

The beginning and end of World War II

1 September 1939,
Germany

Lesson
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Members of Parliament! Men of the German Reichstag!

For months now we have all been suffering the agony of a problem caused by the Treaty of Versailles—the Versailles Diktat. A problem which went on getting worse until it became unbearable. Danzig was and is a German city. The corridor was and is German. All these areas owe their cultural development exclusively to the German people. Without the German people, deepest barbarism would reign in all these eastern areas. [...]

Poland has directed its struggle against the Free City of Danzig. Poland has not been prepared to solve the question of the corridor in a way that was both fair and in keeping with the interests of both parties. And finally, Poland has given no thought to its obligation to respect minorities.

I must say this: Germany has honoured these commitments. Minorities living in the German Reich are not persecuted. No Frenchman can stand up and claim that the 50,000 or 100,000 French living in the Saar area, for example, are being oppressed, tormented or deprived of their rights. Nobody can say this. [...]

I have therefore now decided to speak to the Poles in the same language in which Poland has been speaking to us for months now! If statesmen in the West declare that this affects their interests, I can only regret such a declaration. But it cannot stop me for one second from doing my duty.

What more do they want from us? I have solemnly affirmed, and I repeat, that we will not demand anything from these Western states, and we will never demand anything from them. I have given my assurance that the border between France and Germany is a permanent one. I have always offered England friendship and, if necessary, the closest possible cooperation. But love cannot be offered by one side alone. It must be reciprocated by the other. [...]

I do have one piece of news that I am happy to be able to bring you. You know that Russia and Germany are governed by two different doctrines. There was just one question that needed to be clarified. Germany has no intention of exporting its doctrine. Given that Soviet Russia does not intend to export its doctrine to Germany, I see no reason why we should take a stand against each other. And we, both sides, have made that quite clear to each other: Any struggle between our peoples would only benefit others. We have therefore decided to conclude a pact which excludes any use of force between the two of us for all time, which obliges us to consult each other on certain European issues, which allows us to cooperate economically, and which, above all, ensures that the forces of these two great and powerful States do not become either interdependent or mutually exclusive. Any attempt by the West to change this will fail. Let me assure you right here and now that this political decision represents a tremendous turning point for the future, and is a final one.

I believe that the whole German people will welcome my political stance. After all, Russia and Germany fought each other in the First World War, and both suffered in the end. This should not and will not happen a second time. [...]

Tonight, for the first time, Poland fired shots on our territory; they have even sent in regular soldiers. Since 5.45 a.m. we have been returning their fire! And from now on every bomb will be answered with a bomb! Whoever fights with poison will be fought with poison. Whoever distances himself from the rules of humane warfare can expect nothing other than that we shall do the same. I will fight this fight, against whomever, until the security of the Reich and its rights are guaranteed. [...]

As a National Socialist and as a German soldier I enter this struggle with a strong heart. My whole life has been nothing but a single struggle for my people, for their resurrection, for Germany. This struggle was always accompanied by a declaration of faith in this people. There is one word I have never known: capitulation. [...]

Just as I myself am prepared to lay down my life at any time - anyone can take it from me - for my people and for Germany, so I demand the same from everyone else. But anyone who believes that he can oppose this national commandment, whether directly or indirectly, will fall! Traitors have nothing to expect but death! [...]

I also expect the German woman to be a model of iron discipline in this great fighting community. The German youth will also fulfil with a radiant heart what the nation, the National Socialist state, expects and demands of them.

If we form this close community, determined to do everything, resolved never to capitulate, then our every hardship will be overcome by the force of our will. [...]

Germany - Sieg Heil!

844 words

