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Marxism and the Holocaust**

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Nothing challenges Marxism more directly than the Holocaust. [1] As at once heir and critic of the Enlightenment, Marx sought to expose the social limits of its aspiration to universal emancipation through the power of reason by tracing the material roots of its ideals to what he called the “hidden abode” of production. At the same time, he radicalized these ideals into the ethical and political drive to rid the world of all forms of exploitation and oppression – what as a young man he proclaimed to be “the *categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions* in which man is a debased, enslaved, neglected and contemptible being.” [2] The Holocaust is – for good reasons I need not rehearse here – generally held to be the most extreme case of human evil. All the different kinds of domination fused together in Auschwitz – racism, directed at Jews, Slavs, and Roma; the economic exploitation of slave labour; the oppression of gays and women; the persecution of dissenting minorities such as Communists and Jehovah’s Witnesses. No human phenomenon can put a stronger demand on the explanatory powers of Marxism. Indeed, it might be reasonable to doubt

whether any social theory can throw light into the darkness of Auschwitz.

Explanation and Silence

Some of course think that it is wrong even to try. For the Auschwitz survivor and Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel, the Holocaust “negates all answers,” “lies outside, if not beyond, history,” “defies both knowledge and description,” is “never to be comprehended or transmitted.” [3] Similarly any attempt to compare the Holocaust with other atrocities is denounced. Thus, according to Deborah Lipstadt, casting doubt on the uniqueness of the Holocaust is “far more insidious than outright denial. It nurtures and is nurtured by Holocaust-denial.” [4]

This attitude seems to me profoundly mistaken. It should be obvious that any serious attempt to demonstrate the uniqueness of the Holocaust can only proceed by, if only implicitly, drawing comparisons between the Nazi genocide and other cases of mass murder. [5] Often the refusal to compare conceals less a religious respect for the victims than more mundane ideological and political motives. Thus in 1982 the Israeli government persuaded Wiesel and other prominent American Jews to withdraw from a major international academic conference in Tel Aviv because a session on the Armenian genocide of 1915 would embarrass that good ally of Israel and the United States, the Turkish state. [6]

More fundamentally, the point of Holocaust commemoration is surely not only to acknowledge the suffering of the victims but also to help sustain a political consciousness that is on guard against any signs of the repetition of Nazi crimes. But any informed judgement of the probability of such a repetition depends on an understanding of the forces that produced it in the first place. The slogan of the Anti-Nazi League – “NEVER

AGAIN!” – is meaningless unless we have some idea of the nature of what we want to stop happening again.

W.G. Runciman has drawn a useful distinction between the explanation and the description of a social event. The first seeks to identify the causal mechanism(s) responsible for that event; the second, by contrast, seeks “to understand ... what it was like for the agent to do” the actions in question – to reconstruct the experiences of the participants. [7] Describing the Holocaust in this sense – showing what it was like to be a victim, or indeed a perpetrator or a bystander – is perhaps best left to autobiography of different kinds and to art (though there is, of course, a major debate over the ways in which it is appropriate to represent it). [8]

That social theory can help to explain how Auschwitz was possible is shown by a few distinguished works, perhaps most notably Zygmunt Bauman’s **Modernity and the Holocaust**. But it must be said that the direct contribution that Marxism has made to this body of work is very limited. On the whole the Holocaust has been cited in Marxist writing as the most extreme case of the general evils of modern capitalist society. The Belgian Trotskyist Ernest Mandel (who as a young Resistance activist barely escaped consignment to Auschwitz himself) can be taken as representative of the classical Marxist tradition. Norman Geras, in an important critical essay to which I shall return, characterizes Mandel’s position thus: “According to him, the destruction of the Jews of Europe is *rationaly explicable* as the *product of imperialist capitalism*, and as such it is manifestly *comparable* to the other barbarisms which this socio-economic formation.” [9]

Thus Mandel argues that “the *germ* of the Holocaust is to be found in colonialism’s and imperialism’s extreme racism,” interacting in the context of total war with “the peculiar – and increasingly destructive – suicidal combination of ‘perfect’ local rationality and extreme global irrationality which characterizes international capitalism.” [10] As Geras observes, “Mandel offers

precisely little sense, and certainly no attempt at an elaboration, of the singularity or specificity of the Shoah.” [11] But it is important to see that a similar lack of specificity is characteristic of less orthodox Marxists than Mandel.

Thus in **Dialectic of Enlightenment** Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno devote a famous essay to *Elements of Anti-Semitism* which essentially treats Nazi ideology and the murder of the Jews as an exemplification of the general tendency towards rationalization that they claim is characteristic of modernity: nature, repressed and dominated within the framework of the “totally administered society,” returns in a barbarous and irrational form. The Holocaust is thereby reduced to a symptom of a more universal disorder. [12] In **Age of Extremes**, a much more recent and widely praised Marxist narrative of the “Short Twentieth Century” (1914 – 90), Eric Hobsbawm similarly treats the extermination of the Jews as merely the best-known case of the epoch’s slide into barbarity: his discussion of the impact of fascism focuses on the Popular Fronts initiated in response by the Communist Parties rather than on the atrocities perpetrated by National Socialism. [13]

This lack of focus on the Holocaust itself as a specific phenomenon is, of course, far from peculiar to Marxism. The paradoxical tendency for the extermination of the Jews to become a more intense preoccupation the further its actual occurrence recedes into the past is a striking feature of Western culture at the end of the 20th century that has recently itself become an object of historical interpretation and controversy. But if this preoccupation requires explanation, so too does the comparative silence on the Holocaust in the first decades after the war, when memories of the horrors inflicted by the Nazis were still fresh. Enzo Traverso, who has, like Norman Geras, made an important contribution to developing a distinctively Marxist response to the Holocaust over the past few years, argues that, on the left at least, this silence reflected the renewed hold of Enlightenment optimism:

The defeat of Nazism, the Red Army's advance into Central Europe and the impressive growth of Communist parties in countries where they had played a leading role in the Resistance all encouraged a return in the immediate postwar period to a philosophy of progress. This left little room for thinking through the catastrophe. Marxism was thus characterized by its *silence* on the subject of Auschwitz. [14]

This seems to me, as a general explanation, quite wrong. Peter Novick in his outstanding study of representations of the Holocaust in the United States argues that both during and immediately after the Second World War the extermination of the Jews was conceived not as a singular event but rather in “universalist” terms, as no doubt the worst of the Nazis’ crimes but not one that could be distinguished from the atrocities perpetrated against gentiles. [15] To drop briefly into the autobiographical mode, I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s in a social environment from which Jews were almost completely absent, but where knowledge of the Nazis crimes was shared by adults personally acquainted with them – my father lived in Greece under the German occupation, while my best friend’s parents had experienced both Nazi and Stalinist rule in their native Poland. Remembering how we talked and what we read about the war, my dominant impression is that of a *continuity of atrocity* – awareness of Auschwitz was part of a broader sense of the horrors inflicted by the Nazis on Jew and gentile alike.

It is at the very least open to argument that whether more “particularist” preoccupation with the Holocaust as a specifically Jewish experience that has gained strength in recent decades necessarily constitutes a more profound understanding of the Nazi genocide. Both Novick and (in a much more problematic way) Norman Finkelstein have documented the mundane geopolitical and even economic interests that have invested the proliferating discourse on the Holocaust. [16] This is not to say that Traverso is wrong to indict Marxism for its failure to confront the Holocaust in its specificity. But the explanation may lie elsewhere than in the evolutionary and determinist optimism

that he holds responsible. Tim Mason, perhaps the greatest Marxist historian of the Third Reich, confessed:

I have always remained emotionally, and thus intellectually, paralysed in front of what the Nazis did and what their victims suffered. The enormity of these actions and these sufferings both imperatively demanded description and analysis, and at the same time totally defied them. I could neither face the facts of genocide, nor walk away from them and study a less demanding subject. I find it almost impossible to read the sources, or the studies and testimonies which have been written on the subject. I know that many other historians of Nazism have had a similar experience. [17]

This kind of paralysis of imagination before the Holocaust may have more than personal roots. Mason was a leading figure in the school of “history from below” that emerged under the inspiration of Edward Thompson, Christopher Hill, and others in the 1960s and 1970s. This intellectual current sought to recover the episodes of resistance hidden from (or perhaps better by) more conventional versions of historiography. Mason’s own work constituted a particularly remarkable case of such restitution as he reconstructed the forms taken by working-class struggle under the Hitler regime. It is not hard to see how a historical intelligence preoccupied with the capacity of the exploited to assert their interests even in the most unfavourable conditions might have found it hard to contemplate the comprehensive eradication of all hope in the death camps.

Facing Evil

The lacuna whose presence Mason retrospectively acknowledged in his own major writings – “[t]he absence of biological politics and genocide” – has certainly been removed in the contemporary historiography of National Socialism. [18] Raul Hilberg’s great pioneering work **The Destruction of the**

European Jews no longer stands alone: a host of excellent studies, increasingly contributed by German historians, have greatly enhanced our understanding of the nature and driving forces of the Holocaust. [\[19\]](#)

But can Marxism contribute anything to this understanding? Norman Geras and Enzo Traverso in their writings on the Holocaust both take as their main intellectual and political reference points the classical Marxist tradition of Marx and Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, Luxemburg and Gramsci. But they argue, from different theoretical perspectives, that this tradition, at least as presently constituted, is of little help in making sense of the Holocaust. I share with them this same tradition, but disagree with the conclusion they both draw. To bring out why I think Marxism can help illuminate even the Nazi genocide, it may be helpful to consider the reasons that Geras gives for holding Marxism wanting. (I return to Traverso below.)

Geras, as we have seen, believes that the kind of historical contextualization practised by Mandel, which explains the Holocaust in terms of more general features of capitalism such as racism, colonialism, and instrumental rationality fails to capture what is specific to the murder of the Jews. Such analyses slide over a crucial feature of the perpetrators' motivations that Geras argues was well captured by Trotsky, writing decades earlier, when he described the pogroms perpetrated by the Tsarist Black Hundreds in reaction to the Russian Revolution of 1905. Geras has in mind in particular this truly striking passage:

Everything is allowed him [the member of the anti-Semitic gang], he is capable of anything, he is the master of property and honour, of life and death. If he wants to, he can throw an old woman out of a third-floor window together with a grand piano, he can smash a chair against a baby's head, rape a small girl while the entire crowd moves on, hammer a nail ... He exterminates whole families, he pours petrol over a house, transforms it into a mass of flames, and if anyone dares to escape, he finishes him off with a cudgel ... There exist no tortures, figments of a feverish brain maddened by

alcohol and fury, at which he need ever stop. He is capable of anything, he dares everything. [20]

This experience of the barbarous impulses unleashed by counterrevolution made it possible, Geras argues, for Trotsky thirty years later to anticipate the Holocaust, predicting in December 1938 that “the next development of world reaction signifies with certainty the *physical extermination of the Jews.*” [21]

Already long before 1938 Trotsky had seen into the depths. He had seen the spirit of limitless excess, the exaltation people can feel in exercising a merciless power over others and the “total-ness” there can be in a humiliation – both the horror and the joy that is taken in inflicting it, lethal couple in what is already an annihilation. He had seen also one of the most terrifying faces of human freedom, self-consciously turned against its other, better faces. In all of this he had seen part of what would subsequently be in the Shoah, including the element of an irreducible choice. The preconditions and the surrounding context of this kind of choice can and always must be explored and described. But it remains in the end what it is: underdetermined, a choice. [22]

Though this was the insight of what he calls a “powerful and creative Marxist intellect,” for Geras it goes beyond the limits of a conventional Marxism, preoccupied as that is with precisely the “preconditions and surrounding context” to which the will to destroy revealed in both the Tsarist pogroms and the Holocaust itself cannot be reduced. It highlights that aspect of the Holocaust that he believes tends to get neglected in interpretations such as Baumann’s that stress the role played characteristic structures of modernity – for example, the bureaucratic division of labour and the large-scale use of technology – in allowing many perpetrators to distance themselves emotionally as well as physically from the crimes they were helping to commit. Geras argues that such analyses fail to give proper weight to “the cruel desires and sense of an unusual elation, ...the emotional charge produced – and maybe required – by the assault upon the innocent” evident in many

descriptions of Nazi atrocities. “There is something here that is not about modernity; something that is not about capitalism. It is about humanity.” [23]

As this last sentence implies, Geras’s argument rests ultimately on a certain view of human nature. Elsewhere he makes this assumption explicit, contending that a capacity for evil is an intrinsic feature of human nature co-existing with more benign traits, and that socialist theory and practice must take proper account of this potential. [24] The intuition expressed in the passage from Trotsky that Geras cites is indeed one that any proper understanding of mass murder must accommodate. A remarkably similar analysis of the psychological mechanism described here by Trotsky was recently offered from the perspective of an idiosyncratically Lacanian Marxism by Slavoj Žižek:

although, on the surface, the totalitarian Master ... imposes severe orders, compelling us to renounce our pleasures and to sacrifice ourselves to some higher Duty, his actual injunction, discernible beneath the lines of his explicit words, is exactly the opposite – the call to unconstrained and unrestrained *transgression*. Far from imposing on us a firm set of standards to be obeyed unconditionally, the totalitarian Master that suspends (moral) punishment – that is to say, his secret injunction is *You may!*: the prohibitions that seem to regulate social life and guarantee a minimum of decency are ultimately worthless, just a device to keep the common people at bay, while you are allowed to kill, rape and plunder the Enemy, let yourself go and excessively enjoy, violate ordinary moral prohibitions ... *in so far* as you follow Me! [25]

So a real insight is present here. It is, however, only a partial one. On its own it suffers from the same lack of specificity for which Geras takes to task Mandel’s interpretation of the Holocaust. Simply to invoke a human capacity for evil, the perverse liberation we can enjoy through the unrestrained infliction of suffering on the Other, in order to explain the extermination of the Jews fails to connect with the fact that this episode – ghastly beyond imagining though it was – was

precisely that, a historical episode limited in time and space. On its own this idea recalls one of my favourite Woody Allen characters, Frederick, the melancholic artist played by Max von Sydow in *Hannah and Her Sisters*, who dismisses as idiotic all the agonizing over why the Holocaust happened, since the real question is why it doesn't happen all the time.

Formally Geras can accommodate this objection: his aim, as he makes clear, is to offer a corrective to other, more social explanations invoking capitalism and modernity. But filling the picture in can't be just be a matter of adding the kind of list of material, social, and ideological preconditions of the Holocaust that Mandel, for example, sets out. Thinking that it can would imply conceiving the role of the social context merely as providing the precipitant that releases the destructive impulses lurking beneath the surface. The context would then be the form filled by the urge to transgress. But the relationship between social and psychological mechanisms is much more complex and dynamic than is suggested by these metaphors. In the case of the Holocaust, the key mediating element is provided by the nature of National Socialism itself. [26]

Revolution and Counter-Revolution

Here we must come to terms with one of the greatest achievements of classical Marxism, Trotsky's analysis of fascism, developed in the early 1930s as the Nazis made their play for power. Remarkably, both Geras and Traverso, despite the great respect they accord Trotsky, effectively deny the relevance of this analysis to an understanding of the Holocaust. Thus Traverso writes: "The Jewish genocide cannot be understood in depth as a function of the class interests of big German capital – this is, in truth, the interpretive criterion 'in the final analysis' of all Marxist theories of fascism – it can only be caricatured." [27]

But this criticism effectively caricatures Trotsky's theory. The idea that Nazism – and fascism more generally – was the instrument of big capital was indeed an incontestable dogma of the Communist International under Stalin. The thought was expressed in more or less crude ways – for example, by John Strachey when he called fascism “one of the methods which may be adopted by the capitalist class when the threat of the working class to the stability of monopoly capitalism becomes acute,” and by Georgi Dimitrov, offering the official Comintern definition of fascism as “*the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital.*” [28] The same idea was visually dramatized in John Heartfield's famous photomontage “The Real Meaning of the Hitler Salute,” where capitalist gold is seen pouring into the Führer's outstretched hand. [29]

Particularly when focused on the rise of National Socialism Trotsky's analysis avoids such crude portrayals of Hitler as a mere puppet of big capital. Its originality lies in Trotsky's appraisal of Nazism as a mass movement, which can be brought out by considering two contrasting historical interpretations of National Socialism. One of the most distinguished recent attempts to arrive at a totalizing understanding of the Holocaust is Arno Mayer's **Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?** Mayer's argument, summed up by the title of the German translation of his book – **Der Krieg als Kreuzzug (The War as Crusade)** – rests on a comparison between what he calls the “Judeocide” and the widespread massacres of Jews that accompanied the First Crusade at the end of the 11th century. He contends that Operation Barbarossa – Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 – was a modern anti-Bolshevik crusade supported by the upper classes of continental Europe desperate to eradicate the Red menace.

In an earlier study Mayer had argued that the *ancien régime* in its essential features – the social and political dominance of landed elites – survived until 1914. [30] What he calls “the

General Crisis and Thirty Years War of the twentieth century” – the epoch of catastrophe between 1914 and 1945 – represented the crisis of the *ancien régime*. Its main characteristic was the counter-revolutionary resistance of the old elites to the threat represented to their privileges by the Russian Revolution and the international Communist movement it inspired. Even National Socialism was an expression of this impulse. “While he [Hitler] drummed up mass support for Nazism among those in the middle orders of German society who were, or felt themselves victims of modernization, he found his essential collaborators among members of the old elites who were moved less by political faith than by material and personal interest.” This pattern, set by the time Hitler seized power, was also operative during Barbarossa: “the Nazis loudly proclaimed that the war against Soviet Russia was a *Glaubenskrieg* [war of faiths] against ‘Judeobolshevism,’ which initially earned them considerable sympathy and support among conservatives, reactionaries, and fascists throughout the Continent.” It was the failure of this enterprise that prompted Hitler and his henchmen to vent their rage and despair on the Jews by unleashing the Holocaust: “the escalation and systematization of the assault on the Jews was an expression, not of soaring hubris on the eve of victory, but of bewilderment and fear in the face of possible defeat. Indeed, the decision to exterminate the Jews marked the incipient debacle of the Nazi Behemoth, not its imminent triumph.” [\[31\]](#)

This last thesis – that the “Judeocide” was a by-product of Nazi plans for the conquest of the East going awry – has provoked considerable criticism from other historians of the Holocaust. [\[32\]](#) Mayer’s overall interpretation of National Socialism has nevertheless the undoubted merit of underlining the complicity of traditional German elites, not merely – as is well known – in Hitler’s attaining the Chancellorship, but also in his regime’s later crimes. Thus it was the Army High Command that drafted the so-called “Commissar Order” of 6 June 1941,

which decreed that in the interests of “[t]he struggle against Bolshevism,” Soviet political commissars were to summarily shot. [33] This order provided the authority for the massacres carried out by the SS *Einsatzgruppen* after the invasion of the USSR. The image of a “good” *Wehrmacht* that, on the whole, kept its hands clean has not survived historians’ scrutiny. In Serbia, for example, it was the *Wehrmacht* that murdered all adult male Jews and Roma. [34]

The formative as well destructive power of counter-revolution occupies the centre of Mayer’s historical imagination. [35] But, whatever we may think of this as an interpretation of modern European history, it leads him into a much too undifferentiated view of National Socialism. In particular, he underestimates the conflicts dividing the Nazis from the dominant class. To cite merely the most obvious example: some of the proudest names of the German aristocracy – among them Bismarck, Metternich, and Moltke – were implicated in the plot to assassinate Hitler on July 20 1944; the savage revenge subsequently taken by the SS cut a swathe through the upper echelons of the Prussian military. [36] In his history of the resistance to Hitler, Joachim Fest argues that it is a misunderstanding of “the real nature of the Nazi revolution” to think that “National Socialism was essentially a conservative movement. In reality it was egalitarian and destructive of traditional structures.” [37] Though Fest writes for the conservative **Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung** his view of Nazism can claim support from studies of everyday life produced by historians at the opposite end of the political spectrum that highlight the extent to which modernizing processes already under way in the *Kaiserreich* and the Weimar Republic continued, and sometimes accelerated under Hitler. [38]

Revolution and counter-revolution – these contrasting images of National Socialism by the conservative journalist Fest and the “leftdissident historian” Mayer – sum up the difficulties in grasping the nature of this regime and therefore the sources of its

crimes. [39] Both interpretations can cite historical evidence in their support, but neither seems really satisfactory. It is here that Trotsky's analysis is of help. One might summarize his view as follows: National Socialism as the most developed form of fascism is *counter-revolution in the guise of revolution*. [40] It is counter-revolutionary inasmuch as in taking power it seeks to eradicate the organized working class – “razing to their foundations all the institutions of proletarian democracy,” political parties, trade unions, and other more informal associations. [41] It was his recognition of the mortal threat that Nazism represented to the German workers' movement that gives Trotsky's writings of the early 1930s their urgency and their prophetic power as he pressed, in vain, for a united front of the left against Hitler. As Nicos Poulantzas notes, he was “almost alone in predicting, in an astonishing fashion, the unfolding of the process in Germany.” [42]

But it was his understanding of the nature of the threat that constituted Trotsky's most important insight. The aim of destroying the organized working class was one of the points of convergence between the Nazis and many leading industrialists, bankers, generals, and landowners. Yet the Nazis as a mass movement represented a far more effective means of carrying out this task than the conventional forces of the state:

At the moment that the “normal” police and military resources of the bourgeois dictatorship, together with their parliamentary screens, no longer suffice to hold society in a state of equilibrium, the turn of the fascist regime arrives. Through the fascist agency, capitalism sets in motion the masses of crazed petty bourgeoisie, and bands of the declassed and demoralized lumpenproletariat; all the countless human beings whom finance capital itself has brought to desperation and frenzy. From fascism the bourgeoisie demands a thorough job ... And the fascist agency, by utilizing the petty bourgeoisie as a battering ram, by overwhelming all obstacles in its path, does a thorough job. [43]

This was the historic contribution of National Socialism. It fused into a movement the petty bourgeoisie – small businessmen,

white-collar employees, and peasants – traumatized by world war, revolution, inflation, and world depression:

While the Nazis acted as a party and not as a state power, they did not quite find an approach to the working class. On the other side, the big bourgeoisie, even those who supported Hitler with money, did not consider his party theirs. The national “renaissance” leaned wholly upon the middle classes, the most backward part of the nation, the heavy ballast of history. Political art consisted in fusing the petty bourgeoisie into oneness through its common hostility to the proletariat. What must be done in order to improve things? First of all, throttle those who are underneath. Impotent before big capital, the petty bourgeoisie hopes in the future to regain its social dignity through the ruin of the workers. [44]

Trotsky’s analysis of the class basis of National Socialism, which portrays it as the mass movement of those caught between big capital and organized labour, is supported by recent historic research. [45] Yet if the social meaning of Nazism was to direct the negative energies released by Mayer’s “general crisis of the 20th century” onto the workers’ movement, it was only able to do so by means of a powerful pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric. This involved what Daniel Guerin called “demagogic *anti-capitalism*.” [46] Nazi ideology was anti-capitalist in the restricted sense of holding “Jewish finance capital” responsible for all the ills of German society. Counterposed to Weimar realities was the Utopia of the *Volksgemeinschaft* – of a racially pure national community where German capital and labour were reconciled and the small producer finally in the saddle. Here we see the centrality of racism to National Socialism. Their supposedly common biological “race” united Germans of all classes against the alien Jews and against other inferior races, especially the Slavs, with whom, according to Hitler’s Social Darwinism, Germans were in competition for territory and resources in the East. [47]

This racist, pseudo-revolutionary ideology provided the cement of National Socialism as a mass movement. Trotsky noted that the plebeian, anti-capitalist character of Nazi ideology

made using Hitler risky for the German ruling class: “this method has its dangers. While it makes use of fascism, the bourgeoisie nevertheless fears it.” Elsewhere he wrote: “The political mobilization of the petty bourgeoisie against the proletariat ... is inconceivable without that social demagoguery which means playing with fire for the big bourgeoisie.” But, though thus sensitive to the conflicts between the Nazis and the ruling class, Trotsky assumed these would tend to be overcome once the former took power, when the specificity of fascism as a distinctive type of mass movement would progressively disappear: “as the Italian example shows, fascism leads in the end to a military-bureaucratic dictatorship of the Bonapartist type.” This implies a significant difference between Nazism out of and in power:

German fascism, like Italian fascism, raised itself to power on the backs of the petty bourgeoisie, which it turned into a battering ram against the organizations of the working class and the institutions of democracy. But fascism in power is least of all the rule of the petty bourgeoisie. On the contrary, it is the most ruthless dictatorship of monopoly capital. [48]

But, far from finishing up as a military dictatorship, the Nazi regime massacred the generals after the July 1944 plot. Poulantzas, criticizing Trotsky among others for having failed to grasp the specificity of fascism as a variant of the “exceptional” form of the capitalist state, argued that a stabilized fascist regime was characterized by the dominance within the state apparatus of the political police. [49] Certainly this corresponds well to the final phase of the Nazi regime, in which the SS and its police arm, the RSHA (Reich Main Security Office), acquired ever greater prominence, a process symbolized by Himmler’s appointment on 20 July 1944 to command the reserve army, in what Fest calls “a well-calculated gesture of contempt” on Hitler’s part towards the officer corps. [50] But while Poulantzas’ criticisms of Trotsky seems to me correct here, his general approach – stressing as it does the idea of the “relative

autonomy of the state” – does not capture the complexity of the relationship between National Socialism and German capital.

This is best characterized as a *conflictual partnership*. [51] It was based on a limited convergence of interests between the Nazis and sections of German capital (particularly those associated with heavy industry) who shared common objectives, notably the destruction of the organized working class and an imperial program of expansion into the East. Even before the onset of the Great Depression, the leaders of heavy industry were in revolt against the Weimar republic, denouncing it as a “trade union state” whose commitment to social welfare and institutionalized collective bargaining imposed excessively high costs on German capitalism: in this respect the iron-and-steel lock-out of November 1928 marked a turning point. [52] From the fall of the Grand Coalition in March 1930 onwards, the industrialists’ intransigence against the background of a spectacularly deteriorating economic situation helped to doom liberal democracy in Germany. Ian Kershaw writes:

During the Depression, democracy was less surrendered than deliberately undermined by elite groups serving their own ends. These were no pre-industrial leftovers, but – however reactionary their political aims – modern lobbies working to further their vested interests in an authoritarian system. In the final drama, the agrarians and the army were more influential than big business in engineering Hitler’s takeover. But big business also, politically myopic and self-serving, had significantly contributed to the undermining of democracy that was the necessary prelude to Hitler’s success. [53]

The relationship between big business and the Nazis after Hitler’s accession to the Chancellorship was riddled with tensions. The conservatives’ hopes of incorporating the Nazis as junior partners were soon dashed. Hitler and his followers used the reign of terror they launched against the organized working class both to demonstrate their usefulness to those who had brought them to power and also to conquer exclusive control of

the state (with the exception of the *Reichswehr*). To quote Kershaw once again:

Only Hitler, and the huge – if potentially unstable – mass movement he headed, could ensure control of the streets and bring about the “destruction of Marxism,” the basis of the desired counter-revolution. Yet precisely this dependence on Hitler and eagerness to back the most ruthless measures adopted in the early weeks and months of the new regime guaranteed that the weakness of the traditional elite groups would be laid bare in the years to come as the intended counter-revolution gave way to the Nazi racial revolution in Europe and opened the path to world conflagration and genocide. [54]

The Night of Long Knives (30 June 1934) assuaged elite fears of Nazi plebeian radicalism by eliminating Ernst Röhm and other leaders of the SA (storm-troopers) who advocated a “Second Revolution,” but at the price of entrenching the Nazis in power and, in particular, allowing the SS (who carried out the massacre with the help of the army), to extend their control of the security apparatus. The months of 1937–8 saw a further radicalization of the regime made possible by the removal of the chiefs of the military (Blomberg and Fritsch) and of Hjalmar Schacht, who had previously dominated the regime’s economic policy. These personnel changes, which significantly increased the control of the state exercised by Hitler and other top Nazis, were accompanied by a more determined pursuit of economic autarky and by the adoption of a more aggressive foreign policy – moves that, of course, formed the context of the train of events leading to the outbreak of the Second World War. [55]

There has been considerable debate among historians of the Third Reich about the role played by the domestic problems of the Nazi regime – including class conflict – in fuelling the drive to war. [56] The leading Marxist contributor to this debate, Tim Mason, has also famously put forward the thesis that the Nazi regime was characterized by the “primacy of politics”:

From 1936 onwards the framework of economic action in Germany was increasingly defined by the political leadership. The needs of the economy were determined by political decisions, principally by decisions in foreign policy, and the satisfaction of these needs was provided for by military victories ...The large firms identified themselves with National Socialism for the sake of their own further economic development. Their desire for profit and expansion, which was fully met by the political system, together with the stubborn nationalism of their leaders, did, however, bind them to a government on whose aims, in as much as they were subject to control at all, they had virtually no influence. [57]

Mason's formulation has the considerable merit of closing the door to any vulgar Marxist attempt to reduce the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes to the economic needs of German capital. But it is too simple to try to map the distinction between the National Socialist regime and German private capital onto a broader one between politics and economics. For a key feature of the "radicalization" of the regime in 1937–8 was the development of the state as an independent source of economic power. Schacht's fall was accompanied by Göring's emergence as the dominant figure in Nazi economic policy-making. The shift to greater state direction and to some extent replacement of private enterprise was symbolized by the establishment of the Four-Year Plan, with Göring at its head. In some ways more significant was the development of the Reichswerke, also headed by the Reichsmarschall, into a state-controlled multinational corporation that competed with private firms, often with great success, in order to gain control of the productive assets made available by German territorial expansion eastwards into Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, and westward into France during 1938 – 40. Richard Overly argues that "the German economic empire was not won and held by private capitalism on behalf of the 'monopoly capitalists' but was firmly under the control and in large part owned and operated, by the Göring economic apparatus." [58]

It is important for anyone old enough to remember the Marxist debates about the state during the 1960s and 1970s to see that this is the opposite of what the “*stamokap*” (state monopoly capitalism) theory then popular among the Communist Parties would predict. This involved a pretty crude form of instrumentalism in which the state becomes the tool of a handful of big monopolists. [59] Here rather the Nazis (or, given the fragmentation of the *Führerstaat*, a section of the National Socialist regime) used their control of the state to gain direct access to the accumulation process. This helps to explain why the Nazis did not simply, as Trotsky predicted, collapse into a conventional military dictatorship: they converted political into economic power. This achievement puts Mason’s “primacy of politics” into a different light. The Hitler regime’s success in setting the parameters for private capital was no mere act of ideological levitation, but was rather closely associated with its success into entrenching itself in control of a large and expanding state capital. [60]

This way of putting it also helps to place the evolution of National Socialism in a wider context. For the 1930s were marked by the disintegration of the world market, the contraction of foreign trade, and a general drive by the state to supplant private enterprise that was widely seen by left and right alike as having failed. The most extreme case of this tendency towards state capitalism was, of course, the Soviet Union during the so-called “Stalin revolution” of the late 1920s and the 1930s, but the New Deal in the United States and the nationalizations carried out even by the Tory-dominated National Government in Britain are other examples. The Nazis’ drive to autarky and to war must be seen against this background: the increasing difficulties faced by a largely closed German economy in obtaining scarce raw materials through foreign trade undoubtedly played a part in pushing the regime towards seizing them through territorial expansion and military conquest. [61] But the Nazis leaders’ judgement that long-term survival

depended on an imperial drive into eastern and central Europe was an assessment they shared with key sections of both big capital (particularly in heavy industry) and the military. [62]

Above all, Nazi radicalism respected certain limits: most importantly, the basic structure of economy remained untouched. Germany under Hitler remained an industrial capitalist society, with economic power concentrated in the hands of big capital. From the perspective of the basic structure of class relations, whether that capital took the form of private enterprise or state concerns was a secondary matter. The Utopia of a racially pure, socially homogeneous *Volksgemeinschaft* remained just that. As Detlev Peukert puts it, “National Socialism adapted readily to long-term trends towards modernization. In terms of long-range socio-economic statistical data, the years of the Third Reich (or at least the years of peace up to 1939) show no divergence, either positive or negative.” [63] The working class, though atomized and subject to the end to the surveillance and terror of the Security Police, were able to use the conditions of full employment produced by the rearmament drive to put on pressure for wage-increases in 1938 – 9. Hitler to the end was haunted by the fear that war-time privation would provoke another revolution like that of November 1918. [64]

But the development of what Peukert calls a “cartel of power elites from industry, the armed forces and the Nazi party” did not represent the disappearance of Nazi radicalism. [65] After the curbing of the SA, it was concentrated now in the SS, which developed into a bureaucratic empire centred on the RSHA, but creating its own military wing (the Waffen SS) and the WVHA (Economic-Administrative Main Office) responsible for administering the vast system of concentration camps. Its chiefs, Himmler and Heydrich (head of the RSHA), saw themselves as custodians of Nazi ideology. Himmler in particular was obsessed with restoring the traditional German peasantry through a vast programme of agrarian resettlement schemes in the East, as it fell to German arms. This peculiar fusion of racial Utopia and

security apparatus in the SS bureaucracy is, as we shall see, critical to understanding the Holocaust. [66]

Ideology and Genocide

The development of research into the Holocaust over the past few years has, in my view, definitively settled the long-running debate among historians of the Third Reich between “functionalists” and “intentionalists.” [67] The extermination of the Jews, rather than emerging fully formed from Hitler’s long-term plans, was a piecemeal process driven to a large extent, “from below,” by initiatives from rival power-centres within the highly fragmented Nazi bureaucracy. To say this is not to absolve Hitler of responsibility for the Holocaust. His notorious “prophecy” to the Reichstag on 30 January 1939 – “if international finance Jewry inside and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, the result will be not the bolshevization of the earth and thereby the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!” – was frequently cited by both Hitler and his subordinates as they sought to fulfil his prediction. [68] But recognition of Hitler’s role is not inconsistent with an analysis that highlights the complexity of the process that led to Auschwitz. To that extent, the portrayal of the Holocaust by Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen as the outcome of what the latter famously called a “cumulative spiral of radicalization” is correct. [69]

Thus, to start with, it seems clear that mass murder of the Jews was not the only option considered by Nazi decision-makers in the efforts to use the opportunity offered by the world war to rid Europe of the Jews – proposals to deport the Jews to Madagascar or to the Arctic Circle (once the USSR had been conquered) were seriously discussed, though these plans always envisaged the death of many Jews through the physical

deprivations caused by their forced removal and inhospitable destination. But it was the invasion of the USSR on 22 June 1941 that created context in which the Final Solution actually developed. Operation Barbarossa reflected the long-term aims, not just of Hitler (as expressed, for example, in **Mein Kampf**) but of also key sections of the German ruling class: the 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk forced on Soviet Russia had briefly given Germany control of Poland, the Ukraine, and the Baltic states. From the start the Nazi leadership made it clear that this was not just going to be just another war but a *Vernichtungskrieg* – war of extermination – waged against inferior races – the subhuman Slavs and their “Jewish-Bolshevik” masters – to win *Lebensraum* for the German *Volk*. Mass murder was built into the operation from start. German military planners predicted that thirty million Soviet citizens would die as result of the diversion of food supplies to meet the needs of the Nazi war machine. [70] The Commissar order, as we have seen, authorized the German invasion forces to execute the “Jewish-Bolshevik intelligentsia” whether or not they were engaged in actual combat.

It was as part of this war of extermination that the *Einsatzgruppen* were sent into the Soviet Union alongside the *Wehrmacht*. The mass machine-gunnings of Jews that they carried out in the summer of 1941 are generally seen as the beginning of the Holocaust. But in fact even here these massacres only approached full-scale genocide through a series of stages. In Lithuania, for example, the initial shootings in June – July 1941, in which about 10,000 – 12,000 predominantly Jewish victims perished, were confined mainly to Jewish men and Communists. It was only in August 1941 that the massacres extended to virtually the entire rural Jewish population and substantial numbers of Jewish town-dwellers. At least 120,000 Jews perished, while some 45,000–50,000 more were allowed temporarily to survive the selections in the towns in order that they might work for the German war industry. Christoph Dieckman argues that a decisive factor in the radicalization of

Nazi policy towards the Jews of Lithuania was the unexpectedly slow progress of the war. This forced the revision of the earlier “starvation plan” as the occupied parts of the Soviet Union became important base areas for the Wehrmacht. Chronic food shortages encouraged the Nazi authorities to give priority to those whose labour they needed: rather than feed those Jews whom they regarded as “useless mouths” they murdered them. [71]

This case study illustrates the diverse factors responsible for the extermination of the Jews. Various pragmatic considerations played their part. One, as we have just seen, was the development of local food shortages in the context of the Nazis’ failure to win the rapid victory over the USSR they had expected. Another was competition between rival Nazi bureaucracies, in which the SS used their success in winning overall responsibility for the Jewish Question to stake their claim for increased political power and access to scarce resources. A further complication was introduced by the fact that the scale of the German victories between autumn 1939 and summer 1941 placed larger and larger numbers of Jews on the Nazis’ hands. This conflicted with Himmler’s grandiose plans (as Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood) to resettle ethnic Germans from all over Central and South-Eastern Europe in the new territories being conquered by German arms. The result was what Götz Aly calls an “ethnic domino effect,” in which the demands from Himmler to find living space for disgruntled ethnic Germans often stuck in resettlement camps and from Nazi *Gauleiter* eager to make their areas *judenfrei* saddled the German occupation authorities in Poland with increasingly unmanageable numbers of pauperized Jews. [72]

Mass murder came to seem to Nazi officials as the only way out of what they experienced as a managerial nightmare. [73] Aly argues that, after plans for the wholesale deportation of the Jews of Europe to the more inhospitable parts of the Soviet Union (itself, as he notes, a “comprehensive plan for medium-

term biological extermination”) had gone awry thanks to dogged Soviet resistance, a consensus developed in Nazi officialdom to murder them. It was against the background of this decision, taken according to Aly in the autumn of 1941, that gassing was chosen as the main instrument of industrialized annihilation, that Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Chelmno, and Majdanek were developed as extermination camps, and that Auschwitz-Birkenau took on, in addition to its existing function as a forced labour camp, also took on the role of a site for mass murder. [74]

Auschwitz indeed in its varying functions sums up the plurality of determinations that produced the Holocaust. Strategically cited at a junction of the Central European railway system that had made it in the late 19th and early 20th centuries a key stopping off point in the seasonal movement of Polish agricultural labourers to work in Germany and Austria, the little Galician town of Oswiecim became the site of, first, a SS concentration camp to service the Nazi terror in freshly conquered Poland; then a centre for Himmler’s plans to resettle ethnic Germans in the farms stolen from their expelled Polish owners; then, because of its proximity to the Upper Silesian coalfield and the availability of Soviet prisoners of war as slave labourers, I.G. Farben’s buna synthetic rubber plant; and, finally, the extermination camp into which so many of the Jews of Europe vanished. [75]

Aly describes the process from which the Holocaust emerged as an instance of what he calls the Nazis’ “practice of projective conflict resolution”:

The conflicts of interest between the various power centres of the Third Reich, which were constantly losing or gaining importance and influence, arose out of the tension between differing and generally hypertrophied goals (of conquest), sanitized social utopias, and the notorious scarcity of the materials necessary for these. Even when the representatives of the various institutions pursued conflicting, mutually exclusive interests, they were willing to work together to resolve the conflicts necessarily produced by

their divergent strategies – especially the intended speed of their implementation – with the help of theft, slave labour, and extermination. [76]

Critical to this process was the often only implicit role played by biological racism in providing the framework of debate and the basis on which decisions could be legitimized. The following remark of Hitler's to Himmler in 1942 comes as close as he ever did to acknowledging the Holocaust, but it is also highly revealing of the character of this ideology: "The discovery of the Jewish virus is one of the greatest revolutions that have taken place in the world. The battle in which we are engaged is of the same sort as the battle waged, during the last century, by Pasteur and Koch. How many diseases have their origin in the Jewish virus! ... We shall regain our health only by eliminating the Jew." [77]

This medical language (also present in the common Nazi use of the word "cleansing" as a euphemism for mass murder) is symptomatic of a pseudo-scientific ideology that posited a hierarchical world of races from which the "unfit" should be eliminated. It was in virtue of this ideology that Hitler authorized the secret T-4 "euthanasia program" under which between 70,000 and 90,000 mentally ill patients were murdered in 1939–41: the personnel used and expertise acquired in this operation were later transferred to the Operation Reinhard camps (Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka). [78] The same biological racism – a modern ideology, not traditional anti-Semitism – motivated the murder of the Roma and Sinti, largely through the initiative of the Criminal Police (a separate wing of the RSHA from the Security Police) and despite Hitler's lack of personal interest in the "Gypsy Question." [79]

But it was the Jewish "virus," as Hitler called it, that represented the most deadly danger to the health of the German *Volk*. As Paul Karl Schmidt, press chief of the German Foreign Office, put it in 1943: "The Jewish question is no question of humanity and no question of religion, but a question of political

hygiene. Jewry is to be combated wherever it is found, because it is a political infectant, the ferment of disintegration and death of every national organism.” [80] Thus when it came to devising actual policies for the “final solution of the Jewish question,” murder was the Nazis’ default position, set by an ideology that identified the Jews as a deadly threat. The Holocaust was the outcome of a bureaucratic problem-solving process over-determined by the biological racism that constituted the ideological cement of National Socialism.

The primacy of Nazi ideology in the development of the Holocaust is critical to understanding that, even if even if economic pressures – for example, food shortages in the occupied USSR – may have helped motivate particular murder campaigns, the extermination of the Jews cannot be explained in economic terms. Raul Hilberg argues that “in the preliminary phase [the isolation and expropriation of the Jews] financial gains, public or private, far outweighed expenses, but ... in the killing phase receipts no longer balanced losses.” [81] From the standpoint of the war effort, the Holocaust destroyed scarce skilled workers and diverted rolling stock from military purposes. Individual capitalist firms such as I.G. Farben undoubtedly profited from the extermination of the Jews, but, however instrumentally rational the bureaucratic organization of the Holocaust may have become, this crime was dictated by considerations neither of profitability nor of military strategy. [82]

Biological racism also played a crucial role in motivating the perpetrators. Norman Geras, as we have seen, has sought to highlight the importance of the Nazis’ liberation of the urge to transgress. Now one can see evidence of this, notably in the more pogrom-like massacres – for example, during the radicalization of the murder of Lithuanian Jews in the summer of 1941, when the *Einsatzgruppen* exploited local anti-Semitism, encouraging Lithuanian popular participation in the killings. [83] But anti-Semitism – whether in the pseudo-scientific form it

took in Nazi ideology or in a more traditional version – was required in order to transform the Jews into the objectified Other against which these passions could legitimately be expressed.

Their commitment to Nazi ideology helped to sustain in the SS elite the combination of callous efficiency and self-control that seems to have been what Himmler meant by “decency” in his notorious speech of 4 October 1943 to SS *Gruppenführer* in Poznan, when he declared: “Most of you know what it means when 100 corpses lie there, or 500 lie there, or 1000 lie there. To have gone through all this and – apart from the exceptions caused by human weakness – to have remained decent, that has hardened us. This is a page of glory in our history never written and never to be written.” [84] As Ulrich Herbert puts it,

the intellectual anti-semitism, so to speak, is detectable, especially in the leaders of the Security Police and the *Einsatzgruppen*. Here, in genocide’s hard core, enmity towards the Jews is recognizable as a manifestation of a radical *völkisch* world-view ... seeing their own actions within the context of such a world-view not only insulated them against interference by other agencies, it also provided that exculpatory discourse that lessened inhibitions and offered an avenue of self-justification by representing one’s own actions as the necessary means to a higher end, thus suspending acquired humanitarian principles. [85]

The overdetermining role played by Nazi ideology in the Holocaust might seem to rule out any Marxist interpretation. Such seems to be the implication of Herbert’s declaration: “Racism was not a ‘mistaken belief’ serving to conceal the true interests of the regime, which were essentially economic. It was the fixed point of the whole system.” [86] But it is a caricature of historical materialism that reduces it to the attribution of economic motives to social actors. [87] Marx famously replied to an objection to his theory that “this is all very true for our own times, in which material interests are preponderant, but not for the Middle Ages, dominated by Catholicism, nor for Athens and Rome dominated by politics,” by saying: “it is the manner in which they gained their livelihood

which explains why in one case politics, in the other case Catholicism, played the chief part.” [88] Similarly one might say that a historical materialist account of the Holocaust must proceed, not by denying the central role played by biological racism in the extermination of the Holocaust, but by explaining why this ideology assumed such centrality in National Socialism. Much of the contemporary historiography of the Third Reich seems, in correcting for an earlier neglect, to treat racism as a kind of brute datum that does not itself require explanation.

Overcoming this weakness requires that we situate the Holocaust in the larger evolution of the National Socialist regime. Here the most important contribution has been made by Martin Broszat, who places the radicalization of the regime, the so-called “racial revolution,” in the context of the Nazis’ failure to reconstruct German society:

The more or less corporatist ideals of National Socialism, the pursuit of a comprehensive new order for agriculture ..., the ideas for reforming the Reich and the proposals for a revolutionary recasting of the army, civil service and judicature – none of this could be achieved. The strength of the National Socialist movement was only sufficient to endanger the existing state of affairs and partially to undermine it ... But the less chance there was of converting National Socialism’s ideological dogma to the tasks of constructive reorganization, the more exclusively that ideological policy focused only on the negative aspects and aims which primarily affected only legal, humanitarian and moral principles, but which appeared to be socially or politically unimportant ... But since the practical (rather than the propagandist) activity of the ideological movement was almost exclusively geared to these negative aims, the only conceivable further development had to be by way of a continued intensification of the measures against the Jews, the mentally ill and anti-social elements. But discrimination could not be stepped up *ad infinitum*. As a result the “movement” was bound to end up by wreaking physical destruction. [89]

Broszat's argument provides, in my view, the best basis on which to understand the "cumulative radicalization" of National Socialism that he and Hans Mommsen have highlighted. Ian Kershaw offers an alternative interpretation that stresses the personal role of Hitler within the regime. Indeed, for Kershaw, the defining characteristic of Nazism seems to be Hitler's unique authority, which he considers an instance of what Max Weber called charismatic domination. The initiatives by individual Nazi officials that played such a critical role in, for example, the development of the Holocaust legitimized their actions by claiming to be (as one of them put it) "working towards the *Führer*": the justification provided by such an invocation of Hitler's authority helped to fuel the welter of centrifugal initiatives that drove the Nazi regime into increasing barbarity and progressive disintegration:

Doctors rushing to nominate patients of asylums for the "euthanasia programme" in the interests of a eugenically "healthier" people; lawyers and judges zealous to cooperate in the dismantling of legal safeguards in order to cleanse society of "criminal elements" and undesirables; business leaders anxious to profit from preparations for war and once in war by grabbing of booty and exploitation of foreign slave labour; thrusting technocrats and scientists seeking to extend power and influence by jumping onto the bandwagon of technological experimentation and modernization; non-Nazi military leaders keen to build up a modern army and restore Germany's hegemony in central Europe; and old-fashioned conservatives with a distaste for the Nazis but an even greater fear and dislike of the Bolsheviks: all were, through their many and varied forms of collaboration, indirectly at least "working towards the *Führer*." The result was the unstoppable radicalization of the "system" and the gradual emergence of policy objectives closely related to the ideological imperatives represented by Hitler. [90]

This passage brings into focus the feeling that gradually develops about the metaphor of "working towards the *Führer*" while reading Kershaw's fine biography of Hitler – namely that a concept that within certain narrow limits may be quite useful is

being stretched to the point of meaninglessness. There would often have been a discrepancy between the actual motivations of the actors listed above and the reasons that they gave in order to legitimize their actions within the “public sphere” of the Third Reich. Kershaw covers himself against this kind of objection by treating these cases as ones “where ideological motivation was secondary, or perhaps even absent altogether, but where the objective function of the actions was nevertheless to further the potential for implementation of the goals which Hitler embodied.” [91] But what criterion is one to use in order to determine whether particular actions had this “objective function”?

Kershaw talks of Hitler “representing” or “embodying” certain “ideological imperatives,” but this simply pushes the problem back: how are we establish what these imperatives were? To refer to Hitler’s personal goals would collapse into the kind of intentionalism that the metaphor of “working towards the *Führer*” is presumably meant to avoid. In a manner familiar to any student of Hegel, objectivism risks sliding into its polar opposite, subjectivism. The only way to avoid this trap is, in my view, to place at the basis of one’s interpretation of National Socialism, not Hitler’s personal role as charismatic leader, but rather the specific nature of Nazism as a distinctive kind of mass movement. [92]

Here we return to Trotsky’s analysis of fascism. National Socialism represented a particular response to the intense social and economic contradictions undergone by German society at the onset of Mayer’s “General Crisis and Thirty Years War of the twentieth century.” While mobilizing its followers in support of a counter-revolutionary project – the destruction of organized labour and the rehabilitation of German imperialism – it promised them an apparently revolutionary vision of a *Volksgemeinschaft*, a racial Utopia from which both class conflict and alien races (the two united in Nazi ideology in the figure of the Jew setting German against German) had been

banished. Denied fulfilment in the shape of a genuine reconstruction of society when Hitler took power, Nazi radicalism was displaced onto the Jewish question. The energies of the movement could safely focus on what Broszat calls the “negative aspects” of National Socialist ideology – the drive to eliminate the Other. Racial policy did not threaten the uneasy pact struck by the Nazis and big capital. Crudely put – National Socialism failed to create the *Volksgemeinschaft*, but at least the SS could exterminate the Jews.

The interpretation sketched out here dovetails in with some suggestive remarks by Slavoj Žižek. He writes that “the true horror of Nazism lies in the very way it displaced/naturalized social antagonism into racial differences.” [93] Elsewhere he argues that “‘political extremism’ or ‘excessive radicalism’ should always be read as a phenomenon of ideologico-political *displacement*: as an index of its opposite, as a limitation, of a refusal actually to ‘go to the end.’” [94] The “cumulative radicalization” of the Nazi regime was thus not simply a consequence either of its own internal fragmentation or of Hitler’s personal role. It reflected the structural inability of National Socialism to “go to the end” – to remove the social contradictions to which it was a response and for which it had promised a cure.

This is one respect in which there is a connection between the Holocaust and the capitalist mode of production. It is, of course, as I have already noted, not the case that the extermination of the Jews can be deduced from the economic needs of German capitalism. But National Socialism became a mass movement during what is still the worst economic crisis in the history of the capitalist system. More than that – to escape from this crisis and to crush the working class, German big business allied itself to a movement whose racist and pseudo-revolutionary ideology drove it towards the Holocaust, particularly because of its failure to transform German society. Thus – not directly, but in this nonetheless important way – capitalism was causally implicated

in the process that led to the extermination of the Jews. [95]

Mechanisms and Murder

This kind of explanation, invoking as it does economic and political structures, social classes, ideologies and mass movements, may not satisfy many seeking to make sense of the Holocaust. To return to the beginning of this essay, Norman Geras complains of Ernest Mandel's structural explanation of the extermination of the Jews that it "seems to me to fall far short of the thing it purports to address. None of these causes speaks directly to the aim of *wiping out a people*." [96] Now it is indeed true that Mandel sees "the Holocaust as the ultimate expression of the destructive tendencies existing in bourgeois society, tendencies whose roots lie deep in colonialism and imperialism." [97] By contrast, the interpretation I have offered here tries to fill out the specificity that is wanting in Mandel's account in particular by giving what seems to me its proper weight to the dynamics of National Socialism as a mass movement.

But this might still not satisfy Geras. I can think of two reasons why it mightn't. One is that (as is all too possible) it just isn't a very good explanation: it fails to take into account, or lay sufficient stress on, factors crucial to a proper understanding of the Holocaust. And maybe this failure reflects a deeper myopia inherent in Marxism as a social theory. Perhaps this is so: whether or not it is will emerge from the critical debate inherent in historical enquiry. There is, however, another reason why the interpretation of the Holocaust set out here might fail to satisfy Geras (or indeed anyone else). And that is just that *no* explanation of the extermination of the Jews can really satisfy, not because the explanation is necessarily false but because of the enormity of the event that it seeks to make sense of. Such an inherent discrepancy between cause and effect is presumably at least part of what Hannah Arendt was trying to get at when she

put forward her celebrated thesis of the “banality of evil.” This gap between the event of the Holocaust and our attempts theoretically to comprehend it is the rational kernel in the idea, articulated by Elie Wiesel among others, that it is beyond history and understanding.

Silence is certainly one legitimate response to what happened at Auschwitz, but, I have tried to argue, it is not enough. Theoretical generalization is required, and not only to help capture the Holocaust in all its specificity. For Mandel isn’t simply wrong to seek to situate the extermination of the Jews in the context of the broader history of capitalism as an economic and social system, even if such contextualization is insufficient. Mike Davis has shown in his stunning new book **Late Victorian Holocausts** how British imperial policies in India designed to minimize government expenditure and encourage industrious habits among the poor helped to turn the great droughts of 1876–9 and 1896–1902 into human catastrophes of appalling proportions: the combined Indian death-toll from famine and disease in these two droughts is estimated at between 12 and 30 million (many millions more died in China and elsewhere). [98]

Now plainly Lord Lytton and Lord Curzon – respectively the British viceroys of India during these two droughts – and the Home governments they served aren’t the same as Himmler and Heydrich. The deliberate intention to exterminate millions was missing in their case. [99] But are we to conclude that those who pursued policies that in their own way were as callous and ideological as the Nazis’, even though the inspiration came from Smith, Malthus, and Spencer rather than from the strange brew concocted by Hitler, and whose consequence was the avoidable death of millions belong to a completely different moral universe from the racist bureaucrats of the RSHA? Consider, for example, these words of the highly respectable Oxford philosopher Hastings Rashdall, published in 1907:

I will now mention a case in which probably no one will hesitate. It is becoming tolerably obvious at the present day that all

improvement in the social condition of the higher races of mankind postulates the exclusion of competition with the lower races. This means that, sooner or later, the lower Well-being – it may be ultimately the very existence – of countless Chinamen or negroes must be sacrificed that a higher life may be possible for a much smaller of white men. [100]

Such comparisons introduce a further complication. For Davis argues that the disasters he chronicles did not simply result from the malign interaction of weather systems with imperial policy and liberal ideology, but also reflected the transformation of hitherto prosperous regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America into “famished peripheries of a London-centred world economy.” [101] The subordination of small-holding peasantries to the rhythms of a world market beyond their comprehension or control, and the indebtedness of their rulers to European and American banks increased the vulnerability of entire societies to extreme weather events. Here tracing the thread of responsibility becomes even more complicated. Once again, there is plainly no will to exterminate on the part of bankers and brokers, but all the same their decisions may have played a critical role in outcomes that destroyed entire communities thousands of miles away.

So how then are we morally to judge actors who enjoy a privileged role in impersonal economic mechanisms that have devastating consequences for others? This is, of course, not simply a historical question. We live at a time when the ideology of *laissez faire* that legitimized Victorian indifference to Indian starvation has enjoyed a comeback in the shape of the neo-liberal “Washington consensus” that now rules Western finance ministries and multilateral bodies such as the IMF and WTO. Ken Livingstone caused much indignation when, during last year’s mayoral elections in London, he said that capitalism kills more people every year than Hitler did. [102] But a much more sober figure, the sceptical liberal historian Peter Novick has pointed out the “curious anomaly” that, amidst more and more elaborate Holocaust commemorations, between 10 and 12

million children die each year because “they lack the food and minimal medical facilities that would keep them alive,” a cause that it is well within human power to remove. [103]

The point of these comparisons is not to relativize the Holocaust out of existence, or to deny the historical specificity of the extermination of the Jews. Much of this essay has, after all, been devoted to addressing this specificity. The point is rather that avoidable, socially caused mass death is a chronic feature of the modern world. The mix of causes of these mass deaths – economic structures, bureaucratic callousness, collective ideologies, deliberate policy, and emotions as diverse as hatred, greed, fear, indifference, and the enjoyment of a perverted liberation – varies from case to case. If the Holocaust represents one extreme – that of deliberate, industrialized mass murder, contemporary child mortality represents another – that of impersonal structural causation. [104] But both are avoidable, and both arose within modern capitalism. Studying the extermination of the Jews is important. We need to remember the victims and to remain alert against movements reviving the obscene ideology of National Socialism. But understanding the Holocaust can also help to prevent the mass murders that are happening now, and stop us from being mere bystanders.

Notes

1. This text provided the basis of my inaugural lecture at the University of York on 2 March 2001. The interpretation it offers was originally given in a talk at *Marxism 93* (organized by the Socialist Workers Party in London in July 1993). I am grateful to Tom Baldwin, Norman Geras, Donny Gluckstein, and Julie Waterson for their comments. I should also acknowledge two debts that date back to the 1970s, to the late Tim Mason, for his personal kindness and the intellectual inspiration he offered, and to Colin Sparks for the informal tutorials he gave me (amidst much friendly raillery) in the Marxist theory of fascism.

- [2.](#) K. Marx, **Early Writings** (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 251.
- [3.](#) N. Finkelstein, **The Holocaust Industry** (London: Verso, 2000), 45.
- [4.](#) P. Novick, **The Holocaust and Collective Memory** (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 330–1, n. 107.
- [5.](#) The problem of comparison was effectively dealt with by some of the saner contributions to the German *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s: see especially H. Mommsen, *The New Historical Consciousness and the Relativizing of National Socialism*, in **Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?** (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1993).
- [6.](#) Novick., **Holocaust and Collective Memory**, 193.
- [7.](#) W.G. Runciman, **A Treatise on Social Theory** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), I. 20.
- [8.](#) See, for example, S. Friedlander, *ed.*, **Probing the Limits of Representation** (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), and N. Geras, *ife Was Beautiful Even There*, **Imprints 5** (2000).
- [9.](#) N. Geras, *Marxists before the Holocaust*, in *id.*, **The Contract of Mutual Indifference** (London: Verso, 1998), 143–44. On Mandel’s wartime brush with death see *The Luck of a Crazy Youth*, in G. Achcar, *ed.*, **The Legacy of Ernest Mandel** (London: Verso, 1999), where Geras’s piece also appears.
- [10.](#) E. Mandel, **The Meaning of the Second World War** (London: Verso, 1986), 90 – 93. See also *id.*, *Material, Social and Ideological Preconditions for the Nazi Genocide*, in Achcar, *ed.*, **Legacy of Ernest Mandel**.
- [11.](#) Geras, *Marxists before the Holocaust*, 147.
- [12.](#) M. Horkheimer and T.W. Adorno, **Dialectic of Enlightenment** (London: NLB, 1979), 168–208. Enzo Traverso documents an even more extreme failure to register the Holocaust in Sartre’s **Anti-Semite and Jew**: see his *The Blindness of the Intellectuals*, in *id.*, **Understanding the Nazi Genocide** (London: Pluto, 1999).
- [13.](#) E.J. Hobsbawm, **Age of Extremes** (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), 50–52, and ch. 5. A contrasting focus on the fascist challenge to liberal democracy is the main strength of Mark Mazower’s otherwise disappointing history of 20th century Europe, **Dark Continent** (London: Allen Lane, 1998).
- [14.](#) Traverso, **Understanding the Nazi Genocide**, 44.

- [15.](#) Novick, **Holocaust and Collective Memory**, esp. chs. 1–4.
- [16.](#) In particular Finkelstein’s cavalier dismissal of the political threat represented by Holocaust denial and by the far right – as when he declares that “there is no evidence that Holocaust deniers exert any more influence in the United States than the flat earth society does” (**Holocaust Industry**, 68) – seems to me very seriously mistaken.
- [17.](#) T.W. Mason, **Social Policy in the Third Reich** (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 282, from his posthumously published Epilogue to a book that first appeared in German in 1977.
- [18.](#) **Ibid.**, 282.
- [19.](#) See especially the research summarized in the contributions to U. Herbert, *ed.*, **National Socialist Extermination Policies** (New York: Berghahn, 2000).
- [20.](#) L.D. Trotsky, **1905** (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 150–51.
- [21.](#) Geras, *Marxists before the Holocaust*, 139.
- [22.](#) **Ibid.**, 159 – 60.
- [23.](#) **Ibid.**, 158, 163, 164. For a sample of such descriptions, see the repellent narratives assembled in E. Klee *et al.*, “**The Good Old Days**”: **The Holocaust as Seen by its Perpetrators and Bystanders** (New York: Konecky & Konecky, 1991).
- [24.](#) N. Geras, *Socialist Hope in the Shadow of Catastrophe*, in **Contract of Mutual Indifference**.
- [25.](#) S. Žižek, **The Ticklish Subject** (London: Verso, 1999), 391.
- [26.](#) Similar considerations would apply to other attempts to explain the Holocaust directly from what are held to be universal characteristics of human nature – for example, the need for identity that, according to G.A. Cohen, underlies the varieties of national, ethnic, religious, and racial identifications: see *id.*, *Reconsidering Historical Materialism*, in A. Callinicos, *ed.*, **Marxist Theory** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- [27.](#) Traverso, **Understanding the Nazi Genocide**, 60.
- [28.](#) J. Strachey, **The Coming Struggle for Power** (London: Gollancz, 1934), 261; G. Dimitrov, [Report to the Seventh Congress Communist International 1935: For the Unity of the Working Class against Fascism](#) (London: Red Star Press, 1973), 40. Extensive

critical discussion of the Comintern's analysis of fascism will be found in N. Poulantzas, **Fascisme et dictature** (Paris: Seuil, 1974).

[29.](#) I appreciate that use of “fascism” as a generic term for a particular type of movement and regime rather than specifically to refer to the Italian case is now regarded as *vieux jeu* by historians. I have found nevertheless this usage unavoidable – first, because I am discussing Marxist theories of fascism conceived in this broad sense, and, secondly, because I regard the refusal in principle to engage in comparative analysis designed to illuminate the similarities and differences that connect not merely German National Socialism and Italian Fascism but also more recent far-right movements to be the worst sort of historical obscurantism. For a discussion of “the disappearance of theories, or articulated concepts, of fascism from research and writing about the Third Reich,” see T.W. Mason, *Whatever Happened to ‘Fascism’?*, in id., **Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class** (ed. J. Kaplan; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): quotation from 323.

[30.](#) A.J. Mayer, **The Persistence of the Old Regime** (New York: Pantheon, 1981). Restricted to the German case, Mayer's thesis amounts to a version of the idea, widely influential among West German left-liberal historians, of the *Sonderweg*. This interpretation of German history (at least prior to 1945) having followed a “special path” reflecting the dominance of pre-modern agrarian elites has, in my view, found its definitive refutation: see D. Blackbourn and G. Eley, **The Peculiarities of German History** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). See, for an alternative account of late 19th century Europe, E.J. Hobsbawm, **The Age of Empire 1875–1914** (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987).

[31.](#) Id., **Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?** (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 31, 33, 34, 235. Mayer's detailed account of the Holocaust will be found in *ibid.*, Part Three.

[32.](#) See, for example, C.R. Browning, *The Holocaust as By-product?*, in id., **The Path to Genocide** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[33.](#) I. Kershaw, **Hitler** (London: Allen Lane, 1998 – 2000), II. 357 – 59.

[34.](#) W. Manoschek, *The Extermination of the Jews in Serbia*, in Herbert, ed., **National Socialist Extermination Policies**. See more

generally O. Bartov, **Hitler's Army** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[35.](#) See, for example, A.J. Mayer, **The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[36.](#) The aristocratic *monde* involved in the plot to kill Hitler is well evoked in some of the memoir literature: see, for example, C. Bielenberg, **The Past is Myself** (London: Corgi, 1984) and **The Berlin Diaries 1940–1945 of Marie 'Missie' Vassiltchikov** (London: Methuen, 1987).

[37.](#) J. Fest, **Plotting Hitler's Death** (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 19.

[38.](#) See, for example, D. Peukert, **Inside Nazi Germany** (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989) and, for a general survey of the literature, M. Nolan, *Work, Gender, and Everyday Life: Reflections on Continuity, Normality and Agency in Twentieth-Century Germany*, in I. Kershaw and M. Lewin, eds., **Stalinism and Nazism** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[39.](#) Mayer, **Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?**, 456.

[40.](#) Ironically enough in the light of his later evolution, this characterization of National Socialism is very close to Ernst Nolte's definition of fascism as "revolutionary reaction": see **Three Faces of Fascism** (New York: Mentor, 1969).

[41.](#) L.D. Trotsky, **The Struggle against Fascism in Germany** (New York; Pathfinder, 1971), 159.

[42.](#) Poulantzas, **Fascisme et dictature**, 69 – 70.

[43.](#) Trotsky, **Struggle against Fascism**, 155.

[44.](#) **Ibid.**, 402.

[45.](#) See the careful analysis of the evidence in D. Gluckstein, **The Nazis, Capitalism and the Working Class** (London: Bookmarks, 1999), ch. 4, and Ian Kershaw's summary of the state of popular opinion on the eve of the Nazi seizure of power: **Hitler**, I. 404–12.

[46.](#) D. Guerin, **Fascism and Big Business** (New York: Monad, 1973), 76.

[47.](#) Despite the immense value of Ian Kershaw's **Hitler** as a compellingly written and scholarly synthesis of a vast literature, Fest's older biography (perhaps because his conservatism attunes him more to the nuances of German cultural life) paints a more convincing portrait of Hitler as a racial revolutionary who, when his Machiavellian engagement with the realities of power finally failed at Stalingrad, relapsed into the Utopianism of the pre-1923 period, embracing what Fest calls "the strategy of a flamboyant downfall," **Hitler** (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 666. See also, for example, **ibid.**, 609–13.

[48.](#) Trotsky, **Struggle against Fascism**, 282, 441, 278, 405. When Donny Gluckstein approvingly cites the last two sentences quoted he is, I think, mistaken, even though I agree with the argument that surrounds this quotation: Gluckstein, **Nazis, Capitalism, and the Working Class**, 162.

[49.](#) Poulantzas, **Fascisme et dictature**, Pt. 7, ch. IV.

[50.](#) Fest, **Plotting Hitler's Death**, 332.

[51.](#) In my view this is also the best way of conceptualizing the relationship between the state and capital as such: see R. Miliband, *State Power and Class Interests*, **New Left Review** 138 (1983) and C. Harman, *The State and Capitalism Today*, **International Socialism** 2 : 51 (1991). The analysis put forward by Henry Ashby Turner in **German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), though offered as a refutation of Marxist accounts of Nazism, therefore actually provides detailed support for the interpretation developed here.

[52.](#) D. Peukert, **The Weimar Republic** (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 125–27, 229–30.

[53.](#) Kershaw, **Hitler**, I, 425.

[54.](#) **Ibid.**, I, 436; see generally **ibid.**, I, chs. 11 and 12.

[55.](#) See **ibid.**, II, ch. 1.

[56.](#) For a lucid summary of the issues, see O. Bartov, *From Blitzkrieg to Total War*, in Kershaw and Lewin, eds., **Stalinism and Nazism**, 168–73.

[57.](#) T.W. Mason, *The Primacy of Politics*, in id., **Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class**, 71–2.

[58.](#) R. Overy, **Goering** (London: RKP, 1984), esp. chs. 3–6; quotation from 111.

[59.](#) For a comparatively sophisticated version of *stamokap* theory see P. Boccara, **Etudes sur le capitalisme monopoliste d’Etat, sa crise et son issue** (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1973). For critiques, see N. Poulantzas, **Les Classes sociales dans le capitalisme aujourd’hui** (Paris: Seuil, 1974) and B. Jessop, **The Capitalist State** (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1982).

[60.](#) For a very similar analysis to that put forward in this and the preceding paragraph, see Gluckstein, **Nazism, Capitalism and the Working Class**, ch. 7.

[61.](#) See T. Cliff, **State Capitalism in Russia** (rev. edn., London: Bookmarks, 1988), and C. Harman, **Explaining the Crisis** (London: Bookmarks, 1984), ch. 2.

[62.](#) For a pioneering Marxist study that offers a differentiated account of German capitalist interests particularly in Hitler’s programme of territorial conquest, see A. Sohn-Rethel, **The Economy and Class Structure of German Fascism** (London: Free Association Books, 1987).

[63.](#) Peukert, **Inside Nazi Germany**, 182. At most, Peukert argues, by undermining traditional institutions and beliefs, National Socialism contributed towards the emergence of a more individualized and privatized society that blossomed fully during the West German *Wirtschaftswunder* of the 1950s: see esp. **ibid.**, ch. 13. For a thorough critique of the idea that Hitler presided over a “social revolution,” see Gluckstein, **Nazis, Capitalism and the Working Class**, ch. 6.

[64.](#) Mason, **Social Policy**, *passim*. Working-class resistance was, however, much weaker during the war itself. Involved in this shift were the divisive effects of the presence in Germany of (by August 1944) over seven and a half million foreign slave labourers: as a result, Ulrich Herbert writes, “the practice of racism became a daily habit, part of everyday life, without individual Germans having to participate in active discrimination or oppression,” **Hitler’s Foreign Workers** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 396.

[65.](#) Peukert, **Inside Nazi Germany**, 245.

[66.](#) See H. Höhne, **The Order of the Death’s Head** (London: Secker & Warburg, 1969).

[67.](#) See, for an overview of this debate, see T.W. Mason, *Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism*, in id., **Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class**.

[68.](#) Kershaw, **Hitler**, II, 153. See *ibid.*, II, 520–23, on Hitler’s awareness of (but refusal explicitly to acknowledge) the extermination of the Jews.

[69.](#) H. Mommsen, **From Weimar to Auschwitz** (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 175; see esp. id., *The Realization of the Unthinkable*, in *ibid.*, and M. Broszat, *Hitler and the Genesis of the ‘Final Solution’*, in H. Koch, ed., **Aspects of the Third Reich** (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1985).

[70.](#) C. Gerlach, *German Economic Interests, Occupation Policy, and the Murder of the Jews of Belorussia, 1941–3*, in Herbert, ed., **National Socialist Extermination Policies**, 212–17.

[71.](#) C. Dieckmann, *The War and The Killing of the Lithuanian Jews*, in Herbert, ed., **National Socialist Extermination Policies**.

[72.](#) G. Aly, **“Final Solution”** (London: Arnold, 1999), 166. Aly’s earlier work with Susanne Heim on Nazi population policy has provoked much controversy: see, for example, C. Browning, *German Technocrats, Jewish Labour, and the Final Solution*, in id., **Path to Genocide**. Browning’s criticisms do not, however, seem to apply to this book.

[73.](#) The attitude of Nazi officials towards what they defined as administrative problems was always permeated by racism. Ulrich Herbert argues that the occupation authorities in Poland consciously adopted unworkable Jewish policies such as ghettoization in order “to pressurize the authorities in Berlin to find a final, radical solution,” *Labour and Extermination: Economic Interest and the Primacy of Weltanschauung in National Socialism, Past & Present* 138 (1993), 160.

[74.](#) Aly, **“Final Solution”**, chs. 7–11 (quotation from 176), and *‘Jewish Resettlement’: Reflections on the Political Prehistory of the Holocaust*, in Herbert, ed., **National Socialist Extermination Policies**. There is considerable controversy among historians over both the precise timing of the decision to murder the Jews and whether it was taken, as Aly argues, as a result of frustrated expectations of victory, or in the euphoria occasioned by early German military

successes against the Red Army. For an influential statement of the latter view, see C.R. Browning, **Fateful Months** (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985) and *Hitler and the Euphoria of Victory*, in D. Cesarini, ed., **The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation** (London: RKP, 1994).

[75.](#) See Robert Jan van Pelt's and Debórah Dwork's compelling study, **Auschwitz 1270 to the Present** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

[76.](#) Aly, "Final Solution", 259.

[77.](#) **Hitler's Table Talk 1941–1944** (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1953), 332.

[78.](#) See, for example, H. Friedlander, *Euthanasia and the Final Solution*, in Cesarani, ed., **Final Solution**, id., **The Origins of Nazi Genocide** (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), and Kershaw, **Hitler**, II, 252–61. Aly stresses the role of "pragmatic goals" – clearing hospital space, saving money, etc., in T-4, but he acknowledges that "[i]deology did, however, remain important in so far as it sufficiently undermined the moral and legal barriers in the minds of the perpetrators," "Final Solution", 29.

[79.](#) M. Zimmermann, *The National Socialist 'Solution of The Gypsy Question'*, in Herbert, ed., **National Socialist Extermination Policies**. The centrality of racism to the National Socialist regime is systematically developed in M. Burleigh and W. Wipperman, **The Racial State** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). The modernity of National Socialism is one of the main themes of Peukert's **Inside Nazi Germany**.

[80.](#) R. Hilberg, **The Destruction of the European Jews** (rev. edn., 3 vols., New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), II, 739.

[81.](#) *Ibid.*, III, 1006. As an example of the role played by economic factors in specific cases Christian Gerlach argues: "The various liquidation programmes in Belorussia, particularly those against non-Jewish population groups, were in large part responses to pressures related to food economics," *German Economic Interests*, 227.

[82.](#) It is a weakness of Donny Gluckstein's generally excellent account of National Socialism that he tends to relax the tension between ideology and economics in the Holocaust: see **The Nazis, Capitalism and the Working Class**, 183–90. Nevertheless, even during the last

phases of the war, Hitler's opportunism could still override ideological considerations: in April 1944, long after the Reich had been made *judenfrei*, he authorized the deployment of over 100,000 Hungarian Jews to work in the German arms industry: Herbert, *Labour and Extermination*, 189–92.

[83.](#) D. Porat, *The Holocaust in Lithuania*, in Cesarini, ed., **Final Solution**.

[84.](#) Hilberg, **Destruction**, III, 1010. See also on perpetrators' motivations, *ibid.*, III, 1007–29, and Christopher Browning's outstanding study, **Ordinary Men** (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993).

[85.](#) U. Herbert, *Extermination Policy*, in id., ed., **National Socialist Extermination Policies**, 33.

[86.](#) Id., *Labour and Extermination*, 195.

[87.](#) For a recent example of this error see N. Ferguson, **The Cash Nexus** (London: Allen Lane, 2001), *Introduction*.

[88.](#) Marx, **Capital, I** (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 176 n. 35. See L. Althusser and E. Balibar, **Reading Capital** (London: NLB, 1970), 217–18.

[89.](#) M. Broszat, **The Hitler State** (London: Longman, 1981), 355, 357.

[90.](#) I. Kershaw, 'Working Towards the Führer', in Kershaw and Lewin, eds., **Stalinism and Nazism**, 105.

[91.](#) *Ibid.*, 104.

[92.](#) See, for further discussion of these issues with respect to the second volume of Kershaw's Hitler biography, A. Callinicos, *Just a Case of Bad Intentions?*, **Socialist Review** (November 2000).

[93.](#) Žižek, **Ticklish Subject**, 228.

[94.](#) Id., *Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!*, in J. Butler et al., **Contingency, Hegemony, Universality** (London: Verso, 2000), 130 n. 17.

[95.](#) This indirect connection was well expressed by Joel Geier, speaking at *Marxism 1993*: "German capitalism didn't need the Holocaust. But it needed the Nazis, and they needed the Holocaust."

[96.](#) Geras, *Marxists before the Holocaust*, 166 n. 43.

[97.](#) Mandel, *Material, Social and Ideological Preconditions*, 229.

98. M. Davis, **Late Victorian Holocausts** (London: Verso, 2001).

99. Indeed, David Goodhart, Curzon's latest biographer and an admirer of the British Raj, praises "[t]he energy and thoroughness with which Curzon handled the famine crisis," **Curzon** (London: Macmillan, 1994), 173.

100. Quoted in Jeremy Waldron, *Two Essays on Basic Equality* (1999), 8, available at www.law.nyu.edu. I am grateful to Chris Betram for this reference.

101. Davis, **Late Victorian Holocausts**, 291.

102. See, for example, R. Bennett, *Livingstone Defiant over Hitler Claims*, **Financial Times**, 12 April 2000.

103. Novick, **Holocaust and Collective Memory**, 255.

104. The mass murders perpetrated by the Stalinist regime in the USSR during the 1930s represent an intermediate case, since they combined the deliberate elimination of perhaps two million real or imagined political enemies with millions more deaths caused mainly by the pursuit of policies that did not aim at this outcome though it was their predictable consequence. See E. Traverso, *The Uniqueness of Auschwitz*, in id., **Understanding the Nazi Genocide**, and, for a recent study of the Stalinist Terror that draws on new evidence, J.A. Getty and O.V. Naumov, **The Road to Terror** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

