MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF THE WORK AND THOUGHT OF ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

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WRITINGS ON THE EMPIRES IN WORLD HISTORY, IV

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HITLER'S EUROPE

by Arnold J. Toynbee

The present volume of the History of the Second World War in the *Survey* series has been given the title of *Hitler's Europe* advisedly, because the facts testify that Hitler's personality was the key both to the amazing establishment and to the still more amazing collapse of the Third German Reich's short-lived domination over the rest of the European peninsula of the continent of Asia. This temporary enslavement of Europe by Germany was Hitler's personal achievement; and Germany's swift loss of her conquests – which was even more extraordinary than her swift achievement of them – was due to Hitler's personal inability to reap for Germany a harvest that had been ripened by the magic of his personal gifts.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Germany was well placed and well equipped for dominating the rest of Europe. She now occupied the central position in Europe that France had occupied before the centre of European population and production had shifted eastwards in the second half of the nineteenth century. In continental Europe early-twentieth-century Germany was the most highly industrialized country, with the largest fund of technologically skilled man-power. Indeed, in this half century her industrial potential was greater than that of any other country in the world with the single exception of the United States; and Germany could possibly have raised herself up to, and perhaps even above, the level of the United States' industrial potency if, without prematurely falling into war with the United States, she had managed to reinforce her own massive national economy by integrating with it the economies of all the adjacent continental territories that were actually under her domination on the eve of the United States' entry into the Second World War.

On planes of economic action that were out of Hitler's sight – the financial plane, for instance – considerable progress towards an integration of Hitler's Europe was in fact duly achieved by German technical ability even within the short period 1940-5; and some progress was also made towards the integration of the employment of labour and industrial plant thanks to the abilities of a Sauckel and a Speer, though on these planes the efficiency of the German technicians was hamstrung by Hitler's resistance to their efforts. This

resistance of Hitler's to the harvesting, by German technical prowess, of the opportunities of aggrandizement for Germany that Hitler's own gifts had brought within Germany's reach was undoubtedly one of the most effective causes of the collapse of Hitler's European edifice – and of Bismarck's German edifice along with it in the same grand catastrophe.

The measure of the extent to which Hitler thus sabotaged his predecessors' and his own handiwork may be gauged by imagining one of the historic master-empire-builders standing in Hitler's shoes on the morrow of the fall of France or, for that matter, on the morrow of the agreements made at Munich. If Hitler's cards had been in the hands, not of Hitler, but of Augustus or Han Liu Pang or Cyrus, what might the thoroughbred man of genius not have made of them? Assuredly he would have fashioned out of Hitler's Europe an oecumenical empire that would have lasted for at least four centuries after the founder's own day. Even Napoleon – who resembled Hitler in lacking Augustus's moderation, though he was, of course, poles apart from Hitler in the Caesarean height of his powers – might perhaps have steered his empire clear of the rocks of Moscow and Waterloo if he had held all the cards that Hitler held in October 1938 and in June 1940. For Napoleon, unlike Hitler, could reap some harvest from his conquests in virtue of knowing how to present himself to his non-French subjects not simply as a conqueror and an exploiter but also as a bringer of precious administrative and cultural gifts and therefore in some sense as a liberator. Napoleon's Polish lancers fought for him to the last, and he received his apotheosis in the German Jew Heine's *Buck Le Grand*. It lay similarly within Hitler's power to win the devotion, not of the Poles, but of the Ukrainians, and to be glorified, not by the Jews, but by Russian Christians and bourgeois whom he might have brought up again out of the catacombs into the light of day in a beneficent harrowing of a Communist hell. But such large-minded Napoleonic deeds were quite beyond Hitler's moral and intellectual range.

Though Hitler and Napoleon were not native-born sons of the countries over which they made themselves dictators, each of them reflected his adopted country's traditional attitude in his policy towards subject peoples. Napoleon took over an un-Corsican eighteenth-century and seventeenth-century French tradition of being a culture-bearer as well us a conqueror; Hitler took over an un-Austrian Prussian tradition of finding no pleasure in the acquisition of power without savouring this by tasting blood. It gave Hitler no satisfaction to

establish his ascendancy over foreign peoples unless he could make them rue it by knocking them on the head; and, rather than forgo this tigrine pleasure, he would forfeit all chance of winning their good will and securing their co-operation. Hitler could never have brought himself to emulate Napoleon's stroke of trying to win the loyalty of his Italian subjects by crowning himself with the iron crown of Lombardy. In Hitler's Europe the Italians were, in theory, not conquered provincials, but equal partners with the Germans in a Rome-Berlin Axis; yet Hitler's only idea of how to deal with these nominal allies of his was to use Germany's overwhelmingly superior power and efficiency in order to reduce the Italians to the status, *de facto*, of Germany's subjects; and the Italians' resentment and alarm at German domination played its part, side by side with the Anglo-American invasion of Italy, in precipitating the half-successful Italian anti-Fascist revolution and break-away from the Axis in 1943. *A fortiori*, Hitler indulged in the Prussian pleasure of offensively asserting his domination over satellite states and conquered peoples. The only conquered country towards which he showed for a time some rudiments of consideration and forbearance was Vichy France; and his motive here was the obvious one of inducing the Vichy Government's representatives in the French overseas empire, which was inaccessible to Hitler himself, to refrain from throwing in their lot with the Fighting French and their English-speaking allies. A military occupation of Vichy France was his immediate retort to the Allies' landings in French North-West Africa.

Hitler's ideal (founded on his persistent illusion that the war would be a short and a light one) was that «the German alone should bear arms»[1] and the combination of this ideal of a German "Herrenvolk" with his demagogic reluctance (springing from the same fundamental misconception of the character of the war) to mobilize German man-power to the full, or to mobilize German woman-power at all, had depleted his fighting force by the time when his need for troops was becoming desperate. In the last stages of the war he did consent to eke out German military man-power in a considerable scale by impressing into the ranks prisoners of war belonging to the non-Great Russian nationalities of the Soviet Union and by accepting the military services of "collaborators" in the conquered countries who were

[1] «Nur der Deutsche soll Waffen tragen»: see below, p. 79 and note 6.

aware that, if the Nazis' heads fell, their own heads would fall too. But Hitler never persuaded – and never sought to persuade – any one of the nominally allied or liberated peoples in his Europe that its own national interest was identical with the German people's. No Ukrainian counterpart of Napoleon's faithful Polish henchman Poniatowski ever came forward to preach *bona fide* to his people that, in fighting for the preservation of Hitler's Europe, they would be fighting for their own national cause; and Rosenberg's efforts to win the Ukrainians to this idea were defeated by Hitler's determination to treat all non-Germans in his Europe as creatures existing merely to be exploited to serve German ends.

Hitler was, in fact, a commonplace mind and a vulgar character that had been endowed, by a *Lusum Naturae*, with an inordinate measure of the narrowly circumscribed gifts of the demagogue and the trickster; and, when these gifts thrust an empire into his hands, they did not tell him what to do with it. His inspiration here seems to have been limited to two ideas that were both narrow-minded and narrow-hearted. He would annex to the German Reich the maximum amount of conquered territory that there was any prospect of his being able to assimilate. The rest of his Europe – allies, satellites, and conquered peoples alike – he would reduce to a servile, and in the lowest categories to a sub-human, status in a swollen German Reich's European colonial empire.

Direct annexations were the only changes in the political conditions of Hitler's Europe in which Hitler himself showed an interest. For example, in proposals outlined at a conference at Göring's headquarters on 19 June 1940, on the morrow of the fall of France, it was announced to be «the Fürher's will» that

«Luxembourg shall be incorporated in the German Reich and that Norway shall come to Germany. Alsace-Lorraine will be morticed into the German Reich, and an independent Breton state shall be set up. Tentative plans are also on the stocks relating to Belgium, to the special treatment of the Flemings there, and to the setting up of a Burgundian state»[2].

The new Franco-German frontier was to include in Germany, not merely Alsace-Lorraine, but also further slices of north-eastern and northern France[3]. There was a plan[4] for "germanizing"

[2] *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg, 1945-1946*. Proceedings and documents in evidence (Nuremberg, International Military Tribunal, 1948) [referred to hereafter as *I.M.T. Nuremberg*], xxvii. 31(1155-PS). Ibid, xxxvii. 222 (513-F).
[3] Ibid, xxxvii. 222 (513-F).
[4] See ibid. p. 220.

within ten years certain territories – Luxembourg, Alsace-Lorraine, Styria, Bialystok – that were to be placed under a Chief of Civil Administration. According to a German Foreign Ministry memorandum of 3 October 1942[5], Hitler, on the eve of the turning of the tide against him in the war, was laying it down that Denmark must «become a German province». Proposals for cutting up a still unslaughtered Russian bear's skin had been put forward by Hitler at a conference held on 16 July 1941[6]. Galicia was to become a *Reichsgebiet*; the Baltic republics were to become an integral part of Greater Germany; the Crimea, the Volga German district, and Baku were to become Reich territory.

This exclusive concern of Hitler's with the territorial aggrandizement of his Reich worked for his defeat in the war by precluding all possibility of Germany's national war efforts being reinforced by any voluntary support from any of the non-German peoples in Hitler's Europe. A second cause of Hitler's defeat was an administrative and organizational chaos which the triumph of National-Socialism had let loose in the Third Reich and which spread into Hitler's Europe in the wake of the German conquests in the Second World War.

In the Hitlerian Revolution the principal existing secular institutions in Germany – the *Länder*, the political parties, the trade unions, and the rest – had been ruthlessly liquidated on the pretext that these were intolerable impediments to the monolithic unity which it was the Fuhrer's mission to bestow upon the German people; but the more or less harmonious and fruitful variety of the old order that had been swept away had been replaced, in fact, not by national unity but partly by an anarchy and partly by a vacuum.

As in the western provinces of the Roman Empire in the fifth century of the Christian Era the complex structure of the Diocletianic imperial régime had been supplanted by an Ishmaelitish struggle between Goth, Sueve, Vandal, Burgundian, and Frankish war-bands that now roamed over a fallen civilization's derelict domain, perpetually clashing with one another and incessantly exploiting their ex-Roman subjects, so, among the ruins of the Second Reich and of the adjoining European states which the Nazis liquidated one after

[5] Published in the Department of State Bulletin (Washington, U.S.G.P.O.), 2 June 1946, pp. 939-40.
[6] *I.M.T. Nuremberg*, xxxviii.87, 89-90 (221-L); *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* (A collection of documentary evidence and guide materials prepared by the American and British prosecuting staffs (...) for the International Tribunal at Nürnberg) [referred to hereafter as *N.C.A.*] (Washington, U.S.G.P.O., 1946), vii. 1087-90.

another, the old articulation of society was replaced by a frantic competition between the SS and other upstart gangs of neo-barbarians whose feuds with one another were not the less fierce or the less poisonous on account of the uniform Nazi badge that was worn by all these rival heirs of the old Germany and the old Europe. This inter-Nazi struggle for power round the steps of the Führer's throne was carried on shamelessly and recklessly down to the last moment of the Third Reich's fight for existence against the overwhelming coalition that it had rallied against itself by successive flagrant acts of aggression. A reader of the present volume will be able to judge for himself the amazing extent to which this Nazi domestic discord contributed to the victory of Germany's adversaries by breaking the edge of the German war effort. Throughout the war every prominent member of Hitler's barbarian *comitatus* was waging with one hand a more vigorous war against his adversaries on the home front than he was leaving himself the energy to wage against the British, Russians, and Americans. And as for the Führer, under whose nose this fatal domestic warfare was being conducted, either he was unaware of what was going on or else he chose to ignore it – whether because he did not appreciate its baleful effect on his chances of winning his own war or because he had learnt by experience that the surest way for him to avoid being devoured himself by his pack of wolves was to connive at their devouring one another.

While chaos thus reigned in Hitler's Germany and Hitler's Europe on the political and administrative planes – and eventually on the military plane too, as Himmler's power waxed and the professional soldiers' power waned – the organization of Germany's resources, and the planning of her policy, on the economic plane – on which Hitler had perforce to give a freer hand to experts because economics were above his and his fellow-gangsters' heads – were disastrously handicapped by Hitler's demagogic reluctance to be convinced that he could not avoid losing the war if he would not impose a total mobilization on the German people.

Hitler's obstinate refusal to sanction the mobilization of all the means at his command was perhaps the most extraordinary of all the self-inflicted causes of his defeat. In the summer of 1942, when Hitler's Europe stood at its maximum extent, the area dominated by the armed forces of the Third Reich stretched from the continental European shore of the Atlantic to the north-western end of the Caucasus, and from the North Cape to the Libyan

Desert. The aggregate potential resources of this vast area were very great; and if a statistician had been asked to estimate what Germany's control of them would enable her to achieve in her struggle with her opponents – even at a date when these included the United States and the Soviet Union as well as the states members of the British Commonwealth – he might reasonably have reported, on a review of the material facts and figures, that a Power commanding so substantial a proportion of the total resources of the contemporary world could never be brought to the ground by any counter-coalition, even if the assets in its hand should prove insufficient to enable the holder of them to defeat and conquer the rest of the world now that it was united in arms against him.

Any such forecast was, of course, totally confuted by the historical event which, within three years of the date at which Hitler's power stood at its zenith, saw the German armies expelled from all their conquests, Germany herself invaded and overrun by the armies of her adversaries, and the German Government compelled to dissolve itself in an unconditional surrender. This striking confutation of a statistical forecast that might have been not unreasonable if material facts had been the only relevant consideration was, of course, the work of political and psychological factors that could not be expressed in statistical terms.

The chapter on Labour in the Economic Part of the present volume brings out the amazing fact that Hitler's Reich – which had been created for aggression, and which had repudiated every virtue and shrunk from no crime in its determination to make sure that its cold-blooded designs should succeed – nevertheless allowed itself to lose the war without ever having fully mobilized – if the test of full mobilization was the degree of mobilization achieved in Great Britain after the fall of France.

In the nineteen-thirties, when Hitler was making his preparations for launching an aggressive war, he could not be persuaded to arm "in depth", though he was contemplating the possibility that his attacks on small countries might bring Great Powers into the field against him before he had achieved his war aims. This impolicy caused misgivings to his professional military advisers; for the clear lesson of the First World War for Germany was the improvidence of assuming that an intended war was bound to be a short one just because Germany was going to choose the time and place for delivering her blow, and had accumulated in advance a sufficient stock of munitions and of first-line troops to give her,

on paper, the means of making this first blow a decisive one. On the eve of Hitler's launching of a Second World War there was nothing in the international situation to assure him that the history of the First World War would not repeat itself in this respect. Above all, he could not be sure that, before Germany had overcome the resistance of all her victims in Europe, German aggression would not provoke, once again, the intervention of the United States – whose war potential would certainly again ensure Germany's defeat if and when it was once again mobilized against her. Yet Hitler could not or would not think of a Hitlerian war except in terms of a Hitlerian political coup carried out by military means; and the military equivalent of the political coups by which Hitler had reoccupied the Rhineland, annexed Austria, and broken and subjugated Czechoslovakia, would be a *Blitzkrieg* in which novel weapons and tactics, employed with audacity, would bring Germany's victims to their knees before there could be time for the full war potential on either side to be brought into play in a war of attrition.

Hitler persisted in thinking of the Second World War in these "smash and grab" terms of the burglar's profession even after the war had been twice lengthened – first, against Hitler's will, through his failure to win the Battle of Britain, and then through his deliberate assault upon the Soviet Union. On each of these two occasions he seems still to have expected to win a decisive victory as quickly and as cheaply as he had won it in the Battle of France. On 1 January 1941, in an Order of the Day to the Wehrmacht, he predicted «the completion of the greatest victory» in German history; on 3 October 1941 he declared in a public speech in the Sportpalast in Berlin that Bolshevism was now crushed and that its final liquidation would be only a matter of time; and, even after the winter of 1941-2 had left the Soviet Union still in the field and had brought the United States into it, Hitler's economic and political advisers failed to persuade him to set about fully mobilizing the resources of the *Lebensraum* which the German armies had occupied until a stage of the war had been reached at which the fullest possible mobilization could no longer avail to save Germany from defeat.

In particular, Hitler was very late in agreeing to anything like a general mobilization of man-power, and he never drew on the potential human resources of the female half of the population in the great area under his control. When, after the fall of France, Great Britain

was at last mobilizing in earnest, there was a saying current among the military authorities in the United Kingdom that Britain would redress the disparity in numbers between herself and Germany by mobilizing her women. The writer remembers the annoyance that he used to feel at the time when this recipe for winning the war was propounded to him. It seemed to him cold comfort, because he took it for granted that Germany had long since put in train the mobilization of her woman-power with all the thoroughness of the German temperament and all the ruthlessness of a totalitarian government that lived for making wars and winning them. As far as he could see, the mobilization of woman-power would leave the relative strengths of Great Britain and Germany as they were, while increasing the absolute superiority in numbers of the Power commanding the larger population. It never occurred to him that Great Britain would be the first of the two to mobilize her women, and still less that Germany would look on while Great Britain made this addition to her mobilized strength without attempting to do likewise. Indeed, it was not till he read the draft of Part II of the present volume that he realized that, in 1940, «the damned fools» had been «right» in their apparently fatuous assumption that they were going to redress the balance by mobilizing the British women without defeating their purpose by provoking Germany into following suit.

In the course of the three years ending in May 1942 the total civilian German labour force was actually allowed to decrease by nearly 4 million; and, in order to make good this deficit, the Hitlerian régime was content to import foreign male labour from countries now under Germany's domination, instead of applying the radical remedies of drastically reallocating the employment of the German male labour that had not been drafted into the army, and putting in hand a large-scale mobilization of German women. There was an actual decrease during this period in the total number of women in the civilian labour force in Germany; there were only temporary and sectional increases in the length of the working week; and not only down to this date but throughout the war Germany's industrial plant continued to be operated for the most part by single-shift working, instead of being kept running right round the clock for twenty-four hours in the day. In March 1942 Sauckel was appointed Plenipotentiary for Labour Allocation with almost unlimited power over the recruitment, utilization, and allocation of labour, but at this stage, when the war with Russia was falsifying

Hitler's expectations by dragging on, the German armed forces were requiring increased numbers of German men who were only procurable at the expense of German industry – and this at the very time when industrial production needed not only to be maintained but to be greatly increased in view of the Soviet Union's continuance in the war and the United States' entry into it.

This signal failure of the Hitlerian régime to mobilize either the woman-power or even the man-power that was at its disposal was reflected in the history of Germany's war-time armaments production. This was actually allowed to decrease after the invasion of the Soviet Union, in the expectation that the war with Russia would be a short one for which the stocks in hand would be sufficient. Between February and July 1942 the production of armaments was raised by 55 per cent, through an increase in the efficiency of the use of the resources in labour, materials, and plant already allocated to the armaments industries. The Stalingrad disaster at the close of 1942 made it impossible any longer to ignore the need for a fundamental change in Germany's economic policy; but it was now too late. The opportunity to provide, after all, for "defence in depth" by broadening the industrial basis of Germany's war economy had now been lost. Labour and materials could no longer be spared for projects that would not give immediate returns, and, in her subsequent losing battle against an inexorably approaching defeat, Germany remained the prisoner of Hitler's fortunately fatal conception of the war as a "stunt" in which the fruits of an all-out effort were to be culled, without ever making the all-out effort, by the brilliant use of a trickster's audacity and sleight of hand.

In these adverse, and in fact really hopeless, circumstances, Speer, who was appointed Minister for Armaments and Munitions in February 1942, achieved notable results. Yet, even at this desperate stage of the war, Speer made little headway in his efforts to reduce the output of civilian consumers' goods – and this largely owing to Hitler's invincible unwillingness to endanger his demagogic hold upon his public by bringing home to them the seriousness of their plight through sanctioning measures for the curtailment of civilian expenditure. In producing his results, Speer therefore had to concentrate on making the fullest productive use of existing reserves of tools and equipment at the disposal of the German armaments industries, and on measures of rationalization; and by these means he

managed, in spite of having one hand tied behind his back, to produce a constant rise in armaments production until the autumn of 1944, when the peak was reached. Considering how large a part of her temporarily acquired foreign resources Germany had already lost by that date, and how severely she was now being bombed at home, Speer's feat must be considered remarkable; but, by the time it had been achieved, it was already clear that it was labour lost; for by then the shortage of raw materials – which had been hanging all the time, like a sword of Damocles, over Hitler's neck – was making itself felt with a vengeance, and its effect was now being clinched by a catastrophic falling off in Germany's manufacturing capacity. In fact, by the autumn of 1944 it was already clear that, on every account, Germany would find herself unable to carry on the war for many months longer.

Thus Hitler lost his Europe by the cumulative effect of three major failures to take patently necessary action. He would not mobilize his Europe's war potential to anything approaching its full capacity; he would not stamp out the domestic warfare between rival Nazi gangs; and he would not make a bid for winning the voluntary co-operation of any of his allies, satellites, or subjects by treating them as human beings who had a right to consideration for their own sake. The verdict of history on Hitler's downfall was *quos Deus vult perdere, prius dementat*. The lesson for the peoples who had endured the tribulations of a Second World War rather than resign themselves to being a Nazi Germany's slaves was that, in spite of Hitler's overthrow, some such hateful servitude was the price for political unification that they would nevertheless still have to pay to some other abominable dictator if they did not unite voluntarily in an atomic age in which mankind was bound in the last resort to purchase unity at any price as the only alternative to self-annihilation.