

Background: Allied bombing of Germany had reduced many German cities to ruins by April 1944, but had not succeeded in stopping the German war effort. Here Goebbels addresses the damage caused by the bombing, and hints at the coming V-weapons.

The source: "Das Leben geht weiter," *Das Reich*, 16 April 1944, pp. 1-2.

Life Goes On

by Joseph Goebbels

To live and work in a frequently bombed city is not something anyone enjoys today. We hardly need mention the tremendous burdens enemy air terror puts on those who suffer it. They lose their homes and their possessions, and often their dearest loved ones meet grisly, miserable death in basements and shelters during firestorms. The little they are able to rescue from the ruins often stands outside in the rain and snow for days without being moved. And when one believes he has found a halfway safe place, a week later it too may fall to the flames. Family keepsakes that symbolize an entire life are buried in the ruins of homes and buildings. Often people save only the bare essentials, sometimes not even that.

Still weary and exhausted from putting out the fires, those who have been bombed out must find some kind of clothing, secure the necessary papers, and seek some sort of primitive shelter. Party and city offices do everything they can to ease the process, but it remains miserable work. Here and there public transportation fails. He must walk to work if a friendly motorist does not happen to be going in the same direction. That evening the air raid sirens may sound again. Once again he has to head for the basement or a shelter. It thunders around him for another hour. He lost touch with his family in the afternoon, and is deeply worried about them, a helpless mother or the father who provides for the family. Once again the sky is blood red. The fire engines rush by, sirens blaring. And again he has to go to work, to defend his beloved hometown, and to save what can be saved from the still burning buildings.

We certainly do not want those cities so far spared enemy air terror to experience it. Still, virtues are born under enemy bombing that one encounters only rarely in such depth and power in ordinary times: the virtue of solidarity above all. Enemy air terror is the university of community spirit. It reveals what people really are. One may live for years next to a man whom one thinks could rip up trees with his bare hands. Under the hail of enemy bombs and phosphorus canisters, he turns out to be a miserable creature interested in nothing but saving his own life. Another, who went about his business quietly and without fuss, suddenly reveals himself to be a real hero, almost deified by his neighbors, since even in the midst of the gravest danger he has a friendly word of good cheer and encouragement that works miracles. People generally show their stuff only when times are critical.

We cannot help loving the city of Berlin more today than ever before, even with its heavy wounds. After another night of bombing, public transportation may not be working. We see a stream of men and women walking through the wide avenues for two or three hours to reach their workplaces. The men are unshaven and rumpled. The women may be wearing pants and a simple pullover, carrying a small suitcase with the essentials under their arms. Such a sight makes us appreciate this brave city of millions from the bottom of our hearts, and in a way we could not do before. We know then that we are more at home here than we could be in any other city in the world. We feel a part of all these unknown people. We have to thank them for loyally and diligently doing their duty, fanatically and faithfully.

Their silent and unemotional behavior proves that they do not want to be worn down, and therefore cannot be worn down.

It is the same in all the other frequently bombed cities of the Reich: Cologne, Essen, Hamburg, Mannheim, Frankfurt, and everywhere else where the enemy indulges in orgies of air terror. We know them all, and our high opinion of them is always justified yet again. If the enemy believes he has brought life to a standstill, he is mistaken. They all manage to continue life under war conditions. They must give up much that is still taken for granted in areas not subject to enemy air terror. That is not important to them. They simply cannot be beaten down. One could fill libraries with stories of the anguish that nights of bombing bring. But life goes on. After a few days, water, gas, and electricity return. Public transportation begins functioning again, perhaps with a jolt here or there, but that is borne with patience, even grim humor. Everyone has something to eat and a place to sleep. Stovepipes smoke once more over the ruins and the curious stick their noses out to see what is going on. In a word, people are getting along again.

Do not think we are making things better than they are, or turning it into a kind of poetry. Things are much too serious for that. Still, we deeply admire the indestructible rhythm of life and the unbreakable will to live of our big city population. They are not as rootless as well-meaning but purely theoretical books used to say. Look at the workers from the Ruhr, the Rhineland, Hamburg, Berlin, and everywhere else. They are an example of patriotism and national pride. Their sense of duty, their courage, their cheerful coarseness that helps them overcome even the worst, the hard work they do in the armaments factories even while their homes are still burning! The vital strength of our people is anchored as solidly here as it is in German farmers. When has one ever heard a trace of defeatism or panic in the big cities! What city has been deserted by its population, and where did the leadership have more trouble getting the workers back to their jobs than it had moving those not working!

Who can object when people in those areas talk about the air war when they come together after an attack? Each had his own encounter with fate, and each wants to talk about it. He has every right to do so. We have a coworker who has been bombed out five times already, and everyone knocks on wood if she is around when the air raid alert sounds. She is the exception; fate is usually random. He who today has been spared sees it as his plain duty to provide shelter in his small apartment for those who have been bombed out, since he knows that he may depend on his neighbors for the same favor tomorrow. People need no compulsion to behave that way. They do not see it as in any way unusual. It has to be that way; otherwise we could not survive. It has to be done. After the last heavy attacks on the Reich capital, the last homeless person had found quarters within a week. It took that long primarily because most did not want to leave their section of the city.

We will never forget a typical conversation with an old Berlin woman worker from Wedding [**a district of Berlin**]. She had been bombed out and had no where to go. Could we find her a modest apartment in Wilmersdorf [**another Berlin district**]? No, she wanted to stay in Wedding. And where in Wedding? Only on Müller Street, where she had lived all her life, preferably in the building next door, even if she had to be in the basement or attic. That is a kind of love of one's native area, even if the surroundings are not as romantic as the beauties of the forest, the blessings of the field, the quiet lakes or the snow-crowned mountains. But it was as dear to her heart as any of those. The city breathes life as much as the village. One only need drive through the streets when the blackout warning sounds. The last lights vanish. The lookouts take their positions. The roof watchers take their posts in the big government buildings and factories. The whole city is feverishly tense, finding its release in the first thundering flak salvos. The finely-tuned apparatus starts to function. The city is ready.

Many hearts shake when the bombs fall. We do not deny it. But the life rhythm of hundreds of thousands carries along the weak and wavering. A pause! Already the brave are out on the rooftops with pails of water to put out the fires. Back to the basements and shelters. New attacks, new defense, then

the all clear. As if directed by a magician's hand, the whole city is in motion, taking up battle with enemy forces. One gives way only when human strength can no longer resist the elements. It's all over here, let's get to work somewhere else! Our civilian population is singing a quiet heroic song that will live on far into the future. If our generation did no more than this during the war, it would be immortal. Our ruined cities will be rebuilt and the last scars will fade. Only then will the fame of their citizens shine with its true force. Only then will our people realize the heights of courage and bravery that rise from our battles with fate.

We have no cause to discuss these matters with the enemy. They have no ability to understand. They are using air terror solely to terrorize. They cannot understand that they will never reach their goal. They do not see that they are driving our people together, not apart. It will take drastic measures to persuade them that in the long run the air war is neither materially nor morally productive. The discussion is only beginning, but it will not be long before we are forced to give the enemy far more persuasive proof. The British people above all will be forced to prove whether they in the fifth year of the war possess the same steadfastness as the German people. The worst of this phase of the war is behind us. England is facing it. We did not break. The British must still endure the trial. Whatever happens, we know the horrors of modern war, and we also know that they can be overcome.

Life goes on in the ruins and rubble of our bombed cities. It is not as rich and full as it once was. But we are standing firmly on our feet and have not the least desire to fall on our knees. As we bury our dead in Mother Earth, our burning eyes rise to see the vision of the coming Reich for which we bear these heavy sacrifices. We must be sure they are not in vain. We have seen mothers and children, sometimes even fathers, weep at a grave side too often ever to forget it. The men, women, and children who gave their lives in the air war stand in the middle of the army of those who have fallen on every front. They died for the eternity of the Reich. As comrades fight on to fulfill their legacy, so also it is our duty to work on to realize the historical claim of those who fell at home. A people that makes so many sacrifices to defend its life and honor can never be defeated. It will victoriously overcome all the war's obstacles and in the end win the place in the sun that it deserves, a place that no power on earth can in the long run keep it from gaining.

The longer we wait for the hour of deliverance, the greater will be the victory. Victory is always the result of a people's willingness to sacrifice, of its affirmation of life and its faith in its future, of its unwillingness to be distracted, of the steadfastness and loyalty with which it defends itself. The pain and anguish the enemy brings to the individual may at times seem almost unbearable. Still, we will survive, for we have no other choice. In view of the alternative, there can be no weakness or surrender. The nation has made its position clear, and it cannot be shaken even by the terror of barbaric war.

The ruins of our cities are a reminder to us all, even for those thus far spared the enemy's air terror. The fact that life goes on even amidst the ruins of our destroyed city districts proves the vital strength of our people, which is ready to bear the worst to preserve its freedom. Freedom is our dearest treasure. We will serve it steadfastly through the storms of war, following it like the good star that shines through the dark night to show the way to the coming dawn.