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Speaking to a selected audience of party fanatics on the 18th February 1943 Hitler's propaganda chief, Joseph Goebbels, made the most famous speech of his career¹. His central message was, in reality, a terrible one.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  |  |  |   Josef Goebbels (1897-1945), Reich Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, was an enthusiastic anti semite and a devoted supporter of Hitler. During the live speech he accidentally began to mention the “extermination” of the Jews, a reference that was edited out from later versions, leaving veiled threats against the Jews who were blamed for ‘causing the war’.  *A merciless war is raging in the East. The Führer was right when he said that in the end there will not be winners and losers, but the living and the dead.*  The war was set to continue and become an even more bitter struggle, many more soldiers would die - and conditions at home would get much worse as everyone had to make more of a contribution to the war effort². Yet he managed to turn this on its head and make it sound like a triumph:  The tragic battle of Stalingrad is a symbol of heroic, manly resistance to the revolt of the steppes. It has not only a military, but also an intellectual and spiritual significance for the German people. Here for the first time our eyes have been opened to the true nature of the war. We want no more false hopes and illusions. We want bravely to look the facts in the face, however hard and dreadful they may be.  The history of our party and our state has proven that a danger recognized is a danger defeated. Our coming hard battles in the East will be under the sign of this heroic resistance. It will require previously undreamed of efforts by our soldiers and our weapons. A merciless war is raging in the East. The Führer was right when he said that in the end there will not be winners and losers, but the living and the dead.  *The danger facing us is enormous. The efforts we take to meet it must be just as enormous. The time has come to remove the kid gloves and use our fists.*  Total war is the demand of the hour. We must put an end to the bourgeois attitude that we have also seen in this war: Wash my back, but don't get me wet! (Every sentence is met with growing applause and agreement.) The danger facing us is enormous. The efforts we take to meet it must be just as enormous. The time has come to remove the kid gloves and use our fists. (A cry of elemental agreement rises. Chants from the galleries and seats testify to the full approval of the crowd.)  We can no longer make only partial and careless use of the war potential at home and in the significant parts of Europe that we control. We must use our full resources, as quickly and thoroughly as it is organizationally and practically possible. Unnecessary concern is wholly out of place.  *The future of Europe hangs on our success in the East. We are ready to defend it. The German people are shedding their most valuable national blood in this battle. The rest of Europe should at least work to support us.*  The future of Europe hangs on our success in the East. We are ready to defend it. The German people are shedding their most valuable national blood in this battle. The rest of Europe should at least work to support us. There are many serious voices in Europe that have already realized this. Others still resist. That cannot influence us. If danger faced them alone, we could view their reluctance as literary nonsense of no significance. But the danger faces us all, and we must all do our share. Those who today do not understand that will thank us tomorrow on bended knees that we courageously and firmly took on the task.  ...  We promise you, we promise the front, we promise the Führer, that we will mold together the homeland into a force on which the Führer and his fighting soldiers can rely on absolutely and blindly. We pledge to do all in our life and work that is necessary for victory.  Goebbels whipped his audience into a frenzy, concluding with a final question:  **I ask you: Do you want total war? If necessary, do you want a war more total and radical than anything that we can even imagine today?**  The answer from the faithful Nazis in the hall was screaming enthusiasm.  The Armaments Minister, Albert Speer³ was later to comment:  Except for Hitler’s most successful public meetings, I had never seen an audience so effectively roused to fanaticism.  Back in his home, Goebbels astonished me by analyzing what had seemed to be a purely emotional outburst in terms of its psychological effect — much as an experienced actor might have done. He was also satisfied with his audience that evening. “Did you notice? They reacted to the smallest nuance and applauded at just the right moments. It was the politically best-trained audience you can find in Germany.  Yet Goebbels was speaking to the converted. For ordinary Germans - whose [enthusiasm for the war was waning](https://substack.com/redirect/db51d9eb-73bb-4bf3-b516-fb59d1fd1132?j=eyJ1IjoibnRuN3kifQ.99RiO8DPibtCcxg2Q0s_SKfOWhCt48yBEyYZHINc-tU) - the redoubled Nazi fanaticism meant further wartime austerity, including the conscription of civilians for war work and the closing of 100,000 restaurants and clubs throughout the country. However the most senior Nazis, like Goring, resisted having their favourite restaurants closed down.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  |  |  |   The true horrors of the Eastern front, including over 300,000 dead at Stalingrad, could only be whispered about within Germany. To be denounced to the authorities as a ‘defeatist’ meant a concentration. camp or worse.  1  Read the whole of the speech at [Calvin College](https://substack.com/redirect/c69e8387-2dbe-4a00-b64c-2e6d4ae9ca9f?j=eyJ1IjoibnRuN3kifQ.99RiO8DPibtCcxg2Q0s_SKfOWhCt48yBEyYZHINc-tU).  2  The myth, propagated by some Germans after the war, that it was only after Stalingrad that the German economy was put on a full war footing has been comprehensively demolished. See Adam Tooze: [The Wages of Destruction](https://substack.com/redirect/bc782667-35c9-44d1-80ab-fef6e349a6f9?j=eyJ1IjoibnRuN3kifQ.99RiO8DPibtCcxg2Q0s_SKfOWhCt48yBEyYZHINc-tU).  3  [Inside the Third Reich](https://substack.com/redirect/32322ec1-367c-4d89-babf-d25f066909ab?j=eyJ1IjoibnRuN3kifQ.99RiO8DPibtCcxg2Q0s_SKfOWhCt48yBEyYZHINc-tU) |  |