

THE 'HITLER  
MYTH'  
IMAGE AND REALITY  
IN THE THIRD REICH  
IAN KERSHAW

'[a] major contribution to the study of the  
Third Reich'  
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perhaps the most revealing study available of  
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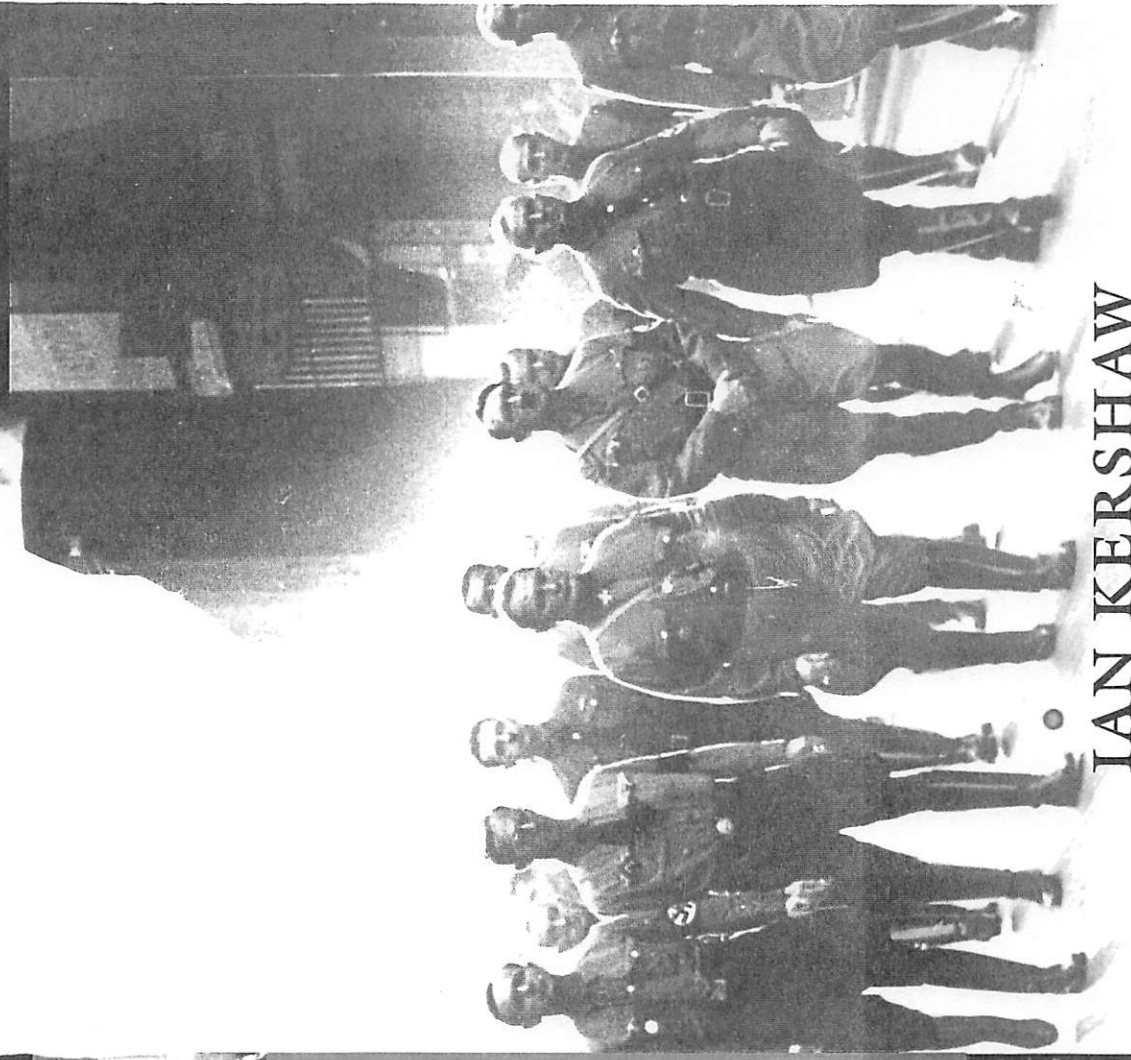
Few twentieth-century political leaders enjoyed greater popularity among their own people than Hitler in the 1930s and 1940s. His hold over the German people lay in the hopes and perceptions of the millions who adored and believed in him. Their admiration rested less on the bizarre and arcane precepts of Nazi ideology than on social and political values recognizable in many societies other than that of Germany in the Third Reich. Ian Kershaw charts the creation, growth, and decline of the 'Hitler myth'. He demonstrates how the manufactured Führer-cult formed a crucial integrating force in the Third Reich and a vital element in the attainment of Nazi political aims. Masters of the new techniques of propaganda, the Nazis' successful 'deification' of the Führer in a modern industrial state carries a portentous message.

Cover photograph: Hitler and cohorts restage the 1923 March on Munich on its anniversary in 1936.  
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OXFORD  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

www.oup.com

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ISBN 0-19-280206-2



£9.99 RRP \$15.95 USA

PART THREE

The 'Hitler Myth' and the  
Path to Genocide

## Hitler's Popular Image and the 'Jewish Question'

HITLER'S twin ideological obsessions, it is universally recognized, were *Lebensraum* and anti-Semitism. Paranoid hatred of the Jews was the dominant strain, though the two themes fused in Hitler's mind in the vision of Jew-infested Bolshevik Russia, ripe for German expansion. We saw in earlier chapters that there was a substantial disparity between Hitler's actual expansionist aims and what his public image suggested he stood for. Certainly there were affinities between popular aspirations favouring a growth in Germany's national prestige and power, and Hitler's racial-imperialist aims. Expansion of German's borders, especially the incorporation of 'ethnic' German territory into the Reich, was massively popular, as long as it was attained without bloodshed. But enthusiasm for war itself and for an apocalyptic struggle for 'living space' was difficult to raise outside circles of nazified youth, the SS, and Party fanatics. And once the war had come, the overriding sentiment was the desire for an early peace, despite the readiness to benefit in every way possible from the acquisition and exploitation of the occupied territories. There were affinities, therefore, but nothing like a total identity between the Hitler version of *Lebensraum*-expansionism and the hopes and expectations of the mass of the German population.

A parallel disjuncture can be claimed with regard to anti-Semitism. Certainly, dislike or suspicion of the Jews was widespread even before Hitler took power. Jews had to experience forms of discrimination in many walks of life. And among a minority of the non-Jewish population, though a growing one which after 1933 came to occupy positions of power, dislike of Jews became vicious and violent hatred. In the climate of the Third Reich itself, it goes without saying that the barrage of Nazi propaganda could not be without effect in extending and deepening already prevalent anti-Semitic attitudes. Many, probably the great majority of the population, were convinced by 1939

if not before that the Jews had been a harmful influence in German society, and that it would be better if those still remaining left (or were forced to leave) as soon as possible. But prevailing attitudes towards the Jews at this time among all but a small proportion of the population, discriminatory though they were in different degrees, did not remotely match the anti-Jewish paranoia of Hitler and the activist Jew-baiting elements within the Nazi Movement. In fact, much points towards the conclusion that, despite its centrality to Hitler's own thinking, anti-Semitism was for the most part of no more than secondary importance as a factor shaping popular opinion in the Third Reich.<sup>1</sup>

This raises the difficult question about the place of anti-Semitism in Hitler's popular image. Could anti-Semitism, so pivotal in Hitler's 'world view', have been of only minor significance in forming the bonds between Führer and people which gave the Third Reich its popular legitimation and plebiscitary base of acclamation? Was the Hitler image, in this centrally important area, again largely detached from reality? And what function do we accord, then, to Hitler's public *persona* in explaining the process which led to Auschwitz? The evidence available for trying to answer such questions is, it has to be admitted, difficult to assemble, and even more difficult to interpret. The conclusions arrived at in the brief analysis which follows have necessarily, therefore, to be seen as no more than tentative and hesitant deductions.

The recent publication of all known speeches and writings of Hitler between 1919 and 1924 provides for the first time an opportunity to observe the self-image profiled in his public statements. In the present context, what is significant, if not altogether surprising, is that hardly a speech or publication went by between 1920 and 1922 without the most concentrated vitriol being poured upon the Jews. In the first speeches, the Jews were above all at the heart of Hitler's ferocious attacks on war 'profiteers', 'racketeers', and 'parasites'—an expression of his brand of

<sup>1</sup> This is now widely accepted in the literature—see Steinert, p. 263; I. Kershaw, 'The Persecution of the Jews and German Popular Opinion in the Third Reich', *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute*, xxvi (1981), 281, 287; W. S. Allen, 'Die deutsche Öffentlichkeit und die "Reichskristallnacht"—Konflikte zwischen Werthierarchie und Propaganda im Dritten Reich', in Peukert and Reulecke, pp. 401–2; D. Bankier, 'German Society and National Socialist Antisemitism, 1933–1938', Hebrew University of Jerusalem Ph.D. thesis, 1983, Engl. abstract, p. xi; O. D. Kulka and A. Rodrigue, 'The German Population and the Jews in the Third Reich', *Yad Vashem Studies*, xvi (1984), 435.

populist anti-capitalism. From mid-1920, possibly influenced by Rosenberg, Hitler became preoccupied in his speeches with Bolshevik Russia. The picture of the brutal rule of the Jews, for which Social Democracy was said to be preparing the way in Germany, provided the catalyst in the link-up of anti-Semitism and anti-Marxism. In February 1922, Hitler told his SA that the 'Jewish Question' was the only thing that mattered, and a few months later he summed up the entire Party Programme in the one point: that no Jew could be a 'people's comrade'.<sup>2</sup> The ubiquity of the Jewish theme in his public addresses at this time makes it impossible to imagine that early converts to Nazism could fail to regard violent anti-Semitism as a leading feature of Hitler's image.

From late 1922, however, extreme anti-Marxism—now often without the express linkage to the Jews—began to take over as a dominant theme of his speeches. He now declared the aim of the NSDAP to be simply the 'annihilation and extirpation of the Marxist world view',<sup>3</sup> and during 1923, as the notion of a heroic, final struggle between two opposed *Weltanschauungen* seemed to grow in his mind, the Jews played a less overt role in Hitler's public statements, whereas the sole, mortal enemy of the Nazi Movement was now proclaimed to be Marxism.<sup>4</sup> When the press noted the change in tone, Hitler agreed that he had altered his stance, but only to the extent, he said, that he had earlier been too mild, and had realized while at work on *Mein Kampf* that the 'Jewish Question' was one not solely for the German people, but for all peoples, 'for Juda is the world plague'.<sup>5</sup> There had been no change of basic thinking, then, merely an adjustment of emphasis. But even at this date the alteration in emphasis can only have been a conscious attempt to attune to the wider audience, if still at that time mainly within Bavaria, which was beginning to show interest in Hitler in 1923, and an awareness that anti-Marxism had a wider potential appeal than the mere repetition of anti-Jewish paroxysms of hate.

We know little in any systematic fashion about the ideological motivation of the rank-and-file membership (approximately 55,000 strong in November 1923) of the pre-Putsch Nazi Movement. Since anti-Semitism was such a prominent feature of the Party's public

<sup>2</sup> Jäckel and Kuhn, pp. 568, 727, nos. 357, 421.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 704, no. 411.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, e.g. pp. 1210, 1226, 1232, nos. 625, 626, 636.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1242, no. 654.



image, and that of its leader, whom many must have heard speak in person in the Munich beerhalls, it seems certain that the 'Jewish Question' ranked highly as a motivational factor at this date for the Movement's recruits, often coming to the NSDAP from other anti-Semitic organizations and *völkisch* groups. Impressionistic evidence provided in a number of studies of the early Nazi Movements supports the suggestion that those entering the Party earlier rather than later were more likely to be strong anti-Semites.<sup>6</sup>

It is unlikely that anti-Semitism was as powerful in its motivational force for recruits in the Party's 'mass phase' after 1929–30 as it had been for the early activist core of the NSDAP. A striking feature of the Abel material—and more than half of the sample came from members who had joined the Party before its 'take-off' in 1930—is indeed that even among 'Old Fighters' of the Movement—according to Merkl's ranking of 'main ideological theme'—only about one-eighth saw anti-Semitism as their most salient concern, while what he calls 'strong ideological antisemites' comprised only 8.5 per cent of the total sample.<sup>7</sup> Merkl summarized his findings as follows: 'A breakdown by dominant ideological theme . . . shows about one-third to be primarily preoccupied with the solidaristic *Volksgemeinschaft* and over one-fifth to be superpatriots. Nearly that many are devotees of Hitler's personal charisma. About one-seventh appears to be motivated mostly by their antisemitism. . . . Ranked by the chief object of their hostility, Abel's early Nazis by two-thirds turned out to be anti-Marxists.'<sup>8</sup> Merkl pointed out, of course, that these other categories by no means excluded anti-Semitic feelings, which were encountered in around two-thirds of the 'biographies'.<sup>9</sup> In fact, one could go further and claim that the negative image of the Jew provided a common denominator which was able to combine and provide justification for all these ideological themes. However, the figures are certainly compelling enough to suggest that features other than anti-Semitism dominated

<sup>6</sup> e.g. Noakes, ch. 1; R. Hambrecht, *Der Aufstieg der NSDAP in Mittel- und Oberfranken, 1925–1933*, Nuremberg, 1976, ch. 2. The same deduction is supported by the 'Abel Material'—the 581 'autobiographies' of rank-and-file Nazis later processed by Peter Merkl—though it contains only 20 *vitae* of members who joined before 1923, and is weighted in the sample towards Berlin rather than towards the earliest Nazi homelands around Munich and in Franconia. The war, and especially the revolution, had played a formative role in the prejudice of a relatively high proportion of the extreme anti-Semites in the sample—see Merkl, pp. 498ff., 556–7; and Gordon, pp. 57–65.

<sup>7</sup> Merkl, pp. 33, 453, 566–7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33, and see also pp. 453, 522–3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 499. See also Gordon, pp. 55ff.

the image of the Nazi Party in the eyes of its pre-1933 membership. If we accept that Hitler was regarded by most if not all as the embodiment of the Party, it would seem that, for most new recruits to the Nazi Movement during the rise to power, his own undoubted extreme anti-Semitism formed a secondary rather than primary component of his image and appeal.

In the absence of modern opinion-surveys, the motivation of Nazi voters can only be inferred. But if we extend the above argument, drawn from the motivation of 'Old Fighters' of the Party to the wider electorate, we would have to conclude that here—probably to an even greater extent—Hitler's image was not dominated by his obsession with the 'Jewish Question'. This inference gains some backing from the comparison of the content of Hitler's speeches—revealing his self-profile—in the early 1930s, when the Nazi Movement was making huge electoral gains, with the early 1920s, when it was a fringe *völkisch* sect. Examination of election propaganda before the 1930 'breakthrough' poll has indicated that attacks on Jews provided more of a background than a main theme, and it appears that Hitler's speeches tended not to tackle the 'Jewish Question', especially if dealing with an upper middle-class audience.<sup>10</sup> By 1932, when Hitler was running for Reich President and the Nazi Movement was gaining the support of over a third of the population, the 'Jewish Question' scarcely featured in Hitler's public addresses. Jews and the 'Jewish Question' were mentioned as such neither in Hitler's New Year exhortation to his Party at the beginning of 1932, nor in his notorious speech to the Düsseldorf Industrieklub in January, nor in his 'Appeal to the Nation', sold as a record in July and typical of his election addresses in the first half of the year.<sup>11</sup> The main target was clearly 'Marxism' and the Weimar 'system', and the main message that he alone and his Movement offered the hope of salvation from these and from the disaster which they had brought upon Germany. Of course, for Hitler himself—and for some of his oldest and most fanatical supporters—all these ills were reducible solely to the 'Jewish Question', a point of dogma which was a fundamental premiss within the Nazi Movement. But the public image of Hitler at this time did not reflect the pre-eminence of the 'Jewish Question' in his own thinking. Though his popular image undoubtedly embodied the broad

<sup>10</sup> Gordon, p. 68.

<sup>11</sup> Domarus, pp. 59–117.

ideological prejudices and aspirations of the masses—including anti-Semitism—it appears hard to argue that at the time that Hitler was gaining his widest electoral support the 'Jewish Question' was the decisive element in his growing appeal.

The absence of verbal onslaughts against the Jews is also a striking feature of Hitler's public speeches in the years 1933 and 1934. The 'Jewish Question' is not touched upon in a single major public address by Hitler in this period of the 'seizure' and consolidation of power—a time, as we saw earlier, in which his popularity was greatly extended and the 'Führer myth' massively enhanced.<sup>12</sup>

Only the exhortation to 'all Party organizations' on 28 March 1933 to carry out a nation-wide boycott aimed at Jewish businesses, goods, doctors, and lawyers, starting on 1 April, concentrated explicitly on the 'Jewish Question'.<sup>13</sup> Proclamations to the Party after the 'seizure of power' generally went out under Hitler's name. In this case, however, though the style is recognizably Hitlerian (apart from the accompanying specific instructions for implementing the boycott, which seem to have been composed by Goebbels), the 'appeal' was signed collectively by 'the Party Leadership'.<sup>14</sup> No one, of course, could have imagined that the boycott was proceeding without Hitler's express support. But the wording of the 'appeal' couched the action solely in terms of justifiable retaliation for the 'campaign of agitation' and 'lies' in the foreign press allegedly initiated by Jewish emigrants, and the claim that 'hardly a hair had been touched' on Jewish heads in the course of the 'national revolution' was meant to suggest that the Party Leadership (including Hitler) was ignorant of the daily maltreatment of Jews which had taken place at the hands of the Party rank-and-file. It was possible, therefore, so far as Hitler was specifically linked to the boycott at all, to see him only in connection with presumed justifiable action, and detached from the 'unfortunate excesses' of Party activists.

As is well known, the boycott was less than a resounding success in terms of popular reactions, and, as an organized nation-wide affair, was called off after only a single day. The relative lack of resonance of the boycott can only have indicated to Hitler that he had been right to keep a fairly low public profile on the 'Jewish Question'. For the lack

<sup>12</sup> Nor did the 'Jewish Question' feature in either *Sieg des Glaubens* or *Triumph des Willens*, the films of the first two Party rallies after the 'seizure of power', in which the Führer cult was so prominently projected.

<sup>13</sup> Domarus, pp. 248–51.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

of overt reference to the 'Jewish Question' in his major speeches, and the omission of his name as a signatory to the boycott 'appeal' can only be seen as a deliberate policy to detach the Führer himself in his public image from the violent anti-Jewish rhetoric and actions of which he privately approved. As we have seen, it appears that, despite his own obsessions, Hitler was politically aware from an early date—perhaps as early as 1923—that a wider currency than anti-Semitism was needed to distinguish the NSDAP from the purely sectarian politics of other *völkisch* groups, to extend the Party's appeal, and to make a serious bid for power. The closer he came to attaining power, the more, purely for presentational purposes, anti-Semitism had to be subordinated to or subsumed within other components of the Hitler image. And once he had become Head of Government, the need to detach himself in public from the distasteful gutter tactics of his activist anti-Semites was prompted above all by foreign political considerations as well as by the necessity to avoid gratuitous alienation of the conservative German establishment around Hindenburg, whose own ingrained anti-Semitism nevertheless stopped short of arbitrary open violence. Moreover, by 1935, if not before, it was being made abundantly clear that anti-Semitic outrages and terroristic hooliganism aimed at Jews by Party activists were generally unpopular among the public at large. Nevertheless, by this time the violence provoked by the new anti-Semitic wave and incited by propaganda had put the 'Jewish Question' back in a high place on the agenda, and pressure was mounting from within the Party for anti-Semitic legislation to fulfil the aims of the Party programme, and from the public for regulations to put an end to the 'individual actions' which had characterized the summer of violence.<sup>15</sup> Hitler could no longer remain aloof from the 'Jewish Question'.

In his address to the assembled Reichstag at the Nuremberg Party Rally on 15 September 1935, Hitler took up the 'Jewish Question' in a major public speech for the first time since becoming Reich Chancellor, recommending acceptance of the three laws placed before it—the 'Flag law', and the two notorious anti-Jewish 'Nuremberg Laws' (the Reich Citizenship Law, preventing Jews from becoming citizens of the Reich, and the 'Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour', banning marriage and sexual relations between Jews and 'aryans'). As in 1933, he accused the Jews abroad of

<sup>15</sup> See Kulka, 'Die Nürnberger Rassengesetze', pp. 608–24.

stirring up agitation and boycotts against Germany, and claimed that this had made an impact on Jews inside Germany itself, whose public provocative behaviour had stirred up countless complaints and calls for action by the government. He justified the 'legal regulation of the problem' as the only way of heading off the likelihood of spontaneous 'defensive actions of the enraged population', and claimed the German government had been compelled 'by the idea of being able, through a once and for all secular solution, of perhaps creating a basis on which the German people might possibly be able to find a tolerable relationship with the Jewish people'. If this hope was not fulfilled, and international agitation continued, he threatened, the situation would have to be re-examined.<sup>16</sup> In subsequent speeches the same day, Hitler exhorted the Party and nation to maintain discipline, and not to depart from the path of legality in the matter. He emphasized that the laws opened up to Jews the possibility of their separate existence within Germany in all spheres of life, and renewed the command forbidding all 'individual actions' against Jews.<sup>17</sup>

The hypocrisy of Hitler's expressed sentiments needs no emphasis. But in terms of his public image as seen at the time, he had been careful to distance himself from the unpopular anti-Jewish terror of the Nazi mobs and had placed himself on the side of legality. Reactions among Party members varied. Some activists were disappointed at the emphasis on legal measures and discouragement of 'direct action' and felt that legislation did not go far enough in tackling the 'Jewish Question'.<sup>18</sup> Others suspected the truth: that Hitler's public stance did not represent his real feelings on the issue. A situation report from Hesse in March 1936 expressly mentions the opinion, allegedly widely held among the population in the area, though undoubtedly reflecting above all the views of Party activists, 'that the Führer had for outward appearances to ban individual actions against the Jews in consideration of foreign policy, but in reality was wholly in agreement that each individual should continue on his own initiative the fight against Jewry in the most rigorous and

<sup>16</sup> Domarus, p. 537. Hitler used the same arguments and justification, making substantially the same points, in an interview with a representative of the American press in late November 1935—*ibid.*, pp. 557–8.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 538–9.

<sup>18</sup> Kulka, 'Die Nürnberger Rassengesetze', p. 623; Kulka and Rodrigue, p. 426. H. Mommsen, 'Die Realisierung des Utopischen: Die "Endlösung der Judenfrage" im "Dritten Reich"', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, ix (1983), 388–9, n. 20, speaks of a 'serious defeat' for the Party.

radical form'.<sup>19</sup> Outside the ranks of the Party activists, the most common reported positive responses to the promulgation of the Nuremberg Laws were of approval for the formal legal framework for segregating Germans and Jews and regulating the treatment of the 'Jewish Question'. Negative reactions were recorded among church circles, ideological opponents of the regime, the liberal intelligentsia, and some businessmen who feared the economic consequences of the laws.<sup>20</sup> The image Hitler portrayed of himself at the Nuremberg Rally was clearly consonant with the wide acceptance of the broad principles of legal discrimination and racial segregation, and with the satisfaction generally felt at the ending of the open brutality and pogrom-like anti-Jewish disturbances of the vulgar anti-Semites.

For two years after the Party Rally of 1935, Hitler again scarcely touched upon the 'Jewish Question' in his major speeches. Even following the assassination in February of the leading Nazi functionary in Switzerland, Wilhelm Gustloff, by a young Jew, the proximity of the Winter Olympics and foreign policy considerations confined him to a single and, in his terms, relatively 'moderate', speech at the funeral, attacking Jewry in generalized terms as the stimulus behind practically every political 'martyr' of the Right since the Revolution of 1918.<sup>21</sup> In his speech on 1 May 1936, he merely spoke of 'elements' sowing the seeds of international unrest, but his hints were immediately recognized by the audience, which howled: 'the Jews'. Hitler's next words, 'I know', were followed by applause lasting minutes.<sup>22</sup> A few months later, on 30 January 1937, he referred briefly to the beneficial effects for German culture which had been derived from the removal of Jewish influence,<sup>23</sup> and at the opening of the 'House of German Art' in Munich the following July he again scorned the Jewish contribution to the arts.<sup>24</sup> However, it was only in September 1937, at the Party Rally, that he returned to a frontal attack on Jewry, framed in general terms, in connection with his main attack on Bolshevism, which he explicitly dubbed a Jewish creation. With characteristic phraseology, he alleged that eighty per cent of Soviet

<sup>19</sup> ZStA Potsdam, RMdI, 27079/71, Fo. 52, LB of RP in Kassel, 4 Mar. 1936.

<sup>20</sup> Kulka, 'Die Nürnberger Rassengesetze', pp. 622–3; O. D. Kulka, 'Public Opinion in Nazi Germany and the "Jewish Question"', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, xxv (1982), 124–5.

<sup>21</sup> Domarus, pp. 573–5.

<sup>22</sup> When the tumult died down, Hitler repeated the words 'I know', but now as the first part of a platitudinous sentence in which the Jews were not again mentioned—*ibid.*, p. 621 and n. 121.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 666.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 708.



leaders were Jews, that the former leaders of the Bavarian *Räterepublik*, the Spartakus League, and the Communist Party, had been Jews, and that the Jews were now plotting to plunge the whole of Europe into 'Bolshevik chaos'.<sup>25</sup>

Despite this glimpse of vintage anti-Semitic paranoia, setting the tone for the new wave of anti-Jewish action and propaganda which began in the last months of 1937 and continued throughout the following year, the 'Jewish Question' was scarcely touched upon in Hitler's speeches throughout the critical year of 1938. Once more among his Party faithful in Nuremberg in September 1938, his proclamation contained the usual cliché about the infant Nazi Party beginning the fight against the greatest enemy threatening the German people, international Jewry, and a few days later, still at the Party Rally, he attempted to justify Germany's attempts to rid itself of its Jews by the stereotype reference to an over-populated country.<sup>26</sup> Other than this, he hardly mentioned the Jews in his public statements in 1938. His speeches were, of course, dominated by the great foreign political issues of the year, but there can be no doubt that Hitler was deliberately steering clear of the 'Jewish Question', and that there was a continued conscious attempt to dissociate his public image from the seamier side of anti-Semitism visible in the renewed growing violence of Party activists.

Press directives in 1938 prohibited discussion of the 'Jewish Question' in newspapers in connection with Hitler's visits to various parts of Germany.<sup>27</sup> Above all, Hitler's deliberately intended low profile with regard to action against Jews is demonstrated by the total absence of any public statement with regard to the *Reichskristallnacht* pogrom of 9–10 November 1938. Although the attack by a young Jew on the German Legation Secretary in Paris, Ernst vom Rath, had taken place just the day before his usual address to the Party 'old guard' in Munich on 8 November 1938, Hitler avoided all mention of it in his speech.<sup>28</sup> Nor did he refer to it in his address to new SS recruits at midnight on 9 November, and not a word relating to the pogrom was contained in his confidential speech—not meant for public consumption—to leaders of the German press on the evening of 10 November, less than twenty-four hours after the burning of the

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 727–32.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 890, 899.

<sup>27</sup> Gordon, p. 153.

<sup>28</sup> Text in Domarus, pp. 966–9.

synagogues and the destruction of Jewish property throughout the length and breadth of Germany.<sup>29</sup> The violence and destruction of the pogrom aroused much criticism,<sup>30</sup> but the unpopularity was mainly incurred by Goebbels and the Party rather than by Hitler—even if, according to one *Sopade* observer from Saxony, Hitler himself, 'whose name had formerly scarcely been mentioned in such discussions', was 'increasingly reproached with having to bear the main responsibility because of his silence, his toleration, or even his blatant backing for all the events'.<sup>31</sup>

During the 1930s, then, in the years when his popularity was soaring to dizzy heights, Hitler's public pronouncements on the 'Jewish Question' were less numerous than might be imagined, and, while certainly hate-filled, were usually couched in abstract generalities in association with western plutocracy or Bolshevism. Where he did intervene in public, it was generally to lend support to 'legal' discriminatory measures—for the most part popular and meeting with widespread approval—excluding Jews from German society and the economy. But as we have seen, he was extremely careful to avoid public association with the generally unpopular pogrom-type anti-Semitic outrages. If considerations of foreign diplomacy, unquestionably influenced by his personal fears of the international power of world Jewry, were paramount, the protection of his prestige and standing among the German public was clearly also a matter of concern to Hitler.

In the peacetime years of the Third Reich, the 'Jewish Question' did not rank prominently on the scale of priorities of most of the German population. At certain times, notably in the spring of 1933, the summer of 1935, and above all in the autumn of 1938, the 'Jewish Question' had a high profile. But for the most part interest in it was relatively low—except for Party activists—and subordinated to other far more pressing matters in the formation of popular opinion. There is no doubt that Hitler's anti-Semitism, perceived as it was chiefly in connection with legal discrimination against Jews, was acceptable to the millions of his admirers. But it is striking how little, either in internal reports or in those of the *Sopade*, the 'Jewish Question' figures

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 970–3.

<sup>30</sup> See Steinert, pp. 74–6; Kershaw, 'The Persecution of the Jews', pp. 275 ff.; Allen, 'Die deutsche Öffentlichkeit', pp. 398 ff.; Kulka, 'Public Opinion' in Nazi Germany and the "Jewish Question"', pp. 138 ff.

<sup>31</sup> *DBS*, vi. 10, 9 Feb. 1939.



in remarks about Hitler's popular standing, and it seems unlikely that it formed, for most 'ordinary' Germans, the main reason for their adulation of the Führer.

Between the pogrom and the start of the war, Hitler dealt with the 'Jewish Question' in only one speech. This was, however, his notorious Reichstag speech on 30 January 1939, when, in far more menacing fashion than ever before, Hitler made his threatening 'prophecy' that a new war would bring 'the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe'.<sup>32</sup> It was the first in a series of brutal references to the 'Jewish Question' which Hitler came to make during the following years.

Hitler's speech had its background in Germany's strengthened position since the Munich settlement, in his determination to force the pace in foreign policy in 1939, and—in its tone of heightened aggression towards the Jews—in the anger he felt at the increasingly strong anti-German feeling in the USA and in Britain which the *Reichskristallnacht* pogrom had greatly fuelled. Hitler's threats against the Jews, whose hand he of course saw behind the British and American 'war-mongers', were an attempt to retaliate at what he regarded as Jewish-provoked anti-German public opinion and, by depicting Jews in the position of hostages as the certain victims in any new war, to exert pressure on Britain and the USA to leave Germany a free hand in Europe.<sup>33</sup>

Hitler's 'prophecy', a brief moment in his two-hour speech, was singled out as the central point of the newsreel coverage on 3 February. Remarkably, however, neither internal opinion reports nor the reports of the *Sopade* mentioned the passage on the Jews in their comments on the impact of Hitler's speech. The SD report for the first quarter of 1939 mentioned the speech only in the context of factors influencing the German press to fix attention firmly on foreign policy developments, and made a brief reference to Hitler's remarks on the 'Church problem'.<sup>34</sup> The reports of the Bavarian Government Presidents all record the resounding impact of the speech—one called

it 'mighty', another 'epoch-making'—but interpreted this solely in terms of anxiety about an imminent war being eased by Hitler's emphasis on his desire for peace.<sup>35</sup>

The *Sopade* reports also centred on the implications of the speech for war or peace, but, in contrast to internal reports, asserted that it had substantially increased the fears in Germany of war in the near future. According to an observer in Silesia, the speech focused the general discussion of the population, even in Nazi circles, almost exclusively upon the coming war.<sup>36</sup> But again, there was no mention of the passage on the Jews. The lengthy section in the same report on the persecution of the Jews in Germany began by stating that what was currently taking place was the 'irresistible extermination of a minority', comparable to the genocide against the Armenians by the Turks during the First World War but carried out in Germany against the Jews 'more slowly and in more planned fashion', adding accurately that 'in reality a lawless situation has long prevailed, through which every act of force against the Jewish minority is sanctioned'. Again, there was no direct reference to Hitler's 'prophecy' about the destruction of European Jewry, though the whole section of the report was placed under a quotation from the speech which led up to the passage on the Jews: that in the light of the suffering of the Germans at the hands of others, people should 'keep well away from us with their humanitarianism'.<sup>37</sup>

Recorded reactions suggest that the German public was preoccupied not with Hitler's remarks on the 'Jewish Question', but with the implications for war or peace contained in his speech. The threats against the Jews were no doubt correctly 'read' in government and Party circles as an indication that a war would somehow bring about a final show-down with the Jews. But Hitler's prophecy, highly significant though it appears in retrospect, was at the time probably taken much for granted by most 'ordinary' Germans in the context of the ever more overtly radical anti-Jewish policy of the regime—a 'prophecy' so commonplace in its sentiments that it scarcely prompted the need for exultant expressions of praise, just as it failed to

<sup>32</sup> Domarus, p. 1058, and see pp. 1055 ff.

<sup>33</sup> Mommsen, 'Die Realisierung des Utopischen', p. 396, and see also p. 392 n. 36.

<sup>34</sup> *MadR*, ii. 228, 287, 'SD-Vierteljahresbericht 1939'. Hitler had said that he would protect the German priest as the servant of God, but destroy the priest who acted as the political enemy of the Reich, and attacked the sympathy shown abroad for members of the clergy who had 'come into conflict with the law' in Germany—Domarus, p. 1061.

<sup>35</sup> GStA, MA 106671, RPvOB, 8 Feb. 1939; MA 106673, RPvNB/OP, 9 Feb. 1939; MA 106683, RPvS, 7 Feb. 1939; MA 106678, RPvOF/MF, 8 Feb. 1939; MA 106681, RPvUF, 10 Feb. 1939. See also Steinert, p. 80 for glowing tributes paid to Hitler after his speech, but again without reference to the 'Jewish Question'.

<sup>36</sup> *DBS*, vi. 123, 10 Mar. 1939.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, vi. 201 ff., 10 Mar. 1939.

stir up any animosity or repulsion.<sup>38</sup> What is, however, abundantly clear is that, unlike the 1930s, Hitler was prepared, indeed anxious, to be publicly associated during the war with the most radical steps in the 'Jewish Question', even though, of course, his horrific statements remained couched in vile generalities, avoiding any specific reference to the details of the 'Final Solution', which were intended to remain entirely secret.

The nauseating 'documentary' film, *Der ewige Jude* (*The Eternal Jew*), receiving its première in November 1940—a year which also saw the production of two other anti-Semitic films, *Jud Süß* and *Die Rothschilds*, in a concentrated attempt to 'educate' German opinion and harden attitudes on the 'Jewish Question'—provides an illustration of the way in which propaganda was now directly linking Hitler himself with the need for a most radical 'solution' to the 'Jewish problem'. It also reveals some of the difficulties in relating this to the popular reception of Hitler's image.

The film, which concentrated on depicting the 'real' ghetto Jew behind the 'mask of assimilation', and, using trick photography, likened the migrations of Jews to the spread of a plague of bacillus-carrying rats, closed 'in shining contrast', as the film programme put it, with a clip from Hitler's Reichstag speech of 30 January 1939, 'prophesying' the annihilation of Jewry. The aim was to 'fill the viewer with a feeling of deep gratification for belonging to a race whose Führer is fundamentally solving the Jewish problem'.<sup>39</sup> The film ran in every major city of Germany in late 1940 and early 1941, and simultaneously in no fewer than sixty-six Berlin cinemas.<sup>40</sup> An SD report, summarizing reactions to the film from numerous cities, noted an overwhelmingly positive reception. According to the report from Munich, enthusiastic applause broke forth at the scene from Hitler's Reichstag speech. Interestingly, however, the SD went on to note that after unusually large audiences, prompted by heavy propaganda, had attended the film at the outset, the numbers rapidly dropped off, and there were comments that the film would bring nothing new, that people had had enough of the Jewish theme, and that many were

<sup>38</sup> The cases coming before the Munich 'Special Court' show a rise in criticism of Nazi anti-Jewish policy in late 1938 and early 1939, mainly in connection with the *Reichskristallnacht* pogrom, but the total number of such cases was still extremely small—SGM files in StAM.

<sup>39</sup> Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema*, pp. 293, 299.

<sup>40</sup> D. Sington and A. Weidenfeld, *The Goebbels Experiment*, London, 1942, p. 213.

nauseated by the depiction of ritual slaughter scenes—some fainting, and others leaving the cinema in disgust. It was added that 'the typical film public' was avoiding the film and even engaging in 'verbal propaganda' against it, while in a number of cities—including Munich—it was expressly stated 'that frequently only the politically more active section of the population attended the documentary film'.<sup>41</sup> It would seem from these comments that Hitler's association with the solution of the 'Jewish problem' was regarded as a highly positive attribute in the eyes of mainly the 'politically active' part of the population which formed the bulk of the film's viewers, but that among 'ordinary' Germans there was also a considerable degree of disinterest in the 'Jewish Question'.

From 1941 onwards, and particularly so in 1942 when the 'Final Solution' was in full swing, Hitler repeatedly harked back to his 'prophecy' of 1939, which he consistently misdated to the day of the outbreak of war, 1 September, not 30 January. This in itself could scarcely be accidental, and reflects Hitler's own identification of the war with the destruction of the Jews.<sup>42</sup> Hitler reminded his audience of his grim 'prophecy' for the first time in his Reichstag speech on 30 January 1941, and in 1942 returned to it in no fewer than four major addresses, on 30 January, 24 February, 30 September, and 8 November, as well as hinting at the destruction of the Jews in the war in his 'New Year Appeal'.<sup>43</sup> In his most dire reference to 'the extermination of Jewry in Europe', in his November speech to the Party 'Old Guard', he stated: 'I've always been scorned as a prophet. Of those who laughed then, there are countless numbers who are no longer laughing today, and those who are still laughing now, will perhaps also not be doing it any longer in the time to come.'<sup>44</sup> Twice more, on 24 February and 21 March 1943, Hitler repeated his threat

<sup>41</sup> *MadR*, vi. 1917–19, 20 Jan. 1941. I am grateful to Prof. O. D. Kulka (Jerusalem) for drawing my attention to this report.

<sup>42</sup> See Domarus, pp. 1058 n. 119, 1663 n. 54; H.-H. Wilhelm, 'The Holocaust in National Socialist Rhetoric and Writings', *Yad Vashem Studies*, xvi (1984), 102 n. 8; E. Jäckel, 'Hitler und der Mord an europäischen Juden', in P. Märthesheimer and I. Frenzel (eds.), *Im Kreuzfeuer: Der Fernsehfilm 'Holocaust'*, Frankfurt a.M., 1979, pp. 161–2; E. Jäckel, *Hitler in History*, Hanover/London, 1984, p. 56. Unlike Hitler, Goebbels dated the 'prophecy' correctly—Wilhelm, p. 105, referring to a Goebbels editorial of 16 Nov. 1941.

<sup>43</sup> Domarus, pp. 1663, 1821, 1828–9, 1844, 1920, 1937; Jäckel, 'Hitler und der Mord an europäischen Juden', pp. 160–1.

<sup>44</sup> Domarus, p. 1937. See also Wilhelm, p. 111 n. 23.

that the war would bring about the extermination of Jewry, and came back to it again in one final reference—which produced 'lively applause'—during an address to generals and officers at Berchtesgaden on 26 May 1944.<sup>45</sup>

It has been rightly said that these remarkable statements can only be seen as Hitler's wish to make manifest his work in the eyes of history.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, however, he had agreed with Rosenberg in late 1941 that it was inappropriate to speak of extermination in public.<sup>47</sup> And by late 1942 Bormann was anxious to end rumours circulating about the 'Final Solution' in the east.<sup>48</sup> The striking contrast between Hitler's deliberate flaunting hints—barbaric, but nevertheless generalized and abstract—of the dire events unfolding in the east and the suppression of 'hard' information about the actual mechanics of mass murder, mirrors the manner in which Hitler, as the driving force behind genocide, even privately combined massive threats against the Jews with a taboo on the details of extermination.<sup>49</sup>

The reactions provoked by Hitler's chilling public statements about the coming end of Jewry cannot, of course, be established with precision. A few days after Hitler's repetition of his 'prophecy' on 30 January 1942, the SD reported that his words had been 'interpreted to mean that the Führer's battle against the Jews would be followed through to the end with merciless consistency, and that very soon the last Jew would disappear from European soil'.<sup>50</sup> However, it seems likely that the open expression of opinion on such matters coming to the ears of the SD informants was over-representative of the overtly nazified section of the population. Moreover, Hitler's vicious but unspecific remarks about the Jews were clearly not the centre-point of the speech for most people. According to the SD report itself,<sup>51</sup> the main interest of the population in Hitler's speech lay in his assessment

<sup>45</sup> Domarus, pp. 1992, 2001; Wilhelm, p. 102. Goebbels also referred explicitly to the 'prophecy' in at least two 'leading articles' (of 16 Nov. 1941 and 9 May 1943) in *Das Reich*—regarded as a 'quality newspaper' with a circulation, by early 1944, of one and a half millions—*ibid.*, pp. 104–5, 111.

<sup>46</sup> Jäckel, 'Hitler und der Mord an europäischen Juden', p. 161.

<sup>47</sup> Cited in Jäckel, *Hitler in History*, p. 55.

<sup>48</sup> Cited in Steinert, p. 252.

<sup>49</sup> See Mommsen, 'Die Realisierung des Utopischen', pp. 391–5.

<sup>50</sup> *Meldungen*, pp. 218–19; see also O. D. Kulka, '“Public Opinion” in Nazi Germany: the Final Solution', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, xxvi (1983), 147; and Kulka and Rodrigue, pp. 433–4.

<sup>51</sup> *Meldungen*, pp. 216–20. The response to the passage on the 'Jewish Question' takes up only five lines in a report of almost four printed pages.

of the military situation in the east, and the generalized response to the 'prophecy' passage was summed up in the single sentence quoted above. For the majority of the population, it seems that, now as before, the 'Jewish Question' was of no more than secondary interest.

The point seems reinforced by the fact that the SD reports following the further repetition of the Hitler prophecy in the speeches of 24 February, 30 September, and 8 November 1942, and 24 February and 21 March 1943, make no mention of any reaction to the passage about the Jews. Hitler's proclamation on 24 February 1943 was, in fact, hardly noticed at all by the population,<sup>52</sup> while reactions to the low-key speech on 21 March 1943 were dominated by the speculation over the astonishingly low figures for German war casualties which Hitler had given.<sup>53</sup> The suspicion must be that for all their draconian nature, Hitler's comments on the Jews were regarded as stereotype repetition, and of little interest compared with his assessment of the war situation.

There are, nevertheless, sufficient indications to suggest that attitudes towards the Jews hardened during the war, and that among those Party members and others who shared radical Nazi views on the 'Jewish Question', Hitler's pronouncements were welcomed as endorsement of the most ruthless destruction of the 'racial enemy'.

The climate had worsened significantly for the remaining Jews in Germany following the invasion of the Soviet Union, in a period of stepped-up hatred towards the 'Jewish-Bolshevik' arch-enemy and heightened tension, as Party activists agitated with renewed pressure for action in the 'Jewish Question'. The introduction of the 'Yellow Star', publicly branding the Jews as outcasts, in September 1941—a direct outcome of such pressure—and the beginning of the deportations in the autumn that year, brought the 'Jewish Question' temporarily into the limelight. In this climate, Goebbels's essay, 'The Jews are Guilty', in *Das Reich*, with its express reference to Hitler's 'prophecy', was said by the SD to have 'found a strong echo' in the population, with critical comments coming from church-going circles.<sup>54</sup> A few weeks later, the deportation of Jews from Minden in Westphalia provoked reported mixed reactions from the local population, ranging from sympathy for the Jews to outrightly nazified

<sup>52</sup> *MadR*, xiii. 4869, 1 Mar. 1943.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii. 4981–3, 22 Mar. 1943; and see above ch. 7 for disbelief in the figures for German losses provided by Hitler.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, viii. 3007, 20 Nov. 1941.



comments thanking the Führer for freeing the people of the plague of Jewish blood, claiming that had it been done half a century earlier the First World War would not have been necessary, and including rumours that the Führer wanted to hear by 15 January 1942 that there were no more Jews in Germany.<sup>55</sup>

These and other reports make it plain that attitudes were divided on the 'Jewish Question', now as before. Whether positively, or—in a minority of the population—negatively, it seems plain that Hitler was now, to a far greater extent than in the pre-war period, directly associated with the radical anti-Jewish actions of the regime. And for those, especially within the Movement, for whom it ranked as a burning issue, Hitler's words were clearly taken as a signal and sanction for further radical action and were increasingly treated as a literal description of what was actually taking place.<sup>56</sup>

The extreme anti-Jewish sentiments expressed in letters from soldiers at the Front, though evidently a small minority of the overall services' mail, also sometimes included direct references to Hitler's stance on the 'Jewish Question', interpreting the war in classical Nazi fashion as a struggle brought about by the Jews and destined to end in their destruction. One, stating that 'the great task imposed on us in the struggle against Bolshevism resides in the annihilation of eternal Jewry', went on: 'Only when you see what the Jew has brought about here in Russia, can you really understand why the Führer began the struggle against Jewry. What sort of suffering would not have fallen upon our Fatherland if this beast of mankind had retained the upper hand?'<sup>57</sup> Another, this time from a lance-corporal serving on the western Front and evidently of an extreme Nazi mentality, expressly

<sup>55</sup> SD-HAS Bielefeld, 16 Dec. 1941; SD-AS Minden, 6 Dec., 12 Dec. 1941. I am most grateful to Prof. O. D. Kulka (Jerusalem) for his kindness in allowing me to consult these reports prior to publication in his *The 'Final Solution' and the German People*, Wisconsin Univ. Press, forthcoming.

<sup>56</sup> The day after Hitler had repeated his 'prophecy' in his 'message', read out (in his absence, for the first time) to the 'faithful' assembled for the annual Party foundation celebration in Munich on 24 Feb. 1942, the *Niederrheinische Tageszeitung* headed the relevant paragraph of its report: 'The Jew is being exterminated' (*Der Jude wird ausgerottet*). A cutting from the newspaper was kept with his diary jottings by Karl Dürckefeldten, an ordinary citizen opposed to Nazism, living near Celle in Lower Saxony, who evidently took the heading in its literal sense—H. Obenaus, 'Haben sie wirklich nichts gewußt? Ein Tagebuch zum Alltags von 1933–1945 gibt eine deutliche Antwort', *Journal für Geschichte*, II (1980), 29; see also H. and S. Obenaus, 'Schreiben, wie es wirklich war! Aufzeichnungen Karl Dürckefeldens aus den Jahren 1933–1945', Hanover, 1985, pp. 107ff.

<sup>57</sup> *Das andere Gesicht des Krieges*, p. 171, no. 351, 18 July 1942.

referred to Hitler's 'prophecy' in a malevolent tirade, thanking *inter alia* the *Stürmer* for remaining true to its principles on the 'Jewish Question' and applauding the introduction of the Yellow Star now also in the western occupied territories: '... Things have now finally reached the point which our Führer at the outbreak of this struggle prophesied to world Jewry in his great speech: "... should Jewry once more succeed in again plunging the nations into a new world war, it would be the end of that race, and not ours." Gradually, therefore, this race is being ever more reminded of these words. ... All its efforts won't any longer be able to alter its fate.'<sup>58</sup> Other soldiers sent letters with similar sentiments direct to the *Stürmer*, which, with its circulation during the war estimated at still over 300,000, continued as before to publish a selection of the most repulsively anti-Jewish readers' letters.<sup>59</sup> When, under the hail of bombs in the last phase of the war, some Nazi cranks and fanatics sent letters to the Propaganda Ministry, extraordinary even for the Third Reich in the depths of inhumanity they plumbed, suggesting the shooting or burning of Jews in retaliation for allied air raids, it was occasionally specifically requested that the 'suggestions' be sent on to Hitler. Others addressed their propaganda 'suggestions' directly to the Führer himself.<sup>60</sup>

The evidence we have considered, patchy though it is, suggests a number of generalized conclusions.

The growing barbarization of the war, especially following the invasion of the Soviet Union,<sup>61</sup> led to an increasing dehumanization of the abstract image of the 'Jew' and a corresponding 'internalization' of the justification of the need to search for a radical solution to the 'Jewish Question'. As the forthright proponent of the 'destruction of European Jewry', Hitler's image was enhanced among a minority—though a growing and powerful minority—of the German population (especially, though by no means exclusively, those 'organized' in the Nazi Movement and, presumably, those who already before the war

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172, no. 352, 22 July 1942.

<sup>59</sup> F. Hahn, *Lieber Stürmer. Leserbriefe an das NS-Kampfblatt 1924 bis 1945*, Stuttgart, 1978, pp. 114, 149, 188–227.

<sup>60</sup> BAK, R55/1461, Fos. 38–40, 301; and see Steinert, pp. 260–1.

<sup>61</sup> See O. Bartov, 'The Barbarisation of Warfare. German Officers and Men on the Eastern Front, 1941–1945', *Jahrbuch des Instituts für Deutsche Geschichte*, Tel Aviv, xiii (1984), 305–39; and also H. Krausnick and H.-H. Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges*, Stuttgart, 1981; and C. Streit, *Keine Kameraden. Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen*, Stuttgart, 1978.

had been active, whole-hearted Nazis and convinced ideological anti-Semites) by his open association with extreme anti-Jewish measures. For the committed exponents of Nazi rule, Hitler's public statements on the destruction of the Jews provided sanction and legitimation for their own 'private initiatives' taken against Jews, backing and support for their own involvement in the escalating criminality of the regime.

For another, smaller and by now entirely powerless, minority, the barbarous anti-Jewish measures and policies were one component in their criticism or outright rejection of Nazism. Practising Christians were the most visible group, singled out by many Nazi reports as voicing objections to the treatment of the Jews. But many anonymous individuals whose traits of basic humanity had not been eradicated even by years of Nazism revealed through small acts or gestures of kindness of sympathy that they were out of step with mainstream Nazi attitudes towards the Jews.<sup>62</sup> For these, it seems obvious, Hitler's public association with the radical 'solution of the Jewish Question' and the linking of the Führer to the widespread knowledge and rumours of the extermination of the Jews in the east, can only have been a further negative feature of his image. The same can probably be claimed for those who for reasons which had little to do with humanitarian concern—fearing Jewish revenge in the event of a lost war, or blaming Hitler for bringing on the war through attacking the Jews, attitudes which of course themselves betrayed the influence of Nazi 'Jewish conspiracy' propaganda—were voicing criticism of Nazi anti-Jewish policy.<sup>63</sup>

The identification of Hitler with the 'struggle against the Jews' was most probably seen in a more positive light by the far wider sections of the population, who, though never rabid or violent anti-Semites, had accepted the basic justification of discrimination and expulsion of Jews, and who were largely persuaded of the responsibility of world Jewry for the war. At the same time, although feelings towards the Jews undoubtedly hardened in such circles during the war years, it would be easy to exaggerate the significance of the 'Jewish Question' in the

<sup>62</sup> For notable instances of aid to Jews, see K. Kwiet and H. Eschwege, *Selbstbehauptung und Widerstand. Deutsche Juden im Kampf um Existenz und Menschenwürde 1933–1945*, Hamburg, 1984, pp. 159ff.; and also H. D. Leuner, *When Compassion was a Crime*, London, 1966; A. M. Keim (ed.), *Yad Vashem. Die Judenretter aus Deutschland*, Mainz/Munich, 1983; I. Deutschkron, *Ich trug den gelben Stern*, 4th edn., Cologne, 1983; and L. Gross, *The Last Jews in Berlin*, London, 1983.

<sup>63</sup> See Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, pp. 368–70; and SD-AS Minden, 6 Dec. 1941 (cf. above n. 55).

formation of popular opinion. The evidence suggests, in fact, that, during the war as before it, the 'Jewish Question' did not rank highly, relative to other factors shaping German popular opinion.

There was, it seems clear, much deliberate or subliminal exclusion of the treatment of the Jews from popular consciousness—a more or less studied lack of interest or cultivated disinterest, going hand in hand with an accentuated 'retreat into the private sphere' and increased self-centredness in difficult and worrying wartime conditions. As has been aptly stated, the fate of the Jews 'was an unpleasant topic, speculation was unprofitable, discussions of the fate of the Jews were discouraged. Consideration of this question was pushed aside, blotted out for the duration.'<sup>64</sup>

This conclusion is supported by the replies which Michael Müller-Claudius, formerly a psychologist, received to his unique, camouflaged small sample of opinion of sixty-one Party members (all of whom had joined either the NSDAP or the Hitler Youth before 1933) in 1942. In response to his prompting remark that 'the Jewish problem still hasn't been cleared up' and 'we hear nothing at all about what sort of solution is imagined', only three Party members (5 per cent) expressed open approval of the right to exterminate the Jews, with comments such as: 'The Führer has decided upon the extermination of Jewry and promised it. He will carry it out.' Thirteen persons (21 per cent) showed some signs of ethical and moral sense, though accepting much of the Nazi claim that the Jews had caused Germany harm. Their replies also revealed resigned attitudes—washing of the hands for whatever brutalities were taking place. Three persons (5 per cent) revealed what he called a 'clear detachment from anti-Semitism'. Finally, 42 of the Nazis (69 per cent of the 'sample') provided responses which could be classed as 'indifference of conscience', and pointed to disinterest or internal suppression of knowledge and responsibility for the fate of the Jews. Characteristic replies included: 'There's no point in thinking about it. The decision lies with Hitler alone.' 'I prefer not to speak of it. It's simply not possible to form an opinion on it.' 'Have a cigarette instead. I'm busy twelve hours a day, and can't be concerned with that as well. . . .' And 'I'm just about up to here with the war. I want a regulated situation. What part the Jews play in that isn't my concern.'<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> W. Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, London, 1980, p. 201.

<sup>65</sup> M. Müller-Claudius, *Der Antisemitismus und das deutsche Verhängnis*, Frankfurt a.M., 1949, pp. 166–76.



Though of course Müller-Claudius's 'sample' was hardly a representative one, the responses have more than a ring of plausibility about them, and, coming from Nazis who had been in the Party since before Hitler's 'seizure of power', can be extended *a fortiori* to 'non-organized' Germans. It would seem fair to conclude that while for the bulk of the population Hitler's image was no doubt related in an abstract fashion to finding a 'solution to the Jewish Question', this was an issue which people either gave little thought to or deliberately turned their minds from, and that, correspondingly, Hitler's public attacks on the Jews were something absorbed with little deliberation, forming no central part in explaining either the high peaks of his popularity or the collapse of the 'Führer myth' in the last years of the war.

Returning to the questions we posed at the outset of this enquiry, we would, therefore, have to conclude that anti-Semitism, despite its pivotal place in Hitler's 'world view', was of only secondary importance in cementing the bonds between Führer and people which provided the Third Reich with its popular legitimation and base of plebiscitary acclamation. At the same time, the principle of excluding the Jews from German society was itself widely and increasingly popular, and Hitler's hatred of the Jews—baleful in its threats but linked to the condoning of lawful, 'rational' action, not the unpopular crude violence and brutality of the Party's 'gutter' elements—was certainly an acceptable component of his popular image, even if it was an element 'taken on board' rather than forming a centrally motivating factor for most Germans.

Clearly, the Hitler image, in this fundamentally important area, was again largely detached from reality. Though at the very beginning of his political 'career', Hitler had emphasized the need for anti-Semitism derived from 'reason', not pure 'emotion',<sup>66</sup> there were—as is well known—no measures in the 'Jewish Question' which were too extreme for him, except on occasions where tactical considerations prevailed. His consistent defence of Streicher and *Stürmer* anti-Semitism, together with his sanctioning of the Goebbels initiative to unleash the November pogrom of 1938—to which he never publicly admitted—demonstrate the extent of the gulf between image and reality. And the replacement of anti-Semitism by anti-Marxism as early as 1922–23 as the main 'hate-theme' of his public addresses, and

<sup>66</sup> Noakes and Pridham, pp. 36–7.

the relatively low profile of anti-Semitism in his speeches during the 1930s, can again only be explained in terms of a conscious decision to limit the public expression of his own phobias and paranoia for political and diplomatic purposes, to provide a wider appeal and to avoid gratuitous alienation at home and abroad. His Reichstag speech of 30 January 1939 marks the point at which public image and reality started to approximate, although during the war, too, however violent his rhetoric, he avoided any explicit connection with the actual processes of mass murder.<sup>67</sup>

The third question to which we sought an answer was the function of Hitler's public *persona* in an explanation of the radicalization of the 'Jewish Question' and genesis of the 'Final Solution'. Here it seems important to distinguish between Hitler's image as portrayed to and perceived by the mass of the population, in which anti-Semitism was no more than a subsidiary component of the 'Führer myth', and his image as viewed from within the Nazi Movement and sections of the State bureaucracy, where his 'mission' to destroy the Jews functioned as a symbolic motivating force for the Party and SS, and an activating and legitimating agent for government initiatives to 'force the pace' in finding a 'radical solution' to the 'Jewish Question'.<sup>68</sup> It is in this last capacity that Hitler's image as perceived by his loyal 'following'—functioning within the framework of 'charismatic politics'—played its crucial role, as not only the leaders of Party and State, but those in responsible intermediary positions—whether for ideological reasons or for a variety of careerist or other motives little related in essence to principled hatred of Jews—'read' Hitler's vaguely expressed 'intent' as a green light for radicalizing actions which developed their own dynamic and momentum.

For the top and intermediate Party leadership, Hitler's image stood therefore in far closer relationship to reality than it did for the broad mass of the population. In private or semi-private conversation and 'confidential' addresses to the Party faithful, Hitler left no doubt of his feelings on the 'Jewish Question'. A case in point was his speech to Party *Kreisleiter*, the indispensable link with the Party activist base at the district level, at Sonthofen in 1937, in which, in contrast to the carefully cultivated image portrayed in his public addresses, he spoke

<sup>67</sup> See Mommsen, 'Die Realisierung des Utopischen', pp. 391–8.

<sup>68</sup> See Broszat, 'Soziale Motivation', pp. 402ff., 408; Mommsen, 'Die Realisierung des Utopischen', esp. pp. 389–90, 399–400; M. Broszat, 'Hitler and the Genesis of the "Final Solution"', *Yad Vashem Studies*, xiii (1979), esp. 81, 83–5, 97–8.



openly and frankly about his methods and aims.<sup>69</sup> With direct reference to the 'Jewish Question', and in response to a 'demand' for more radical action which he had read in a newspaper, Hitler made clear that he had at the time to proceed tactically and in stages, but that his strategy was to manoeuvre his enemy into a corner before destroying him completely.<sup>70</sup> In such ways, Hitler set the vicious tone for discrimination and persecution, providing the touchstone and legitimization for initiatives which largely came from others at various levels of the Party, the State bureaucracy, and not least the SS-SD-Gestapo complex, where the 'Jewish Question' had a key functional role.

Hitler's image functioned, therefore, on two different levels. Within the Nazi Movement and the coercive apparatus of the State, symbolizing the struggle to rid Germany of its Jews, and increasingly the struggle to destroy Jewry itself once and for all, it had a significance which can hardly be overrated. But outside the Nazi Movement, the objective function of the 'Führer myth' was rather to integrate into the Third Reich, through association with the far more popular and attractive aspects of Nazi rule symbolized by Hitler, the mass of 'ordinary' and 'non-organized' Germans for whom the 'Jewish Question' retained only a relatively low level of importance. This in itself distracted attention from Hitler's involvement in the 'seamier' side of Nazi policy. Hitler's massive personal popularity enhanced at the same time the readiness to accept uncritically his proclaimed struggle against the immense (but anonymous) power of world Jewry, and to welcome the increasing levels of 'legal' discrimination against Jews which he publicly advocated. This in turn ensured at least passive acquiescence in if not outright approval for the escalating inhumanity of Nazi anti-Jewish policy, and provided the regime with an extensive sphere of autonomy, free from any constraints of popular disapproval, in adopting ever more radical measures towards providing a 'final solution' to the 'Jewish Question'.

<sup>69</sup> Text and commentary in von Kotze, pp. 111-77.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 147-8. See also the instance of the *Kreisleiter* who, following a court case in which a Jew had triumphed at the expense of an 'Aryan', said he would have doubts about justice 'if one did not know that at the head of our people stands a leader who will dry out this swamp when he finds time'—Hahn, p. 193.