

PROFILES IN POWER

Hitler

... this short book ought to be read by everybody with any interest, whether general or specialized, in Hitler and the Third Reich.' *History*

Adolf Hitler has left a lasting mark on the twentieth century, as the dictator of Germany and instigator of a genocidal war, culminating in the ruin of much of Europe and the globe.

This innovative best-seller explores the nature and mechanics of Hitler's power, and how he used it.

On the face of it, Adolf Hitler was an unlikely candidate for dictatorial power:

- Why, of all the fanatics in Germany after the First World War, was it Hitler who found such mass appeal?
- How did such an unimpressive figure come to take control of the machinery of a complex modern state?
- Why – contrary to all expectations – was his authority not curtailed by the traditional ruling classes and constitutional constraints?
- What did his personal role in the shaping of policy amount to?
- Was he personally taking the key decisions, right to the very end?

Professor Kershaw answers these questions to provide a lucid introduction to the character and exercise of Hitler's dictatorial power.

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In addition to his publications, he was consultant to the BAFTA-winning BBC-TV series *The Nazis: A Warning from History*, to the BBC2 programme *War of the Century*, to ZDF's *Hitler: eine Bilanz* and to ZDF's series in preparation on the Holocaust.

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POWER OF THE 'IDEA'

Hitler's personality should not be overrated as a factor in his power. Nor, however, should it be ignored. Its greatest impact was upon the circle of the earliest, most fanatically devoted followers, his most committed 'inner circle' of disciples. Looking for a cause and a leader before they 'found' Nazism and Hitler, they formed the core of the 'charismatic community' which saw greatness in Hitler.

The 'charisma' in Hitler's own personality, so influential among his close followers, was rooted in the power which flowed — for those already open to it — from his 'idea', his political credo, together with the remarkable ability he showed from the moment he entered active politics to sway the masses. In this chapter, therefore, we examine the emergence of the 'conviction politician', and the response to the personality and ideas of Hitler of his early followers who became some of the most important personages in the Third Reich.

In physical appearance, Hitler was unprepossessing.¹ He was of medium height and fair complexion. His head seemed to dominate the whole of his body. His high forehead was concealed by the drooping forelock. The centre-point of his face seemed to be his trimmed moustache. He never looked smartly dressed. His teeth were poor and in later years the deterioration in his formerly good eyesight eventually necessitated him wearing reading glasses (though he was anxious not to be seen in public in them). His slightly protruding eyes and unblinking gaze were his most striking feature.

Hitler's personal habits were repetitive, conservative, but at the same time rather quirky. He held as far as poss-

ible to fixed daily routines, was near teetotal and (from the early 1930s onwards) vegetarian, did not smoke or drink coffee, and had a feish for cleanliness which saw him washing with abnormal frequency. He needed little sleep, read avidly and widely (though unsystematically), and possessed an extraordinary memory for factual detail. He monopolised conversation with opinionated views on a wide range of subjects. On anything connected with history, art and architecture, he considered himself particularly expert. He was also especially interested in medicine and biology. His reliance upon his self-learning went hand in hand with an utter contempt for 'intellectuals' dependent upon a formal education. There is no doubt, however, that, though his knowledge was half-baked, one sided and dogmatically inflexible, he was intelligent and sharp-witted.

Though, even in his regular entourage, Hitler remained in human terms distant and unapproachable, he could show great consideration in trivial matters, such as what to give his secretaries as birthday presents. He liked the company of women, and was invariably courteous and gracious towards them, especially if they were beautiful. He could make those around him laugh with a cutting humour and a talent for mimicry. And he had a strong sense of loyalty towards those of his comrades who had endured sacrifices to support him from the early days.

These personal characteristics would have been insufficient to single out Hitler for attention had they existed in isolation from his political world view and his ability to sway an audience by the force of his public speaking. Seen in purely personal terms, detached from his political philosophy, Hitler was indeed a mediocrity. But his political creed and the conviction with which he expressed it transformed him into a personality of quite extraordinary dynamism.

It was for long thought after the collapse of the Third Reich that Hitler's message consisted of no more than the empty phrases of the power-thirsty demagogue, that the man behind the message was as devoid of genuine ideas as were the classical tyrants of old. It is now universally recognised, however, that behind the vague missionary appeal lay a set of interrelated ideas — however repulsive and irrational — which congealed by the mid 1920s into a cohesive ideology. While Hitler's fixed ideas, which remained unchanged in

essentials down to his death in 1945, could not individually or in themselves go far towards explaining his mass appeal, or the growth of the NSDAP, they did amount to a personal driving-force of unusual strength. They provided Hitler with the all-encompassing world view which gave him the opportunity exclusivist ideologies offer of ordering every idea within his own comprehensive philosophy and of ruling out as absolutely untenable any alternative proposals. They gave him, too, the 'missionary' zeal of the leader who appears to combine the vision with the certainty that his path is the right one – in fact, the only one which can be taken.

Though he was often indecisive about precise political actions, Hitler never wavered about the certainty of his ideas. To those in his proximity, who shared his general prejudices, the strength and certainty of conviction, extending beyond that of the average bigot or crank into a grandiose and irrevocable formula for a glorious future, was a major factor in establishing his personal supremacy. The simplicity of his dualistic world-view of a Manichean struggle between good and evil in which everything was reduced to absolutes – all or nothing – was matched by the fanatical ferocity and unyielding tenacity with which his views were upheld. Such 'attributes' made him a notable figure in the circles of the *völkisch* Right in which he mixed in the early 1920s. And the fact that his public appearances rapidly made him the leading propaganda exponent of such views and opened up contacts to leading circles of Munich's moneyed bourgeoisie made him indispensable and assured him of the support of others on the extreme Right.

The essence of Hitler's personal world-view comprised a belief in history as racial struggle, radical anti-Semitism, a conviction that Germany's future could be secured only through conquest of *Lebensraum* ('living space') at the expense of Russia, and the uniting of all these strands in the notion of a life-or-death fight to the finish with Marxism – most concretely embodied in the 'Jewish Bolshevism' of the Soviet Union. These interlocking ideas were significant not only in the sense that they were held to with extraordinary tenacity for over twenty years, but above all in that the ideological aims arising from them came to be put into actual practice during the Second World War. We have to

take them seriously, therefore, in an evaluation of Hitler's power. Before proceeding further we need to look at their formation, development and content.

Exactly when, how and why Hitler's fanatically held ideas took their hold on him is far from clear. But the gradual forging of the various strands of his thinking into a composite ideology was completed by the time of the writing of *Mein Kampf* in 1924, and scarcely wavered thereafter. An important formative period was his time in Linz in 1905–6 after leaving school and especially in Vienna from 1907 to 1913. The experience of war and, quite traumatically, of Germany's defeat was a second, even more vital influence upon Hitler. Finally, the years 1920 to 1924 saw some crucial modifications to his ideas, under the impact, not least, of the Russian civil war.

Hitler's deepest hatred was of the Jews. The roots and causes of his visceral anti-Semitism have been much discussed but can still not be established with absolute certainty. Some theories are outrageously fanciful. The notion that Hitler's anti-Jewish paranoia can be attributable to the fact that he himself was of part-Jewish descent is without foundation.² That he feared or believed that his father's father had been Jewish is more plausible, but cannot be proved.³ Even more speculative is the attempt to link Hitler's pathological hatred of Jews to his hysterical trauma while suffering from mustard gas poisoning at the end of the First World War, which he allegedly associated with the death of his mother in 1907 following a gas anaesthetic delivered by a Jewish doctor.⁴ Apart from the fact that Hitler had been grateful enough to the doctor at the time to give him one of his water-colour paintings as a present,⁵ this theory ignores the evidence for Hitler's anti-Semitism during his Vienna days.

In fact, we remain in the dark about why Hitler became a manic anti-Semite. Psychological explanations revolving around sexual fantasies and a persecution complex bear differing degrees of plausibility but ultimately amount to no more than guesswork. All that can with some certainty be presumed is that Hitler's personal frustrations at the discrepancy between his own self-esteem and his drop-out existence as a failed artist and social outsider found a focus in an ever stronger negative image which provided both

explanation for his own failure and also 'proof' that history was ultimately on his side.⁶

Hitler's own story, retailed in *Mein Kampf*, tells of his conversion to anti-Semitism after encountering a kaffan-garbed figure with black hair locks in the streets of Vienna.⁷ This was probably a dramatisation. Hitler was already reading pan-German anti-Semitic newspapers in his Linz days and was even then an admirer of the Austrian anti-Semite and pan-German leader Georg von Schönerer.⁸ But there seems no doubt that whatever views he already had on Jews were inordinately strengthened while he was in Vienna. At this time he became greatly impressed by the vehemently anti-Semitic demagogue Karl Lueger, the mayor of the city, whom he later described, in a rare show of admiration for others, as 'the greatest German mayor of all times'.⁹ Though the 'Kaffan Jew' story is probably embellished, it seems likely that it does reflect some telling experience of Hitler during this period, when he was obviously soaking up anti-Semitic literature, confirming and sharpening his embryonic prejudice. At any rate, it seems to have marked the change in him from the conventional anti-Semite of the Linz period to the manic obsessive anti-Semite which he remained to the end of his days. From this time, wrote Hitler, 'wherever I went, I began to see Jews, and the more I saw, the more sharply they became distinguished in my eyes from the rest of humanity'.¹⁰

The Vienna years were also a formative period in the development of other aspects of Hitler's world-view. According to his own account – plausible in its general tone if not accurate in detail – his own 'drifting' existence among the Viennese underprivileged meant that he tasted the crass social injustices of bourgeois society at first hand, and plunged him thereby into contemplation of the 'social question'. His encounters with Viennese social democracy led to a violent rejection of its class-based, anti-nationalist doctrine. His detestation of the Habsburg monarchy was part of his already pronounced, fanatical German hyper-nationalism which he had soaked up since his attachment to the Schönerner movement in his Linz days.¹¹ Once his 'recognition' of the Jew as the 'culprit' for all these ills took its place as the dominant ingredient, the essentials of an ideology based on burning revulsion towards existing society

coupled with a utopian vision of a future order to be created by the strong and ruthless authority of an ethnically German national state began to slot into place.

Hitler's world-view was, then, already formed in good measure by the time he served in the trenches. A core element – the social Darwinistic view of history as a struggle between individual races with victory going to the strongest, fittest and most ruthless – seems to have occupied its place at the centre of this world-view by 1914–18 at the latest.¹² His hysterical reaction, while lying blinded in the Pasewalk hospital, at the news of the triumph of the forces he hated with all the fibre of his being appears to have led to an intensification of his already fixed dualistic world-view – above all, his conviction that guilt for the catastrophe which had befallen him and all he believed in lay at the door of the ubiquitous Jew.¹³

Hitler had apparently earlier discussed with one of his comrades at the front whether after the war he would become an architect or a politician.¹⁴ While in the military hospital, he claimed, he took the decision to become a politician.¹⁵ In reality, the 'decision' to involve himself in active politics came less self-consciously and more indirectly. Still in the army, he returned to a Munich scarcely recognisable from the city he had left in 1914. Political conditions were in turmoil. After the revolution, government had been headed by a left-wing socialist, Kurt Eisner, a Jew. The assassination of Eisner in February 1919 by a young right-wing aristocrat led to political chaos and a republic of Soldiers' and Workers' Councils – several of whose leaders were Jewish – being proclaimed in April; and this in turn was within weeks bloodily overthrown by forces of the paramilitary Right.

Hitler refrained from any active involvement. But from his army barracks, he observed what was taking place and read widely in right-wing tracts, which presumably confirmed his own diagnosis of events. During the late spring and summer he attended army indoctrination courses. These introduced him to deeper consideration of the workings of international finance capital – a topic on which he was influenced by the ideas of Gottfried Feder, the economic 'guru' of the early Nazi Party. He also attended lectures and seminars on German history, socialism in theory and practice, the

economic situation and the peace conditions, Russia under Bolshevik rule, price policy, and the question of Bavaria and Reich unity. He became noted for his impassioned and opinionated views.

Hitler's own awareness of the impact he had as a speaker in such circles constituted his own first step into active politics. And when he himself was assigned to work in the army 'educational unit', he was singled out as 'a born popular speaker who through his fanaticism and populist style positively compelled his audience to take note and share his views'.¹⁶ 'All at once,' noted Hitler, 'I was offered an opportunity of speaking before a larger audience; and the thing that I had always presumed from pure feeling without knowing it was now corroborated: I could "speak".'¹⁷ It was above all in autumn 1919, as Hitler came into contact with the newly formed German Workers' Party and began to realise what an impact he could have on an audience, that his way into politics – though only on the beerhall fringes – opened up.

At the time that Hitler began to make his mark as a populist demagogue in the Munich beerhalls, his political views – though held and expressed with extraordinary fanaticism – remained the conventional fare of the extreme Right. There was nothing to distinguish them from those of the pan-Germans or of other vehemently racist-nationalist groups which abounded in Munich at that time. Agitation against the Versailles Treaty dominated his early speeches. He demanded – as did all pan-Germans – the return of the lost colonies, and the uniting of Germany and Austria. France and Britain, not Russia, were seen as the main enemies of Germany. And the Jews were attacked above all as the agents of finance capital. Hitler himself claimed that his world-view had already been decisively built before the war. But vital steps towards the completed ideology still remained to be taken in the early 1920s. In particular, his ideas on the direction of Germany's future foreign policy, on the Jews, and not least on his own future leadership role, underwent significant modification between his entry into politics and the writing of *Mein Kampf*.

Apart from his own voracious – if unsystematic and one-sided – reading, which included influential social-Darwinist and geopolitical tracts, a crucial part in amending Hitler's

thinking in these years was played by the Bavarian poet Dietrich Eckart, and by the Baltic Germans Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter and Alfred Rosenberg. Eckart contributed his own philosophy of struggle to overcome 'soulless Jewishness' as the prerequisite of a genuine revolution – in contrast to the 'false' revolution of 1918 – which would bring forth new leaders and true socialism. Rosenberg and Scheubner-Richter were even more influential in focusing Hitler's mind on the 'Jewishness' of Russian Bolshevism. Both had experienced the Russian Revolution, both were extreme anti-Semites, and both were in touch with violently anti-Bolshevik circles. In the early ideology of the Nazi Party, neither Russia nor Bolshevism had figured prominently. But now, Rosenberg acquainted Hitler with the ideas of a 'Jewish world conspiracy' contained in the forged 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion'. And the two Balts played a decisive role in cementing in Hitler's mind the notion of the Jewish essence of Bolshevism. This provided the keystone to the edifice of Hitler's ideology. By the time we reach *Mein Kampf*, the extirpation of 'Jewish Bolshevism' has become synonymous with the destruction of the Soviet Union in the German quest for 'living space'.

The shifts in Hitler's world-view between 1919 and 1924 can be followed in his speeches and writings over this period. Under the influence of Rosenberg and Scheubner-Richter, the relationship of anti-Semitism and anti-Marxism in Hitler's thinking underwent a transformation during these years. Though both strands of thought had already long been present in his mind – with anti-Semitism dominant – they became systematically conjoined only in this period through the catalytic image of Bolshevik Russia.

Before the fusion with anti-Marxism, Hitler's vicious anti-Semitism had, in his public speeches, initially focused more intensively upon anti-capitalism. His first noted public comments on the 'Jewish Question' occurred in August 1919 in the context of a 'lecture' on capitalism, while he was employed by the Reichswehr to provide political indoctrination for 'unreliable' soldiers returning from captivity.¹⁸ It was also in this capacity that his superior officer asked him, a few weeks later, to reply to an enquiry on the 'Jewish problem'. In his letter, the earliest surviving text of his statement on the subject, Hitler spoke of the Jews as a race, not a

religious group, and of the need to combat them by rational means, not simply on the basis of emotion. This would necessitate the removal of their legal rights and ultimately the 'removal of the Jews altogether'.¹⁹ Jewish power was seen as the power of money, 'the gleam of gold'. Marxism was not mentioned, though Hitler regarded the Jews as the driving force behind the revolution and social democracy. While the exclusion of legal rights for Jews was prominently expressed in the Nazi Party programme of February 1920, again there was explicit mention neither of Marxism nor of Bolshevism.

The heavy concentration upon Jewish finance capital in Hitler's early speeches was linked to his allegations of the responsibility of the Jews for the war, the defeat and the millions of German dead. So fundamental was this point to his thinking that later, in a notorious passage in *Mein Kampf*, he claimed that the lives of a million Germans killed at the front could have been saved if 'twelve to fifteen thousand of these Hebrew corrupters of the people had been held under poison gas'.²⁰ The fury at 'Jewish' war financiers dominated many of his early speeches. There were repeated intense attacks upon usurers, profiteers, racketeers and parasites. Over and over again he demanded hanging for Jewish racketeers.²¹ Genuine socialism for him, stated Hitler, meant to be an anti-Semite.²² Under Feder's influence, he distinguished between essentially healthy industrial capital and flourishing 'Jewish finance capital', which constituted the real evil. Once 'Jewish Bolshevism' had been incorporated into this thinking, international capital was seen as working hand in hand with the 'international element in Soviet Russia' against German national interests.²³

In speech after speech Hitler denounced the Jews in the most vicious terms. He rejected, as he had done in his letter of September 1919, emotional 'pogrom' anti-Semitism as the answer to the problem, but said Germans should be prepared to enter a pact with the devil if necessary in order to extirpate the evil of Jewry.²⁴ He demanded the basic solution: 'removal of the Jews from our people'.²⁵ He spoke of the prevention of the 'Jewish undermining of our people' by internment in concentration camps.²⁶ His language, violent in the extreme, became coloured with biological terminology suggestive of the eradication of germs.

He proclaimed in August 1920:

Don't think that you can combat an illness without killing its causative organ, without destroying the bacillus, and don't think that you can combat racial tuberculosis without seeing to it that the people is freed from the causative organ of racial tuberculosis. The impact of Jewry will never pass away, and the poisoning of the people will not end, as long as the causal agent, the Jew, is not removed from our midst.²⁷

In a speech to the SA in February 1922, Hitler stated that in his view only the 'single, total and exclusive' concern with the 'Jewish Question' mattered, and a few months later summed up the entire Party programme in the one point that no Jew could be a people's comrade.²⁸ But a change of emphasis had taken place in his expressions of anti-Semitism. Under the influence of events in Russia, Hitler's main target switched from the Jews as the exponents of international finance capital – not that he ever forgot or ignored this element of his anti-Semitism – to the Jews as the power behind Marxism, and explicitly behind Marxism's practical political manifestation in Soviet Bolshevism. Either way, as the controller of international capital or as the controller of Bolshevik Marxism, the 'Jewish world conspiracy' presented Hitler with the image of an indomitable foe. But compared with his dismissal of effete bourgeois democracy, Marxism in its Bolshevik manifestation amounted to a *Welanschauung* which, in all its ruthless brutality, he could comprehend as a formidable force. It offered him a vision of the future which, in his eyes, only the racial struggle under Germany's leadership could prevent.

By the time of his trial for high treason in spring 1924, following the failed putsch attempt on 8–9 November 1923 when, in the Bürgerbräukeller in Munich, he had proclaimed a national revolution in the hope of overthrowing the Reich government, Hitler was telling the court that what he wanted to be was the breaker of Marxism, and asserting that the Nazi Movement knew only one enemy, the mortal enemy of Marxism.²⁹ The Jews were not mentioned. When the change in tone was noted by the 'Jewish' press and Hitler was asked about it, he replied in typical fashion that he had indeed changed his stance: while working on *Mein Kampf*, he

1922

world view

had realised that he had hitherto been too mild, and that the 'Jewish Question' was not of concern solely for the German people, but for all peoples, 'for Juda is the world plague'.³⁰ The struggle would not be victorious, therefore, until the international power of Jewry was completely annihilated.

The connection in Hitler's mind between Bolshevism and Jewry is the crucial additive responsible for the change in intonation. It was in spring and early summer 1920 that he first came to comment on a number of occasions on the catastrophic effect of Bolshevism in Russia and on Russia being destroyed by the Jews. By July 1920 he was explicitly combining the images of Bolshevism, Marxism and Soviet Russia in the picture of the brutal rule of the Jews, for which social democracy was allegedly paving the way in Germany.³¹

The theme of Bolshevik Russia preoccupied Hitler on numerous occasions during the following months. By June 1922 he was envisaging a struggle of two ideologies, the idealistic and the materialistic, representing the mission of the German people in the struggle against Bolshevism with the forces of good united against the mortal enemy of the Jew. The state was merely the means to the end of upholding the race.³² And by autumn 1922 his conception of the absolutely pivotal relationship of anti-Semitism and anti-Bolshevism had reached the point of development which was to dominate his political mission to the end. In October he wrote of a fight for life and death between two *Welanschauungen* which were incapable of coexistence. In this struggle there could only be victors and the annihilated. The example of Russia had shown what this meant: 'A victory of the Marxist idea signifies the complete extermination of the opponents The Bolshevisation of Germany . . . means the annihilation of the entire Christian-western culture altogether.' The aim of the Nazi Party could, therefore, be simply stated: 'Annihilation and extermination of the Marxist *Welanschauung*'.³³

Hitler's changing awareness of the significance of Bolshevik Russia for his racial philosophy had obvious implications for his foreign-policy thinking. It is, therefore, of note that it was precisely around the time, about 1922, when he was coming to conceive of his mission as a life-or-death struggle with 'Jewish Bolshevism' that a shift took place in his concept of Germany's future foreign policy, from a traditional

pan-German concern with colonialism to the notion of a continental expansionism at the expense of Russia. Under the influence of the success of 'Jewish Bolshevism' in the civil war in Russia and the threat of Bolshevisation in Germany, the fusion of anti-Semitism and anti-Bolshevism in Hitler's mind into an obsessive determination to destroy 'Jewish Bolshevism' was a far more powerful determinant than conventional diplomatic considerations in the reordering of foreign policy goals.

In his early speeches, Hitler conveyed little of any future intentions in foreign policy. He repeatedly berated the failures in the post-Bismarck era to ensure peace with Russia instead of siding with Austria-Hungary, and spoke of the inevitably hostile stance of Britain and France. His main target was, of course, the foreign policy of Weimar governments, which he scourged at every opportunity. He remained down to 1922 essentially anti-western in his thinking, though without a clear concept of a future alliance strategy. His attitude towards Russia was ignorant and ambivalent. He continued to harbour a dualistic view – positive towards the 'national' people of Russia, negative towards the 'Jewish-Bolshevik' rulers – and to favour an alliance with a non-Bolshevik Russia against Britain. By late 1922 he was increasingly aware of the essential division of interest between France and Britain. But above all, he was rethinking future policy towards Russia.

By December 1922 the foreign policy goals which were outlined in *Mein Kampf*, and which remained at the heart of Hitler's thinking to the end, were formulated. In a confidential discussion at that time, he turned his back on the old policy of commercial and colonial rivalry with Britain in the interest of winning over Britain for support in a continental policy against Russia.

Germany would have to adapt herself [he stated] to a purely continental policy avoiding harm to English interests. The destruction of Russia with the help of England would have to be attempted. Russia would give Germany sufficient land for German settlers and a wide field of activity for German industry. Then England would not interrupt us in our reckoning with France.³⁴

Two years before the writing of *Mein Kampf*, therefore, Hitler's personalised world-view was to all intents and purposes complete. The struggle to destroy the power of international Jewry, the struggle to annihilate Marxism, and the struggle to obtain 'living space' for Germany at the expense of Russia amounted in effect to three forms of expression of the same integral thought. And this was embedded in, and took its justification from, an understanding of history which, turning Karl Marx's belief in the centrality of socio-economic motive forces on its head, dogmatically held to a view of historical development as the unfolding of a constant struggle between races – ethnic, biological peoples. Hitler wrote:

All great cultures of the past perished only because the originally created race died out from blood poisoning Blood mixture and the resultant drop in the racial level is the sole cause of the dying out of old cultures All occurrences in world history are only the expression of the races' instinct of self-preservation, in the good or bad sense.³⁵

Though for Hitler the Jewish race was the antithesis of the highest racial entity, the Aryan, the instinct of self-preservation was greater than in other peoples, enabling the Jew to thrive 'as a parasite in the body of other nations and states'.³⁶ Ultimate Jewish dominance would come about through the undermining and destruction of other pure races. The next stage after control of liberal democracy is 'in the organised mass of Marxism', which 'allows him [i.e. the Jew] to subjugate and govern the peoples with a dictatorial and brutal fist'.³⁷ The culmination is the 'fanatical savagery' and 'inhuman tortures' of 'Jewish Bolshevism'. 'The end is not only the end of the freedom of the peoples oppressed by the Jew, but also the end of this parasite upon the nations. After the death of his victim, the vampire sooner or later dies too'.³⁸ But before this stage the cataclysmic showdown with the rejuvenated racial force of the German nation would destroy Jewry for ever.

The linkage of this definitive turning-point in world history to German foreign policy is left to one of the last chapters of *Mein Kampf*. The land necessary to support Germany as a world power was to come from Russia. There, 'Jewish Bolshevism' had destroyed and replaced the former

Germanic ruling strata. But, 'as a ferment of decomposition', the Jew had weakened the Russian empire which was now 'ripe for collapse'. 'And the end of Jewish rule in Russia will also be the end of Russia as a state'.³⁹ The mission of the Nazi Movement was to prepare the German people for this task. The rebuilding of the German people to a level of strength capable of accomplishing the destruction of 'Jewish Bolshevism' was the task of a 'Germanic state of the German nation'.⁴⁰ The state itself was but the means to attaining this end.⁴¹ But this could be achieved only under leadership of genius attuned to the task. While in prison in the Landsberg fortress in 1924, serving a five-year sentence for high treason from which he was released within nine months, Hitler came to see himself as that great leader for whom the German people was waiting.

Ideas of heroic, quasi-messianic leadership in a new Reich were commonplace on the extreme Right in Germany in the early 1920s. Initially, Hitler had seen his own role solely as that of the propagandist – the 'drummer boy' for the great leader who would arise. The example of Mussolini's success in Italy in 1922 was a stirring one for Hitler. In 1922 and 1923 he spoke more frequently about the importance of personality and heroic leadership, responsible to the people but demanding their unconditional obedience for the historic mission he would carry out. As late as May 1923 Hitler stated that he was still only preparing the path, to give the coming dictator a people ready for him.⁴² Two months later, he commented that salvation could be found only in the value of personality, and that as leader of the NSDAP he saw his task 'in accepting responsibility'.⁴³ By the time of his trial in 1924, in which he turned the putsch fiasco into a personal triumph, his conception of his own role was emerging into the fully-fledged heroic leadership self-image which took shape only after his return to politics in 1925 following his short imprisonment.

By the mid 1920s, then, Hitler had developed a rounded philosophy which offered him a complete view of the world, its ills, and how to overcome them. Its substance never changed down to his death. When, in the 1940s, Hitler's ideas on all subjects under the sun were expounded at length to his cronies in his dinner-table monologues, the self-same underlying tenets of his world-view which he had developed