

Ends and Beginnings

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This is one of a number of papers which Tim was preparing, in the last year of his life, as an afterword for the English translation of his *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich*. It offers an eloquent, simple, brilliant solution to the question of differing interpretations of German history - a means of addressing the related questions of interpretation and theory, without engaging directly with theory which Tim thinks historians should not do. Theory, he argues, should be structured into the narrative rather than treated apart, but it is inescapably a part of it. The choice of ending carries with it an unspoken burden of interpretation and a ruling problematic. If totalitarianism is the phenomenon the historian is attempting to explain it will require one kind of narrative and one kind of chronology; if genocide, then a different one; if nationalism a third.

We have reproduced Tim's interpolated notes to himself (on sources, argument and style) so as to convey the draft character of the piece and for the interest of seeing his thought process. They are printed in italic, between double slashes: //like this//.

All good history writing begins at the end. However artfully it may be disguised however unthinkingly it may be assumed, the end of the story is there at the beginning. Where the end is judged to lie in time, what its character is, how it is defined - in taking these decisions about any piece of work, historians necessarily make their judgement about the general significance of their particular theme or period. And this judgement in turn determines where they start. If the end of the Third Reich was Hitler's suicide in the air-raid shelter of the Reich Chancellery on 30 April 1945, if the significance of the Third Reich lay in his personal predominance, in // the mark which he stamped upon // the politics of Germany, Europe, the world, then the story must begin with his birth. If the end of the Third Reich was Auschwitz, if the great fact about nazi rule was genocide, the story must begin at the latest with the development of modern anti-semitism in the 1870s.

If the end of the story is the elimination of the German nation state after 1945, if the historical significance of National Socialism lay in the fact that it was German, the beginning must be taken back still further, at least to the failure of the national liberal revolution of 1848, probably to the Reformation and the foundation of Prussia. If on the other hand the end of the story was the military and political defeat of european fascism in 1945, if the significance of nazi rule lay in defining an 'epoch of fascism' which was characterised above all by distinctive attitudes towards politics and public life, then the beginning is the emergence of fascist political groups in the immediate aftermath of World War I. Two further and quite different schools of thought doubt whether the history of National Socialism really has a chronological end, and suggest that it is part of an unfinished story. If the real import of the Third Reich lay in the breakthrough of a completely new type of modern dictatorial politics, totalitarianism,

historical understanding must be informed by an awareness that this form of domination can recur, under different guises, in all modern societies; and the story must then begin with the first development of those specifically modern forms of political activity which contribute to the possibility of totalitarian rule - mass participation in politics, the rapid communication of political ideas, the emergence of powerful political organizations, ... developments which took shape in most European countries in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The history of the Third Reich is also part of a possibly unfinished story if its real import is located in the class struggle: on this reading the imposition of fascist rule is a political alternative generated by major crises of industrial capitalism and by violent class conflict, which serves the function of both rescuing and developing further the modern capitalist economic system by means of wars of imperial expansion. Such a need could recur. The beginning of this story goes back to the first major political and economic crises of modern capitalism, to 1848 once more, but this time to the 1848 of Karl Marx and Louis Napoleon.

These examples are intended to illustrate the nature of the problem, no more. The problem is not peculiar to writing about National Socialism and fascism: in a more or less acute form it faces all historians. Underlying the differences between the various histories which we have, for example, of the British working class or the British Empire, are different judgements about the end of the respective stories, and these judgements largely determine where each story begins, and what it is about - which themes are given particular significance. Was the British Empire a prelude to the national independence of the colonies (to the formation of new nation states), or was it a prelude to neo-colonial economic exploitation? - and if it was a prelude to both, which of these endings matters more? Did the first stage of the making of the English working class end with Chartism, in the sense that later developments were new departures, or was there a continuity of causes, goals and forms of action from the 1830s to the formation of the Labour Party? These questions are of the same kind as those posed above about National Socialism. In each case, the answer about the end of the story in question will inform the beginning of the work, and strongly influence its structure and its interpretation. But historians of modern Britain can, and often do, get by without self-consciously posing themselves this kind of question. The high degree of continuity in modern British political history, without civil wars, revolutions or coups, has helped to nurture an indifference or scepticism towards questions of this kind, a distinctive admixture of professional scholarly caution and intellectual sloth (philistinism) which is hostile to reflection about the framework within which a work of history is written. Beginning and ends seem very indistinct, the middle ground large and rich, wherever one stands in time. There are strong pressures, strong temptations to let the big questions look after themselves, or to leave them to the collective responsibility of the profession at large, whose accumulating wisdom will (perhaps) in time assign a place and significance to individual pieces of research. Many English historians write as though they were contributing to a mosaic, for which there is no design.

There are many intellectually compelling reasons for not writing history in this way. The approach skates over every important problem raised by modern theories of knowledge; the particular subject which is researched is not conceived of as part of a whole social, economic and political system, but is left to stand on its own; and the

precision of the research becomes the main yardstick for assessing the objectivity of historical work, with the consequence that the ideological pre-suppositions which determine the choice of most topics of research are rarely considered by the individual historian or remarked upon by colleagues. What is missing is discussion of the meanings of past human experience, and how we can interpret it. Methodology is better practised than preached, and other have written more exactly than I can about the theoretical and philosophical issues involved in trying to write history. // Habermas, Carr, Vilar // Historians do better to try to work them out in their own specific studies, than to write about them as general issues. But it must be emphasised that the questions of ends and beginnings, and therewith the question of definition, are simply inescapable for the historian of nazi Germany. Their priority is beyond taste, temperament or argument. While many historians of England have proved, at least to their own satisfaction, that it is possible to write about many aspects of their social and cultural development of the country in the 19th century, without even noticing that Britain was the greatest imperial power in the world (because this did not seem to be directly relevant to their own particular topic; the absence of mind with which the Empire was acquired has been inherited by its scholars), such myopia is quite impossible in the case of National Socialism. There is no aspect of the history of the movement and its supporters, no aspect of the history of Germany under nazi rule which can have historical meaning, unless it is firmly related to the end of the story - however that end may be defined and described, wherever it may be located. This is so, not only because the Third Reich was a total dictatorship, which, by virtue of the comprehensive political power which it exercised brought all spheres of public life into some sort of relationship with each other - after 1936 people were authoritatively told, for example, that what they chose to eat was directly relevant to the development of Germany's military and economic power. The imperative to assess the whole is above all a moral and political imperative. The suffering and destruction of life which the nazi regime brought about was on so vast a scale and of such novel quality, that any study of a part of the story which fails to confront this central fact, must, at least by implication, trivialize the whole. If this study of the working class in Germany were a piece of labour history in the conventional sense, it would be an intellectual moral and political evasion, however accurate it might be in detail. This obligation to attempt to interpret the whole through one of its constituent parts is not, in the end, different in kind from that which faces all historians working on all subjects. It is just more massively obvious. Casting a small, finely finished stone onto a heap which might one day transform itself into a mosaic is here an unmistakable capitulation elsewhere this is just less obviously the case.

The moral and political obligation to interpret the whole must not be confused with the task, now almost completed, of assigning moral and juridical responsibility for specific crimes. The latter approach focuses of necessity upon the intentions and actions of individuals. It is clearly nonsensical to exclude this dimension and to think of nazi politics simply in terms of the working out of blind impersonal forces, but to concentrate solely upon individual responsibility both narrows and confuses our understanding. The causes of great historical changes are never the same as the intentions of the actors, however powerful they may have been; as a system of domination and conquest the Third Reich was more than the sum of its specific crimes; and the categories of individual moral responsibility are of only limited use in trying to account for the conditions which made policies of military aggression and genocide

possible. The moral and political obligation of the historian has a broader and much less well defined focus. It is an obligation to the millions who were shot, gassed, crippled, tortured, imprisoned, uprooted, and, if the story is indeed unfinished to people anywhere who may in the future be victims of another organised mass destruction of life.

This is the reason why the debate about the end and the essential character of National Socialism is no mere scholastic dispute. The debate is the form in which the discussion about the precise nature of the historian's moral and political obligation is cast and it furnishes the vocabulary in which judgements are made. For the obligation is not an invitation to moralize about the past, but a command to understand in the broadest possible context. Understanding and explaining are themselves moral and political acts; and the communication of better interpretations of past history is in principle capable of modifying the grounds on which moral and political choices can be made in the future. These last words are chosen particularly carefully, for it is of course not the case that expert knowledge and understanding are in any sense a substitute for or superior to moral and political choices, nor that such choices can be reduced to questions resolvable by a special competence. But in the complex modern social order with its dense network of inter-dependencies between different sectors of public life, these choices must be heavily mediated by difficult calculations of probable consequences: the road to 1933 in Germany was paved with many intentions, which many people now, both in Germany and outside, consider good.

Thus a great deal hangs on where the story begins and where it ends. The meaning of the campaign of death, destruction and terror which the nazi regime unleashed upon the world differs greatly, according to where the beginning and where the end is placed. Was it the most brutal chapter to date in the history of modern capitalist imperialism? Was it the culmination of generations of european anti-semitism? Did it mark the conclusion, perhaps the necessary conclusion of specifically German political traditions? Could something like it recur? Or does the Third Reich confront us as an absolutely unique (in a trivial sense, everything in history is unique) historical phenomenon, which was wholly dependent for its development on a singular conjunction of long-term social change, short-term political and economic crises, of the legacy of the First World War and the presence of the one man, Hitler, who alone was able both to orchestrate and to set his personal stamp upon the whole? Historians do not agree about the answers to these questions, and they thus invest National Socialism with different political and moral meanings. From this it follows that they differ in the significance which they attach to the economic, administrative or military ASPECTS of recent German history and in their assessment of the personal role of Hitler and his aims. They focus their attention and efforts on the different questions which seem to them to be of greatest importance in interpreting the whole phenomenon and they often put different constructions upon the same piece of evidence. These basic disagreements will continue; they will not be resolved, first because the processes of research and argument are fundamentally open-ended, and second because the disagreements, like all such historical debates, contain an irreducible ideological component - the historian's own society, narrower and wider, and his perception of his role in society will always inform the questions which he asks and the modes of argument which he adopts in exploring these questions.

We need an end before we can begin. The history of the Third Reich as written hitherto offers many different ends, more than have been sketched in above. It is not a matter simply of choosing among them, for not all of them are mutually incompatible, modifications are possible and the attempt can be made to construct new versions. This part of the work is both inescapable and always provisional; abstinence and conclusiveness of proof are both impossible. But provisional conclusions are not wholly arbitrary. The provisional picture of the whole must be constantly open to modifications demanded by the study of the parts; and its validity will depend upon how comprehensively it can encompass, order and make intelligible all of the relevant parts. It is open both to empirical checks and to criticism on grounds of faulty reasoning.

The introduction is not going to take the form of yet another critical review of all the different possible approaches to the subject. The task of acknowledging intellectual debts and of pointing to the inadequacies of some views concerning the ends of National Socialism will be attempted in passing. This strategy has been chosen in the belief that the appropriateness of general historical theories needs above all to be demonstrated through the writing of history, rather than argued out at the level of theoretical discussion. These are, of course, not alternative methods of working and thinking: prior to the stage of writing, theoretical argument and the detailed reconstruction of past realities are complementary parts of a single intellectual effort. But in the presentation of historical work, the theoretical argument should be no more (and no less) than a visible ground plan, sufficiently clear for readers always to be able to keep their bearings as they move through the different rooms of the completed structure, but not an independent set of out-buildings through which it is necessary to pass in order to reach the main structure. In terms of composition, the theoretical prolegomenon is a distraction, the more so if its main purpose has to be to invalidate general arguments // interpretations // other than that actually adopted. These arguments are better conducted in other publications. Repeated reference to these debates over general interpretation ought to suffice as one type of check on the arbitrariness of the specific interpretation put forward; the other check is the adequacy of the account offered to the evidence available - are there omissions, mis-readings, mistaken assessments of the importance of some themes? The discussion will go on. //the 2 checks relate also to each other, which is not brought out in this formulation.// It is both a political and moral discussion and a set of rational arguments about the internal coherence of different approaches to the subject and about the relationship between evidence and interpretation. It can only attain its full political and moral import if it is conducted as a rational discussion in this sense. // so here goes ... // The organizing principle of national socialist politics was competition and struggle. That human life consisted of eternal struggle and competition and derived its meaning from struggle and competition was the basic axiom of nazi thought and practice. It was the only ideological axiom which consistently informed all political practice. This seems to be the right way to formulate the observation, for it was not the case here that an 'idea' was systematically and self-consciously translated into political practice, or that an ethic of struggle and competition was enforced upon the German social and political system//wrong term!/. Rather, the axiom was a practical assumption, a self-validating mode of experiencing the world and of acting in it. It had the status of an obvious truth, both about the processes of all social life and about the goals of politics.

The language of struggle was the only language in which national socialists gave an

account of themselves which was not wholly misleading: it was neither metaphor nor propaganda, but the vehicle of an undisguised self-image which was acted out in a compulsive manner. This fact is most clear in the one partial qualification which Nazi leaders appeared to make to their vision of life as struggle: in their incessant invocation of the community and solidarity of all Germans. This national-racial community was in no sense a goal in itself. Its informal structure was the product of the 'selection of the fittest', and was determined by the struggle of competing interests, organizations and individuals; the purpose of communitarian solidarity was the efficient prosecution of the struggle against other peoples and states; and the Nazi vision of the future held out no prospect of conditions under which this struggle for imperial superiority might come to an end and thus make way for the construction of a new community of all Germans as an independent goal of policy - whatever one makes of Hitler's speculations before 1941 about a future war of world domination against the USA, the conquest of 'living space' in European Russia was never even conceived of as being a finite goal, and Hitler ruminated repeatedly about the danger of degeneration setting in, if the German people should ever find themselves in a situation in which they did not have to struggle against adversaries. // Hossbach; other MK refs? // Hitler's one denial that he contemplated a regiment of eternal war for the German people ///2nd book; card // reads like a rhetorical flourish, designed to anticipate the criticism that this was indeed the necessary consequence of his conception of life and politics. It is clear now that it was. The community of all ethnic Germans was only a fighting community. It was not the antithesis of the organizing principle of struggle; on the contrary, in its structure, its purpose and in its distinctive lack of finite political goals, the people's community was the instrument of struggle, the proof of its realization as a principle. That this community could be made to appear to many Germans as the antithesis of the omnipresent struggle, as a practical and moral compensation for its rigors, is evidence merely of their own yearnings, of the skill of Nazi propaganda in playing on this source of self-deception, and of the great difficulty which all people who live under dictatorships have in making sense of the world they live in. It was not easy for them to appreciate that the reality was quite different from that invoked by the sentimental slogans.

The end of the struggle best demonstrates its absolute quality. // I can't use END in this simple sense, after making it a problematic term // It is not a hindsight-wise criticism of the Allied demand for unconditional surrender to remark that it defined the terms of the last stages of the war in a manner which was exactly appropriate to the dynamic of the Nazi struggle: 'All or nothing', 'Total victory' (a meaningless phrase, describing a strictly inconceivable goal) or 'total defeat' had been the sole alternatives around which Hitler's thinking revolved since long before the war-aim of unconditional surrender was agreed by Churchill and Roosevelt at Casablanca in January 1943 // some evidence in Hildeb's essays //. This conclusion to the war was not simply forced upon the Nazi leadership. And even if it had been, the precise form of the concluding stages would be no less revealing of the origins and character of the struggle. The manner in which defeat is experienced is always revealing in this sense; the extreme pressures of certain defeat strip regimes and individuals down to the bare skeleton of irreducible perceptions, motives and modes of action. Under these pressures the Nazi regime fell apart at the centre. Of solidarity, dignity, unity of purpose in defeat there was no trace. The bitter institutional and personal conflicts within the leadership, which in the past had done so much to drive the regime forward to ever greater achievements, burst

through the constraints which Hitler's authority placed upon them. The latent incoherence and barely balanced rivalries at the centre of the Third Reich broke through to the surface, and the last weeks were weeks of intrigue, confusion, mutual recrimination and boundless hate and disillusionment; old scores were finally settled. Where in the past, these modes of political action (leavened with ambition) had been the raw material of policy-making, pushing the regime as a whole into a process of cumulative radicalization, there could no longer be any outcome in terms of policy. The fact of rivalry and struggle within the leadership stood alone, naked of any higher purpose. Speer contemplated assassinating Hitler, and then did his best to subvert the order that the retreating German forces should scorch the earth and destroy the means of survival for the population. (His willingness to tell Hitler that he had acted in this way on 23 April 1945, and Hitler's acceptance of this insubordination, without reproach or retribution, was one of the very few episodes marked by honesty and elementary human sympathy among the Nazi leaders in these last weeks // Awful prose! Bullock 786f; check Speer //). Goring, indecisive to the last, asked Hitler's permission to sue for peace. Bormann then finally settled scores with Goring by persuading Hitler to dismiss him from all his offices and have him arrested for treason // bull. 787f//. Four (?) days later on 28 April, when the Red Army was already fighting within the city of Berlin, news came through to the bunker that Himmler had been conducting unauthorized negotiations with the Western powers. He too was denounced, and stripped of all his posts, and, with an act which throws as much light as any other on the pattern of relations among the leading Nazis, Hitler ordered two fliers to leave Berlin and to arrest Himmler - distrust spilled over into surreal vengeance and his adjutant in Berlin was shot. Of Hitler's old guard only two men stayed with him and maintained his confidence to the end: Goebbels and Bormann. But these two were acting out their own particular roles, not trying to bring order into the process of ultimate defeat. Goebbels, propagandist to the last, instinctively began to stage-manage the inferno in Berlin in order to turn it into a media-event which would, he hoped, inspire later generations // more detail from new diaries //; and Bormann continued compulsively to eliminate all his rivals for supreme political influence in the Reich, even as the Reich was reduced to ill-defended and scattered patches of rubble. 'Disloyalty and betrayal have undermined resistance throughout the war', proclaimed Hitler in his last message to the Armed Forces//bull. 798, bad source //and Gen. Iodl, one of the men closest to him until 22 April 1945, noted that Hitler 'spoke all the time of treachery and failure; of corruption in the leadership and in the ranks'. // bull 784 // Self-exculpation, the need to pass responsibility for defeat on to others, was only a minor motif in these ruminations; what they document much more powerfully is the utter lack of sympathy and mutual respect of leading Nazis for each other. Their most powerful bond had been the corporate self-aggrandisement of the Third Reich, on which their individual self-aggrandisement rested. Competition had always been of the essence of this bond, and it was overlaid mainly by the prospect of success, less reliably by varying degrees of personal devotion to Hitler on the part of the other leaders, and not at all by a totally abstract rhetoric of common loyalty (which served the function of a necessary self-deception, both public and private). The imminence of complete defeat deprived co-operation among the leaders of its purpose (individual success) and deprived their disunity of its mask. At the end there was only rivalry, distrust and bitterness, an incoherent confusion utterly devoid of common purpose and even of common sentiment. Only Hitler's designation of Admiral Donitz as his successor as Head of State and Supreme Commander allowed the - purely symbolic - ritual of

surrender to be carried out, and it is most improbable that Hitler had this aim in mind when he made his choice of Donitz. He may well have hoped that Donitz would have the military authority necessary to continue resistance after the defeat II Werewolf 11, and the choice of an Admiral was certainly yet a further act of vengeance against the army leaders, by whom he believed he had been consistently thwarted. The struggle within the Third Reich went on until the very end, and indeed, as we shall see shortly, beyond the end. It was all that was left.

// Fill out with brief description of where each leader was May '45, and what they were doing? Planning? - incl. Funk, Ribbentrop, Ley. From Steinert, Reg. Donitz; T-roper and new russ. lit; Or low II Goebb. diaries. Or would this be a distraction from argument? //

At the peripheries of its networks of power, the dissolution of the Third Reich conformed to similar, if less dramatic patterns. While escape and preservation were, for various reasons, not a realistic alternative for most of the top leaders, in the localities party bosses were frequently observed quietly making off in their cars, taking with them the transportable fruits of office, and leaving behind them stirring injunctions to the people to resist to the last man. In this crisis, the ethic of leadership and responsibility, which the party had so insistently proclaimed, ceded priority to that principle of struggle by which the local leaders had selected themselves; but it was now a simple struggle for survival and the fittest were those who had cars, petrol and civilian clothes. Remarkably few of the functionaries, propagandists, policemen, who had owed their power in provincial Germany to the nazi regime, showed any disposition to act heroically in its last defence. (And some of those who did, or who attempted to terrorize others into doing so, were forcibly restrained by the many anti-fascist resistance groups which sprang up in March-May 1945.) //This section does need thickening out:

from where? Steinert? Salomon? Lutz et at. anti-fa? //

Political and economic institutions continued to act according to type, playing the roles which they had carved out for themselves, or had been assigned, and unconcerned about the overall situation or the overall policy of the regime, in which context alone, their particular activities might have made sense, or not. Thus in March 1945 the deputy head of one of the largest heavy industrial combines in the Ruhr reported to the head of the firm that the factories and offices had been destroyed; production had ceased, and he was writing from the cellars of the old administration building, where the board's grand piano and some of its wine had been saved; the workers no longer clocked on to clear the debris, but tried to save what they could of their own homes; in the preceding quarter, however, profits had remained satisfactory at 5%. // check details, GHH notes or xeroxes // In April 1945 the chancellery of the NSDAP in Munich was still sending replacement membership cards, together with warnings about carelessness, to party comrades who had lost them. // bdc notes/xeroxes // And the armed forces went on promoting men to higher ranks, and, more obviously exemplary of the ethic of struggle, shooting deserters whom they could lay hands on and even holding courts martial over those who managed to get away - this latter practice continued after the capitulation. // craig; press summer '78, Filbinger // Such actions expressed something more than an over-adequate sense of duty, something more than the

clinging to routines of men utterly disoriented by events: they threw into stark relief the complete fragmentation of politics under the dictatorship, that progressive disaggregation of the component parts of the power structure which the struggle for dominance within the regime had both fed on and accelerated/accentuated. The businessman, the party officials, the military officers were not thinking about the context of their actions, and this self-serving narrowness had long been tried and tested as the mentality most appropriate to the conflicts for power within the Third Reich. Someone else was looking after context, overall policy, the meaning of the parts - just keep making the profits, issuing the party cards, promoting the lieutenants and shooting the deserters, for there was no mercy for those who stopped, or failed: someone else would push them to one side. The anticipated consequences of failure, inaction, lack of initiative formed a powerful motive force in the politics of the Third Reich: the vague threat to each component institution that it would lose power, to each office holder that he might be demoted (or worse), was among the most powerful mechanisms of competition within the nazi system. // problem: above egs. don't really prove this vital point; they prove blindness, no more // The mechanism was the more powerful for the fact that the threat was vague, and the incentive to action thus unspecific. What was at stake here was not the capacity of an institution or an individual to execute orders, for frequently there were no orders. The component parts operated under a diffuse but heavy pressure to act, and because it was rarely clear precisely which action in any given situation would conform to the overall policies of the political leadership, self-defence against actual or potential competitors and self-aggrandisement at their expense was the one secure-essential-unquestionable goal of all such action. The vagueness of the pressure thus enhanced the disintegrative qualities of the struggle for predominance within the nazi system: it spurred the component parts on to a restless dynamic activity and a harsh resilience, but the ends of this activity remained partial, self-serving and, in political terms, unco-ordinated. When they bothered to think about the question at all, the leaders of subordinate institutions could only hope that the leadership was moulding their actions into a coherent whole. Given the continuous overwhelming pressure of work on the particular tasks, and in the face of fragmentary but mounting evidence that the leadership was not fulfilling this function, most subordinate leaders preferred not to think about the question. They filtered out of their perceptions the problem of the larger purpose of their activities and got on with the job of competing, struggling. The utterly fragmented, robot-like activity of the various public agencies and business firms in the Spring of 1945 was the grotesque finale of this internal struggle.

// this gen. point is prob. too abstract in this form; can it be made in such general terms, in anticipation of specific examples from pre-'45? would explicit cross-refs in the text suffice?//

That the finale took this form in the domestic politics of the Third Reich was both a cause and a consequence of the external struggle. The complex relationship between the competition for power within the Third Reich, and the struggle of the Third Reich against the other powers and people of Europe will be discussed in detail later . In this introductory context one fact about the external is of overwhelming significance: it was fought through to a hopeless destructive conclusion, as an end in itself. The Second World War was lost for Germany before it was started. An awareness that it was lost forced itself upon the consciousness of individual military and political leaders by

stages from late 1941 on, in a process of evaluation which was made random by the impossibility of conducting informed and co-ordinated discussions of the situation: it was not only that any such perspective upon policy-making and strategy were ruled out by Hitler's authoritative veto on all defeatist talk, for Hitler could enforce this veto only because the disintegrative competition for power had by now gone so far that no institutional framework now existed, within which the responsible military, political and economic leadership groups could possibly collaborate in assessing the deteriorating situation in a comprehensive manner. By January 1945, with the failure of the Wehrmacht's Ardenne Offensive and the simultaneous beginning of the massive thrust to the West by the Red Army, it was obvious to everyone in Germany that. military defeat within a matter of months was absolutely certain. // footnote: H's speculations of E- W conflict no evidence against: regrets that he did not fight it out at Rastenburg.//Whatever ambiguities may attach to the interpretation of German strategy during 1944, it is only possible to make sense of it after January 1945 on the assumption that hopeless defiance, struggle to the last man and boy, had become the overt and single goal of 'policy'. Military resistance was a goal on its own account. It served no specific, defined strategic or political goals. The only point was that the Third Reich should go down fighting, taking down with it to death and destruction as many allied troops and as many German troops and civilians as possible. It was a 'policy' of revenge against both the victors and the subject German people. Hitler was determined that, in its death throes the Third Reich should prove him right on one point, which had been a central pre-occupation throughout his political career: there should be no repeat of November 1918, no revolutionary stab-in-the-back, no capitulation. Resistance to the bitter end would prove something about the regime, prove that at least in this respect it was superior to the Wilhelmine Empire. Hence his boundless bitterness over the attempts of Goring and in particular of Himmler to negotiate a surrender to the Western powers; hence the use of methods of open terror by flying 'courts martial' to conscript people off the streets for the last defence of Berlin. Defying the odds, preventing capitulation brought out in a final and unmistakable form Hitler's murderous contempt for the people whom he had flattered as a master race - because the imminent defeat had proved that the German people were not worthy of victory and thus not worthy of their leaders, millions more of them than necessary were to die, in order to prove that the national socialist regime at least had the resilience to struggle to the very end. If the chimera of total victory was impossible, at least defeat could be total. The last struggle was a struggle against capitulation - those Germans who wanted to capitulate (whether they were footsoldiers, Generals, political leaders, bishops) fused with the allied armies into a single enemy of the regime.

There is a sense in which this reading of the last months of the war is 'beyond politics', and it is indeed not possible on the basis of the evidence to attribute to Hitler and his advisers any intelligible political purposes in their conduct of Germany's resistance. The last intelligible hope of this kind (and it was no more than a hope) was, that by concentrating the remaining armed forces heavily on the Western Front, the German leaders would be able to inflict such heavy losses on the UK and the USA that these powers would be willing to sue for a separate peace. (This attempt to bludgeon the Western powers into negotiations was perhaps coupled with the - at least - implied threat, that this disposition of German forces would make it relatively easy for the Red Army to over-run the whole of Germany from the North-East: a development which

could not be in the interests of the USA and the UK //style of last two sentences appalling //) The defeat of the Ardennes offensive destroyed this hope. After this, speculations about the possibility of splitting the allies continued to serve as short-lived morale-boosters in the bunker of the Reich Chancellery: Roosevelt's death on //?//April furnished one occasion, news of friction between the first American and Russian units which met on the Elbe//? //another. But no consistent policy to this end can be discerned, for the end could only have been pursued after January 1945 by means of a complete capitulation to the Western powers (Le., not to Russia). After Hitler's suicide Donitz did try to inject some sort of rationale into the continued resistance of the German army, in that every day that the fighting was prolonged enabled more refugees to flee from the feared and hated Russian forces towards the west; and it may well be that some army commanders had been quietly pursuing this goal for some time before 30 April. But there is no hint in the sources that this consideration ever impressed itself upon Hitler.//se. earth; Fetung order; disposit. of armies - this first!; dismissal of 'weak offs.' unworthy of people.//

His personal role in conducting the last stages of the struggle was very great, and in a whole variety of ways he consistently emphasized the trans-political character of the struggle, its symbolic, destructive and self-destructive purpose. He refused to allow the re-disposition of the remaining German forces in ways which would both have held up the advance of the Red Army and facilitated the movement of refugees to the West. His insistence that every German unit should simply hold out where it was and resist to the last showed clearly that the demonstration of defiant struggle was more important to him than practical results. Not only did the German forces have no defensive strategy at all in 1945 (a large part of the army stayed locked up in Bohemia); where Hitler could get his way, it was not to employ pragmatic defensive tactics either. He repeatedly commanded offensive action against the flanks of the Russian armies which moved to encircle Berlin. Although these commands were frequently clad in rhetoric of fantasy about turning the tables, securing victory, they are really just further evidence of the self-validating quality which Hitler attached to the spirit of hopeless defiance. He conducted the defence of Germany in the spring of 1945 as though it were a matter not of military strategy and tactics, but of will-power; of the assertion of will in a situation which he knew to be utterly lost. This, together with a still unrequited desire for vengeance against the officer corps on account of the Stauffenberg bomb plot, accounts for his repeated outbursts of hysterical hatred against field commanders who retreated or failed to achieve the break-throughs he had ordered. // give egs.//He was not in fact interested in the practical task of defending Germany as effectively as possible. In terms of his radical ethic of either/or, there was nothing worth defending once the war was lost militarily, and so there was no set of practical tasks to which the practical reason of the General Staff could be applied. Tactical arguments became treasonable if they advocated withdrawals. Defiance, not defence, was the goal, and for this reason the question of the costs and effects of specific military decisions was simply irrelevant. The only imperative was that the Third Reich should go down fighting, for struggle was the law of life. At least in the manner of its defeat, the Third Reich could prove the truth of this law.

That these were indeed the terms in which Hitler saw the defeat of Germany is proved conclusively by two further and closely related facts: by his scorched earth orders of Dec. '44 //? //, which were repeated in a more draconian form in March '45//? //, and by

his comments that the outcome of the war had shown the German people to be unworthy of victory. In Hitler's intentions, nothing was to be left behind to make the allied victory worth-while, and nothing to facilitate the survival of the unworthy conquered people. In a world of remorseless struggle between peoples this was the necessary and only proper form which defeat could take. It was right, logical that the defeat should be absolute, the victory costly in lives and of little political or economic profit. The German people would disappear as a great actor on the stage of history in consequence of the defeat; no lesser role was worth contemplating, and there could thus be no valid argument for trying to preserve the amenities of life in the ruins of defeat. Worse, such hopes and efforts could only serve as a breeding ground for defeatism and capitulation. The law of struggle dictated that the German people destroy themselves and their means of livelihood as they were being destroyed by the enemy.

This programme for the end of the Third Reich was devoid of politics in the conventional sense, Hitler was not attempting to achieve specific finite goals in the spring of 1945, and he was not even attempting to guide and control the flow of events towards an end which is accessible to normal empathetic understanding. He was compulsively seeking comprehensive destruction and self-destruction for the Third Reich in battle. This was neither a sudden whim, nor is it proof of his failing mental and physical powers. The programme ante-dated the collapse of the Ardennes offensive and the elimination of the last hope of playing power politics to the regime's advantage. (The first scorched earth order was issued in Sept. 1944.) And there are vague anticipations of the programme much earlier: in addresses and speeches in the later 1930s Hitler frequently invoked 'the destruction of Germany' as a possible outcome of nazi policy, if (as if was then always understood) his policies did not secure adequate support from army or business leaders, or whoever. The turn of phrase is no less significant than talk in *Mein Kampf* about the elimination of the Jews. The words convey, in each case, not a set intention, but the mental possibility of utmost radicalism. 'The destruction of Germany' was a possible alternative outcome in Hitler's mind of the unending struggle for domination in the world, long before it became a programme. And long before it became a reality, another, then still quite hypothetical alternative had also been ruled out by him, time and again, and with the greatest vehemence: the Third Reich would never be forced to capitulate by a stab in the back. The German people were to go on fighting by all possible means until they were totally overwhelmed amid the ruins of their country. In order to establish fully the distinctive qualities of the last goal-less struggle, it is worth considering in a schematic manner what policies Hitler and his advisers could conceivably have adopted after mid-January 1945. First, a policy of conventional military defeat could have been pursued: i.e. German forces could have been committed to a few carefully chosen major defensive battles, which, if successful, would have made the further continuation of the war seem realistic, at least for a time; and which, if lost, would have made 'surrender with honour' an acceptable solution within the peculiar utilitarian terms of the military ethic. The political leadership could have placed their own lives at risk in these battles. A week before his suicide Hitler regretted that he had not adopted this line, and had not had the army defend his East Prussian headquarters at Rastenburg to the end in November 1944. // Steinert 37//After mid-January there is no trace of this sort of strategic-political thinking in Hitler's orders. Under the impact of his insistence that every defensive position be held at once, defensive strategy collapsed into incoherence.

Which parts of Germany were to be defended, how, and by which units, was never the subject of realistic or even in intention pragmatic planning. The scheme of fighting to the end in the mountainous terrain of Bohemia, Bavaria and Austria was never revised, although it became more and more clear that the Red Army was heading for Berlin and that it could not be stopped. Meanwhile the largest and best equipped sections of the German army were locked up in Bohemia and in Denmark and Norway, where there was very little fighting, or had been surrounded and left behind by the Red Army in Curland. Even the plans for the evacuation of the Reich government from Berlin remained completely uncertain - as late as 25 April it was unclear which ministers were going where. This confusion was by no means entirely due to the surprising rapidity of the advance of the Allied forces, nor to the worsening transport situation within Germany. Army leaders repeatedly pointed out tactical and strategic alternatives to Hitler, which might have concentrated and thus strengthened the military effort. The confusion, which certainly accelerated the collapse, was due in the first instance to Hitler's lack of interest in a 'policy of military defeat'. He behaved consistently as though military defeat was inevitable and uninteresting, as though he was determined that the defeat should be much more than a military defeat. The only thing that mattered was the spirit of total resistance, something quite different from a policy of maximum or optimum military resistance.

After mid-January 1945 the only policy which would have served the welfare of the German people was a negotiated surrender on both fronts, but the regime was interested in the welfare of the German people only in a purely instrumental manner - the people's welfare mattered only insofar as it helped them to prove the regime's contention that they did indeed constitute a master race. This contention had been disproved (according to the logic of the argument from struggle), thus it was proper that the people should go under in every way - be killed, starve, die of disease, have their homes and workplaces destroyed. If a general surrender was quite out of the question, a serious attempt to split the allied camp promised certain military advantages and at least held out a possibility of political advantage (if not for Hitler's nazi regime). This policy, which was advocated in one form or another by almost all of Hitler's senior advisers during the spring of 1945, would, in order to have been realistic, have had to start with military surrender on one of the two fronts. Guderian //CinC/chief of gen. staff of army?//put it forward to Ribbentrop in January 1945; and later both Ribbentrop and another top official suggested that the regime should try to make common cause with the Soviet Union, and overrun Western Europe together. Getting on to terms with the Western Powers on a platform of anti-bolshevism was the more popular alternative among the nazi leadership, and some quite ingenious suggestions were made about ways in which the regime could prove its good faith and force the hand of the western allies -like releasing all of their prisoners of war, but not russian prisoners. Hitler never took any of these proposals seriously, and although he gave his assent to some of the feelers put out to the western powers, he was never prepared to contemplate the big step of surrender on one front, which alone would have given the policy even a slight chance of success. In respect of the western powers, Hitler and Ribbentrop persisted in their decade-long struggle to bludgeon the UK into a perception of where its 'true interests' lay, namely in a joint struggle with Germany against bolshevism - only force, not concessions, would open english eyes to realities. And thus the hints dropped with various representatives of the western powers in the spring of 1945 met with incomprehending and angry rejection. Perhaps Hitler was right

in his assessment that no initiative of this kind could have split the Soviet Union and the western powers after January 1945. When Himmler finally tried it on 24 April, Churchill and Roosevelt insisted that they would only contemplate a simultaneous surrender to their forces and to the Red Army. By January the allies knew that they had won the war militarily, and their governments were not seriously threatened by war-weary populations, who would be embittered by the refusal of a German offer to surrender on one front. And yet, many Russian, British and American soldiers were to die in the last four months of fighting - the German government could have made this seem less than inevitable/necessary; there were uncertainties in the allied camp about the political future of central Europe; and surrender to one side would have created many extremely difficult problems for the allies. If, for example, the German armies in the west had surrendered after the failure of the Ardennes offensive, would the British and American forces have been able to stop German troops being moved across to the Eastern front? Would they have marched across Germany, in order to attack in the rear the German armies which were still resisting the Red Army? Hitler was not willing to take the decisions which would have posed these questions. Such a policy would have been a gamble. He may well have thought that the news of his willingness to surrender on one front would have completely undermined the will to resist on all fronts and among the civilian population. But he had taken bigger risks than this in the past; and no utilitarian calculation indicated that any of the alternatives was especially promising. It was not a policy which he himself could execute - he would have had to disappear as Führer at a very early stage in any such negotiations, since neither Stalin, nor Roosevelt nor Churchill would have been willing to do business with him personally. But he was anyway going to lose his power, and in all probability his life too, either by his own hand, or in battle, or, least likely, by the hangman's rope. Is it possible, one must ask, that a few more desperate weeks of his own life were more important to him than the chance of contributing (by surrender to the western powers and by his own disappearance) to the continuing, future struggle against Russian bolshevism? This is possible, but it seems unlikely. By this stage his own life was probably not particularly dear to him, for all decisions to commit suicide are, in one sense or another, long prepared. The problem was the partial surrender which this line required. Hitler's machiavellianism knew no other limits than this, but this stratagem was outside of his repertoire. He had never at any time used surrender of any kind, however transparently dishonest, as a ploy to enhance his power or to gain his ends. This was not a matter of honour or dishonour, but of compulsive conviction that the struggle must always be fought as a struggle. Mendacious reassurances, false promises, tactical withdrawals, compromises which could later be undermined and disavowed, ... all these were possible modes of struggle but any surrender which involved even a partial loss of independence was ruled out. This basic feature of the party's struggle for power within Germany before 1933 and of the rise of the Third Reich to predominance on the continent of Europe after 1933, was maintained intact to the end.

It is not possible to prove from Hitler's recorded statements in the spring of '45 that this was indeed the reason why no serious attempt was made to avert total collapse by means of a machiavellian partial surrender, but this interpretation does fit with the basic patterns of Hitler's political actions from 1923 on. Struggle was only possible if he, the movement, the country was dependent upon and beholden to no superior power - better to risk defeat than to sacrifice that independence // cf. Chancellorship 1931-33//.

And so the war continued on both fronts//The failure of the regime to explore much of this at the level of mentality, and that of one man, necess. to stay there for a time: other distinctive feature = suicide.//

Any of these possible alternatives to complete collapse and destruction brings out what can only be described as an underlying determination among the leadership to lose totally.