

COPYRIGHT NOTICE:

**Götz Aly and Susanne Heim: Architects of Annihilation**

is published by Princeton University Press and copyrighted, © 2003, by Princeton University Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.

For COURSE PACK and other PERMISSIONS, refer to entry on previous page. For more information, send e-mail to [permissions@pupress.princeton.edu](mailto:permissions@pupress.princeton.edu)

## INTRODUCTION

The Third Reich lasted for just twelve years, and more than four times as many years have elapsed since its demise. Yet it continues to shape the world we live in. Its bloodless legacy is woven into the everyday fabric of modern German life, from the legal requirement to register with the local police, and the regulation of the market in agricultural produce, to the Volkswagen car. The designation 'special needs school' is a part of that legacy no less than the abolition of the old German script and the invention of mass tourism. The National Socialist state inaugurated a drive for modernization such as Germany had never seen: at the same time it evolved a machinery of destruction and extermination such as the world had never witnessed. The death of millions and the indescribable sufferings of millions more are the bloody legacy of those twelve brief years.

In recent years the modernizing forces unleashed by National Socialism have been attracting the attention of historians, who have examined the institutions and individuals behind this dynamic process. For the most part, however, historical analysis ends where Auschwitz begins. In this book we set out to uncover the connecting links between the politics of modernization and the politics of annihilation. We shall describe the relationship between the development of certain plans and the perpetration of specific acts in Germany during those years. Their purpose was to impose a new political, economic and social order on the German Reich, and ultimately on the entire European continent – and all within a very short space of time. This undertaking was predicated both on the war and on the taking-away of human rights and property.

Allied to the aggressive ideology of National Socialism, these plans were transmuted into political and military aggression, and increasingly radical projects followed at ever-decreasing intervals – projects

for a new European order, for a German Europe: 'lightning wars' (*Blitzkriege*), structural models, campaigns of annihilation, large-scale colonization plans, gas chambers. The year 1941 – when victory seemed at hand, and with it the intoxicating prospect of being able to 'reshape' anything and everything – was also the year in which the German leadership decided to murder millions of men, women and children.

A satisfactory explanation for this is not to be found in the individual personality of a Hitler, Himmler or Goebbels, nor in the hysterical fervour – incited and self-incited – of an entire nation. Nor can it be explained away in terms of the self-perpetuating machinery of exclusion and marginalization that operated in a highly compartmentalized way and with characteristically Teutonic efficiency.

All of these factors played a role, and without them the mass murders perpetrated by the Germans could not have taken place.<sup>1</sup> But behind all this lay certain conceptual models, designs for 'final solutions', which recommended – rarely explicitly, more often than not in sterile scientific jargon – the state-directed mass extermination of human beings as a functional necessity for a long-term programme of social modernization. This is the subject of the present book. In their intellectual abstraction these designs seem strangely at odds with the brutal reality of the death camps. And yet National Socialist Germany was not only possessed of an ideology that consigned to extermination all those who were classed as 'inferior': it had also elaborated detailed theories showing how entire social classes, minorities and peoples were to be 'restructured' and decimated. The ideology and the theory had to come together and intermesh in order to produce Hadamar, Chelmno, Leningrad, Stukenbrock, Treblinka and Auschwitz. And it is certain that with every year that National Socialist Germany continued to exist, millions more people would have been killed by various means – starved, deported, sent to the gas chambers or simply worked to death.

The executive dynamism of National Socialist Germany was generated by the interaction of three forces: the abandonment of moral restraint, the pursuit of a nationalistic and expansionist social utopia and the emergence of a modern technocracy. But it was not the case that some Germans severed all moral ties while others gave themselves up in a spirit of idealism to grand social designs and the pursuit of efficiency. Instead the three components define areas of common ground between the Nazi leadership and the advisory and executive intelligentsia. There is broad agreement on this and many other

findings of historical research. This research has not sought to play down the criminal nature of German policy at that time, nor has it relativized the murder of the European Jews. But it does help us to see National Socialism in its historical context – not so that we might safely forget the past, but rather that we might reconstruct it more fully.

Our own understanding, which is supported by our study of the source material, is at odds with received historical thinking. The broad consensus – albeit driven by a variety of motives – is that the murder of the European Jews defies all attempts to explain it in historical-rational terms. Hannah Arendt has underlined this very point: what makes the Holocaust unique, she argues, is not the number of victims as such, but the apparent failure of the murderers to consult their own advantage or interest. The documents adduced in evidence in the present book show this thesis to be untenable. As in the case of the mass murder of the mentally ill in Germany and the slaughter of the civilian populations in Poland, Serbia and the Soviet Union, it is possible to discern utilitarian goals behind the murder of the European Jews. Which in no way diminishes the horror of those murders.

Today Auschwitz is discussed in terms of a ‘totally irrational racial hatred’, of ‘annihilation for annihilation’s sake’, of the ‘self-perpetuating machinery’ of German bureaucracy, the ‘descent into barbarism’ and ‘the breakdown of civilization’. What is widely ignored or relativized is the fact that in the eyes of those who paved the way for the ‘final solution’ the policy of extermination implemented against other population groups, most notably in the Soviet Union and Poland, took its place alongside the murder of the European Jews as part of a grand strategy known as ‘negative population policy’.

Our analysis shows that arbitrary acts and self-perpetuating bureaucratic routine played only a minor role; that – on the contrary – the National Socialist leadership sought to maximize the input from scientific policy advisers and used their research findings as an important basis for their decisions – including the decisions to murder millions of human beings.

In the SD (‘Sicherheitsdienst’: security service) Heinrich Himmler not only had at his disposal a thoroughly unorthodox and highly qualified think-tank equipped with its own data bank, but he also appointed a special ‘inspector of statistics’, for example, whose chief task was to furnish him with empirical raw data on the social make-up of the SS and for the preparation of colonization plans in the East. In order to

decide the future fate of the Warsaw ghetto Hans Frank, the Governor-General of German-occupied Poland, commissioned a report from the Reich Board for Industrial Rationalization (RKW) and adopted its recommendations. Shortly before that the Reich Minister of Finance had personally ordered the Reich Audit Office to carry out a review of the economic viability of the Łódź ghetto, in order to put him in the picture and brief him ahead of further debate and discussion. The heads of the armed forces and government ministries commissioned over 1,600 secret reports from the Kiel Institute of World Economic Studies alone as an aid to planning the economic strategy of the war. Hermann Rauschning documents an early example of this kind of political consultancy in National Socialist Germany from 1934:

I reported to Hitler what I had seen of Koch's 'planning agency' [Koch was the Gauleiter of East Prussia]. A young academic, Professor von Grünberg, had devised all kinds of fantastical 'model landscapes' for the future. He had had maps drawn up at his institute, marked out with lines of communication, fields of force, lines of force, motorways, railway lines, canal projects. The whole of the East as far as the Black Sea, as far as the Caucasus, was divided up into meticulously planned economic zones. These maps showed Germany and western Russia as a single vast land mass with integrated economic and transport systems. The whole scheme was German-centred, of course – planned and run by Germany, for Germany. In this 'planned economy' Poland had ceased to exist, let alone Lithuania...<sup>2</sup>

The top leadership of the National Socialist state generally took decisions not simply as they saw fit, but on the basis of detailed memoranda. At the key conference which took place on 12 November 1938 Hermann Göring, for example, declared that he was 'not sufficiently versed' to assess the consequences of 'eliminating Jewish elements from the economy'. He asked for suggestions, found them 'excellent', had decrees drawn up, put them into force. Over a hundred people attended the conference. The vast majority of them were either members of Göring's staff, highly experienced in administrative and economic matters, or representatives of an intelligentsia that advised across the whole range of policy issues – the latter all too easily overshadowed in discussions of National Socialist crimes by the leading lights of the Nazi regime, who appear in contemporary and later accounts as all-powerful, larger-than-life presences.

In his book *Behemoth*<sup>3</sup> the jurist and political scientist Franz Neumann identifies industry, bureaucracy, the Party and the military as the four pillars of the Nazi regime. One reason why these pillars were able to support the increasingly elephantine imperial structure of the German state for so long was that they were tied together and shored up by this network of scientific advisers. The advisers to the men in power sat on a variety of differently constituted and changing committees, made up of ministerial undersecretaries, senior ministry officials and experts of every shade and technical persuasion. Later these men would actually boast of their role as 'crisis managers in the Third Reich'.<sup>4</sup>

In this book we describe the work of these economic experts and professional administrators – the regional planners, statisticians and agronomists, the labour deployment specialists and demographers. We endeavour to analyse their influence on key policy decisions taken in 1940 and 1941. We are looking for evidence of specific responsibility, of the part played by these men in planning and pushing through the murder of millions of people.

Initially many of these experts were distinctly cool towards the new regime, and did not join the NSDAP until well after 1933, if at all. Those who joined did so in order to further their careers, but also because they realized that as Party members they would be better placed to shape and influence government policy. Very different from the ideologists of the 'years of struggle' whom they largely came to supplant, these men advanced slowly at first, but with increasing rapidity after 1938, into the nerve centres of political decision-making; and month by month they acquired growing power as planners to decide the fate of thousands, and ultimately many millions, of their fellow human beings. Up until the end of 1941 their influence grew with each new stage in Germany's expansion. Each time they were less constrained in the way they formulated their proposals and options: each time they could afford to take less account of conflicting social realities in the German Reich and in the occupied territories. Compromise was looked upon as a mark of intellectual laziness, while patently criminal acts were spuriously dignified as historical necessity, 'the price one pays for progress'. SS officers, civil servants, junior academics, business leaders and engineers: they were all impressed by the newly conquered 'expanses' and by their seemingly infinite possibilities, just as they were by the scale of the task that confronted them, and by the opportunity to implement their ambitious plans without any bureaucratic obstacles to speak of.

These young, career-minded technocrats and academics, whose plans and ideas are the focus of the present study, regarded Europe – densely populated and shaped by the complex vagaries of history, full of differences and contrasts – as a drawing-board on which to work out their grand designs. For them eastern Europe was one vast wasteland crying out for ‘readjustment’ and ‘reconstruction’. They wanted to rationalize production methods, standardize products, introduce an international division of labour, modernize and simplify social structures, reduce the number of ‘unproductive’ people to an absolute minimum. The ultimate aim was to harness large tracts of Europe to the interests of the German economy and the German striving for hegemony. The architects of this policy looked to the new, scientifically based concept of ‘demographic economics’ (*Bevölkerungsökonomie*) to help them attain their goals as cheaply and quickly as possible. The size and qualitative composition of the population were to be continuously monitored and regulated through government programmes of birth control (and birth promotion), resettlement and extermination.

In the course of the war, as supplies of food, raw materials and capital steadily dwindled, ‘human resources’ soon became the only economic factor that these planners still had the power to manipulate. As they saw it, the German Reich in 1941 was short of one to two million workers, while at the same time there were 30 to 50 million ‘useless mouths to feed’ in Europe – people whose labour was not being exploited, and could not be exploited without far-reaching changes in social policy. So the architects of the new order set to work on a grand design for ‘adjusting’ the ratio between productive and unproductive population groups, between those who worked and those who allegedly worked too little or not at all. In the eyes of these German intellectuals, eastern and south-east Europe lacked a middle class that would guarantee stable social conditions and promote the development of an internal market. At the same time – measured by these standards – these regions suffered from ‘overpopulation’, with umpteen millions too many people living on the land: poor people, eking out a modest existence and devoid of economic aspirations. They stood in the way of plans to develop a modern economy on the German model, and they had to be removed before any useful gains could be extracted from those who remained. So ‘resettlement’, ‘labour redeployment’ and ‘evacuation’ became the chief policy instruments of the German new order.

Economic disadvantaging, starvation and murder – initially of

minorities, later of entire peoples – were programmed in from the very beginning by the engineers of this brave new National Socialist Europe in order to create advantages for the majority, especially the German majority, or at least to guarantee the preservation of the social status quo. This is instanced by the fact that the older generation living today report that they only suffered serious food shortages in Germany after the war, following the collapse of the state that had hitherto ‘solved’ the problems of food, clothing and housing with the aid of mass expropriation, wars of aggression and gas chambers.

When it came to constructing this new social hierarchy, which meant deportation and death for millions of people, the strategic intentions of the planning elite found a ready accommodation with the racist ideology of the National Socialist regime. Heinrich Himmler formulated this murderous design with brutal frankness: ‘The only way to solve the social problem is for one lot to kill the others and take their land.’<sup>5</sup>

We have subdivided the historical material of this book into three phases, the first beginning in 1938, the year in which Austria and the Sudetenland were annexed. We show how from that point onwards, and in close conjunction with the continuing process of territorial expansion, anti-Semitism became an integral part of the plan to establish a ‘new order’, finding expression in a policy of systematic ‘Entjudung’ – the ‘elimination of Jewish elements’. This was followed in the second phase by the war against Poland, which left that country completely crushed and devastated. We describe the German projects designed to bring about the complete transformation of Poland’s demographic and economic structure. The planning experts used the occupied country – comprising the ‘annexed eastern territories’ and the ‘Government General’ – as a testing ground for their ideas. Here the ‘Jewish question’ presented itself to them for the first time ‘as a population policy problem on a massive scale’, which could not be ‘solved’ with the hitherto customary instruments of terror, expropriation and enforced emigration. What is significant here is how the respective planning staffs of the SS and the civil administrations agreed on a common strategy. From this it is easy to see how the constructive desire of the German planners to build a better future was the very thing that led ultimately to genocide.

For the third phase we look at the situation as it appeared in 1941. In occupied Poland there was growing conflict between German colonization policy on the one hand and plans for economic

development on the other. The war of conquest in south-east Europe was designed to create the military conditions for the creation of a European economic community under Nazi auspices. But here too, according to German economists, 'overpopulation' was hindering the development of a new economic order, and many millions of people were viewed as 'unproductive' and 'surplus to need'. Similarly the plans for the military conquest and colonization of the Soviet Union envisaged a 'reduction' in the population – by whatever means. To this was added the prospect of food shortages, which threatened to undermine morale on the home front. In order to maintain food supplies to population groups who were not categorized as 'inferior', 30 million Soviet men, women and children were to be starved. These plans did not exist in isolation. They were part of the context in which the decision was taken, in the summer of 1941, to proceed with the 'final solution of the Jewish question'. Additional encouragement for that decision came from the reports of German economic experts who concluded that no further gains could be extracted from the dispossessed and starving people in the ghettos. To keep them alive, even under a harsh regime of forced labour, was therefore an unprofitable exercise.

In reconstructing events we need to look also at the biographies of the scientists and academics and senior ministry officials who were involved in framing these plans. Through the careers and personal connections of specific individuals we can see how ideas and suggestions percolated upwards through the hierarchy, and how open and permeable the National Socialist state was in this regard. Furthermore, a knowledge of biographical details and an understanding of middle-ranking institutional structures have an important part to play in the search for new documents and the reconstruction of decision-making processes. Many decisions taken in the key organizations were purely verbal understandings, actioned by word of mouth and never written down. In many areas of the National Socialist ruling apparatus the most important written records were either burned immediately ('Top secret – read and destroy!') or consigned to the flames in the final months of the war. This is what happened in most of the main departments of the SS and in Göring's apparatus; the same applies to the reports sent by the security police from the Government General, Heydrich's memorandum on the 'final solution of the Jewish question' and many other documents besides. It is indicative – and one of the specific difficulties of a study such as this – that any mention of the systematic policy of

mass murder was evidently taboo even in the secret reports drawn up by the security service.<sup>6</sup>

Biographical details are also important in that they focus attention on the members of an intelligentsia that has gone largely unmentioned, not least because the post-war Federal Republic 'relied heavily during the reconstruction period on the old administrative elites who had previously served the NS regime'.<sup>7</sup> After 1945 the members of this intelligentsia obviously had a vested interest in portraying National Socialism as a period in German political life when their efforts to influence events were repeatedly frustrated by 'the nightmare of madness and tyranny'.

Our theme, by contrast, is the nightmare of a designing rationalism in the service of practical policy-making, which inherently tends towards the abandonment of moral restraint, and as such found in National Socialism its ideal conditions.