

Goebbels on German Womanhood (1933)

Background: Despite their not exactly progressive view of women, German women in general supported the Nazis. Goebbels gave this speech on 18 March 1933, just six weeks after Hitler took power. The occasion was the opening of a women's exhibition in Berlin. Goebbels lays out rather clearly what National Socialism intends to do to change the role of women in society.

The source: "Deutsches Frauentum," Signale der neuen Zeit. 25 ausgewählte Reden von Dr. Joseph Goebbels (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1934), pp. 118-126.

German Women  
by Joseph Goebbels

German women, German men !

It is a happy accident that my first speech since taking charge of the Ministry for Propaganda and People's Enlightenment is to German women. Although I agree with Treitschke that men make history, I do not forget that women raise boys to manhood. You know that the National Socialist movement is the only party that keeps women out of daily politics. This arouses bitter criticism and hostility, all of it very unjustified. We have kept women out of the parliamentary-democratic intrigues of the past fourteen years in Germany not because we do not respect them, but because we respect them too much. We do not see the woman as inferior, but rather as having a different mission, a different value, than that of the man. Therefore we believed that the German woman, who more than any other in the world is a woman in the best sense of the word, should use her strength and abilities in other areas than the man.

The woman has always been not only the man's sexual companion, but also his fellow worker. Long ago, she did heavy labor with the man in the field. She moved with him into the cities, entering the offices and factories, doing her share of the work for which she was best suited. She did this with all her abilities, her loyalty, her selfless devotion, her readiness to sacrifice.

The woman in public life today is no different than the women of the past. No one who understands the modern age would have the crazy idea of driving women from public life, from work, profession, and bread winning. But it must also be said that those things that belong to the man must remain his. That includes politics and the military. That is not to disparage women, only a recognition of how she can best use her talents and abilities.

Looking back over the past year's of Germany's decline, we come to the frightening, nearly terrifying conclusion, that the less German men were willing to act as men in public life, the more women succumbed to the temptation to fill the role of the man. The feminization of men always leads to the masculinization of women. An age in which all great idea of virtue, of steadfastness, of hardness and determination have been forgotten should not be surprised that the man gradually loses his leading role in life and politics and government to the woman.

It may be unpopular to say this to an audience of women, but it must be said, because it is true and because it will help make clear our attitude

toward women.

The modern age, with all its vast revolutionary transformations in government, politics, economics and social relations has not left women and their role in public life untouched. Things we thought impossible several years or decades ago are now everyday reality. Some good, noble, and commendable things have happened. But also things that are contemptible and humiliating. These revolutionary transformations have largely taken from women their proper tasks. Their eyes were set in directions that were not appropriate for them. The result was a distorted public view of German womanhood that had nothing to do with former ideals. A fundamental change is necessary. At the risk of sounding reactionary and outdated, let me say this clearly: The first, best, and most suitable place for the women is in the family, and her most glorious duty is to give children to her people and nation, children who can continue the line of generations and who guarantee the immortality of the nation. The woman is the teacher of the youth, and therefore the builder of the foundation of the future. If the family is the nation's source of strength, the woman is its core and center. The best place for the woman to serve her people is in her marriage, in the family, in motherhood. This is her highest mission. That does not mean that those women who are employed or who have no children have no role in the motherhood of the German people. They use their strength, their abilities, their sense of responsibility for the nation, in other ways. We are convinced, however, that the first task of a socially reformed nation must be to again give the woman the possibility to fulfill her real task, her mission in the family and as a mother. The national revolutionary government is everything but reactionary. It does not want to stop the pace of our rapidly moving age. It has no intention of lagging behind the times. It wants to be the flag bearer and pathfinder of the future. We know the demands of the modern age. But that does not stop us from seeing that every age has its roots in motherhood, that there is nothing of greater importance than the living mother of a family who gives the state children.

German women have been transformed in recent years. They are beginning to see that they are not happier as a result of being given more rights but fewer duties. They now realize that the right to be elected to public office at the expense of the right to life, motherhood, and her daily bread is not a good trade.

A characteristic of the modern era is a rapidly declining birthrate in our big cities. In 1900 two million babies were born in Germany. Now the number has fallen to one million. This drastic decline is most evident in the national capital. In the last fourteen years, Berlin's birthrate has become the lowest of any European city. By 1955, without emigration, it will have only about three million inhabitants. The government is determined to halt this decline of the family and the resulting impoverishment of our blood. There must be a fundamental change. The liberal attitude toward the family and the child is responsible for Germany's rapid decline. We today must begin worrying about an aging population. In 1900 there were seven children for each elderly person, today it is only four. If current trends continue, by 1988 the ratio will be 1 : 1. These statistics say it all. They are the best proof that if Germany continues along its current path, it will end in an abyss with breathtaking speed. We can almost determine the decade when Germany collapses because of depopulation.

We are not willing to stand aside and watch the collapse of our national life and the destruction of the blood we have inherited. The national revolutionary government has the duty to rebuilt the nation on its original foundations, to transform the life and work of the woman so that

it once again best serves the national good. It intends to eliminate the social inequalities so that once again the life of our people and the future of our people and the immortality of our blood is assured.

I welcome this exhibition, whose goal is to explain and teach, and to reduce or eliminate harm to the individual and the whole people. This serves the nation and popular enlightenment, and to support it is one of the happiest duties of the new government.

Perhaps this exhibition titled "The Woman" will represent a turning point. If the goal of the exhibition is to give an impression of women in contemporary society, it does so at a time when German society is undergoing the greatest changes in generations. I am aware of how difficult this is. I know the obstacles that had to be overcome to give this exhibition a clear theme and a firm structure. It should show the significance of the woman for the family, the people, and the whole nation. Displays will give an impression of the actual life of women today, and will provide the knowledge necessary to resolve today's conflicting opinions, which were not primarily the result of the contemporary women's movement.

But that is not all. The main purpose of the exhibition "The Woman" is not only to show the way things are, but to make proposals for improvement. It aims to show new ways and new opportunities. Clear and often drastic examples will give thousands of German women reason to think and consider. It is particularly pleasing to us men in the new government that families with many children are given particular attention, since we want to rescue the nation from decline. The importance of the family cannot be overestimated, especially in families without fathers that depend entirely upon the mother. In these families the woman has sole responsibility for the children, and she must realize the responsibility she has to her people and nation.

We do not believe that the German people is destined by fate to decline. We have blind confidence that Germany still has a great mission in the world. We have faith that we are not at the end of our history, but rather that a new, great and honorable period of our history is now beginning. This faith gives us the strength to work and not despair. It enabled us to make great sacrifices over the past fourteen years. It gave millions of German women the strength to hope in Germany and its future, and to let their sons join in the reawakening of the nation. This faith was with the brave women who lost their husbands and breadwinners in the war, with those who gave their sons in the battle to renew their people. This faith kept us standing during the need and desperation of the past fourteen years. And this faith today fills us with new hope that Germany will again find its place in the sun.

Nothing makes one harder and more determined than struggle. Nothing gives more courage than to face resistance. During the years when Germany seemed destined to decline, a new kind of womanhood developed under the confused veneer of modern civilization. It is hard, determined, courageous, willing to sacrifice. During the four years of the great war and the fourteen years of German collapse that followed, German women and mothers proved themselves worthy companions of their men. They have borne all the bitterness, all the privation and danger, and did not fail when hit by misfortune, worry and trouble. As long as a nation has such a proud and noble womanhood, it cannot perish. These women are the foundation of our race, of its blood and of its future.

This is the beginning of a new German womanhood. If the nation once again has mothers who proudly and freely choose motherhood, it cannot perish. If the woman is healthy, the people will be healthy. Woe to the nation that neglects its women and mothers. It condemns itself.

We hope that the concept of the German woman will again earn the honor and respect of the entire world. The German woman will then take her pride in her land and her people, in thinking German and feeling German. The honor of her nation and her race will be most important to her. Only a nation that does not forget its honor will be able to guarantee its daily bread. The German woman should never forget that.

I declare this exhibition open. May it reveal all the former errors and show the way to the future.

Then the world will once again respect us, and we will be able to affirm the words of Walther von der Vogelweide, who had this to say about the German woman in his famous poem:

He who seeks  
Virtue and proper love,  
Should come to our land.  
There is much joy.  
Long may I live there.

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