

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 5 October 1941. Goebbels explains why Germans may not listen to foreign broadcasts. The Herr Bramsig and Frau Knöterich he refers to several times are his examples of foolish Germans taken in by British propaganda. For a discussion of what the BBC was actually broadcasting to Germany, see Balfour's [*Propaganda in War*](#). For a good discussion of Goebbels' wartime essays, see Bramsted's book [*Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda*](#).

The source: "Die Sache mit der Leichenpest" *Das eherne Herz* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1943), pp. 30-36.

The Matter of the Plague

by Joseph Goebbels

German news policy has not had an easy time of it in the past weeks. Vast military operations were being planned about which the enemy had no idea, and of which, of course, he could be given no inkling, so the OKW report [[the daily military communique](#)] for a while had to depend on stereotypic phrases such as military actions in the east were following their expected course. Nothing more could be said without running the risk of giving the Soviet military leadership valuable information, thereby endangering the planned operations.

In the interests of the war, German news policy was forced into silence, which naturally led to a certain nervousness on the part of the German people. English and Bolshevist propaganda thought that their hour had come. They could speak, we could not. All the nonsense from London and Moscow over the past weeks would take a long time to discuss. It is also unnecessary to repeat any of it. It is already trash, tossed aside by the fiery storm of earth-shaking military operations whose long-term effects we still cannot entirely foresee. Silence was worth it.

In all their chattering and boasting, the Bolshevists and the English entirely forgot to pay attention. They thought our reluctance to answer their simple and ridiculous lies was the result of weakness, so one day Budjenny and his five armies found themselves in our trap. We won a battle that will go down in history as a classic battle of annihilation. Now all the uproar is on the other side.

We have often seen similar things during the war. They always follow the same plan, and one would assume that our opponents have learned something. There is no evidence that they have. They run into the mousetrap as soon as they smell the cheese, with the result that their premature shouts of victory lead to a moral defeat as well. If only they could shut up and wait! But no, they take their illusionary successes seriously and keep talking big. If we had made even a small percentage of the mistakes they have made, not even a dog would take a piece of food from us. It began with Poland and continues in the Soviet Union. They have always made false predictions. They still have the gall to present themselves to the world as pure and incorruptible fanatics for truth who present things as they are, while we, they claim, abolish freedom of the press, send lie after lie into the world, and lie so much that even we do not know the truth any longer.

It is true that we have made some mistakes during the war. We do not hesitate to admit it. By and large, however, we have told the truth. In contrast to England, we have correctly estimated the military, economic, and psychological strengths of the warring powers. We do not need to be embarrassed when one reminds us of our speeches and articles from 1939 or 1940. Can Mr. Churchill say the same? He

missed the bus just before the Norwegian campaign. Then there was the unbreakable Maginot Line, the Ruppel Pass that could be held forever, the island of Crete that England would defend as dearly as its own life, or the Stalin Line, which was to be defended to the last man, but then suddenly never even existed. All swindles and lies!

One ought to be able to assume that English news policy has lost all credibility with neutral nations. To the contrary! Swedish and Swiss newspapers cite its lies every day with general satisfaction, printing our facts only when they can no longer be denied. There are even some unteachable people among us who cannot resist turning secretly and quietly, behind closed doors, to Radio London in order to enrich their political and military knowledge with English swindles. Two recent death sentences and a series of prison terms prove that. What are they doing wrong? Their behavior is not only criminal, it is tremendously stupid. They can hardly seriously maintain that the plutocrats in London are producing expensive German-language programming to keep Herr Bramsig and Frau Knöterich informed about the political and military situation. They openly admit that they are doing it to throw our people into uncertainty and sow dissension between the leadership and the nation. Their news is directed entirely toward this goal, and serves only this purpose. Herr Bramsig and Frau Knöterich volunteer, with no compulsion, to hear such nonsense. Do they gain anything? Hardly! First, they run the risk of ending up in jail as traitors, and secondly, even if that does not happen, they wind up with new worries and sleepless nights, since they have no way to separate right from wrong and truth from falsehood.

The English, for example, estimated our casualties at three million during the weeks we were silent. That naturally was utter nonsense. First, the English are in no position to estimate our losses, and second they do not care to, since they want to cause unrest in the German population through their enormously exaggerated figures. We cannot reply to their lies, since we want to provide only accurate figures, which simply are not available at the moment. We therefore have to restrict ourselves to saying that our losses are at the expected levels, which we can say in good conscience given the facts available to us. The prison-deserving listeners to Radio London run around for three or four weeks with a casualty total of three million, whispering it to others, only to learn one day that although our losses are certainly painful to those directly involved, they are not even 10% of the English figures.

Aside from the criminal nature of such behavior, does it really pay to listen to the English? We have to listen to them for professional reasons. Cross our hearts, we would be delighted if we were free from this unpleasant duty. It is so boring and stupid that it gradually revolts us. Remember, too, that we know how things really stand, and thus can separate truth from swindle, something Herr Bramsig and Frau Knöterich cannot do. No one gives them speeches about the real state of things. If our radio and press are silent, it usually means operations of truly gigantic scope are being prepared. It is the duty of each German to wait with confidence — a confidence, by the way, that is justified by countless historic successes. When Herr Bramsig and Frau Knöterich secretly listen to Radio London, they are being played for fools by our most bitter enemies.

That is not only criminal, it is absolutely unfair. The Führer and his military and political staff are working day and night, and not for themselves, but for the people that means everything to them. Just before the great successes, they often hold their breaths, wondering if everything will work, if things will really turn out as planned, if perhaps somewhere unforeseen problems will surface. Then they are delighted to once again announce a great victory to the people, compensating it for the long period of silence. Our soldiers march day and night through dust and rain, destroying bunkers and fortifications, wading through streams and swimming across raging rivers, having only one thought: to close the pocket at the right time and to seal the enemy within an unbreakable wall.

Meanwhile, Herr Bramsig and Frau Knöterich sit at the radio listening to Mr. Churchill. That is thankless, contemptible, and vile. It lacks even the most basic respect for the work and responsibility of the leadership. I know that when Radio London hears this, they will jump to the defense of Herr

Bramsig and Frau Knöterich. They deserve nothing less. The London Jews and plutocrats would like nothing better than such a conversation. They are too dumb and foolish to be worth the trouble. And besides that, we lack both the time and the inclination. We have better things to do. We have no obligation to do them a favor. Our goal is to serve the German people, to help them to win this war, since we know that it is our last, but also our greatest chance. We know well enough the terrible consequences British propaganda had for us in the World War. We do not want to risk that danger a second time. If we had had someone then able to stand up to London's lies, this war probably would not have been necessary. This time, we have learned our lesson thoroughly and forever more.

Take the following example. The German army does not attack Kiev for weeks, both to save German lives and because the leadership knows that the city will fall into our hands as the result of the great battle of encirclement that finished last Sunday. One naturally can say nothing about such a plan, since the enemy will hear of it and take precautions. While we are making feverish preparations, Britain's propaganda can spread all the lies it wants without any fear of us contradicting them. They claim our attack has stopped because the plague has broken out in Kiev. Herr Bramsig and Frau Knöterich hear that over English radio and pass the rumor on. A woman or mother whose husband or son is near Kiev worries unnecessarily, and we cannot tell the truth, since we must conceal it in the interests of our soldiers.

Does not such rumor mongering deserve not only prison, but also the contempt of the entire people? We cannot excuse it on grounds of stupidity. We are fighting for our lives. Let us be not only as strong as lions, but as clever as serpents. We must defeat the enemy both through strength and intelligence. If Frau Bramsig and Frau Knöterich do not have enough brains in their heads to see that during a war one may not listen to the enemy, then they must receive exemplary punishment.

That, too, is a requirement of victory.