THE SHAPING OF THE NAZI STATE

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Peter D. Stachura

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INTRODUCTION

Peter D. Stachura

National Socialism, as a historical phenomenon, continues to exert a special kind of fascination among wide sections of the general public as well as professional historians. Books, monographs, and learned papers on the subject have accumulated to the point where even the specialist is increasingly hard pushed to keep abreast of all the latest developments and lines of enquiry. This compelling interest exists despite the fact that National Socialism arose more than half a century ago, and collapsed amidst the most ignominious circumstances imaginable in 1945.

There are many good reasons, however, why this topic still attracts such far-ranging attention. It is not just that National Socialism, and particularly its *Führer,* Adolf Hitler, remain essentially enigmatic and elusive of comprehensively satisfying and precise definition. The era itself in which all this took place was so utterly extraordinary and grotesque by any measurement. The circus-like atmosphere of the Third Reich, the absurd antics of its leadership, the awesome sight of disciplined marching columns, the frenzied mass rallies, all seem to promote an aura of the unbelievable about the years 1933 to 1945. Yet the prosaic and gargantuan evil of the Hitlerian epoch, epitomised by the physical annihilation of millions of people, especially of Jews and Eastern Europeans, will remain its indelible hallmark. Names like Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen, and Dachau will be forever synonymous with National Socialism. They bear lucid testimony to its devastatingly destructive impact on the whole physical and ethical fabric of European culture and civilisation. There are too many people, uprooted and displaced as a direct result of the Second World War—Hitler's War—who, having experienced the nightmare of National Socialism at first hand, can never allow discussion and judgement of it to rest. For them, above all, National Socialism can never be forgotten, or forgiven.

Moreover, while all the answers to the critical problems of why Germany should have been the first highly industrialised and advanced country to witness the advent to power of an avowedly totalitarian party, and why such a richly cultural nation could have succumbed to nihilistic barbarism in the form of Hitler's dictatorship, have not been supplied, searching examination of National Socialism must go on. Otherwise, the course of not only German but also European and world history in the twentieth century cannot be understood as deeply or as sensitively as it should be.

From a narrowly academic point of view, it must be borne in mind that a good deal of the literature on National Socialism which appeared in the decade or so after Germany's defeat, especially where it related to the era of the Third Reich, was inevitably and understandably influenced by the direct personal involvement of many authors in that calamitous period. Survivors of the Weimar political system, the concentration camps, and opponents from Germany and other countries certainly wrote much that was in detail useful and relevant. They unequivocally established and documented the cruelty and inhumanity of the National Socialists, but they naturally lacked that necessary detachment for their accounts and impressions to be regarded as entirely objective and sober appraisals. In consequence, it is only comparatively recently that dispassionate, scholarly perspectives have been brought to bear which allow National Socialism to be analysed within conventional criteria of historical enquiry.

Thus, notwithstanding the plethora of literature, there is considerable scope for new interpretations and reassessment of many basic questions, and for more probing scrutiny of still relatively unexplored aspects of National Socialism. While it would be quite inappropriate to suggest that the Nazi era as a whole requires thorough revisionist assessment, it is already the case that some areas, such as the relationship between the internal political dynamics of the Third Reich and its social and economic organisation, and the broad field of foreign policy development, have been the subject of much fresh re-evaluation in recent historiography. Further aspects which need more systematic consideration include the sociological typology of the National Socialist movement, and the nature and magnitude of links between the Nazi Party and big business. *The Shaping of the Nazi State* is designed as a contribution to these new avenues of approach to the study of National Socialism.

The nine essays, which are original and specially written for this volume, collectively present critical and often provocative analyses of a variety of significant themes pertaining to the evolution of National Socialism. Although a number of different methodologies and interpretative frameworks of reference are employed by the authors, every contribution is concerned with penetrating the innermost core of Hitler's movement and offers above all a serious and reasoned challenge to many traditional orthodoxies and assumptions. Based on an extensive and diversified array of predominantly German archival material, the essays produce a host of controversial arguments and conclusions. While it is not claimed that these ideas constitute a new and identifiable school of thought, they will, it is hoped, advance our knowledge of National Socialism and stimulate further discussion and research. In particular, the present volume is designed to convey the range and quality of the most up-to-date scholarship of a younger generation of historians in the field. The essays, which have been arranged with an eye to chronological order and thematic continuity, are primarily intended for a specialist audience but have been written in such a way as will also appeal, I believe, to non-specialists with a genuine interest in one of the most momentous periods in modern German and European history.

The development of National Socialist attitudes to foreign policy has aroused sustained scholarly comment in recent years, especially in the works of the West German historians Andreas Hillgruber, Klaus Hildebrand, and Jost Dülffer. It has been established beyond reasonable doubt that Hitler's ideas in this sphere are to be regarded as constituents of a coherent, if fundamentally irrational, programme. Andreas Hillgruber originally advocated the concept of a *Stufenplan* in Hitler's calculations, whereby German political and territorial power would expand in stages to the point where the Third Reich not only achieved hegemony in Europe and *Lebensraum* in the East, but also ultimately became poised for overseas global aggrandisement. Accepting this scenario, Geoffrey Stoakes, in the first essay in this volume, nonetheless takes issue with established interpretations of a central theme of Hitler's foreign policy, his attitude towards Russia and Britain.

Until now, it has been accepted that Hitler only conceived of creating a vast empire in Eastern Europe at Russia's expense in 1924, and that this was essentially the result of his espousal of the idea of an alliance with Britain two years earlier. Disagreeing with this view, Stoakes argues that for a combination of ideological, strategic, political, and personal reasons, Hitler had decided by late 1922 on a policy of hostility towards Russia, and a policy favouring alliance with Britain. This is despite the fact that these attitudes were expressed only privately by Hitler to Party colleagues and not made public until the writing and subsequent publication of *Mein Kampf* in 1924-6. Hitler was convinced, Stoakes continues, that Britain's support was vitally necessary if Germany was to be able to realise her territorial ambitions in the East. Indeed, extending this hypothesis, Stoakes states, against current opinion, that this spatial dimension had been added to Hitler's outlook well before he came into contact in 1924 with geopolitical theories as propounded, for example, by Professor Karl Haushofer. The latter's theses did not form the foundation of Hitler's imperialist ambitions because they were too restricted in scope for the Führer's liking, were not specifically directed against Russia and, in any case, came too late to influence Hitler's decision. In contrast to Haushofer's lack of influence, however, Stoakes underlines, within the limits of a general enquiry into the extent of ideological motivation behind the Führer's opinions, the important bearing of Alfred Rosenberg. He suggests that Rosenberg's conspiratorial view of history, which was moulded on the basis of a virulent anti-semitism and anti-Bolshevism, provided Hitler with attractive ideological justification for his estimate of both Russia and Britain. These views were not made public until the appearance of *Mein Kampf,* Stoakes explains, because of Hitler's fears that important supporters outside the NSDAP (for example, Russian émigrés) might be alienated by his Russian policy, and also because of his fears that opinion within the Party might be offended by his proposed alliance strategy towards Britain.

On a wider scale, Stoakes' paper re-emphasises the crucial significance of the very early 1920s for the development of the NSDAP. Although the Party suffered severely from the abortive Munich *Putsch,* it carried forward into the new phase after 1925 much of the ideology, organisational and propagandistic precepts, and of course, fanatical commitment to the Führer, which had been embedded in the National Socialist ethos during those turbulent incubation years. The NSDAP undeniably underwent profound changes after it was re-founded, particularly as regards the question of how to achieve power in the state, but the spadework completed before 1923 was indispensable to the Party's later success.

Stoakes' discussion of Alfred Rosenberg in his essay furnishes an appropriate connection with the following contributions by Albrecht Tyrell and Peter Stachura. Both authors consider the role and relative importance of subsidiary leaders in the NSDAP. Their choice of Gottfried Feder and Gregor Strasser respectively is apt if only because of the fact that of all Hitler's top leaders they are among the very few who have not yet been the subject of full-scale biographies. While studies of Hitler continue to swamp the academic and popular market, other figures like Josef Goebbels, Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler have succeeded in attracting a degree of interest which is in disproportion to their real significance in the NSDAP during the

Kampfzeit. There is plenty of scope, therefore, for investigating lesser known and largely neglected leaders not merely to ascertain what each of them actually did in the National Socialist movement, but also to help illuminate still further the growth of the NSDAP as a totalitarian party dependent on the autocratic and charismatic leadership of Hitler.

In his essay, Tyrell probes beyond the undifferentiated image of Gottfried Feder as the author or co-author of the 1920 Party programme, and as the somewhat eccentric propagandist of the 'breaking of the slavery of interest' theory. In attempting to define more accurately Feder's role in the NSDAP before 1933 and in the few years following the *Machtübernahme,* as well as the nature of his relationship with Hitler, Tyrell describes, firstly, Feder's activities within and around the NSDAP during the early 1920s, laying emphasis on the genesis and substance of his economic theories. Tyrell sees them as representative of the anti-liberal and anti-capitalist psychosis of the post-1918 German bourgeoisie, and crystallising around the concept of a 'German Socialism'. Nonetheless, Tyrell states, Feder's participation in the formulation of the Party programme in 1920 was limited. In any case, much of his time and energy were directed, not into the NSDAP, but into the *'Deutscher Kampfbund zur Brechung der Zinsknechtschaft'*, which Feder founded in early 1920.

Although Feder's economic and financial conceptions left a mark on Hitler's political ideology during this early period, he never established a close relationship with the Führer, nor did he create for himself, despite his sense of personal importance, a substantial power base in the NSDAP. Feder did not even acquire the status of the Party's official financial expert, and his theories were not at any time formally adopted as Party policy. His position during the 1920s therefore remained rather ambivalent and insecure, and when during the early 1930s the depression brought economic questions more to the fore in public debate, Feder found his views even being vigorously challenged by others within the NSDAP, including Otto Wagener and Walther Funk. In short, he failed throughout the pre-1933 period to commit the Party wholeheartedly to his financial and economic plans, while during 1933-5 his influence was perhaps even less noteworthy. Tyrell concludes that since Feder never realised his ambition of becoming the official Party spokesman on economic and financial matters, it is quite misleading to argue, as most historians have done hitherto, that Feder's standing in the NSDAP suddenly declined in the early 1930s. Quite simply, he had never been a personality of real importance in the Party. His role was that of a mere propagandist.

Tyrell's study accentuates the point that in the vehemently anti-intellectual NSDAP, whose leader openly and repeatedly derided 'bourgeois intellectuals', theorists like Feder had little opportunity for self-assertion. Feder's failure to leave a decisive mark on the Party's ideological development reinforces the belief that in the NSDAP action, not ideas, was of paramount consideration. Those with ideas were looked upon with unyielding scepticism and kept at a safe distance from the machinery of decision-making and political power. After all, Hitler scarcely took ideology seriously as a factor in the battle for power. For him, the complementary and interdependent elements of disciplined organisation and adroit propaganda constituted the real substance of that overriding objective.

Concentrating on Gregor Strasser, with special reference to the resignation crisis at the end of 1932, Stachura calls into question a number of previous assumptions concerning the political orientation of this dynamic yet neglected Party leader. With the broad intention of clarifying the principal issues at stake in Strasser's final disillusionment with Hitler's leadership of the NSDAP, Stachura identifies and analyses the crucial changes which took place in Strasser's political and ideological outlook, and at the same time raises some questions about the character of the Party itself prior to 1933. It is argued that Strasser's alleged 'socialism' which had earned him the unofficial status of leader of the so-called Nazi Left, was notably tempered during the early 1930s as he established concrete ties with a variegated body of mainly moderate conservative-nationalist opinion outside his own party. To people like General Kurt von Schleicher and moderate leaders in industry and the trade unions, Strasser represented the acceptable face of National Socialism with which a degree of understanding could be reached. The quest for a coalition government at the end of 1932 came into the reckoning in this regard.

In progressively drifting away from an exclusively NSDAP perspective, Strasser effectively ceased being the Party's leading 'socialist' and, of course, the main inspiration of the Nazi Left. In any event, Stachura contends that the description 'Nazi Left' had no substantive ideological or organisational meaning. Disenchanted with Hitler's uncompromising stand vis-à-vis government participation, and apprehensive of what the NSDAP under Hitler signified for Germany's interests, the ambitious Strasser decided he could no longer remain in the Party. However, acknowledging that he lacked the requisite power-base and the personal courage to mount an open challenge to Hitler, Strasser simply made his protest a personal affair and retired quietly from active involvement in the NSDAP and Weimar politics altogether.

The episode brought into clear focus Strasser's undeniably complex personality and also stressed once again the limitations of protest in a *Führerpartei.* Throughout the early history of the NSDAP, Hitler was able to increase his hold on the Party in the wake of every instance of unsuccessful disaffection: the Bamberg Conference and the collapse of the northern *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* in 1925-6, the Otto Strasser affair in 1930, the Stennes Revolt in 1931, and finally the Gregor Strasser crisis. In the latter case, Hitler's speedy defeat of the dissenters helped smooth the way towards his uppermost aim, the Reich chancellorship. The intrinsic strength and pervasiveness of the Führer Myth doomed any resistance to him to abject failure. By 1932, the fortunes and political future of National Socialism hinged totally on Hitler. The Gregor Strasser crisis essentially reaffirmed, therefore, that the NSDAP was indeed the 'Hitler Movement' (*Hitler-Bewegung*).

When, in 1924-5, Hitler decided that the way to power was not by revolutionary but by quasi-legalistic, constitutional means, the resultant need to win mass support among the German electorate caused him to reconsider the place of ancillary organisations (*Gliederungen*) within the National Socialist movement. Before 1923 only the SA, or Stormtroopers, played a meaningful role in the Party's bid for power, while other auxiliaries, like the *Jugendbund der NSDAP* (Youth Association of the NSDAP), contributed very little. As part of his reassessment of the overall political situation in 1925, therefore, Hitler began to encourage the idea of a proliferation and strengthening of ancillary organisations and even professional interest groups connected with the Party. Although the initiative for such developments did not always come from central Party headquarters (*Reichsleitung der NSDAP*), the years after 1925 saw not only the setting up of a streamlined and more politically-conscious SA, but also a series of other groups, including the Hitler Youth, the National Socialist German Students' League (NSDStB), the National Socialist Schoolboys' League (NSS), and specialised women's formations. The basic task of each of these groups was initially to disseminate the National Socialist gospel as widely as possible among the German people, and to attract new adherents to the Führer's cause; later, in the Third Reich, they were meant to reconcile whole sections of the population to the National Socialist *regime* and to indoctrinate them in the Nazi *Weltanschauung.*

The performance of the ancillary organisations was generally uneven and their combined efforts on behalf of National Socialism did not surpass the Party's contribution. Nonetheless, they were a significant extra dimension of the movement's swift rise and consolidation of power. On this account alone, they are worthy of independent and detailed examination, and recent scholarship has already made a beginning in this direction. The three essays which form the central part of this volume pursue this trend by analysing the SA, the most powerful ancillary group, the NSDStB, and the *NS-Frauenschaft*, the women's auxiliary.

The SA's muscle power and usefulness as a terror and propaganda weapon to National Socialism is undisputed. But on one other vital aspect, the sociological composition of its rank and file membership, there is no such unanimity of agreement among scholars. They are heatedly divided over the question whether the SA was primarily a movement of the lower middle class or of the working class. Involved in the debate is the central issue of the relationship between the NSDAP and the class structure of Weimar Germany.

Conan Fischer tries to come to terms with the conflicting and often contradictory interpretations of this question on the basis of new archival evidence. By firstly defining class terms, particularly relating to the working class, and then analysing a comprehensive range of sociographic data, including parental background, occupational patterns and age. Fischer demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of the SA's rank and file in both urban and rural areas came from the working class. The independent lower middle classes were largely absent. At the same time, Fischer is able to confirm previous ideas that most ordinary SA men were unemployed (as many as 70 per cent) and belonged to younger age categories (under 30 years). Indeed this evidence, taken in conjunction with the age composition of the main occupational groups in German society before 1933, inevitably meant a preponderance of blue collar, and to a lesser extent, white collar employees in the SA ranks. The social composition of the SA ordinary members contrasted sharply, therefore, with that of the organisation's middle and higher leadership echelons which were largely staffed by the lower middle class. Although this pattern of class affiliation is not unique in mainly working-class movements and, indeed, is apparent in the Hitler Youth before 1933, Fischer rightly concludes that his findings raise broader questions about the social and class nature of the National Socialist movement in general, the more so as the NSDAP itself was a lower-middle-class organisation. A revision of standard generalisations about the class basis of National Socialism is obviously called fo while other implications of this for wider aspects of Hitler's rise to power can hardly be discounted.

Geoffrey Giles and Jill Stephenson discuss the role of ancillary organisations within the power structure of the Third Reich, emphasising the extent to which the NSDStB on the one hand, and the *NS-Frauenschaft* on the other, managed to carry out a programme of political and ideological indoctrination among their respective clientèle.

Giles emphatically rejects the thesis that the NSDStB was in any way successful in this endeavour. The organisation, he contends, displayed in the years before 1933 impressive energy and dedication, as well as a capacity for skilful and ruthless politics. The NSDStB was thus able to emerge as an authoritative voice among Germany's university student population by 1931/32 but this, Giles maintains, represented in many ways the apotheosis of its achievement. After 1933 the group adopted a policy of permanent revolutionary activism more suited to the conditions of the *Kampfzeit* than the different ambience of the Third Reich. Beset by internal leadership struggles and confusion over aims, by stout resistance to its totalitarian schemes from the traditional fraternities, by the absence of support from a suspicious Party, and above all, by increasing apathy among students at large, the NSDStB failed in its fundamental task of politically educating the university sector. With the advent of war in 1939, the situation only deteriorated further. The record of the NSDStB was therefore one of unfulfilled adaptation to the demands of the National Socialist State.

Jill Stephenson comes to much the same conclusion about the role of the *NS-Frauenschaft* between 1933 and 1939, though in a few other respects its contribution to the Führer's work was more positive. Designed like other ancillaries to serve the interests of the NSDAP and later the Third Reich, and in no way meant to promote the cause of feminism, the *NS-Frauenschaft* under the leadership of Gertrud Scholtz-Klink (1934-1945) developed a formidable administrative apparatus which allowed it to pervade many spheres of concern to women. Often this was effected through subsidiary groups such as the *Reichsmütterdienst* and the *Kultur-Erziehung–Schulung*. Despite this sizable bureaucracy, however, which Stephenson describes in some detail, the *NS-Frauenschaft*, though able to bring about the nationalisation and nazification of the organisational life of women under its own leadership, never controlled more than a relatively small minority of them. The task of political indoctrination was therefore bound to be executed to only a severely limited degree. Stephenson explains why most women in National Socialist Germany were unwilling to become officially organised by referring to the voluntary basis of participation in the *NS-Frauenschaft*, the inherent difficulties of organising housewives and more important, the sheer indifference of women. Apathy, we have noted, was the principal stumbling block of the NSDStB. On the other hand, while active support for National Socialism was not forthcoming from most German women, Stephenson stresses that the vast majority of them were prepared passively to acquiesce in the régime.

Giles and Stephenson together add weight to the argument that nazification of German society did not go far beyond the immediate and overt, that it was in fact largely confined to institutional and organisational forms, while leaving relatively untouched in an ideological sense the hearts and mind of most Germans. This situation engenders further doubts about the efficacy of totalitarian regimes where the majority of people under their domination are able to avoid being sucked in entirely by the system, even if they refrain from offering open resistance to it. German resistance to National Socialism is a theme which has, of course, commanded wide attention. Historians have probed not only the actual physical manifestations of resistance but also the allied problem concerning the peculiar constraints and possibilities of mounting opposition in a totalitarian and closely guarded society. Considerable differences of opinion still exist on the scale of importance which the German resistance to Hitler merits. A somewhat underdeveloped aspect pertinent to the controversy is the state of public opinion in the Third Reich regarding the policies, actions, and objectives of the régime. How far the ordinary German supported the government, whether his support was active or passive, is a question which hitherto has been clouded by National Socialist propaganda and coercion. The consequent image of a Reich contented and unswervingly loyal to the Führer clearly requires critical scrutiny.

By making a case study of one particular example of public disaffection, the controversy aroused by the removal of crucifixes from schools and other public buildings in South Oldenburg in 1936, Jeremy Noakes comes to grips with the larger problem of measuring the level of public support for the Third Reich. He is concerned to delineate the limits of opposition to a totalitarian regime both from the point of view of the reaction of the regime to opposition, and from the point of view of the attitudes and behaviour of the population itself.

Noakes argues that groups bound together by either a common ideological, social, or religious identity, provided the strongest resistance to the Third Reich. This applies especially, he adds, to the two categories which had proved most resilient to NSDAP appeals before 1933, the industrial working classes and Catholics. In the case of the latter, the Catholic Church possessed social cohesion, a degree of protection due to its international character, and an independent organisational structure. The Church was thus better equipped than most other institutions to challenge the regime if its interests were being threatened. Applying this criterion to the overwhelmingly Catholic districts of South Oldenburg, Noakes states that the inner social and ideological vitality of the Catholic sub-culture there was primarily responsible for thwarting the efforts of the NSDAP and the State in the crucifix conflict. But although the Catholics of South Oldenburg scored a dramatic victory, Noakes cautions against reading too much of wider significance into the episode. The victory was ephemeral because within two years all denominational schools had been closed in even that staunchly Catholic region. It also has to be remembered that in 1936 the National Socialists were soft-pedalling on contentious religious issues for domestic and diplomatic reasons. Hence, generalisations based on the Oldenburg affair about the extent of Catholic hostility to the regime, and about hostility in general to the National Socialists, are not permissible. The 1936 crucifix scandal is to be seen specifically in the political and social context of that part of Germany and no more.

The deep consternation into which the state authorities were temporarily plunged as a result of the South Oldenburg struggle was a symptom of a more pervasive confusion in the agencies responsible for the administration of the Third Reich. A full and convincing picture already exists of the wasteful overlapping, lack of common purpose, and inefficiency of government during 1933-45. Many historians regard the regime as having been fundamentally unstable and held together only by the extraordinary charismatic force of Hitler in his role as Führer and supreme authority. Interpretations of the National Socialist State are also invariably of a dualist type, that is, they embody theories which see the state's dynamic as some kind of opposition between Party and State, between totalitarianism and authoritarianism, or between politics and administration, and so on. But in her discussion of the National Socialist State, Jane Caplan unfolds a trenchant critique of the traditional dualist approach.

Caplan contends that the dualist interpretations depend upon a particular view of the bureaucracy and administration as incarnations of stability, a view she criticises for applying an organisational insight to a political system. In exploring the specific weight of some basic components of civil service structure and policy in Germany before 1933, Caplan argues that these questions of state organisation were already politicised before the National Socialists came to power. Not only does this fact belie the idea that the Nazi State can be analysed primarily in terms of a dynamic assault by the Party upon an established and stable system of government, but it also underlines the importance of investigating the continuity of political problems and solutions across the dividing line of 1933. Caplan illustrates this continuity with reference to a number of the policies implemented after 1933 by the Reich Ministry of the Interior, the body mainly in charge of administrative affairs. She believes that especially after 1935 this Ministry's policy objectives and methods were themselves significant sources of the very incoherence which characterised the operation of the Nazi State.

In a concluding section, in which she attempts to examine the theoretical implications of her empirical critique, Caplan argues that it is incorrect to lift the bureaucracy as an institution out of its political situation. To do so tends to reduce political problems to their institutional or ideological locations, so that a concrete analysis becomes impossible. In other words, the administrative structure and civil service policy in the Third Reich furnish a basis for examining the political machinery of the Nazi State. Stressing that the vital problem of this state was its inability to reproduce itself as a functioning political system, Caplan outlines how the bureaucracy shared in and contributed to this incapacity. Her final and provocative conclusion is that the real polarities evident in this overall problem must ultimately be understood in terms of a crisis of class representation.

Further evidence of the ineffectiveness of National Socialist governmental policy in practice is provided by Marcus Phillips's consideration of the cultural side of the 'New Order' project which Hitler conceived for occupied Europe. The 'New Order' envisaged a Europe dominated by, and subservient to German political and economic interests, and also ensnared by National Socialist cultural tastes. Phillips examines the predominant influence of Goebbels in the latter sphere with special reference to the priorities he mapped out for the German film industry. The Reich Propaganda Minister was convinced that National Socialist cultural policies in occupied Europe should be used to consolidate Germany's military achievements, and he wanted the film industry to act as a vehicle for the twin purposes of propaganda and ideological indoctrination. The essence of the film industry's brief was to propagate German i.e. National Socialist *Kultur* in order to combat the alleged prodigious advance of American *Unkultur*. The policy was commercially profitable, but the film industry failed in its crucial mission as an agent of the National Socialist cultural revolution for a cluster of reasons which Phillips discusses in detail. He concludes by assessing the light thrown on the character of the 'New Order' and on National Socialist rule in general by the experience of the German film industry, suggesting that in the last analysis the industry's failures merely reflected the weaknesses and tensions of the Third Reich's political and administrative structures.

The underlying and coordinating idea of the essays presented here is to assess certain developments intimately associated with the emergence of a National Socialist State in Germany, and to examine some of the ways in which that state took shape. The volume treats only a small part of a complex historical process, but if it at least partially extends our awareness and comprehension of Adolf Hitler's National Socialism it will have served its purpose.

1 THE EVOLUTION OF HITLER'S IDEAS ON FOREIGN POLICY 1919-1925

Geoffrey Stoakes

Over the past few years the foreign policy ideas formulated by Adolf Hitler in the *Kampfzeit* have been subjected to intensive scrutiny. It is now clear that Hitler's ideas on foreign affairs, far from being a conglomeration of illogical ideological prejudice and crude predictions based on his reading of political history, actually formed part of a coherent and all-embracing *Weltanschauung*.[1] Particular aspects have been examined in exhaustive detail: Nazi attitudes to the acquisition of colonies;[2] the development of the navy;[3] the problem of Hitler's world ambitions;[4] and the origins of the 'alliance system' outlined in *Mein Kampf*.[5]

The aim of this essay is to re-examine current interpretations of the origins of Hitler's foreign policy with particular reference to the position of Russia and England in the Nazi foreign policy programme. For it seems to this writer that there is still a marked tendency amongst many historians to concentrate unduly on the figure of Adolf Hitler and to overlook the ideas of other party members who may well have made significant contributions to the formulation of foreign policy ideas.[6] The relative neglect of the writings of Alfred Rosenberg, probably Hitler's earliest adviser on foreign affairs, is a case in point; these writings are studied, if at all, only to illustrate his differences with Hitler.[7] For example, it is generally assumed that Rosenberg's ideas were characterised by ideological rigidity and Hitler's by the flexibility of the *Realpolitiker*. This is an oversimplification of the position resting on a study of their respective careers only after 1933 and ignoring their relationship in the 1920s. Only if Hitler's thought processes are studied within the context of the Nazi party as a whole is it possible to arrive at valid conclusions about the relative importance of Hitler's personal contribution to the development of Nazi ideology.[8] So far this has not been attempted.

A second aim of this essay is to reassess the relative importance of ideological factors and personal influences in the fashioning of the party's foreign policy. For it is curious how reluctant historians are to pay serious attention to ideological factors. Since Jäckel's brilliant synthesis appeared, everyone pays lip service to the view that a combination of ideological considerations and *Realpolitik* forged Hitler's outlook. But with the exception of Günther Schubert[9] no historian has seriously considered the possibility that ideological factors actually *determined* (and not merely reinforced) Hitler's 'alliance system'.

Klaus Hildebrand in his study of the foreign policy of the Third Reich takes 1924 as a starting-point because 'Hitler's remarks on foreign policy between the years 1919-23 seem far more conventional and indeed resemble those indiscriminate pan-world aspirations of the Wilhelmine policies of the conservatives in Germany and within the Nazi party which he attacked so strongly in *Mein Kampf*.'[10] On the contrary, in the years 1919-23 the Nazis were in fact developing – behind a carefully nurtured facade of conventionality – many of the ideas, which appear so novel in Hitler's autobiography. This is particularly true of Hitler's plans for England and Russia. If applied only to the years 1919-20, Hildebrand's judgement would have far more validity. For it is perfectly true that in the first year of his membership of the German Workers' Party, Hitler's speeches on foreign affairs were mainly concerned with vitriolic attacks on the Versailles settlement, and his view of the international powers was coloured by his unfailing demand for the revision of this treaty. England was castigated along with America and France as one of Germany's 'absolute enemies'.[11] Hitler's hostility towards England was based on the belief that she had been responsible for the seizure of Germany's colonies, which, by robbing her of supplies of raw materials, had destroyed her competitiveness in world markets.[12] Hitler was more sympathetic towards Russia. He described her as one of those states which 'became our enemies because of their unfortunate situations or because of circumstances.'[13] According to Hitler, Russia and Germany had no conflicting interests whilst Russia followed 'an asiatic policy of conquest'; in fact, before the war only 'the international Jewish press concern' had prevented an alliance between the two nations.[14]

As this last comment suggests, during the course of 1920 Hitler began to apply his deep-rooted anti-semitic prejudices to foreign affairs (he had already blamed Germany's internal disorder on the Jews in 1919). The development of this international dimension to Hitler's anti-semitism has been attributed to the publication in January 1920 of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the famous tract which purported to reveal the existence of a Jewish world conspiracy to achieve global domination. It has been suggested that Hitler read the 'Protocols' between February and May 1920 and from that time on applied anti-semitic observations to his foreign policy speeches.[15] This seems to be the likeliest explanation since Hitler was also being tutored in the machinations of the 'conspiracy' by Alfred Rosenberg, who quickly became the acknowledged party expert on Russian affairs and the conspiracy (and possibly also by Dietrich Eckart). In 1919 Rosenberg observed that the collapse of Russia into Bolshevism in 1917 completed the first stage of the Jewish conspiratorial plan, since Russian nationalism had been subverted and Russia was in the hands of several 'Jewish-Bolshevik' leaders; Germany would be next to suffer destruction by the Jews.[16] Whoever was responsible for revealing to Hitler the relevance of the conspiracy to the study of foreign affairs, the important point is that its impact on Hitler's assessment of Russia was immediate. The hitherto friendly attitude towards Russia was tempered by an aversion to her present rulers: 'an alliance between Russia and Germany', he pointed out, 'can only come into being when Jewry is deposed.'[17]

Were Hitler's reservations about a Russian alliance perhaps caused by considerations of *Machtpolitik* alone? Certainly Hitler quoted the physical weakness of Russia after the ravages of the civil war which raged from 1917-20 as a contributory factor.[18] Also important was the fact that Russia under Bolshevik leadership had adopted a policy of imperialist development. 'Bolshevism', Hitler declared, 'is only a cloak for the construction of a great Russian empire.'[19] Whether these political considerations or the ideological insights carried more weight with Hitler at this stage is frankly uncertain; there is certainly no evidence to justify the confident conclusion that 'the danger lay for Hitler not in Lenin's proposal to bring to fruition a world-wide revolution emanating from Germany, but in the strategic striving of the Soviet Union for an increase in her territory.'[20] If strategic factors really determined Hitler's foreign policy, why is there no evidence of Hitler's hostility towards the leaders of Bolshevik Russia *before* 1920? There was, after all, abundant evidence of Russia's territorial aggrandisement at this time – the Red Army's advance into the Baltic States in 1918-19 gave early warning of Russia's aggressive designs on Eastern Europe. Why, then, did Hitler only begin to express reservations about a Russian alliance in 1920? The explanation which cannot be ignored is that ideological 'insights' – that is, the revelation that the Jews were the force behind Bolshevism – led to a fundamental revision of Hitler's view of Russia.

It should be remembered that Nazi ideology, revolving as it did around the notion of 'international conspiracy of Jewry' had implications for the whole field of foreign affairs (not just for Russia). Under the influence of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Nazi anti-semitism became a universalist racialist ideology postulating a struggle for existence between the forces of good and evil, represented by the Aryan race and Jewry respectively. To the Nazi mind, this was the ultimate struggle and every state in the world would be the battleground. The struggle between capitalism and marxism described by Lenin was completely illusory in the opinion of the Nazis. As early as 1918, Rosenberg had pointed out that there was, in essence, no dichotomy between marxism and capitalism; the overt and apparently antithetical confrontation between the two was, according to Rosenberg, a deliberate deception – the Jews were in the vanguard of both camps, as leaders of the proletarian revolution in Russia and as bankers in the financial centres of capitalist Western Europe.[21] So despite apparent incompatibility, international marxism and international capitalism were manipulated by the Jews, whose real enemies were the forces of nationalism. In this struggle between Good and Evil, peaceful Western Europe was just as important a battlefield as war-torn Russia, where the two sides, represented by White Russian nationalists and the Bolshevik Red Army, were facing each other in the civil war. Rosenberg regarded the democratic regimes of Western Europe as, in fact, the first step towards Bolshevism. Put quite simply, world Jewry by propagating democratic and internationalist ideas in the West at the expense of nationalist aspirations, and by exploiting class conflicts in Russia, was attempting to lay the foundations for its own world domination.[22] Hence to Rosenberg's mind, the progress of the twofold machinations of the 'Jewish world conspiracy' materially affected the value of each and every European country as a prospective ally for Germany. If the triumph of Jewry in the guise of Bolshevism in Russia made a Russian alliance less attractive to the Nazis, would it not follow logically that the position of England would also be affected in Nazi eyes by similar ideological considerations? To this aspect of the problem we must now turn our attentions.

Rosenberg's view of England was initially jaundiced by his belief that London was the centre of the 'Jewish world union' which co-ordinated the plans of world Jewry[23] and that following the Balfour Declaration of 1917 which committed Britain to support the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, the British Empire had assumed the role of 'guardian angel' of Jewry.[24] On the other hand, Hitler's first recorded references to England in 1920 were full of righteous indignation at the severity of the Versailles treaty but even so his veneration for the British Empire could not be concealed: 'the English as a nation', he pointed out in one speech, 'have reason to be proud.'[25] Hitler soon began to recognise that the Jews were at work throughout Europe and not just in Bolshevik Russia: 'The Jew is sitting in Russia exactly as he does in Berlin or Vienna, and so long as capital remains in the hands of this race, there can be no talk of reconstruction because the Jews are working hand-in-glove with the international capitalists, who are also Jews, and sell out us Germans.'[26] However, even though Hitler appears to have adopted Rosenberg's conspiratorial world view, anti-semitic arguments still do not appear in 1920 to have affected his view of England.

On the other hand, Rosenberg's attitude towards England was undergoing a distinct modification. Initially he had interpreted the espousal of the zionist cause evident in the Balfour Declaration as an example of how the interests of British imperialism might coincide with those of the Jews. 'England', he wrote in 1920, 'possessed India, Egypt and footholds on the Persian coast, and lacked only a territorial connection between these lands and here Palestine fell into place as part of a chain.'[27] Almost immediately, however, Rosenberg began to differentiate between the interests of Britain and those of world Jewry. The reason for the change is unknown, but henceforth Rosenberg's animosity towards England was curbed by the realisation that in fact true British national interests did not coincide with the plans of world Jewry. The British failure to give adequate support to the White Russian nationalist forces in the Russian civil war did not represent 'true' British policy, but was an aberration attributable, in Rosenberg's view, to Jewish influence on government policy.[28] From now on any subsequent action taken by the British government which appeared to advance the cause of Jewry or hinder that of nationalism could be conveniently explained away as evidence of Jewish subversion of British national interests. He had already started to 'unmask' Jewish figures in foreign governmental circles to back up his thesis. Even non-Jewish leaders were not immune; Lloyd George, whose association with the treaty of Versailles damned him in Nazi eyes, was alleged to be in the pay of the Jews.[29]

The fact that Rosenberg went out of his way to think up 'plausible' explanations of British diplomatic manoeuvres suggests either a certain predilection for England on his part, or alternatively, a determination to minimise the gulf between *actual* British policy and Rosenberg's preconceived notions of what that policy *should be*. Whichever explanation is more acceptable, Rosenberg clearly believed that a more favourable treatment of Germany would be in accord with 'true' British interests. In August 1921, he stressed that English 'national' policies, as advocated by the strong nationalist party (Conservative Party), were not compatible with the complete ascendancy of either France or Germany in Europe, but only with 'a balance of power in Europe.'[30] The complete destruction of Germany (the aim of the Jewish faction) would not be to the advantage of the English nationalists because it would make certain French hegemony in Europe.

The resurrection of the outmoded strategy of the 'balance of power' in Europe as the (supposed) rationale behind a foreign policy dictated by genuine British interests was to be the basic assumption behind Hitler's concept of an English alliance after 1922. Rosenberg was not advocating an Anglo-German alliance in 1921 because, as far as he was concerned, the Jews, and not the English national party, were in control of British government at that time and, therefore, an alliance would not have been forthcoming. It is interesting to note that Hitler felt the same way. In May 1921, he rejected Lloyd George's conciliatory speech over the question of Upper Silesia* as a mere trick. 'An intrinsic change in England's attitude towards Germany is however impossible, because the same society of Jewish press bandits directs the state there as does here.'[31] Hitler clearly felt that the removal of Jewish influence would increase the possibility of a favourable change in England's attitude towards Germany, but whether an Anglo-German alliance would result when traditional British policy reasserted itself is uncertain. Hitler did not feel inclined to explain away British policy solely by reference to Jewish influence[32] despite paying lip-service to conspiratorial anti-semitic theories. Neither Hitler nor Rosenberg was prepared to advocate an English alliance in 1921. The indications are that Rosenberg felt the effects of such an alliance would be beneficial to Germany. His frequent resort to the 'Jewish world conspiracy' to explain British policies may have been a conscious attempt to use ideology to explain away discrepancies between his interpretation of British interests and the actual course of British

* The ultimate fate of Upper Silesia was to be decided according to the terms of the treaty of Versailles by a plebiscite in the area. This took place on 21 March 1921, the majority voting in favour of a return to German rule. France and Poland opposed the return of the whole area to Germany, which caused uproar in Germany. In May 1921 Lloyd George made known his disagreement with the Franco-Polish decision.

policy. But even assuming that Rosenberg were cynically using anti-semitic ideology to correct his own basic misconceptions (and at this stage he could surely have changed his little-known views without losing too much face), this is no reason why historians should ignore his ideological arguments. At the very least, they reflected the prevailing current of Nazi opinion and are thus invaluable; in this case, the use of the 'ideological corrective' shows that one leading Nazi at least believed in the possibility of a future alliance with England.

But did ideological factors affect Hitler's decision to advocate an English alliance late in 1922? The Ruhr crisis is generally considered to be the turning-point in Hitler's alliance policy, because, in his own words, 'for the first time, [the Ruhr crisis] really alienated England basically from France.'[33] The physical occupation of the Ruhr industrial area in January 1923 by French and Belgian troops was, in fact, incidental to Hitler's decision (he announced the alliance in the late autumn of 1922).[34] Much more important, so it is argued, was the evidence of Anglo-French friction caused by Poincaré's threat to extract German reparation payments by force. This, it is believed, was sufficient inducement for Hitler to adopt his new line in foreign policy. But was that the only reason for the change? After all, Hitler had ignored signs of Anglo-French disagreement over Upper Silesia only a year earlier. It is possible that personalities played some part. Just as Hitler's attitude towards Italy must have been modified by the seizure of power by Mussolini's Fascists in October 1922, so Lloyd George's resignation as Prime Minister of England in the same month may have contributed to Hitler's decision to announce to his party colleagues this new facet of his foreign policy programme. In view of Lloyd George's intimate association with the treaty of Versailles and, in Nazi propaganda, with the interests of international Jewry, it is difficult not to see a synchronisation between Hitler's first recorded support for an English alliance and the resignation of the man who seemed to represent Jewish influence in British affairs of state. Lloyd George's departure would at least have provided a convenient, ideologically acceptable, pretext for a change in policy.

Rosenberg certainly relished the moment of Lloyd George's fall from power. It offered, he felt, an opportunity for the traditional aim of British policy – the maintenance of a European balance of power – to reassert itself and to replace Lloyd George's Jewish plans.[35] British diplomacy might now be dictated by the instinct for self-preservation in the face of possible French hegemony in Europe and 'as a result support for Germany would necessarily emerge.'[36] Rosenberg did,