

*Rainer Zitelmann: Hitler. Selbstverständnis eines Revolutionärs. Hamburg usw.: Berg 1987. X, 485 S. (Vertrieb: Verlag Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart.)*

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Among the books about Adolf Hitler and National Socialist Germany which continue to pour forth in an apparently never-ending stream, this one is likely to stand out for a long time as offering major new perspectives. To a scholarly community which in recent years has begun to take more seriously Hitler's ideology in regard to racial matters and war for living space, Zitelmann offers an extension of the ideological analysis into a wide range of other areas. In particular, this book argues that however important those two areas might be, they should be seen in the context of a broad range of perceptions and assumptions which Hitler held in person and often advocated in public but which have not received the attention they deserve. On numerous broad questions of social, economic, and institutional policy, Hitler is shown to have held through most of his career rather clearly defined and relatively closely coordinated views which changed little over time and which he tried to implement during his years as chancellor.

The basis for Zitelmann's analysis is a careful examination of Hitler's speeches, writings, and reports of his comments; and in this context the author correctly calls to the attention of his readers the frequently overlooked fact that a substantial proportion of the speeches has never been published in *any* collection, a deficiency which it is hoped the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich may yet remedy. Zitelmann has also searched with care the memoir and scholarly literature, though he appears to be rather too trusting in his use of the works of David Irving and Werner Maser. In some instances, he argues with the interpretations of Hitler's utterances by others, and in most of these, such as the speech of June 26, 1944 (pp. 235–36), this reviewer finds himself in agreement with the author.

The picture of Hitler which emerges from these pages is one of a man who thought of himself as favoring a revolutionary process to transform German society. He approved the ending of the monarchy in 1918 but believed that no real revolution had then taken place in Germany, comparing the events with those in France in 1870 which had led to new exertions in the Franco-Prussian war. The coup attempt of 1923 makes the subsequent pseudo-legal approach into a second-best alternative, with the question of whether a coup was seriously contemplated in 1932 left open.

During the years in power, Hitler saw himself as trying to institutionalize a revolution in which the road to positions of importance would be open to all Germans of proper racial and ideological characteristics but regardless of social origin. This open road to talent was to serve the needs of the Volk, not the preferences and interests of the individual. In regard to this as well as a wide range of other matters, Hitler was opposed, and vehemently opposed, to a bourgeois society against which he railed constantly. He believed that bourgeois society had far outlived its usefulness, and if he allied himself temporarily with many of its elements, it was precisely because he thought them useful in the short-run but hopelessly ineffective and hence not dangerous to himself in the long-run. The group to which he hoped to appeal and, with more success than often recognized, did appeal was the working class whose organizations he wished to crush precisely because he thought these to be strong and hence possibly threatening.

Zitelmann argues in detail and with substantial evidence against the widely-held view that Hitler was not especially interested in economic questions and held few firm ideas on that subject. On the contrary, he shows how Hitler believed in central planning with economic life subordinated to the political goals set by a state leadership kept carefully independent of involvement in the economic structure of the country. Hitler's view of private property was much more restrictive and instrumental than generally acknowledged, in part because in this field he found it expedient to keep many of his views to himself longer than on other topics. There is a highly interesting discussion in the book of Hitler's views on the subject of world trade and also an attempt to revise the current perception of Hitler's anti-urban and pro-agrarian views. On this aspect the author is only partially convincing. Nowhere do we get any explanation of the projects for levelling Moscow and Leningrad and of deliberately starving out the urban population of the cities of the Ukraine. Furthermore, the author's suggestion that the Wehrbauern settlements Hitler anticipated in the East were in some way analogous to the cowboys about whom he had read in Karl May entirely misses the fundamental difference between the settled farmer — one of whose functions in Hitler's thinking was the raising of very large numbers of children — and the roving herder who rarely settled down.

Many readers will also have doubts about Zitelmann's attempt to differentiate between Hitler's rationality and Himmler's and Rosenberg's mysticism. Surely the Führer was a believer in the power of blood and will; if that is not a form of mysticism, what is it? The whole discussion in the latter part of the book on the concept of the new state needs to be thought out far more clearly, but it does contain many important insights.

Every reader of this book will find specific points at which objections can be raised. Hitler's alleged lack of opposition to the ideals of 1789 needs to be confronted with the deliberate choice of July 14, 1933, as the date for the issuance of the first huge number of new laws in a wide range of major policy fields. The author's assertion that the response of many Germans to the appeal of the National Socialists should be understood in terms of Hitler's stress on many of the issues discussed in this book cannot be squared with the fact that the single topic most frequently dealt with in Hitler's speeches was the Jewish question. And he publicly promised to lead the German people »zum blutigen Einsatz« long before becoming chancellor.

This work will require all who concern themselves with the Third Reich to rethink their own ideas and to reexamine the evidence on which those ideas are based. For any book to do that today is itself a major accomplishment. It would certainly be most unwise for any scholar to ignore the picture of Hitler presented here simply because it does not fit in with his or her own preconceptions.

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