

Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims; Ideology, the Nazi State, and the Course of Expansion*, New York, W. W. Norton, 1973, pp. 352.

Hitler has been dead for almost twenty years, yet his evil genius continues to fascinate authors and readers—and publishers—if the stream of books dealing with his personality and deeds is any indication. One wonders whether there is still something new to say about this man. Apparently there is. Professor Rich's book is a good illustration. Inevitably much of the historical information contained in this book is rather well-known. But around the familiar events, Rich weaves an intelligent, often fascinating analysis. He shows, in effect, that Hitler's war was the inevitable sequence of a deliberate «ideological» grand design to secure for the Germanic nation the appropriate *Lebensraum* for the kind of majestic expansion and development such a superior nation deserved. The comparison to the expansion of the «Nordics of North America, who had ruthlessly pushed aside an inferior race to win for themselves soil and territory for the future» is quite striking. In Hitler's eyes, Germany's «manifest destiny» was to expand into the flatlands to the East. He justified this claim over the land inhabited by other people—who, incidentally, would be eliminated, not incorporated—on the basis of the cultural superiority of the Aryans on whose exceptional qualities «the past and future of human civilization depended exclusively». This assumption was, according to the author, not a mere propagandistic slogan but «the very rock on which the Nazi church was built». This dogmatic belief was the foundation to the entire superstructure of Hitler's ideological tenets, his conception of the role of the party and state, his domestic and foreign policies.

Hitler spent little time over the morality of his expansionist plans. Once he fixed in his own mind the cultural superiority of the «Aryan» race as the standard-bearer of civilization, any action designed to move civilization forward was sanctified by a higher morality. This was the inner sanctum of Hitler's new religion. Professor Rich documents this basic premise amply and convincingly.

Guided by this ideological dogma, Hitler spun the web of his policies. Ultimately he was caught up in this web. In fact, Rich's book is for the most part a perceptive review of the gradual disintegration of this grand design. His hope to strike a bargain with Britain did not materialize. His expectation that Bolshevik Russia «deprived of the old Germanic elite» would crumble proved wishful thinking. Ensnared in the demands of his own expansionist designs, he had to extend his dominion over areas he had not included in his original plans, from Norway to Greece, to North Africa. Eventually, Britain and the United States—the citadels of capitalism—joined forces with the Bolsheviks of Russia—in what to Hitler was a gigantic Jewish conspiracy—to destroy the master race. His intoxicating dream turned into a horrible nightmare.

Professor Rich has made excellent use of his vantage position as a member of the board of editors of the captured German documents stored at Whaddon Hall, Buckinghamshire in England. All those documents, which are of considerable interest to Balkan specialists, have since been returned to Bonn. His reliance on other collections of Nazi documents is also evident. But the book is far from a dry assembly of quotations. The raw material is identified in 46 pages of footnotes. The text itself flows smoothly. All in all, Professor Rich has given us a more complete exposition of what other authors had probed less thoroughly in the past.

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