

Chapter 10

Hitler's Irrationality

To the world, the European statesmen and to the German Jews, Hitler often appeared to be irrational. He killed Roehm and hundreds of his Brown Shirt leaders because they rebelled while he dismissed some of his generals because they wanted peace. He signed a ten-year nonaggression pact with Poland in 1939 the country he wanted to destroy what he actually did five years later. Hitler mentioned in his early speeches in Munich that the Jews should have been gassed in the World War, but after he became chancellor ten years later he announced repeatedly that the German Jews had nothing to fear. After having called the Russian bolsheviks "herds of brutal murderers" for years he signed a friendship treaty with Stalin.

Among his many contradictory orders he sent Goebbels who worked in the defense industries in Germany to Auschwitz a tract which Goebbels considers irrational and self-destructive and indicative of deep-seated, unconscious antisemitism. In this chapter it will be shown that Hitler's contradictory rhetoric and his apparent irrationality are part of his rationally pursued master plan—to kill the Jews and enslave the Russians. Moreover, it will be shown that much of his success was due to this apparent irrationality. He often changed, and at times even contradicted, the objectives of his master plan, whenever it suited to his advantage. He did this cunningly to catch his victims unguarded and also to deceive foreign diplomats from whom he wanted certain

With respect to the Jews Hitler's apparent irrationality was most damaging. His hour-long illogical speeches in the early Munich days made us, and most of his other

enemies, believe that he was an irrational crank who could never be a successful politician. Hence, when Hitler suddenly declared martial law in February 1933, we Jews had no plan for any defense, and no plans for an alliance with the communists or socialists, Hitler's other opponents who were also persecuted. There was no escape route and from that day on we could only play a submissive role not knowing which additional restriction the next day would bring. Our restrictions increased gradually, but there were also periods of easements which most of us took mistakenly as signs of hope.

During the 1936 Olympic year, there was hope when some antisemitic posters disappeared from public display cases, and also, when Goering approved the establishment of the Jewish Cultural Association (Kulturbund). This allowed the Jews to produce and direct their own plays and musical performances, though it was forbidden to perform "typical" German authors and composers, such as Schiller, Goethe, Wagner, Strauss, and others. About half of all German Jews became members of the Kulturbund (Friedlaender, 1997). Its frequent performances provided the Jewish community with a pleasant cultural coherence in its otherwise restricted life.

Few of us realized that the formation of the Kulturbund had other purposes than comforting the Jews. It helped the Gestapo to establish a Jewish Index (Judenkartei), an attempt to obtain a dossier on every German and on some influential foreign Jews. Additional data was obtained from membership lists of Gestapo approved Jewish sports clubs, language schools, etc. Furthermore, the Kulturbund was an early model of the Jewish Self-Administration instituted by Heydrich at the beginning of the war and also for the Jewish Ghetto Councils (Judenrat) in Poland. It gave the appearance of self-rule though the parameters were strictly prescribed by the Gestapo.

The Kulturbund had still other purpose. In the eyes of the Germans and foreign diplomats it made the Nazis appear very civil. Most of Jews looked healthy and were well dressed when attending cultural evenings that it appeared to the public that they were still well treated and that there was urgent need to help

Though they did not realize it at the time any abating Hitler's antisemitism merely for diplomatic purposes and for the stalling of time. After the British Prime minister Nevill Chamberlain, and the French Premier Eduard Daladier had signed the Peace Treaty of Munich, Hitler no longer needed his facade of civility. Hence, only six weeks after his German troops had moved into the Sudetenland, the Propaganda Minister Goebbels staged the Crystal Night. Though they did this without Hitler's permission, Hitler condoned it after it had happened. When Himmler's Goering suggested that Goebbels relieved of his office, Hitler replied that propaganda chief is more valuable to him than several generals.

The Crystal Night was that existence of Germany was coming to end. But again they had no idea what that end would be. The Nazis wanted to emigrate, but they had taken most of their money and only few of us who had relatives or friends abroad, had to obtain visas and tickets. Our money taken the form of "fleeing tax" and "atonement tax". The latter was an assessment of 1000 Reichsmarks for the oath of the German consular officials in Paris paid for the damage for the broken showcase window which the Nazis smashed. Goebbels commanded. As late as January 1938 Goering urged his subordinates to set up offices throughout Germany to speed up the emigration of Jews. He also looked to further the Rublee plan, negotiated between an American business man and the former German finance minister Hjalmar Schacht, which was taking place in London. This plan proposed that the German government pays for the Jew's visa expense and that the Jew guarantees to buy certain amount of German goods after his or

emigration. This "rescue attempt" was to save several hundred thousand Jews, but it did not materialize.

Shortly after Goering issued his appeal for emigration Hitler suggested for the first time that the Jews might serve as hostages and stay in Germany. He announced on January the 30th that the European Jews would be destroyed if the world Jewry would start another World War, though it was Hitler who started this war just seven months later by invading Poland.

Soon after the war started, all emigration was halted and all Jews were assigned to labor commandos or defense work. The hostage idea was brought up again in 1940 when Hitler, on Heydrich's suggestion, envisioned all Jews to be shipped to Madagascar. Hitler wanted all Jews to be in one place, so that it would be easier to inflict reprisals on them in case the American Jews would attack Germany. Some Jews from southern Germany were already on their way to Marseilles for embarkment when the Madagascar Project was halted because the British Mediterranean Fleet had not surrendered as the Nazis had hoped.

By December 1941, Hitler had occupied 19 European countries and an area of Russia which reached from Leningrad in the north to Odessa in the south and to the outskirts of Moscow on the east. Hitler had control over 300 million people, inclusive of five million Jews and three-and-a-half million Russian war prisoners. He had obtained all this by lies and treaties, by bombing Rotterdam, and by threats and reprisals--without fighting a single major battle. In spite of some apparent detours and contradictions, in the main he had rationally followed his master plan.

During the first nine years of his dictatorship, he had made no irrational decisions counter to his very existence--decisions which Goldhagen considers manifestation

It is difficult to ascribe Hitler's irrational decisions to an unconscious antisemitism, as Goldhagen does. On the winning side Hitler's decisions were much more rational than they were on the losing side. Hitler would not have been satisfied with generals refusing to take his suggestions. His irrationality seemed to have been fed by intense hatred, not only by hatred of Jews but also by hatred for Russians, the Polish nobility and the German general class. After the end of his life, he ordered the first batch of eight generals to be killed by slow hanging. The rope noose was to be fixed such a way that it would break the necks but would choke them slowly. During this process he ordered their pants to be pulled down so that they would be left hanging naked. Hitler had the entire hanging filmed and viewed it that evening of the day the hanging took place. Judging Hitler's cruelty is difficult to discern where his antisemitism ends and where his brutality begins. Hitler was not only an antisemitic beast but he was also monstrously antihuman.