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*Hitler: Selbstverständnis eines Revolutionärs*, by Rainer Zitelmann. Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta Verlag, 1987. 485 pp.

Over a decade ago, Robert G.L. Waite predicted in his psycho-biography of Adolf Hitler that more would likely be written concerning the Nazi *Führer* than about anyone else in history, with the exception of Jesus Christ. The reader therefore approaches this latest contribution to the "Hitler wave" by a young German historian — Dr. Zitelmann was born in 1957 — first and foremost asking what claims to originality his study of the dictator's thought can make. Does he tell us something new about the structure of a mind H.R. Trevor-Roper once called a "spiritual dust-bowl"?

Undoubtedly a novel feature of the book lies in its methodology. The author has painstakingly examined every known word Hitler uttered or wrote, from *Mein Kampf* and his long unpublished *Second Book* through his countless speeches between 1919 and 1945 to his secret wartime post-dinner *Table Talk* as well as his private conversations and correspondence with various confidants (some, like Hermann Rauschning, of dubious veracity), in order to reconstruct his thinking about a number of subjects crucial to understanding the man's mental processes. His approach is to quote verbatim many of Hitler's statements on each topic discussed, often at considerable length and as a rule chronologically because his thought on some matters (for example, the desirability of direct state intervention in the economy) changed significantly over the period of the Third Reich. This technique of allowing the *Führer* largely to speak for himself exposes, on the one hand, the authentic quality of his *Weltanschauung*, above all its inner coherence providing its few basic premises — such as the notion of eternal struggle — are accepted. On the other hand, Zitelmann's understandable reluctance to assess the objective validity of most components of that ideology, which would have swollen an already substantial monograph to an indigestible size, leaves important questions unresolved. Thus Hitler's firm conviction that his racist beliefs were scientifically demonstrable is adduced as evidence of the essential rationality of his intellect, and hence his identification with the European Enlightenment tradition. Most previous writers, however, have seen precisely in his illogical views on the inherent inferiority of Jews, Slavs and other ethnic groups proof that Hitler belongs instead within the contrary stream of irrational myth-makers in the company of his idol, Richard Wagner.

Although one may be sceptical whether this argument at least will alter interpretations about Hitler's intellectual pedigree, as Zitelmann confidently maintains (cf. pp. 337-43), it is intended to support one of his main conclusions:

namely, that the thrust of National Socialism as conceived by Hitler was consciously modernist. Far from wishing either to re-agrarianize Germany or to utilize conquered *Lebensraum* in the East primarily for settlement purposes, which Henry A. Turner and other historians have claimed, Zitelmann emphasizes that Hitler greatly admired the technology and industry of the United States. Its consumer-orientated economy was to serve as a model for the Reich (for this reason he vigorously promoted the development of a popular mass-produced automobile, the Volkswagen), made almost wholly independent of overseas trade through the acquisition of the Ukraine; "Europe's India," as he called it, would furnish food and natural resources as well as a market for manufactured goods comparable to the American continental economy. Hitler's ultimate vision was of an autarchic Europe, controlled and organized by the Germans who would also eliminate its crippling Jewish and other "parasites," challenging the U.S.A. in a future war for global domination (cf. pp. 296ff.). This was not, according to the author, the only revolutionary feature of the *Führer's* thinking. He was also a vehement advocate of equality of opportunity (of course, only among his own racially acceptable countrymen); an admirer of Stalin, especially on account of his radical removal of the old Russian elite as the precondition for creating a modern dictatorship; and, with increasing experience of the Soviet economic system during the war, a principled critic of private capitalism notwithstanding his social darwinistic faith in competition.

Aside from methodological difficulties (for instance, in distinguishing between propaganda and program in Hitler's words), this is a thought-provoking work. The lack of an adequate index limits its accessibility; but it will likely influence the seemingly inexhaustible debate about the content of Hitlerism for a long while to come.