

RAINER ZITELMANN. *Hitler: Selbstverständnis eines Revolutionärs*. New York: Berg; distributed by St. Martin's, New York. 1987. Pp. x, 485. \$50.00.

Much of the research on Adolf Hitler during the last one and one-half decade has centered on the important elements in the Führer's Weltanschauung and the degree to which Hitler, and the National Socialist movement that he led, was a retreat from the "modern world" of technology, urbanization, and industrialization.

Rainer Zitelmann's contribution to this debate is this lengthy inquiry, which focuses mainly on whether Hitler's "revolutionary" ideas included a significant social-economic component and whether or not he was primarily a "modernist" or an "antimodernist." To answer these questions, Zitelmann rests his case on a compilation and study of all statements made by the Führer on these matters from the start of his political career in 1919 until his suicide in 1945. The materials in question include Hitler's published works (chiefly his two books and his signed articles in the Nazi press), plus

his wartime monologues (various forms of "Hitler's Table Talk") and his statements to reporters and confidants. From these sources Zitelmann concludes that Hitler did indeed have a significant social-economic program, which pivoted on "careers open to talent" for gifted Aryans, as well as an expansion of state control of economic processes and some increase in public ownership of utilities and the means of production.

All of this was, in Zitelmann's view, shaped by Hitler's fundamental Social Darwinist view of man and society, which dictated competition, the subordination of the individual to the group, and the need for a "racially" competitive society to renew itself by the rise of able *Volksgenossen* from the lower depths of the social order. Given his conclusion that Hitler had a relatively consistent and forward-looking social-economic vision, Zitelmann, not surprisingly, places him in the modernist, rather than the antimodernist, camp.

Zitelmann has managed to give a coherent shape to Hitler's social-economic views and has also turned up some interesting sidelights, such as the Führer's repeated exaltations about the wonders of American technology. But it is the very coherence that Zitelmann finds in Hitler's thought that causes the greatest doubt for me. Anyone who has studied such works as "Hitler's Table Talk" knows that they have the character of a verbal delicatessen. The Führer mixed together insights and humbug in rich profusion, and his desire to score argumentative points, or dazzle his listeners, seems frequently to have been the only discernible motive for the jumble that surfaced on any particular day. It is difficult to accept that Hitler's basic social-economic Weltanschauung can be found in such materials, even if one adds in his formal writings and interviews. It is equally difficult to feel comfortable with any construction of what he "really thought" about these matters when we know so little about the part Hitler actually played in the development and implementation of social-economic policies during the Third Reich.

Zitelmann's book is an admirable example of exhaustive scholarship on an important aspect of the mind of Hitler. But it is less likely to stand as a decisive synthesis than as a provocative turn in the pursuit of the eternal enigmas of the Third Reich and its creator.

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