

Internal Developments, Racial policy and the treatment of Occupied Territories From 'The Third Reich' - K Hildebrand

The outbreak of war in 1939 affected the German people with a sense of depression very different from the enthusiasm of August 1914. Hitler's achievements in the political and economic fields, in military matters and to some extent in social policy had been widely admired; it was now suddenly clear what a price had to be paid for them, and how precarious they were. Food rationing made possible to supply basic needs until 1944, partly at the expense of the occupied territories; but, under war conditions, the regime's claim to ideological domination and its use of terror to subdue the German population became more and more oppressive. Above all the power of the SS increased steadily. From the beginning of the war it controlled 'an institutional apparatus that overshadow all governmental and military control' (Bracher,1970). In September 1939 the amalgamation of the SS and the police was further completed. The two had to be united at the top since 1936 in the person of Himmler, who was Reichsführer: and Chief of the German Police; this union was now extended to middle levels of command, the senior SS officer in each military district being appointed 'Senior SS leader and chief of police'. In addition, on 27 September the Security Police (Sipo), comprising the Gestapo and the detective branch (*Kriminalpolizei*), was merged administratively with the Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst*, SD) of the SS, a party organisation, to form the Reich Central Security Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, RSHA), which was also particularly concerned with racial matters.

Last but not least, the development of the 'SS state' was marked by the advance 'from the improvised terror of the early years to the gigantic concentration-camp system of the extermination era' (Bracher,1970). At the beginning of the war there were six of these camps controlled by the SS in Germany; by 1942 there were fifteen, and three more were added later. At the outset, 'political and religious opponents' of Nazism were deported without trial and imprisoned 'for reasons of security, re-education, or prevention', according to the official formula. Apart from this type of 'preventive arrest' in the concentration camps there were numerous labour camps whose inmates worked as slaves for the benefit of war production and of the SS. The camps were increasingly important for the German armaments industry, especially from spring of 1942 onwards. The number of inmates rose from about 21,000 in 1939 to nearly 800,000 at the end of the war, by which time it included criminals, prisoners of war and hostages from the occupied countries. Many were victims of Hitler's 'Night and Fog' order of 7 December 1941, whereby those suspected of belonging to resistance movements could be deported to the camps without their families knowing anything of their fate. The SS enjoyed absolute power in the extermination camps: for instance, deportees who had served their sentence or been acquitted by special courts could be turned over to the Gestapo on the basis of other ordinances and so remained in Himmler's power.

As far as the German population was concerned, a police apparatus was constantly being enlarged and perfected so as to ensure obedience to the laws, decrees and orders designed to safeguard the Nazi regime - measures of 'internal warfare', as they have been called (Hofer and Michaelis, 1965). Severe penalties, including the death sentence, were inflicted for offences against the laws on food rationing and consumption restrictions which preserved the country from the dire scarcities of the First World War. The 'mental attitude' of the population was also strictly controlled. Under Article 5 of the Wartime Emergency Penal Code (*Kriegsstrafrechtsverordnung*), which dealt with 'Demoralisation of the Armed Forces', the regime could treat as a capital crime any critical remark about the progress of the war. The 'Broadcasting Order' forbade citizens to listen to foreign stations and made them liable to the death penalty for spreading information obtained therefrom. Criminal offences committed under cover of the wartime blackout could be punished with death under the 'Decree concerning

Enemies of the People' (*Volksschiidlingsverordnung*).

Despite this concentration of power, however, the Third Reich continued after the outbreak of war to present a chaotic picture of conflicting and overlapping authorities. This was not remedied by the establishment on 30 August 1939 of the Reich Defence Council under Goring's chairmanship, representing all political agencies of the regime except for military strategy and foreign policy, which Hitler reserved for himself. Until the last phase of the war, when military defeats came thick and fast and Hitler increasingly avoided taking decisions, the state of 'authoritarian anarchy' served as an instrument safeguarding the dictator's absolute supremacy, which was formally endorsed at the last session of the Reichstag on 26 April 1942 in the following terms: 'The Fuhrer, without being bound by existing legal provisions, in his capacity as leader of the nation, as commander in chief of the armed forces, as head of government and the supreme source of executive power, as the highest judicial authority and as leader of the Party, must at all times be in a position in case of need to use any means that seem to him appropriate to compel any German. . . to fulfil his or her obligations.' Hitler's unlimited dictatorship was supported by a terroristic judicial system which entered its last and bloodiest phase, designed to establish the rule of 'National Socialist jurisprudence', on 24 August 1942, when the presidency of the People's Court (*Volksgerechtshof*) was assumed by Roland Freisler, whom Hitler significantly called the 'Vyshinsky' of his regime.

As already mentioned, the exploitation of conquered territories was of major importance to the German war economy. The regime's war aims for the 'Greater Germanic Reich' included the creation of an 'enlarged European economic area' (*Grosswirtschaftsraum*) extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast and completed by a colonial empire in Central Africa. Such plans were already put forward by the Foreign Ministry during the Battle of France, on 30 May and 1 June 1940). In addition, from the outset of the war Hitler's plans assigned decisive importance to the link between military success and the exploitation of conquered territories. Contrary to the views of, for example, General Georg Thomas of the Armaments and War Production Office of the *Wehrmacht* high command, Hitler believed it was sufficient for Germany to be equipped for *Blitzkriege* but not for a long war, since each successive conquest would help provide the economic basis for the next. The 'Speer era' did not set in till 1942, when the blitz campaigns came to an end and Germany had to resign herself to a long war of attrition against an adversary far superior in manpower, equipment, raw materials and economic production. During this period the war effort was placed on a more intensive and comprehensive basis, but Germany remained hopelessly behind the Allies, not least because her preparations had till then been so inadequate.

Nevertheless, both during the blitz campaigns and the later war of attrition, thanks to the plundering of foreign territory in Western Europe and the Soviet Union the supply of food and raw materials did not collapse but functioned with considerable efficiency. Not least on account of the deportation to Germany of between 6 and 7.5 million workers from all parts of Europe, agricultural and industrial production were kept going during the war. Although a labour shortage was increasingly felt, the Nazi Party for ideological reasons was reluctant to permit women to work in the arms industry in 1939-45, as they did in Britain and as they had done to a greater extent in Germany during the First World War.

On the whole it was possible to keep the civilian population, the armed forces and the foreign workers fed adequately until 1944. As already mentioned, this was helped by the measure of 27 August 1939 which, taking account of experience in the second half of the First World War, introduced extensive control especially of consumer goods but also of other products of all kinds. Moreover farm production had been increased during the prewar years and the food

supply was considerably increased by imports from occupied territory, especially the Ukraine. The raw materials position remained difficult, but it too was aided by supplies from conquered territory as well as expensive measures under the Four-Year Plan, for example, for the production of Buna, synthetic fuel and steel from low grade German ore. At the same time the occupied territories could not continue functioning and producing without themselves consuming raw materials on a large scale, and in some cases productivity declined considerably under occupation conditions. However, the fuel shortage, for instance, only became critical during the summer campaign of 1942, when the invading forces were unable to get at the Caucasian oil supplies, so that the increasing demand from all three services had to be met from German and Romanian production. Western bombing attacks did considerable damage in this respect, and the capture of the Ploiesi refineries by Soviet forces on 30 August 1944 spelt the end of Germany's war effort from the economic point of view.

In general it is characteristic of the Nazi dictatorship that Hitler only agreed with extreme hesitation and reluctance, from 1942 onwards, to limit consumer goods production for the benefit of the arms industry. Britain had done this as soon as war broke out, and waged 'total war' in this respect much sooner and more intensively than Germany. The British democracy could demand sacrifices from its people, since all alike felt they were defending a just cause and there was virtually no challenge to Parliament's authority. Hitler, on the other hand, was constantly aware of the needs of the civilian population of Germany, which he was concerned to meet for fear of provoking an internal revolution. 'Total war' in this respect was only embarked on to a limited extent even after 18 February 1943, when Goebbels issued a proclamation which was intended psychologically to offset the shock of the Stalingrad disaster). Hitler throughout took an indulgent line as regards the production of consumer goods, sensitive as he was to the reactions of the German people whom he kept under by means of terror and concentration camps, while offering them the ultimate goal of world domination or destruction. In the same way he was averse to financing the war by increasing taxes or imposing special duties on consumer goods, preferring methods of indirect borrowing which caused inflation but did not inflict immediate hardship on the population. Meanwhile, despite the propaganda slogan of 'total war', much of the new Nazi elite lived in a style of disproportionate luxury. The administrative chaos dating from before the war, and enhanced by the decline of Goring's power, was also not calculated to promote the harmony and efficiency of the country's war economy.

Only after the great military setback of the winter of 1941/2 was Fritz Todt, the head of the Ministry of Armaments and War Production set up on 17 March 1940, instructed to place the economy of the Third Reich on an all-out war footing, a task which was taken over by Albert Speer after Todt's accidental death on 8 February 1942. Between then and the middle of 1944 Speer succeeded in improving the organisation and efficiency of German arms production, but was unable to overcome its fundamental state of chaos. General Thomas's office continued to watch jealously over its own interests, although Speer managed to integrate it into his own ministry. Formally he himself, as 'Plenipotentiary for Armament Matters under the Four-Year Plan', was subordinate to Goring, the 'economic Tsar' of the Third Reich, whose influence was on the decline but who, as commander-in-chief of the air force, again and again flouted the authority granted to Speer by Hitler. The same was naval armaments, at least as long as Grand Admiral Raeder was commander in chief (till 31 January 1943). Sauckel, the Gauleiter of Thuringia, was appointed by Hitler on 21 March 1942 special plenipotentiary for labour allocation recruiting foreign workers, and increasingly rivaled Speer's authority. In 1944-5 he succeeded in pushing Speer completely into the background with the help of Bormann, who became director of the party chancellery after Hess's flight to Britain on 10 May 1941 and came more and more to dominate policy. Thanks to a policy of allowing extensive self-administration Speer was able in 1942-4 to keep armaments production steadily rising despite Allied air raids.

It was far below that of the Allies, however, and in 1942 and Japanese arms production together was only 40 per cent as high as that 'unnatural alliance'. In general Speer endeavoured to absorb branches economy that were not useful to the war effort and to make them serve the needs of all-out warfare.

In the last months of the war, however, as Speer was gradually ousted from power, the Nazi Party recovered the control over industry that it had between 1936 and 1939-41. The 'Speer era' had been more efficient and more friendly to big business; it had reintroduced a minimum of rationality and to meet the demands of a war of attrition. This policy was now brought to and the party renewed its threats to nationalise branches of the economy. The tendency of the party and state to assume control over industry was a steady feature of the Third Reich, manifest from an early stage on the part of the 'anti-capitalist' wing of the Nazi movement, and gaining continuously in s except for the interlude of the 'Speer era'. It cannot be ignored in retrospect, nor can the fact that the war, in contrast to Nazi ideology, tended to favour the process of industrial concentration at the expense of smaller business. The claims of ideology were for a time sacrificed to war production. But this should not blind us to the fact that heavy industry, despite its high profits, was no more than an instrument used to establish, by military means, a social hierarchy which would in the last resort have posed a challenge to its very existence.

Treatment of Occupied Territories

From this point of view we are brought back to the political aims of the Third Reich which were expressed not least in its racial policy and treatment of the occupied countries.

- Poland was the first conquered land to feel the 'heavy hand of German rule' (Hans Frank). The purpose of Nazi racial policy was first and foremost the subject the 'incorporated Eastern territories' to rigorous Germanisation. This task was entrusted by the Fuhrer to Himmler, who on 7 October 19 was appointed 'Reich Commissar for the Consolidation of German Nationhood (*Volkstum*). He set about deporting, resettling, or exterminating the Polish inhabitants and 'Germanising' the conquered territory by the assimilation of persons of mixed Polish and German stock and by introducing Germans from the Baltic States, now under Soviet occupation. Poles were almost completely deprived of civil rights and reduced to the status of 'protected persons'.
- Altogether, the policy of the occupation in Poland differed to a marked extent from that in Scandinavia and Western Europe. In Denmark, for instance, the government was allowed to remain in office till 28 August 1943.
- The Norwegian government and King Haakon escaped on 7 June 1940 to England, whence they organised resistance to Germany. In Norway itself only the unrepresentative 'National Samling' (National Assembly) of the former War Minister, Vidkun Quisling, was prepared to collaborate with the invader.
- Holland was likewise governed by a civilian administration after a short period of military rule. The Reich Commissioner appointed on 19 May 1940 was Seyss-Inquart, who had been Governor of the *Ostmark* (Austria) in 1938-9, and who administered the country through a body of civil servants.
- Belgium, on the other hand, was kept under the military administration of General von Falkenhausen, which also included the French departments of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais

- The armistice of 22 June 1940 divided France into a zone under military occupation and one which remained unoccupied until 11 November 1942. The former comprised two-thirds of French territory, including Paris and the industrial region of the north. It extended southward to the Loire and included the Channel and Biscay coasts as far as the Spanish frontier. Occupied France was governed by the military commander in Paris, General von Stulpnagel, while the government of unoccupied France under Marshal Petain moved to Vichy in the Auvergne.
- As regards South-Eastern Europe, the Reich allowed its Italian ally to occupy Greece subject to some reservation of authority.
- In Yugoslavia, which the Axis powers on 8 July 1941 declared to have ceased to exist as a state, an independent Croatia was established with Ante Pavelic as its *poglavnik* (leader).
- In Scandinavia, Western Europe and South-Eastern Europe, the fact and the character of the occupation, as well as the persecution of Jews which from 1942 onwards affected the whole of Europe under German control or influence, provoked movements of national resistance which steadily increased in scope and hampered Germany's conduct of the war.

While the Nazi 'battle for nationhood' continued in Poland, as far as Scandinavia and Western Europe were concerned German occupation policy until 1944 was dominated by economic exploitation rather than racial policy; but racist ideas on the future of the 'Greater Germanic Reich' were ever present and were to some extent put into practice even there. However, with the preparation and beginning of the Russian campaign the Nazis' war and occupation policy was characterised not only by economic exploitation, as practised, for example, most intensively in the Ukraine, but also by a new quality which may be described as a 'racial war of extermination' .

In his address to over 200 senior officers on 30 March 1941 Hitler laid down as a war aim in the coming invasion of Russia the 'annihilation of Bolshevik commissars and the communist intelligentsia'. Commissars and GPU men were 'criminals' and must be treated as such. The battle 'would be different from that in the West: in the East, severity at the present time would mean mercy in the future'. Hence orders were issued regardless of the accepted laws of war and traditional morality. A notorious example was the so-called 'commissar order' of 6 June 1941, according to which political commissars of the Red Army, 'if captured in battle or offering resistance, were in principle to be put to death at once'. Such orders made clear 'that the separation between the powers of the military and the SS, which had been still maintained in the war in Poland and in the West, was now no more than a fiction, and that the effective merger of these two institutions was related to a breakthrough in the sense of achieving the regime's "ultimate objectives". (Hillgruber, 1973b). Nazi racial policy reached a peak of intensity during the attack on Russia, first when victory seemed to be attained between June and August-September 1941, and afterwards when 'Operation Barbarossa' was in evident danger of failure.

Jewish Policy

The Jewish policy of the Third Reich went through three increasingly radical phases, which began at different times but overlapped and coexisted to some extent.

1. The first phase lasted from 1933 till the outbreak of war and in its different stages took the form of legal discrimination, deprivation of economic power and threats to the

person.

2. With German victory in the West came a second phase envisaging a 'final solution' on a territorial basis: the idea originally favoured was to remove Europe's Jews to Madagascar, then a French possession. The Madagascar plan was to some extent connected with deportation plans that had been considered in 1938-9 by the top Nazi leaders, who were by no means unanimous in their ideas of policy towards the Jews. Hitler mentioned the plan to Mussolini and Raeder on 18 and 20 June 1940, and it figured among studies for a future peace settlement in a memorandum, dated 3 July 1940, by Legation Secretary Rademacher of the home affairs section of the Foreign Ministry. This included the practical argument that Jews deported to Madagascar and kept there under SS surveillance would constitute a 'pledge in Germany's hands' for use in future world power diplomacy. The defeat of France brought into the foreground the possibility of obtaining the use of Madagascar; but it lost its significance in the light of the Russian campaign, which presented Hitler with an opportunity, immediate in space and time, to realise his political calculations and ideological aims. The Madagascar plan was not formally abandoned, however, till 10 February 1942, when the Foreign Ministry was informed of Hitler's decision that 'the Jews should not be sent to Madagascar but to the East', as the war with the Soviet Union had 'now made it possible to use other territories for the final solution'. True, Hitler in his 'table talk' at headquarters on 29 May 1942 once again spoke of its being better to deport the Jews of Western Europe to an African climate intolerable for Europeans, and on a previous occasion during the 'racial war of extermination' he mentioned the Madagascar plan as a possible solution. But the plan definitely faded into the background with the outbreak of the Russian war, which was always closely connected in Hitler's mind with the destruction of Bolshevism and Jewry. In the context of a 'territorial final solution' there was now vague talk of sending European Jews to Siberia, in full awareness of the heavy physical casualties they would sustain in the inhospitable areas east of the Urals.
3. Alongside this plan, however, Nazi Jewish policy entered its third phase. This went beyond the idea of deportation to Madagascar or Siberia (admittedly involving the liquidation of a large number of Jews) and envisaged a direct, systematic 'physical final solution'. Hitler's decision to this effect was part of the preparations for the Russian war and was carried out from 22 June 1941 onwards by the SD and Sipo units in conquered Russia, at the same time as plans still existed for a territorial solution (Madagascar or Siberia). From then on there was no question of, for example, persecuting only Jews of a particular origin or from certain classes of society: those systematically shot were exterminated simply because they were Jews.

Also in June 1941 Himmler, invoking Hitler's authority, ordered the commandant of the Auschwitz concentration camp to construct gas chambers of the largest possible capacity for extermination purposes. This was the ultimate expression of the 'physical final solution', the advanced technical apparatus which, from December 1941 onwards, was eventually to put to death over 4 million European Jews. In the course of preparing for the Russian war Hitler had decided on the physical liquidation of the Jews; the radicalisation of this scheme with all the resources of technology took place at a stage in that war when military defeat could already be foreseen. The gas chambers that had been tried out in the course of the euthanasia programme, which was suspended at the end of 1941, were now turned over, with their operators, to SS Brigade Leader Globocnik, the former Gauleiter of Vienna, and the previous practice of extermination by firing squads was extended from Russian to West European Jews. The 'physical solution' was certainly planned on Hitler's orders - though they are nowhere found in writing - not later than the summer of 1941, and from December 1941 onwards it was put into

effect with the highest technical efficiency. This development was encouraged, though certainly not caused, by the setback to the German war effort in Russia in October-November 1941.

At the 'Wannsee conference' on 20 January 1942 instructions were issued to the State Secretaries of the principal German ministries by Heydrich, head of the Reich Central Security Office. These still referred to the 'evacuation' of Jews to the East as a part of the territorial solution that had by then been effectively superseded. But they left no doubt that the mention of 'other measures' and such formulations as 'natural decrease' or 'appropriate treatment' of the Jewish population were nothing but a smoke-screen for the process of physical extirpation which was now under way.

The 'final solution' of the Jewish question as it was practised until October 1944, with the methods used from the end of 1941 onwards, cannot be directly and conclusively deduced from *Mein Kampf*. But in its most radical form it can be found in embryo in Hitler's mind and philosophy and in his blueprint for future rule. The destruction of the Jews of Europe was the central aim of his policy from the outset of his career: on 16 September 1919 he spoke of his 'unshakable demand for the removal of all Jews', and in the last sentence of his will on 29 April 1945 he called on his followers to 'offer unrelenting resistance to international Jewry, the worldwide poisoner of all nations'.

During the war Hitler repeatedly and publicly proclaimed the racial aspect of his 'programme' for world domination. For instance, on 24 February 1942 he stated: 'I prophesy that this war will not lead to the destruction of Aryan humanity but to the extermination of the Jews. Whatever the fight may bring or however long it may last, that will be its final result.' A month later, on 27 March, Goebbels noted: 'The prophecy which the Fuhrer made about them [the Jews] for having brought on a new world war is beginning to come true in a most terrible manner.'

Hitler's policy and conduct of the war were more and more influenced by his dogmatic racial ideas. This was at a time when the front urgently needed every armaments worker and every item of rolling stock. The military transport authorities and those of the Central Security Office, which was responsible for the final solution of the Jewish question, fought each other for priorities, only to be told that they were both equally necessary to the war effort' (Jackel, 1969). The 'final solution' was still pursued in the second half of the war, when the German troops were being driven back on all fronts by the superior force of the enemy coalition. It was almost as if the defeats of the *Wehrmacht* were to be counterbalanced by Hitler's racial 'victories'. Until October 1944 the Fuhrer and the SS steadily increased their efforts to exalt racial dogma above the demands of the political and military situation, in the hope of realising at least one of their overweening aims, namely, to destroy European Jewry as a prelude to the regeneration of Germany and Europe. This aim of National Socialism basically determined the course of events in the second half of the war; it constantly provoked the resistance of the conquered but undefeated peoples, and made the chances of peace more and more remote. It was expressed clearly in Himmler's notorious speech to SS Group Leaders at Poznan on 4 October 1943, in which he referred 'in all frankness. . . to a painful subject, namely, the extermination of the Jewish people'. This task, assigned to the SS and performed by it, Himmler described as 'a glorious page in your history, which never has been written and never can be'. Two days later, on 6 October 1943, Himmler gave another address to Reich leaders and Gauleiters at Poznan., which was not published until 1974 (in the edition of his speeches by Bradley F. Smith and Peterson). In that very restricted circle Himmler, as the 'true executive agent of the most intimate idea of Hitler and the Third Reich' (from the introduction by J. Fest), again addressed himself to the Jewish problem. What was said on that occasion by Himmler and within the SS 'was never anything but the direct execution of Hitler's express wishes or the consequence of his intentions' (Fest,). The SS thus embodied the regime's policy as Himmler repeated 'The

Jews must be stamped out' and continued:

'I ask you only to listen to what I say to you in this group, and never to speak about it. The question will be asked: 'What about women and children?' I did not consider myself entitled to exterminate the men, to kill them or have them killed, and then allow their children to grow up to revenge themselves on our own sons and grandsons. The painful decision had to be taken, to remove this people from the face of the earth. For the organisation that had to perform it, this task was the hardest we have ever faced. It has been performed, I believe I may say, without our men and our leaders suffering any harm of mind or spirit. . . That is all I wish to say about the Jewish question. You know how things stand, and you will keep the knowledge to yourselves. Much later, perhaps, it may be considered whether to tell the German people more about it. I believe it is best that we, all of us, have borne this for our people, have taken the responsibility upon us responsibility for a deed, not only an idea - and that we carry the secret to our graves.'

With this triumph of dogma over rational policy it can truly be said that 'the reality and irreality of National Socialism were given their most terrible expression in the extermination of the Jews' (Bracher, 1970).

The Euthanasia Programme

In addition reference should be made to the 'euthanasia' programme, which would more properly be called a programme for destroying life. In a decree of October 1939, backdated to the beginning of the war, Hitler instructed Bouhler, the head of his chancellery, and Brandt, his chief medical adviser, 'to confer authority on certain named doctors to perform mercy killing on invalids who are incurable so far as human judgement goes, after a critical examination of their condition'. This was an extension of the peacetime law 'For the Protection of Hereditary Health', and among the criteria determining the fate of victims was not only their medical state but also their racial origin and capacity for work. Despite elaborate concealment the measures became known to the German population in the form of rumours and aroused firm resistance on the part of the clergy, including Count von Galen, the Catholic Bishop of Munster, and Pastor von Bodelschwingh, director of the institutions of the Evangelical Home Mission at Bethel, Westphalia. As a result the programme was to a large extent abandoned at the end of 1941. This resistance to the euthanasia programme caused Hitler, with anger and resignation, to declare that the German people was not yet mature enough for the policy he had designed for it. Together with his reverses in the East, his vexation over this issue caused him to speak more and more frequently and angrily to the effect that if the Germans were not prepared to follow him to victory they must perish.