

“Youth and the War” – by Joseph Goebbels (1940)

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In this speech given on 29 September 1940, Goebbels discusses the duties of the German youth during the war. He explains that the Hitler Youth (HJ) and the League of German Girls (BDM) are taking on part of the parental role, since fathers are at war and mothers are working to support the troops.

By Joseph Goebbels

This Sunday afternoon, the Youth Film Festival for the winter 1940/41 opens, held in conjunction with the Hitler Youth, the League of German Girls, and the Reich Propaganda Office of the NSDAP. As was the case last year, it will have an extraordinarily important role in youth work.

The Youth Film Festival began in 1934/35. It included 371 events with a total of 217,354 visitors. The event grew until 1939/40, when 8,244 events drew 3,538,224 visitors. Between 1934 and 1940, a total of 19,694 events drew a total of 9,411,318. This impressive result, like so much that has been done by National Socialism, began small and grew gradually. The first youth film festival was held in Cologne in 1934. As a result of experiences there, the second season expanded to the entire Reich. The Youth Film Festival grew from year to year, both in scope and significance, until now it reaches small towns and even those areas without a theater.

From the beginning, the goal was to use the German film as a way of systematically educating the German youth. The goal was also to give the youth another method of entertainment and education. During the season, this important festival should give the youth an

overview of all areas of German film. Entertaining and cultural films are shown along with those having more political significance. Youth films are organized by the Press and Propaganda Office of the Reich Youth Leadership along with the Reich Propaganda Office of the NSDAP, Film Department. Each *Gau* office has a Hitler Youth official directly responsible for organizing the youth film festival.

This is an important way of meeting the needs of the youth, especially during the war. The problem of the youth is especially difficult during difficult times. The war makes serious demands on the whole nation, including the youth. They need to display the necessary character to master the resulting difficulties, and to help those in authority to meet them as well.

Often, fathers are in the field or engaged in other work important to the war and are unable to give the attention to the education of their children they would normally give in times of peace. The mother at the same time is overloaded with work and problems. Often she, too, is involved in war production, working to see to it that our soldiers have the munitions they need, or working with the Red Cross, Mother's Assistance, the National Socialist Welfare Organization, or the Winter Relief. The education of the youth does not follow its normal course. The HJ and the BDM have the double duty to jump in to relieve the parents of burdens that under the circumstances they cannot handle. The educational and other activity of the HJ and BDM are hampered during the war by a thousand difficulties unknown in peace. The necessary meeting rooms are lacking. They have been taken over by the army or used for storage. Blackout regulations make evening activities, which are very important, impossible to the normal extent. In parts of the Reich, the risk of air raids simply makes systematic educational work impossible. Alongside their usual tasks, the HJ, and BDM have responsibilities to the Führer, the nation, and parents.

Educating the youth during war can only be done successfully by working closely with the youth themselves. The youth is not only the object, but also the subject of its own education. Much that as a matter of course is done at home or at school during peace is just as clearly impossible during war. Through their attitude and life style, the youth must render superfluous much of the educational work

that relevant organizations handle during peace. The war is not only a great equalizer, it is a great educator. Only what is essential can survive its hard laws. It transforms all values. Things that we thought important or even essential during peace, we gladly give up during war to serve the common cause. War once involved only as small part of the population, whereas today it requires heroic work by all. Since our enemy is waging war even against children, children also must play their part. During the World War the English blockade was particularly directed against German women and German children, and had a major role in the fact that at the critical hour we no longer had the strength to resist the English and French threat.

Our enemy intended to use the same weapon in this war, and hoped for the same result. The German leadership, however, had taken the necessary precautions to render the English blockade ineffective. Nonetheless, the war is ultimately aimed at the coming German generation, and it is therefore more than symbolic that they have followed the flag to defend the German cause on the battlefield. The public knows the statistics on the number of fallen and wounded, particularly leaders of the HJ. They do not need to be repeated. They are compelling proof that the youth have made this war into their cause.

The coming generation must fight the war at home. They are participants in it. They must display strong character and good behavior. When a nation is fighting for its future, which after all is the future of its children, the youth have to be involved, they have to support the battle with their full energy. They must show through discipline, order, industry, and attitude that they are worthy of their age, and of the men who are risking their lives. Cocky know-it-alls or big-mouthed boasters only look stupid. Particularly in the midst of a war in which millions of men are risking their lives for the nation, the youth must again learn respect for sacrificial manhood. They must also learn to honor women and mothers who are fighting for the continuation of their nation. They should be obedient and modest, and above all do their duty. That does not mean they have to act according to the proverb: "Go through the land with hat in hand." That was an idea of the past that we have left behind. Modesty is not the same as subjection, and

a well-bred, disciplined lad of good character does not need to be a pussyfoot. Millions of soldiers today follow orders and do their duty. They have been willing to give up their own independence to serve the Fatherland in the community of the army. How much more should we expect that of German boys and girls during a war! They will become grown up, mature people of our great, proud nation, and many of them later in life will be giving orders to others. That is why they must learn obedience now, especially in a time when everything hangs on us all on doing our duty obediently.

The HJ and the BDM are there to help parents educate their children, since parents today are often in a position themselves to do only part of the job. Every father in the field and every mother at home or on the job must know that their dear child is in good hands with the HJ or the BDM. They must be confident that boys and girls are being brought up to be decent men and women.

The time in which we are living is unique. It makes increased demands on us all, the youth included. One or another may occasionally be inclined to overestimate the demands of the age. But later, when the war is over, crowned by proud victory, we will all look back on the duties and obligations we now have with joy and satisfaction. We will forget our current troubles. The months we now endure with faith and bravery will in retrospect be glorious. It was the same when the National Socialist movement was fighting for power. As soon as the battle was over and the Führer was in power, the old fighters looked back longingly to the time in which they had fought for power. The times when we worked for the movement, sometimes at the risk of our lives, looked wonderful. Who among us, including many who joined us at 14, 15, or 16 would now want to have missed the National Socialist movement's struggle for power! How wonderful it is for the boys and girls of that period to look back and remember what they went through, and in a way that proved their worth! It is today their fondest memory.

The same will some day be true of this war. When it is over and we rejoice in victory, we will remember with pride everything we are now going through. We will recall how we worked for victory with all our being.

It is a good thing for the German youth to fully experience these great days. They should do their best for the war, giving their courage, their idealism, and their faith.

The coming youth film festival should serve these ends. The German youth is gathered throughout the Reich for the first program of the year 1940/41. These programs will occur at regular intervals, and will show the German youth the best work of the German film industry. Over the coming winter, they will be entertained, taught and built up. Again and again, German boys and girls will gain new enthusiasm.

We are not like the English plutocrats who teach their young children to wear frock coats and top hats. Anyone who needs to do that later can learn how later. We are teaching our youth what is difficult to learn later, namely attitude and character. The foundations must be laid early in life. Following the Führer's teaching, we are setting a new ideal for the education of our youth. The Hitler Youth has taken his name. It is the only organization in the Reich that does bear his name. That puts a heavy responsibility on it. Above all, it places on the youth an obligation to imitate the man whose name they bear, and to follow him.

The Führer is the shining example for the German youth. He demands that during the war they show a proper attitude, character, obedience, and discipline. In this sense and according to his command, the German youth must live, work, and create.

I give my warmest and heartiest greetings to the entire German youth, which today is gathered in movie theaters throughout the Reich, and declare the Youth Film Festival for 1940/41 has begun.