

Appeal to the German People
Draft, summer 1944

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Germans!

We have witnessed terrible things in recent years. Against expert advice, Hitler has unscrupulously sacrificed whole armies to his lust for fame, his arrogant drive for power, his blasphemous delusion of being the appointed and blessed instrument of "Providence"!

He was not called upon by the German people, but came to power through the worst kind of intrigues. He has created chaos with demoniacal arts and lies and monstrous extravagance that seemed to bring benefits for everybody, but has actually plunged the German people into massive debt. To maintain his power he has coupled it to an unbridled regime of terror, destroyed justice, declared contempt for propriety, made a mockery of the divine commandments of pure humanity and extinguished the happiness of millions of people.

His insane contempt for all human beings was destined to plunge our nation into disaster with deadly certainty, his arrogant posing as a general was destined to lead our brave sons, fathers, husbands and brothers to ruin, his blood-soaked terror against defenseless people was destined to bring disgrace to the name of Germany. He has instituted lawlessness, the rape of conscience, crime and corruption in our fatherland, which has been proud of its righteousness and honesty since time immemorial. Truth and truthfulness – respect for which even the smallest nations regard as the greatest priority in the education of their children – are being punished and persecuted. Public activity and the life of the individual are being endangered by deadly poisoning.

But we cannot let this happen; it cannot go on like this! The life and efforts of our men, women and children should not be abused to this end any longer. We would not be worthy of our fathers, our children would have to despise us if we did not have the courage to do everything we can, and we mean everything, to avert this terrible danger facing us and regain our self-respect.

To this end, after searching our conscience before God, we have assumed state power. Our brave Wehrmacht is the guarantor of security and order. The police will do their duty.

Every public servant shall obey only the law and his conscience and perform his duties according to his specialist knowledge. Let everybody help with discipline and trust. Do your daily work with new hope. Help each other! Your tortured souls shall become peaceful and cheerful again.

Far removed from any kind of hate, we will strive towards domestic reconciliation and with dignity towards external reconciliation. Our first task will be to cleanse the war of degeneration and put an end to the catastrophic destruction of human life and cultural and economic values behind the fronts. We all know that we are not masters of war and peace. With firm confidence in our incomparable Wehrmacht and assured faith in the tasks that God has set humankind, we intend to sacrifice everything to defend the fatherland and restore a just, worthy order, to live with respect for God's commandments once again, in decency and truth, for honor and freedom!

Germans!

Hitler's regime of violence has collapsed.

We have witnessed terrible things in recent years. Hitler was not called upon by the German people, but became head of the government through intrigues of the worst kind. He has created chaos with demoniacal arts and lies, with monstrous extravagance that seemed to bring benefits for everybody but has actually plunged us into debt and scarcity, confused the hearts and minds of our people and fostered fateful illusions even outside Germany. To stay in power he has established a regime of terror. Our people could once be proud of its honesty and righteousness. But Hitler has made a mockery of the divine commandments, destroyed justice, slandered propriety and extinguished the happiness of millions. He has shown no respect for the honor and dignity, freedom and life of others. Countless Germans and citizens of other nations have suffered for years in concentration camps, subjected to great pain and often terrible torture. Many of them have perished. Our good name is defiled by inhuman mass murder. Hitler has wandered down the wrong track with bloodstained hands, leaving a trail of tears, suffering and misery behind him.

His insane contempt for all human activity has plunged our nation into disaster with deadly certainty, his arrogant belief in his genius as a general has led our brave soldiers to ruin. Lust for power, personal arrogance and the insane pursuit of conquest have found their ultimate expression in this war. The bravery and dedication of our soldiers have been shamefully abused, the enormous sacrifice of the whole nation senselessly wasted. Against expert advice, Hitler has sacrificed whole armies to his lust for fame, his arrogant drive for power, his blasphemous delusion of being the appointed and blessed instrument of Providence.

We will publicly present the evidence for the monstrous betrayal of the German people and its soul, for the total manipulation of justice, for the mockery of the noble demand that the common good should come before the individual good, for shameless corruption. If anybody still doubts these dreadful truths because he finds it impossible as an upstanding person that such ruthlessness should lurk behind high-sounding phrases, the facts will teach him a lesson.

It could not go on like this!

We would not be worthy of our fathers, our children would have to despise us if we did not have the courage to do everything we can, and we mean everything, to avert the terrible danger we are facing and regain our self-respect.

Hitler has violated divine and human law on innumerable occasions, breaking the oath he swore before the people ten years ago. This means that no soldier, no public servant, no citizen at all is bound to him by oath any longer.

In extreme desperation I have taken action together with men from all social ranks of the people, from every part of the fatherland. I have assumed interim leadership of the German Reich and ordered that a government should be formed under the leadership of the Reich Chancellor [Carl Goerdeler]. It has set to work. The supreme commander of the Wehrmacht is [Erwin von Witzleben], to whom the commanders in chief on all fronts have subordinated themselves. These men have worked with me to prevent the collapse.

We are appearing before you at a grave time. We are duty bound by responsibility before God and to our people and its history, the costly blood sacrifice of two world wars, the constantly growing distress in our home country as well as the misery of other nations, and concern about the future of the young.

The principles and objectives of the government will be announced. They are binding until the opportunity comes to let the German people decide on them. Our goal is the true community of the people, based on respect, helpfulness and social justice. We want fear of God instead of self-worship, justice and freedom instead of terror and violence, truth and decency instead of lies and self-interest. We want to restore our honor and our reputation in the community of nations. We want to contribute with all our might to heal the wounds that this war has inflicted on every nation, and to revive the trust between nations again.

The guilty men who have defiled the good name of our people and brought such terrible disaster upon us and other nations will be punished.

We want to put an end to the hopeless feeling that this war must go on forever. We aim for a just peace that replaces self-destruction and extermination of peoples with peaceful cooperation. Peace of this kind can only be based on respect for the freedom and equality of all nations.

I call upon every upstanding German, men and women from every family background and social rank; I call upon the young people of Germany as well. I am relying on the willing cooperation of the Christian Churches. Have courage and faith! The task is incredibly difficult. I cannot and do not want to make any empty promises to you. We will have to work hard in the struggle to achieve gradual progress and improvement again. But we will take this path in dignity as free men, and ease our conscience again.

Let everybody fulfill his duty! Let everybody help to save his fatherland!

Draft of the Appeal to the German People by Ludwig Beck as head of state, prepared for July 20, 1944. The original is missing; the present version was reconstructed from the documents of the Special Commission for Investigating the Assassination Attempt against Hitler of July 20, 1944. Translation: Karen Margolis. Editing: Ute Stepani, Prof. Dr. Johannes Tuchel

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