Debunking History

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Mein Kampf: The Nazi Bible?

Mein Kampf is often said to be a full statement of the ideals and philosophy of Nazism, and the outline of its aims and intentions; in short the book provided the Bible of the Nazis. In practice, however, the influence it exerted in the Europe of the period, or indeed in Germany itself, is open to serious question.

The book dates back to the mid-1920s, when Hitler was imprisoned for five years in Landsberg prison for his part in the abortive Munich Putsch of November 1923, a sentence of which he served little more than nine months. During this time, in comfortable quarters, with regular meals and frequent visits from his well-wishers, Hitler, together with his faithful assistant and later Deputy, Rudolf Hess, who took his dictation, produced Mein Kampf, the two volumes of which came out in 1925 and 1927. The book is a turgid, rambling, illiterate statement of the Nazi philosophy, spiced up by not always very accurate autobiographical material. Apart from the corrosive vituperation against the Jews with which the book is tainted, Mein Kampf is chiefly interesting as a popularisation of the religious and moral thinking of Nietzsche and as a perversion of the ideas of Charles Darwin. Hitler’s use of terms such as ‘the survival of the fittest’ and ‘the struggle for existence’ – indeed the word ‘struggle’ even provides the book with its title – are used to point the lesson that the laws of life are those of conflict, and that notions of tolerance, pity and mercy, were no more than snares devised by the weak to inhibit the actions of the strong. In practical terms, the book predicts the extermination of the Jews, a coming cataclysmic world conflict, the overthrow of the Soviet Union, the winning of Lebensraum and the assimilation of resources for the new Nazi world order under Germanic domination.

Copies of the book were given to each couple who married in Germany under the Third Reich, and may still be found, their pages unread, on the bookshelves of older German households.

Popular Misunderstandings

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How Good was Germany’s Claim to the Sudetenland?

Intellectuals who read Mein Kampf regarded it as the lunatic ravings of a fanatic; contemporary politicians did not take Hitler seriously, but dismissed him as a demagogue and a mountebank, some of them later even showing such a catastrophic misreading of his character as to try to use him as a pawn in their own games. Even after he became Führer a large number of them continued to feel certain private reservations about his character and his policies, though it was impolitic to express them publicly. Mein Kampf, they felt, was a remnant of early Nazi history that was best forgotten.

Foreign leaders, likewise, ignored his displays of uncontrolled rage and his vulgar personal abuse as part of his act. All of these failed to take in the message that Mein Kampf stated so emphatically. Even Stalin dismissed his vitriolic attacks on communism and on the inferior Slavonic peoples as dating back to his former days as a political agitator. He thought they were just designed at that time for winning cheap popularity, and deluded himself that Hitler did not really mean a word of what he wrote.

So in practice no one took the slightest notice of Mein Kampf, even though it contained a perfect blueprint of Nazi policies later.

Hitler laid claim to the Sudetenland area of Czechoslovakia in 1938 on the grounds that the Czech people living there were harassing and browbeating the German minority of the province. He cited numerous examples of this intolerable treatment, and indicated that he was not prepared to countenance it any longer. It was his claim that the Sudetenland should be ‘restored’ to Germany. Students of history have thereafter taken Hitler at his word, and have supposed that the Sudetenland had formerly been German, but had been stripped from the Fatherland by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.
In fact, it was an error to suppose that the Sudetenland had ever been ruled by Germany. Since 1806, when the Holy Roman Empire was abolished, the Sudetenland had formed part of the Austrian Empire, and still was so at the end of the First World War. Indeed, the arrangements for Czechoslovakia (and therefore for the Sudetenland) did not form part of the Treaty of Versailles at all; they were dealt with in the Austrian treaty of St Germain. To speak of the Sudetenland being 'restored' to Germany was therefore quite inaccurate.

The true basis of Hitler's assertion was that he claimed to represent the interests of the German people everywhere, whether they lived within the country's borders or not. This justified him in interfering in the affairs of neighbouring states wherever a German minority existed. His view, and the policy of the Nazi Party, was that his government championed the interests of racially German people as a matter of principle, a principle which he expressed in the slogan: 'Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer'.

11:16

1940-41: Did Britain Fight Alone?

France signed an armistice with Germany on 22 June 1940. Exactly a year later, on 22 June 1941, Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of Russia began. It is usual to assert that during the year between these two events Britain and its empire fought alone against the Axis powers. But in fact this was not the case.

Britain did indeed fight alone against its enemies from 22 June until 28 October 1940, and thus was without allies during the Battle of Britain and the period of the greatest danger from invasion. But on 28 October 1940 Italian forces in occupied Albania invaded Greece. Greece thus became an ally of Britain against Fascist Italy, and Britain gave Greece what assistance could be spared from its own meagre resources. Scarce supplies, weapons and vehicles were provided, and British troops helped to garrison some of the Greek islands, especially Crete, as early as January 1941.

In return Greece proved a valuable ally. Its armies tied down sixteen Italian divisions. Its victories in overrunning Italian strongholds in Albania were an important boost to British morale during the darkest days of the war. Italian concentration on the war with Greece prevented effective reinforcement of the Italian troops in Libya, and enabled General Wavell to seize Cyrenaica in January 1941. More than 120,000 Italian troops were taken prisoner during Wavell's campaign, troops which would be sorely missed later.

Greek success against Italy irritated Hitler, and he tried to browbeat the Greeks in February 1941 into coming to terms with Mussolini. But the Greeks could see little point in losing the peace when they were winning the war. Hitler was therefore forced into a Balkan campaign which caused a five-week postponement of his invasion of Russia. On 6 April 1941 German troops crossed the Greek frontier, and Greek resistance collapsed within three weeks, despite British aid. However, the postponement of Barbarossa was a major factor in its ultimate failure. British attempts to assist Greece resulted in heavy British losses both at sea and on land, but on balance the Greek imbroglio deprived Italy of possible success in Egypt, demonstrated the military weakness of Italy in Albania, provided Britain with an ally who could win victories, and forced Germany into expensive involvement in the Balkans. It is, therefore, a historical error to deny Britain any allies from the fall of France until the invasion of Russia.