

Bracher's Third Reich

The German Dictatorship: The Origins, Structure and Effects of National Socialism, by Karl Dietrich Bracher; translated from the German by Jean Steinberg, *New York and Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1970. xv + 553 pp. \$13.95.*

A BOOK that is obviously the result of much research, that offers a concise, highly readable, and well-organized account of a complex political episode, and at the same time not only obscures basic causes and effects but actually throws up road blocks against understanding the dynamics of twentieth century European politics, represents no mean intellectual achievement. Yet this is precisely what the young Bonn historian Karl D. Bracher has managed to produce. *The German Dictatorship* may well replace William L. Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* as the standard superficial account of National Socialism.

A summary of the factual contents, which include comprehensive treatments of the ideological antecedents of National Socialism, the founding of the NSDAP and its road to power, the multiplex process of *Gleichschaltung*, the road to war, and the excesses of wartime totalitarianism—as well

as the anti-Hitler resistance, the bitter end, and the persistence of National Socialist tendencies in the Federal Republic—would take up space needed for discussing the fundamental issues raised by the Bracher book. Suffice it to say that, with exceptions to be noted later, Bracher deals fairly and conscientiously with his materials. Outright errors are few: one might mention the re-taking of Memel from Latvia rather than Lithuania (which may be a translator's error) and an apparent confusion of Ukrainians and Cossacks with Russians in the description of Hitler's eastern campaign. There is no evidence of intent to distort; the book's distortions are, rather, the result of *reichsdeutsche* provincialism that fails to grasp the connections and analogies between German politics and those of Europe as a whole. Bracher does not deal unfairly with the basic questions his story raises: he simply does not recognize them, and neither will his readers except those few who know the typology of nationalism.

Bracher accepts at face value the distinction drawn in 1918 by Thomas Mann (in his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*) between the "political" nationalism of France and the *völkisch* nationalism that provided the matrix for National Socialism. For him, *völkisch* nationalism (the translator leaves the word in German, since there is no English equivalent) is necessarily xenophobic, racist, and totalitarian. His readers thus learn to use *völkisch* as a pejorative term: a device that leads to automatic condemnation of the organized German expellees as well as of efforts by ethnic groups such as the German-speaking South Tyroleans to assert their cultural and political autonomy against forced assimilation by an alien majority.

The essential point that Bracher does not see is that the integrators and the operational characteristics of nationalisms are two largely independent sets of variables. The integrators, that is, the factors that cause a nationality group to feel a sense of unity and of difference from other nationalities, include residence in a defined terri-

tory, loyalty to a dynasty, republic, or ideology, race or reputed descent, language, culture, religion, or any combination of these. But with the sole exception of revolutionary-totalitarian ideologies, the specific integrators do not dictate the political behavior of the nations they integrate. Such behavior represents each nation's response to its total environment, including the behavior of other nations. One generalization seems permissible: defensive nationalism—that which responds to real or fancied oppression or threats, or which compensates an inferiority complex—tends to choose a political style opposite from that of the nation against which it is directed.

Although France has gone down in history as *la grande nation*, it began as a dynastic-territorial state. The French nation was forged by ruthless cultural centralization, including the suppression of regional languages and traditions such as Breton, Basque, and Provençal. The French Revolution, conceived in rationalism, exerted considerable attractive force and might have become a model for political evolution in Germany had the Jacobins not carried it to the point of democratic totalitarianism. As is evident from a reading of the contemporary Benjamin Constant, Napoleon I's dictatorship was thoroughly tyrannical; in its manipulation of opinion and corruption of the nation it formed a prototype for Lenin and Hitler. But Napoleon invaded and subjected Germany in the name of *liberté, égalité, et fraternité*. It was therefore natural that the German *risorgimento* typified by Stein and Fichte should take recourse to the pre-democratic *ständisch* ("estates") tradition of the Reich: it had, as Bracher correctly observes, a strong conservative, authoritarian, and anti-liberal element. But, as Bracher fails to note, it developed in response to a situation in which the Enlightenment and democracy had been experienced as tyranny and foreign occupation.

In France, the state had integrated the nation. In Germany and in Central and Eastern Europe, the romantic concept of

the *Volk* or linguistic-cultural nation exemplified in the writings of J. G. Herder provided the "dialectical" answer to the territorial nationalism of the West. It is in this connection that Bracher makes the error of interpretation that invalidates the entire perspective of his book.

It is technically correct for Bracher to trace a line of ideological evolution from Herder and Fichte through *Turnvater* Jahn to Wagner, H. S. Chamberlain, and finally to Rosenberg and Hitler, even though this sequence is confusing when separated from the larger story of which it is a part. But it is radically wrong to imply, as Bracher evidently does, that this is the mainstream of *völkisch* nationalism, that *völkisch* ideology is essentially or even primarily German, and that the tyranny and brutality of National Socialism could not have happened without this ideology.

The romantic idea of the nation gave rise to the syndrome that Eugen Lemberg, in his masterful *Nationalismus* (Hamburg, 1964, unfortunately not available in English), describes as "risorgimento nationalism." This is the drive of the linguistic-ethnic nation for secure identity, cultural fulfillment, and political expression. Circumstances dictate whether risorgimento nationalism chooses traditional-authoritarian or liberal-democratic political forms: the nationalisms of Mazzini and Kossuth were entirely *völkisch* in concept, yet internally democratic. Kossuth, anticipating the Czech and Polish leaders of the following century, was equally undemocratic in dealing with minorities who did not belong to the chosen *Staatsvolk*. Nor was risorgimento nationalism necessarily dedicated to the sovereign one-nation state. Palacky, who created Czech national history, not entirely of facts, knew full well that an independent Bohemia would invite conquest by major powers. He and his allies therefore sought reorganization of Austria as a federal state in which the Czechs would play a leading role.

In discussing the Austrian environment in which Adolf Hitler grew up, Bracher

omits the overview of Austrian politics that is essential to an understanding of National Socialism. He fails to observe that the multi-ethnic nobility, with their business allies the cosmopolitan German liberals, were basic integrating forces of the territorial state, whereas the rising Slav and other non-German bourgeoisies were at the same time democratic and provincial, monolingual as far as they could manage, and increasingly belligerent. Their ultimate willingness to risk war for the satisfaction of national aims belies the Wilsonian notion that democracies are more peace-loving than traditional-authoritarian states. It was the non-German nationalities of Central Europe that were the main bearers of *völkisch* nationalism, while Pan-Germanism and anti-Semitism—on which Bracher dilates to the exclusion of other Austrian political trends—were defensive reactions centered in areas where non-German regional majorities discriminated against German minorities. The reader learns nothing of the long line of German-Austrian liberals, federalists, and reformers, from Loehner and Schaeffle in mid-nineteenth century to Koerber, Renner, and Popovici shortly before World War I—all of whom tried to reshape the Dual Monarchy as a federation of equal peoples. Bracher wrongly blames the German-Austrian Social Democrats for failing to consider national feelings and needs. Apparently, he is unaware that precisely this party took the initiative toward creating a federal system built on guarantees of equal nationality rights—a program adopted by the Social Democratic parties of the Empire at Brno in 1899.

Within the German national state created by Bismarck in 1871, *völkisch* nationalism had its advocates, some of whom Bracher enumerates. But it was held in check by the universal-cosmopolitan tradition exemplified by Schiller, Goethe, Novalis, and Beethoven, by the existence of important outward-oriented centers of German culture in Austria and Switzerland, and, for the *Reichsdeutsche*, by the fact that polit-

ical security appeared no longer a problem.

As Lemberg has explained, the connecting link between nationalism and National Socialism is integral nationalism, which establishes the nation as an absolute value overriding other moral imperatives. It has no special connection with *völkisch* integrators, in fact it made its first modern appearance in France after the defeat of 1871: it is characteristic of a nation that has suffered a severe blow to its national pride. French integral nationalists with reputations beyond their own country included Maurice Barrès, whose mystic invocation of "the earth and the dead" laid the groundwork for Hitler's *Blut und Boden*, the anti-Semites Gobineau and Vacher de Lapouge, as well as Paul Déroulède, the brain truster behind France's would-be Führer, General Boulanger.

Bracher mentions Gobineau and Vacher de Lapouge as representatives of international Social Darwinism, and interprets Barrès' national mysticism as a forerunner of National Socialism. But he shows no awareness of the generic phenomenon of integral nationalism, or of the close ideological relationship between its German variant, National Socialism, and its various non-German forms, especially those developed in a territorial rather than a *völkisch* matrix. Trapped in his narrow *reichsdeutsche* perspective, Bracher fails to take account of the fact that justification of persecution, expulsions, and "purifying" genocide is typical of all integral nationalism, not only National Socialism. It thus escapes him that Hitler's political morality was the operationalizing of Rousseau's General Will.

Having misunderstood Austrian politics, Bracher ignores completely the decisive effect which the dismemberment of the Dual Monarchy had on intellectual and political life in the German Reich. The Paris Treaties of 1919 were the triumph of the ethnic or *völkisch* principle, and the old territorial empire was torn into seven parts. In five of the successor states—Italy,

Yugoslavia, Rumania, Poland, and Czechoslovakia—the *Staatsvolk* or master people established its supremacy over sizable minorities, who were protected by vague and badly enforced "minority rights." Since Wilsonian self-determination had been interpreted not only to destroy the multi-nation territorial state but to condemn it morally as "the prison of nations," bourgeois cosmopolitanism *throughout the entire German cultural area* found itself deprived of political relevance. Except for the rising ideology of Marxism-Leninism, ethnic nationalism was left with a monopoly of the field. German intellectuals thus faced the choice of *völkisch* nationalism, pro-Soviet Leftism, or total withdrawal from politics. Humiliation of Germany through the Treaty of Versailles created the classic situation for the emergence of integral nationalism. The superficial internationalism represented by the League of Nations, which left unsolved the great problems of inter-ethnic relationships, was no viable middle ground: Stresemann and Briand failed because they lacked constituencies. The Versailles Peace destroyed the European center, even though that result did not become apparent for some years. Why the United States intervened in Europe to make possible this peace is a story that cannot be told here, but it may truly be said that Woodrow Wilson unintentionally put Adolf Hitler in business.

All this is not to deny Bracher a certain facility in dealing with the visible symptoms of National Socialism. His book is useful as a day-to-day account of events, both before and after Hitler's seizure of power, although it is skimpy in its treatment of diplomatic history. It devotes considerable space to the extermination of Jews and the attitude of the churches, but adds nothing significant to previously published accounts such as those of Reitlinger or Frumkin. Bracher fails to deal critically with the allegations made in Rolf Hochhuth's play *The Deputy* or the charge made by Professor Paul Rassinier of Paris that the commonly accepted figure of six

million killed is grossly exaggerated—a charge that was “answered” by refusing the Professor admission to Germany to attend the Auschwitz trial and by branding him as a “Nazi sympathizer.”

In dealing with postwar politics in the Federal Republic, Bracher gives a useful factual account of the rise and (perhaps temporary) decline of the NPD (National Democratic Party), which is dominated by National Socialist ideas and personnel. He errs, however, in applying the tar brush of “Neo-Nazism” to a wide stratum of German conservatives, including the expellee organizations, which are turning increasingly to federalist rather than national-state ideology. Bracher does not consider the 1950 Expellee Charter renouncing violence as a means of restoration nor the federalist Wiesbaden Agreement of the Czechs and Sudeten Germans worthy of mention, although they are typical of a new and hopeful trend in European political think-

ing. While the historian is within his rights in doubting whether the Reich in its 1914 or 1937 orders is a viable object for German national sentiment, he is indulging in the kind of innuendo identified with a former Senator from Wisconsin when he accuses Franz-Josef Strauss and the Bavarian CSU of “an effort to gear political party propaganda to that of the NPD, to keep abreast of the ‘national wave.’”

In short, Bracher has written a facile but superficial book. It presents useful accounts of several phases of recent German history, particularly the political maneuvering that led to Hitler’s seizure of power. It fails, however, to place the facts recited in a coherent perspective of European ideological history or to perform the essential task required of a historian writing about his own people: to provide an acceptable self-image of the German nation.

Reviewed by KURT GLASER



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