

anti-Semitic politician August Georg von Schönerer. Clearly, even Hitler's father had wanted "nothing to do with the Jews." Hitler's account of his schooldays in Linz further conceals the fact that certain teachers at the Realschule in Linz were unequivocal anti-Semites and had "openly professed their anti-Semitism," and that Hitler himself was, already in 1904 at the tender age of fifteen, "a pronounced anti-Semite." According to Werner Maser, schoolmates of Hitler from his Linz period independently concur on the fact that as early as his schooldays of 1904-1905, Hitler was a "biological anti-Semite," and that this biological anti-Semitism of the young Hitler can be traced back to a programmatic pamphlet of the "Alldeutsche Verband" (Pan-German League), published in 1904, which Hitler had read and which he had openly talked about during recesses at the Realschule in Linz. This pamphlet, they allege, was studied with references to biological anti-Semitism. In the 1890s the Alldeutsche Verband had indeed issued warnings against the "Jewish peril," demanding that rigorous restrictions be imposed on the "Jewish press" — which included the *Berliner Tageblatt* and the *Frankfurter Zeitung* — and advocating that the Jews be treated as "foreigners." Yet in the registered publications of the Alldeutsche Verband from the years 1891-1901, there is no trace of a discussion of biological anti-Semitism. Since, according to Kubizek's fully credible recollection, Adolf Hitler went off to Vienna already "a pronounced anti-Semite," we cannot rule out the possibility that he had been influenced by individual teachers at the Realschule in Linz. . . .

The friendship between Hitler and his childhood companion Kubizek was cemented by their mutual passion for the music of Richard Wagner. Wagner's tracts and essays were readily available in lending libraries in Linz, and the sixteen- or seventeen-year-old Hitler absorbed the works and life of Wagner with systematic diligence. Today it seems clear that the genius of this artist, unfortunately for the German people, contributed to the creation of a political monster, for the collected works of Wagner exerted a decisive influence on Hitler's development and consequently on National Socialism. To quote Hitler's own words, "Whoever wishes to comprehend National Socialism must first know Richard Wagner." And with good reason. In his *Bayreuther Blätter* Wagner gave expression to a synoptic view of history and of the world, to a *Weltanschauung* that was founded on a racial theory. Transmitted through the writ-

ings and pamphlets of Georg von Lanz-Liebenfels and Theodor Fritsch, which Hitler read and reread in his first years in Vienna, the substance of Wagner's thought found its way into the heart of the National Socialist *Weltanschauung* — the National Socialist racial doctrine.

This racial doctrine rested on the following axioms: (1) The fundamental inequality of mankind, determined by genetic traits; (2) the existence of different human types (races); (3) the existence of an irrevocably inferior race, a kind of anti-race: the Jews. From these postulates the Nazis deduced that the best and purest race (the Aryan-Germanic race) has a preordained title to rule and to prevail; and that therefore, the races of inferior status — the less significant, culturally impoverished races — exist to serve the master race. Finally, at the bottom end of the scale, the anti-race (the Jewish race) represents "worthless life" (*unwertes Leben*).

Like Hitler, Wagner looked forward to a time when there would be "no more Jews." Like Hitler, he yearned for "the emancipation from the yoke of Judaism" and spoke urgently of "this war of liberation." Whether Wagner would have assented to the nucleus of Hitler's *Weltanschauung* — to the "elimination," "ridding," "evacuation," "reduction," (read: "extermination") of the Jews — is another question.

Feeling himself to be misunderstood and thwarted by his surroundings, the young Hitler lost himself in Wagner's world. There he could find consolation, understanding, and the welcome affirmation of his personal prejudices — an affirmation he later repeatedly sought and would later also admit had provided the major impetus for his reading. It is no accident that Hitler was especially fond of quoting from act 2, scene 3 of the *Meistersinger*:

*Und doch's will halt nicht gehen: —
Ich fühl's and kann's nicht verstehen, —
kann's nicht behalten, doch auch nicht vergessen:
und fass ich es ganz, kann ich's nicht ermessen! —*

*And yet, it just won't go —
I feel it, and cannot understand it —
I cannot hold on to it, nor yet forget it;
and if I grasp it wholly, I cannot measure it! —*

For Hitler in his Vienna years these lines were an ever-potent spell by which his hero Wagner had lashed out at his contemporaries' lack of understanding. Shortly before the war broke out in 1939, the Reich Chancellor revealed to Winifred Wagner in Bayreuth that it was the production of the *Rienzi* in Linz, when he was seventeen, which first incited him to become a politician. "That was the hour when it all began," by which Hitler meant that his experience of the Wagner opera had opened his eyes to his mission in life: to elevate his nation to greatness and power.

Hitler's definitive decision to pursue a political career came, according to him, when he discovered that he was a uniquely gifted public speaker. In other words, Hitler saw, with increasing certainty, that he could convince the German masses of his entitlement to power and leadership. But the real mission that lay behind this claim to power was formulated in his maxim: "Indem ich mich des Juden erwehre, kämpfe ich für das Werk des Herrn" (By keeping the Jews at bay, I fight for the good Lord's way). With this slogan Hitler, the anti-Semitic nationalist, sought to present himself as a new *Christus militans*. With his linguistic shrewdness he had wisely come up with a formula that the National Socialist propagandists would inevitably make use of. Its overtones of traditional Christian anti-Semitism were easy enough to link up with the Nazi brand of biological anti-Semitism; the move from the one form of anti-Semitism to the other constituted a big step, but nonetheless, no more than a step.

Hitler's frustration in his youth with a world that he felt misunderstood him reached crisis proportions when, as an art student at eighteen and nineteen, he failed the examination that would have gained him entry to the art academy of Vienna. His unsatisfactory portfolio was the official reason for his failure; but Hitler placed the blame for this great disappointment on the Jews. Many years later he recounted to friends that he had learned, after the exams were over, that four of the seven members of the examination committee were Jews; whereupon he had sent the director of the academy a letter of protest that closed with the threat, "The Jews will pay for this." The incident was a total confabulation. And yet, this retrospective explanation for his failure of the entrance exams indicates the degree to which Hitler was gripped by a pathological hatred for the Jews. The personal component of this hatred combined with Hitler's repeatedly articulated delusion of a global Jewish conspiracy

to serve as a safety valve that, ironically, protected him from a future, subjectively insurmountable mental illness. . . .

In retrospect, we can say that Hitler's political career was directly shaped by two experiences, which in their combined impact dictated both his political goal and the means by which to achieve it. The first experience was his service on the front and the shock of defeat; the second was his growing awareness that he could mobilize the masses, that he could virtually "conquer" them with his powers of suggestion. Of the two, the first in particular left an indelible imprint on Hitler for life. "A November 1918 shall never repeat itself in German history," Hitler vowed on 1 September 1939, the day on which World War II broke out. His experience of the short-lived November Revolution of 1918, which he regarded as a Jewish-Marxist plot against the German nation, translated over time into the obsessive idea that Providence had elected him to perform an unprecedented feat in the history of the German people. In its radicalization, his hatred for the Jews thus acquired the dimensions of a destiny. Nearly five months after his Reichstag address of 1 September 1939, Hitler prophesied to Czechoslovak Foreign Minister František Chvalkovsky: "The Jews shall be annihilated in our land. They shall not have staged 9 November 1918 with impunity. That day shall be avenged!"

As Kubizek reports, the *Rienzi* production in Linz provoked in Hitler his sense of mission. It was 9 November 1918, however, that gave him his true *raison d'être*: the unswerving conviction that the antichrist — Jewry — must be exterminated. From his speeches of 1919 and 1920 to his political testament of 29 April 1945, Hitler continuously held this goal up before the German nation. These key experiences prior to his political career thus formed the basis on which, in the early twenties, Hitler developed a strategy that would enable him to realize his goal.

The plan entailed several steps. The first stage in Hitler's political conception was to "uncover the Jewish imperialist designs on world hegemony and parade them before the largest segments of our nation" (27 January 1921), to immunize the masses against the "Jewish-Marxist poison" of internationalism and class struggle. Already at this rudimentary stage the masses were to be roused and made ready for the day when they would put an end — by violence, if necessary — to the "Jewish dominion" that had afflicted the nation since 1918.

"Hatred, burning hatred — this is what we want to pour into the souls of our millions of fellow Germans, until the flame of rage ignites in Germany and avenges the corrupters of our nation," wrote Hitler on 8 February 1921, in *Der Völkische Beobachter*.² The second step in Hitler's strategy was to translate agitation into an effective mass movement. Propaganda and organizing would be crucial in the third step, which would establish the prerequisites for victory in the final phase of the struggle against the domestic political enemy. Step four would definitively grant domestic peace through the founding of a "genuinely National Socialist Grossdeutschland [German and Austrian nation]" to be headed by a national "government invested with power and authority." The military and economic power of Grossdeutschland would, in step five, assure the permanent establishment, for Führer and country, of Germany's proper place in the system of world powers. By "proper place," Hitler had nothing less in mind for his nation than a preeminent, superpower role in a restructured, new Europe. The open enemy of this new Europe, the eternal archenemy to whom the collective guilt for all evil was inexplicably attached, was of course "the Jew" . . .

In his capacity as chief administrator of the Four Year Plan, on 24 January 1939, Göring assigned Reinhard Heydrich, the head of the Security Police, to bring "the Jewish question . . . to as favorable a solution as present circumstances permit," through emigration. At this stage, the objective of the German Jewish policy was still, in general, to remove the Jews from Germany and from the already annexed territories. With this object in view, Göring created a central agency for Jewish emigration in 1939 and then turned it over to Heydrich. In line with this policy, the Foreign Office proposed, after the fall of France in July 1940, that all Jews be removed not simply from the Reich and the annexed territories, but from Europe as a whole. It further recommended that "the island of Madagascar be requested as a resettlement area for the Jews from France."

The Madagascar Plan had not yet been conceived when, in June 1940, Heydrich informed Joachim von Ribbentrop, the Reich Foreign Secretary, that more than 200,000 Jews had "emigrated from the Reich," but the "problem as a whole" — namely, the fact that almost

²The main Nazi Party newspaper. — Ed.

three and a quarter million Jews stood under German jurisdiction — could no longer be resolved "through emigration" (emphasis in the original). "A territorial Final Solution has thus become necessary," Heydrich wrote to von Ribbentrop; while in a predated memorandum from the summer of 1940, in connection with the "treatment of foreign nationals in the East," Himmler wrote, "I hope to see the concept of Jew completely eradicated, through a large-scale deportation of the entire Jewish population to Africa, or else to some colony." At the same time, "out of inner conviction," he still rejected "the physical extermination of a race through Bolshevik methods as un-Germanic and impracticable."

It was almost a year before the Jewish policy of the Third Reich took its fateful turn, in the summer of 1941. On 10–11 November 1941, the Higher SS and Police Leader Ostland, Friedrich Jeckeln, received precise liquidation instructions in the Prinz Albrechtstrasse headquarters from the Reichsführer-SS Himmler, in which we find — as transmitted by Jeckeln — the formula, "the Führer's wish" (*des Führers Wunsch*). In place of emigration from Europe, the solution was now couched in terms of an "evacuation to the East." This formula stood for the physical liquidation, and the liquidation through labor, of the Jewish deportees.

On 20 May 1941, Walter Schellenberg, acting for Heydrich, notified the departments of the Security Police by circular that "in view of the undoubtedly imminent Final Solution of the Jewish question," the emigration of Jews from France and Belgium was to be forbidden. This decree was issued two months after Hitler had addressed the assembled generals and disclosed his views on the conduct of the war in the East that "deviated from the normal rules." On 1 October, Heydrich's Adviser on Jewish Affairs in the Reich Main Security Office, Adolf Eichmann, broke the news to the German Jews. On 23 October, five days after the departure of the first RSHA convoy of Jews out of Berlin, Eichmann's immediate superior, SS-Brigadeführer Heinrich Müller of the Gestapo, issued a related set of instructions to the offices of the Sipo (*Sicherheitspolizei* or Security Police) and the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*, or Security Service). This same Gestapo chief, on 1 August 1941, had wired coded instructions to the commanders of the four Einsatzgruppen (operational task forces) to the effect that "the Führer is to be kept informed continually from here about the work of the Einsatzgrup-

pen in the East." It was doubtless "the Führer's wish" to be continually updated on the mass shootings conducted by Einsatzgruppen A, B, C, and D. Since we find that this expression of Hitler's will, equivalent in force to a command, was closely connected with the mass shootings that occurred outside Riga in November and December of 1941, the following comments are worth quoting. Dr. Werner Best³ has said: "I can attest that, seen 'from below,' that is, from the perspective of those who received the orders, the formulas 'der Führer wünscht' [the Führer wishes] and 'der Führer hat befohlen' [the Führer has ordered] were perfectly synonymous. . . . At the receiving end as well . . . the word 'wish' was used as an equivalent to 'order.'" And according to Richard Schulze-Kossens: "The verbal expressions 'der Führer wünscht,' 'es ist des Führers Wunsch' [it is the Führer's wish], and 'des Führers Wunsch ist' [which is the Führer's wish] . . . are identical in meaning. Although these are not direct orders, they are, nonetheless, to be interpreted as such. If, therefore, he were to tell me to signal to the Leibstandarte [Hitler's bodyguard] . . . 'it is my wish that they do this and that immediately,' then the commander of the Leibstandarte naturally would view this as an order. The 'wish' is always communicated by a third party and is not explicitly passed on as a Führer-order. But it does indeed have the force of an order."

The planned killing of all Jews that could be seized was a comprehensive task. To synchronize the simultaneous liquidations of great masses at the appropriate sites required a procedure thought out with absolute precision down to the smallest detail. Also needed was an organization that would ensure the swift and regular flow of Jews to be delivered to the extermination camps. In the summer of 1941, in line with directives issued by the Führer, three commissions were handed out: one from the Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler to the Commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss, another, likewise from Himmler, to Christian Wirth, and a third, dated 31 July 1941, passed on by Göring to Heydrich. Himmler's assignment to Höss was issued verbally, as were those to the killing specialist of the euthanasia program, Christian Wirth. Göring's written commission resulted in the postponed Wannsee Conference of 20 January 1942.

³ The leading Gestapo lawyer and legal advisor to Hitler. — Ed.

Since 1936 it had become common practice to pass on the powers that Göring had received by the ordinance of 18 October 1936 to special deputies whose spheres of jurisdiction overlapped the normal departmental competence. Fritz Sauckel, authorized personally by Hitler to supervise the deployment of labor forces, likewise derived his powers via Göring from the ordinance of 18 October 1936. But apart from direct assignments from Hitler, Sauckel operated independently. When conflicts arose with Albert Speer, the Reich Minister for Armament and Production, Sauckel looked not to Göring for assistance, but to Hitler. Göring was only the formal middleman; he transferred "his competencies for directing the highest Reich officials" onto others, as Hitler authorized him to do. By the same token, it was Himmler, rather than Göring, who was Heydrich's actual superior in the latter's function as "the deputy for the preparation of the Final Solution of the European Jewish question." It was from Reichsführer-SS Himmler that Heydrich received the order to proceed with the execution of the Final Solution of the Jewish question.

In the summer of 1941, Himmler disclosed to Rudolf Höss, "without the presence of an adjutant," that the Führer had ordered "the Final Solution of the Jewish question" and that now "whatever Jews we can reach" were to be eliminated "without exception" during the war. Höss would receive further details from Adolf Eichmann, who would see him. Eichmann did contact Höss shortly afterward, in Auschwitz, where the large-scale operations were to be "forced through." Eichmann further initiated Höss into the plans for the liquidation actions that had been envisaged for the individual countries.

First destined for Auschwitz were the Jews in Upper East Silesia and the adjacent parts of occupied Poland; simultaneously at first, and thereafter depending upon their location, the Jews from Germany and Czechoslovakia; finally, those from the West — France, Belgium, and Holland. The logistics of the liquidations were discussed: "Only gas could be considered." To eliminate the anticipated masses by shootings alone would have been physically impossible, and also too great a strain on the SS men who would have to perform this assignment — especially "in view of the women and children."

At the time of their discussion in Auschwitz, neither of the two men knew yet which gas would be considered for the mass liquidations. In any case, Eichmann ruled out "the use of carbon-monoxide

gas through nozzles in shower facilities, a method that had been applied in the elimination of mental patients at a few locations in the Reich," because it would require "too many new buildings," and because "the procurement of sufficient quantities of gas for such great numbers [would be] very problematic." But after Zyklon B had been tested on Russian prisoners of war in Auschwitz in autumn 1941 and had proven its effectiveness in "bringing about instantaneous death," Höss passed the news on to Eichmann during the latter's next visit to Auschwitz, "and we decided." Höss writes, "to employ this gas in future mass exterminations."

Before Rudolf Höss and Adolf Eichmann determined which gas would be used in the mass liquidations of European Jews at Auschwitz, the RFSS Himmler had witnessed the shooting, which he personally initiated, of between 120 and 180 Jewish men and women — Russian civilians from Minsk who had not been active as partisans. On the basis of this gruesome personal experience, he ordered that a better means of killing be found; this did not, however, prevent the Einsatzgruppen from following through the orders they had received at the beginning of the Russian military campaign. By the end of 1941 they had shot approximately one million people to death.

Did individual leaders of the Einsatzkommandos ask Himmler who it was that bore the responsibility for the mass exterminations of the Jews? One of these Einsatz leaders, at any rate, did venture to ask. In the middle of August 1941, in Minsk, on the very day when the 120 to 180 Jewish civilians were shot, the head of Einsatzkommando unit 8, Obersturmbannführer (Lieutenant Colonel) Dr. Otto Bradfisch, put the key question to Himmler. As Bradfisch recalls: "As soon as Himmler arrived in Minsk, I turned to him and asked him who was taking responsibility for the mass extermination of the Jews. Himmler made this conversation the occasion for a speech, in which he told the members of Einsatzkommando 8, as well as those members of the Security Police who were present, not to worry — the orders had been personally given by Hitler. It was a question, then, of a Führer-order, which had the force of law, and he and Hitler alone bore the responsibility for these orders." Himmler's private reply to Bradfisch before the execution had been no different:

"Himmler answered me in a fairly sharp tone that these orders had come from Hitler as the supreme Führer of the German government, and that they had the force of law."

The question of responsibility was raised again during this same period of time, by the director of department III in Himmler's command staff, the SS and Police Judge Horst Bender. "Himmler categorically stated that this measure had been personally ordered by Hitler, out of political and military considerations, and it therefore stood above all jurisdiction, including the SS and police jurisdiction."

It should also be noted here that of the 6,500 German Jews who were deported to Minsk, only 11 survived the action.

Bruno Streckenbäch, a department head of the Reich Main Security Office, who was entrusted with selecting the personnel of the Einsatzgruppen, also brought up the subject of the mass exterminations before Heydrich and Himmler. Heydrich's response, in September 1941, was "that it was pointless to criticize this operation or to oppose it. This was strictly a matter of a Führer-order; for in connection with this war, which represented the final, violent clash of two irreconcilably opposed *Weltanschauungen*, the Führer had expressed his resolve to find simultaneously a solution to the Jewish problem." Himmler's comments struck a similar, "though much sharper note" when, following Heydrich's death, Streckenbäch again raised the issue: "Himmler vehemently forbade any criticism. Further, he stressed that this was a matter of a 'Führer-order,' and that he considered it his historical obligation to carry out the order, which affected the police and the Wehrmacht equally, with whatever means he had at his disposal."

Gottlob Berger, Chief of the SS Main Administrative Office, also broached the subject of the mass liquidations with Himmler, once prior to, and a second time following, Heydrich's death. On the first occasion, Himmler "was visibly pained, and he cited as authority orders from Hitler." On the next occasion, Himmler indicated that he shared Berger's view "that it would have been better not to have created the so-called Einsatzgruppen."

Now what did the Reichsführer SS have to say about the responsibility and authorizations for the mass exterminations of the Jews in his secret speeches? Four crucial excerpts will clarify this point:

1. Himmler's secret address of 26 January 1944 before an audience of generals who had gathered in the municipal theater in Posen is described at length in a statutory declaration made by Freiherr von Gersdorff:

At the end of January 1944 I had to attend a meeting that was held in connection with a training course for commanding generals and commanding officers of army corps. The meeting was convened by the highest-ranking National Socialist political officer, General Reineke, and was held in the municipal theater of Posen, the former capital of the so-called Warthegau. Three hundred generals, admirals, and general staff officers from the German Wehrmacht were present.

On 26 January 1944, the Reichsführer SS and Chief of Police Heinrich Himmler gave a briefing on the domestic and foreign security situation. In this context, he also dealt with the Jewish question. Naturally I can no longer recall the exact wording of his remarks. But I can assure you that the following represents, if not the very words he spoke, then at least the gist of these: "When the Führer gave me the order to carry out the total solution of the Jewish question, I at first hesitated, uncertain whether I could demand of my worthy SS men the execution of such a horrid assignment. . . . But this was ultimately a matter of a Führer-order, and therefore I could have no misgivings. In the meantime, the assignment has been carried out, and there is no longer a Jewish question."

2. On 5 May 1944 in Sonthofen, the Reichsführer-SS Himmler had the following to say on this same complex of issues: "Please understand how difficult it was for me to perform this soldierly command, which I followed and performed out of obedience and the fullest conviction."
3. On 24 May 1944, Himmler's words on the ordered Final Solution were as follows: "Another question that was of decisive importance for the internal security of the Reich and of Europe as a whole was the Jewish question. It was resolved uncompro-misingly as ordered and with complete understanding."
4. And on 21 June 1944: "It was the most dreadful assignment and the most awful commission that an organization could ever receive: the commission to solve the Jewish question."

These remarks by Himmler, the authenticity of which is beyond all doubt, need only the following commentary: This dreadful assignment, this most awful commission, this soldierly order can only have

been given to the Reichsführer SS by Adolf Hitler; no one else stood between them in the chain of command. Since Himmler had received this liquidation order from his Führer, the Reichsführer SS wished to make it clear to his listeners that, for all his obedience, had the commission not come from "the highest level" he could never have given the command on his own initiative. . . .

On the night of 28 to 29 April [1945], after Hitler had finally granted his faithful mistress, Eva Braun, her long-cherished wish for marriage, he called in his secretary to dictate his personal and political testament, to be typed in three copies.

This testament is the last venomous word of the demagogic orator, the obsessed zealot, the battling, and now fallen, prophet. Beyond the collapse of the Third Reich, Hitler sought once again to bind the German nation to an eternal, wretched hatred for the Jews: "Centuries may lapse, but from the ruins of our cities and monuments will rise anew the hatred for that people to whom we owe all this, they who are ultimately responsible: international Jewry and its acolytes!"

What, after all, had Hitler announced before members of the press on 10 November 1938? "Circumstances have forced me to talk for decades practically only of peace. . . . This constraint was the reason why I only talked peace over the years. Then it became necessary to realign gradually the psychological bearings of the German people and to make it slowly clear to them that there are things which must be accomplished by means of violence if they cannot be accomplished by peaceful means." Hitler's meaning was clearer still on 25 January 1939, when he addressed the officer training class of 1938: "Only the most recent periods have managed to show a dichotomy, so to speak, between war and politics; of course, such irreconcilability could not objectively and actually exist. . . . During the great periods that shape history, that is, in the formation of the state, politics is in effect the art of the possible; which is to say, attaining an objective by using every conceivable means: persuasion, obligation, intelligence, determination, kindness, shrewdness, even brutality — that is, even the sword, when other means fail."

He had not left "a shred of doubt," Hitler resumed in his political testament some six years later, that "the real culprit in this murderous contest," Judaism, would be "called to account." "Further, I

have made it quite clear that this time, . . . the real culprit must expiate his guilt, though by more humane means." . . .

Hitler's self-justifying remarks about the expiation of Jewish guilt through "more humane means" wore this face in sordid practice, stripped of their incidental components of opportunism, servility, weakness, and petty-bourgeois obsequiousness of a following whose idealism he abused. Shortly before 4:00 A.M. on 29 April 1945, Hitler dictated the final sentence of his political testament: "Above all, I obligate the leaders of the nation and their following to a strict observance of the racial laws, and to a merciless resistance to the poisoners of all peoples, international Jewry."

As he had done earlier in the pages of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler again attributed to the Jews "a unificatory devil-function," to justify this hatred.

Adolf Hitler's Final Solution ideology represented in stark reality a cult of the irrational bordering on lunacy yet advanced under the guise of ice-cold reason, a cult whose founder saw himself as the benefactor and savior of his Greater German Reich.

Now that the huge surge of power had ebbed away and the great gamble had failed, the only remaining course for Hitler, given his painful realization of all that had happened, was suicide. On 30 April 1945, between 2:00 and 3:00 p.m., Adolf Hitler, the most notorious anti-Semite of all time, put his Walther pistol against his right temple, bit into a cyanide capsule, and pulled the trigger.

Hans Mommsen

There Was No Führer Order

Hitler gave no formal order to carry out the Final Solution of the "European Jewish question." . . . Preparations for the systematic implementation of the Final Solution were begun only in late autumn of 1941 and were not based on a written order. There are also many internal reasons for believing that Hitler never gave such an order orally, either.

The exclusively metaphoric language in which the *Führer* discussed the "Jewish problem," as well as his general reluctance to take decisions that might have caused public opposition and perhaps have had to be withdrawn, make it unlikely that he would have come to a binding decision. Remarkably, even in early 1942 Hitler considered reactivating the abandoned Madagascar Plan. If one attributes such behaviour to a desire to dissemble even among his closest friends, then it would simply be evidence of the extent to which he shrank from referring openly to the factory-style destruction of human life. His conduct in this and other matters, however, appears to be due less to an extreme intellectual cynicism than to an ability to dissociate himself completely from reality.

Hitler's speech to the *Reichstag* on 30 January 1939 is cited more than any other as evidence of his early intention to destroy the Jews systematically:

Today I shall once more be a prophet. If the international Jewish financiers inside and outside Europe should again succeed in plunging the nations into another world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevization of the world and thus a victory for Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish Race in Europe. . . .

Although at first sight the connection with the subsequent genocide policy may appear to be evident, the political motive behind this statement is in fact ambivalent. Such threats were intended primarily

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to exert pressure on the Western nations, particularly Britain and the United States. They are thus connected with the hostage argument, which had surfaced as early as 1923: in that year the radical anti-semitic Hermann Esser had argued that, in the event of a French invasion, one German Jew should be shot for every French soldier who stepped onto German soil. . . .

Hitler considered the "Jewish question" from a visionary political perspective that did not reflect the real situation. The struggle against Jewry was for him an almost metaphysical objective; as his "Political Testament" reveals, it eventually took on a chiliastic dimension. Hitler had always sympathized with "spontaneous" attacks on Jews. They reflected his belief that anti-semitic opinions could be used both for mass mobilization and for the integration of the party's supporters. A campaign of extermination, implemented with extreme secrecy and with an increasingly bad conscience (as in the case of Himmler), was not completely compatible with this concept. . . .

The realization of the Final Solution became psychologically possible because Hitler's phrase concerning the "destruction of the Jewish race in Europe" was adopted as a direct maxim for action, particularly by Himmler. Hitler, it must be conceded, was the ideological and political author of the Final Solution. However, it was translated from an apparently utopian programme into a concrete strategy partly because of the problems he created for himself, and partly because of the ambitions of Heinrich Himmler and his SS to achieve the millennium in the *Führer's* own lifetime and thus to provide special proof of the indispensability of the SS within the National Socialist power structure. Himmler's statements indicate that he intended to fulfil in one single, "masterful," self-sacrificial act something that had actually been intended as a timeless programme. He thus directed a large part of his energies towards a programme that, for Hitler, had only a low priority in comparison with the conduct of the war.

Himmler and Heydrich thus played a decisive role in implementing the Final Solution. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that a purely personalized interpretation would prevent full understanding of the issue. The eventual step towards mass destruction occurred at the end of a complex political process. During this process, internal antagonisms within the system gradually blocked all

alternative options, so that the physical liquidation of the Jews ultimately appeared to be the only way out. . . .

The attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, and the dazzling early successes of the German armies, influenced the planning process in the RSHA. The Commissar Order,¹ and the deliberate use of the *Einsatzgruppen* to liquidate Jewish population groups in the occupied areas, signalled the start of a new phase. Initially, however, the belief that a "solution" of the "Jewish question" could be implemented only after the war was retained. In summer 1941 the Nazi leadership expected the Soviet Union to be defeated in a matter of weeks, and at latest by autumn of that year, although they accepted that skirmishes might continue in the Asiatic regions of the Soviet Union. It was taken for granted that Britain would have been forced to yield by this time.

Only against this background is a correct interpretation possible of the authorization given by Goering to Heydrich on 31 July 1941 in which Heydrich was instructed "to present for my early consideration an overall draft plan describing the organizational, technical and material requirements for carrying out the Final Solution which we seek." The authorization, drafted by Eichmann and submitted to Goering for his signature, is not connected with any preceding order from Hitler, although the existence of such an order has often been suspected. Its context is clearly that of the strategy pursued until that point, which was not yet directed towards systematic extermination. Its aim was a "solution" that would no longer be implemented under the cover of war in the East.

At the same time, the *Einsatzgruppen* were carrying out their massacres. These were based on the Commissar Order, unlike the systematic policy of the Final Solution that followed. There can be no doubt that Hitler approved and supported these measures, although it is a matter for conjecture how far he took notice of actual events. Approximately 1.4 million Jews were murdered in these extensive operations, which were carried out on the pretext of securing the rear area of the battle zone; Hitler had from the outset declared the campaign against the Soviet Union to be a war of anni-

¹ Hitler's order of May 1941 for the execution of all captured Soviet political officials. — Ed.

hilation. Nevertheless, it is almost inexplicable that the leaders and members of the *Einsatzgruppen* lent themselves to this unimaginably barbarous slaughter and that the Army — with few exceptions — either stood by, weapons at the ready, or in many cases gave active support to the *Einsatzgruppen*. In the framework of National Socialist propaganda against “subhumanity,” the Russian Jews, like the Polish Jews before them, were classed as the lowest of the low. The massacres also provided an opportunity to rid the German-occupied territories of a part of the Jewish population, which had by then increased beyond any “manageable” size. The fact that the killings were carried out on oral orders only, and that the *Einsatzgruppen* were careful to avoid giving only racial reasons for them in their reports, indicates that the decision to liquidate the entire Jewish population had not yet fully matured.

A decisive turning-point was necessary before leading officials would adopt a course of action that had been unthinkable only a short time before. Certainly, everything was propelling events towards a violent “solution” of the “Jewish problem” which the Nazis had created for themselves. The logistic prerequisites for the mass movement of populations were completely lacking. Conditions in the improvised ghettos were appalling, and appeared completely unacceptable to the German sense of order. In summer 1940 Greiser² had already described conditions in the Lodz ghetto as untenable from the “point of view of nutrition and the control of epidemics.” On 16 July 1941, SS-*Sturmbannführer* Höppner drew attention to the catastrophic conditions in the ghetto which, as a transit camp for the Jews transported from the Old Reich, was permanently overcrowded. Besides, it was the only ghetto within the Reich and was regarded by Greiser as an intolerable burden. Höppner added in his letter to Eichmann that “it should be seriously considered whether it might not be the most humane solution to dispose of those Jews who are unfit for work by some quick-acting means. At any rate this would be more agreeable than letting them starve.”

Martin Broszat has emphasized the symptomatic significance of this reaction. It is not an isolated one. The idea that it would ultimately be more “humane” to finish off the victims quickly had

² SS General Arthur Greiser, Gauleiter and Reich Governor of the Warthegau, an area annexed to Germany from Poland in 1939. — Ed.

already emerged in 1940; it was frequently prompted by the sight of countless trains standing at stations in the biting cold, with their captive Jewish passengers deprived even of drinking water during the dreadful journey to the *Generalgouvernement*. The war in the East provided even more reasons for such arguments. The indescribably cruel treatment of the civilian population caused few protests and produced instead a fatal blunting of moral feeling among the Germans. The partial liquidation of transports of Jews from the Old Reich and the annexed territories was a desperate new step. It could not be justified as part of the destruction of Bolshevik resistance cells. A pseudo-moral justification was needed as a precondition for the systematic implementation of the Final Solution. Inhumanity had first to be declared as “humanity” before it could be put into technocratic practice, with moral inhibitions thereafter reduced to a minimum. Then, once the necessary bureaucratic apparatus had been created, a programme could be set in motion that was applicable to all deportees, including women and children.

The operations of the *Einsatzgruppen* served as the link that enabled the exception — premeditated liquidation — to become the general rule. The immediate liquidation of groups of German Jews deported to the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, to Riga, Kovno and Minsk, did not proceed smoothly. Moreover, like the killings begun with the assistance of the “euthanasia” experts in Chełmno in December 1941, they also encountered opposition, which led to the suspension of further transports. Even if only for this reason, the change in the Jewish policy of the RSHA was by no means abrupt. One indication of such a change was that Jewish emigration from German-occupied areas of continental Europe was halted, although it had previously been explicitly supported. The head of the *Gestapo*, Müller, announced the prohibition of further Jewish emigration on 23 October 1941. Only ten days previously, Heydrich had actually approved a proposal by the Under-Secretary of State, Martin Luther, that Spanish Jews resident in France should be included in the Spanish Cabinet’s plan to send “their” Jews to Spanish Morocco. A few days later his decision was revoked on the grounds that these Jews would then be too far outside the German sphere of influence to be included in the Final Solution to be implemented after the war.

The reference to a “post-war solution” reveals that at this point the decision for systematic genocide had not yet been reached. On