

Hitler

Probing the Mind of Der Fuhrer

Reviewed by
John Mander

The reviewer is the author of "Unrevolutionary Society: The Power of Latin American Conservatism" and many articles about modern Germany.

Viewing the apparently endless flood of books about Nazism—we have had over 40 years of it by now—might well cause the most resilient to despair. If we have not understood Nazism yet, and in particular the personality of Hitler, perhaps we never shall. But a book like William Carr's helps raise the spirits. Carr does not attempt to retell the whole story, but he does manage to give a most convincing picture of how Hitler's mind worked.

The paradox Carr wants us to face is that while Hitler had no grasp of economics in a conventional sense—and indeed despised economists—his actions were determined in large part by economic considerations. It is easy (but dangerous) to make Hitler look like a simpleton. Hitler believed, for example, that excessive use of fertilizers would ruin the soil of Germany. The solution, therefore, was more *lebensraum* for the German peasant, which meant war against

Russia so that the Ukraine might be settled by a supposedly expanding German population. (Ironically, recent statistics have shown that the German population has been falling over the past 60 years.) Hitler knew that Germany was not self-sufficient in military-economic resources; iron ore, manganese, copper, rubber and oil had to be imported if Germany was to have armed quickly. Germany would have had to export more goods to pay for these things. The resumption of a huge German export drive would have led to further intensive industrialization yet Hitler and all the leading Nazis regarded life on the land as "natural" and modern industrialization and life in big cities as undermining a nation's vigor.

How on earth, we may well ask, did a man with such notions contrive to run a modern state and launch a war which very nearly succeeded? One answer is certainly that Hitler was a shrewd judge of men, and in turning to the well-known financier Schacht, who became Reichsbank president and economic minister, he made a masterly move. For Schacht was indefatigable in devising maneuvers—deficit, financing, barter-trade—whereby Germany could finance her rearmament. Yet the time would come when even the

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ARMS, AUTARKY AND AGGRESSION: A Study in German Foreign Policy, 1933-1939. By William Carr. (Norton, 136 pp. \$7)

ingenious Schacht would run out of solutions, and Carr makes it clear that Germany's economy under Hitler was often far closer to the precipice than most foreign observers realized.

But Carr repeatedly insists that Hitler's actions, when analyzed in detail, are those of an ultra-cautious rather than a reckless man. It would often take Hitler months to arrive at a decision—like the murder of Brownshirt leader Roehm, or the invasion of Austria or Czechoslovakia. He cultivated a reputation for rapid, ruthless, dynamic decision-making—and indeed owed much of his success to this frightening image. But the reality was different: It is evident that the long periods of apparent lassitude noted by Langer and many others were in reality periods of withdrawn meditation and calculation.

Thus the cavalier attitude to economic matters was not quite what it seemed. For Hitler, knowing that "autarky" or self-sufficiency was impossible for a Germany within her frontiers, had his own solution which is quite clearly spelled out in

"Mein Kampf." *Lebensraum* in the East would not only make Germany agriculturally independent; the conquest of the Ukraine and other areas would provide the raw materials Germany would otherwise have to purchase from countries she did not control. For this reason, Hitler, unlike most other nationalists, had no interest in overseas colonies. Nor was he worried about Germany's highly unstable economic situation. That his solution was predicated on war did not trouble him; for the true Nazi, war was, after all, the invigoration of the race, a part of that necessary Darwinian process by which the fittest prove their ability to survive.

Timing was all-important because a long war was out of the question; that was how Germany had been beaten in 1918. By 1943, Hitler reckoned, the war-making capacity of her potential enemies would overtake Germany's. Her economic situation therefore demanded *blitzkrieg*, and victory had to be in the bag by 1942. Evil thinking, yes,

but perfectly rational and calculated.

And it nearly came off. But there were three major countries against which *blitzkrieg* could not work: Britain, Russia and the United States. By the end of 1941, Hitler found himself at war with all three powers. As Carr shows, Hitler was clever, but not clever enough. He underestimated Russia and the United States grotesquely, while probably overestimating Great Britain. We all have reason to be grateful for that, as we have for William Carr's admirably lucid demonstration of it.

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