Germany, but to all of occidental culture, when Jewry transformed the physical capacities of the East into a monstrous and armed Soviet military, aimed at Germany and all of Europe. The red commissar is defending his world by holding together his attack on us. We must destroy his system if we want to live free from danger in the future.

This explanation goes beyond the realm of Philistine discussions of the so-called Russian soul. The old measures are inadequate to things of such an enormous spiritual and philosophical scale. The gigantic battle on the Eastern Front is shaking a world that must fall if we are to have any kind of a national future. The bestial brutality with which the enemy is waging war is proof of the enormity of the danger facing us. Everything is truly at stake. One cannot imagine the consequences if that system were to be implemented here. It would introduce Europe's total domination by international Jewry. Our people would be subjected to the stolid brutality of a primitive race and would lose its most valuable aspects. London could only welcome such a thing. They have an opponent they are unable to defeat by their own strength, as the development of the war shows.

One therefore understands why we Germans have limited patience for intellectual discussions of a so-called Russian national soul, which must be thoroughly investigated in order to uncover its presumed secrets. There are no mysteries here, only facts. We are battling a world power that threatens our national life. The war is hard reality for us, not a philosophical question. We see its ghastly origins, and our soldiers are fighting for our holiest possessions. We do not underestimate our opponent. Still, we are as always persuaded that here too the higher race will triumph over the lower one, regardless of what infernal means it uses to escape its deserved fate.

We know well that Europe would be lost if the Axis powers did not defend it. We have given our part of the world renewed youth. The attack from the East against its life and culture will fail, because we will meet its stolid power with an offensive resistance that draws its strength from the intelligence of the leadership and the vitality of Europe's young races.

As so often before, this time, too, the surging nomads of the East will be driven back to their steppes. That is the purpose of our battle against the Soviet Union.