

Events Through Hitler's Eyes

The War Path: Hitler's Germany, 1933-1939, by David Irving, *New York: The Viking Press, 1978. xvii + 301 pp. \$14.95.*

THIS VOLUME, covering the now familiar salient events and developments, internal and external, of the 1933-1939 period, is the latest addition to a long list of the author's publications on the Second World War. David Irving's scholarly studies are indeed impressive as is he himself. A former British naval officer, he studied at the Imperial College and London University. He spent a year working in a steel mill in Germany to perfect his command of the German language. He has contributed to periodicals and newspapers in Germany and Britain, and continues to address German audiences in their language on his studies of their history.

As in his earlier companion volume, *Hitler's War* (1977), Irving's intention is to describe events from behind the Führer's desk, to see episodes through his eyes, thus better to explain and interpret Hitler's often inexplicable decisions, and to trace the story of one man's path to war. Other writers on the coming of the Second World War have merely placed the blame on Hitler. But Irving's structural techniques are dramatic, his narrative colorful, his analyses probing. And, most important, he provides a revision of the current picture of Hitler derived from hitherto unpublished diaries, letters, manuscripts, and interviews. Irving "has tried to accord him [Hitler] the kind of hearing he would have got in an English court of law—where the rules of evidence apply, but also where a measure of insight is appropriate."

The author also informs us in his foreword that all the private records—and some from government archives, which he has made use of in writing this book—are now part of the Irving Collection in the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich, available with some exceptions to other researchers. They will also find there "the line-by-line annotations

originally prepared for this book, some 1500 pages of source notes, which were dispensed with for reasons of space." Still, many of these annotations and a list of noteworthy sources he has used are cited at the back of the book and often interwoven in his narrative.

In his prologue, Irving sets forth some of the events between 1920 and Hitler's seizure of power in 1933, in order to reveal, in the Führer's own words, his plans and objectives for Germany, and the extraordinary hold he exerted on his followers and on the German people. This is followed by Part I, in the first chapter of which the author describes Hitler's staging of the state funeral for General Erich Ludendorff in Munich on December 22, 1937. He dramatically reconstructs from old, but especially from new evidence the Blomberg-Fritsch crisis of January-February 1938, which resulted in Hitler's absolute control over the German armed forces, and a top-level re-shuffle of the German Foreign Service and the military services.

In the second chapter Irving returns to the chronological developments from 1933, elaborating in great detail the establishment of Hitler's total control over labor, press, and police, the relationship of Hitler to Hindenburg, the Röhm Putsch, and the emergence of the Forschungsamt (Research Office, a wire tapping and interception agency under Göring's control, which would grow in importance), providing evidence extensively used throughout this book, and the subject of Irving's *Breach of Security* (1968).

In successive chapters chronological developments in relation to Hitler are similarly elaborated: the Dollfuss affair of 1934; the introduction of German conscription, the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, and Mussolini's attack on Abyssinia in 1935; the German occupation of the Rhineland, Göring and the Four Year Plan, the Spanish Civil War, and the Austro-German treaty of 1936; British-German relations in 1937 and the impact on Hitler of Ribbentrop's report from London of December 27, 1937 which, as Irving points out, "vanished from sight into the British Foreign Office until recently," and

which "warned Hitler that Britain would fight—contrary to the legend established at the Nuremberg trials in 1946." There follow the Austrian crisis and its relation to the Blomberg-Fritsch crisis, the Czechoslovakian crisis, Munich and the aftermath in 1938. Part I concludes with three secret speeches of Hitler in early 1939, reviewing the past and forecasting the inevitability of war in the near future.

In Part II Irving continues his narrative, elaborating with complete particulars, month by month, even day by day in August 1939, the familiar course of developments in and outside of Germany. He has a great deal to say about Hitler's perceptions of the problems and issues in the whole area of Eastern Europe. He sees Hitler's frustration at Poland's rejection of his repeated offer regarding Danzig and the Corridor, his satisfaction over the subversion and independence of Slovakia, and the march into Prague. We get Hitler's reactions to Mussolini's annexation of Albania and his involvement in the "Pact of Steel." Irving guides us through the dangerous period of the British-Russian negotiations and of the Hitler-Stalin approaches toward their treaty, and finally the military preparations for war with Poland and defense against Britain and France in the West. These culminated in the continuing tensions throughout August and into September. The delays and fatal failures lead finally to Germany's invasion of Poland, which, in an epilogue, Irving smoothly connects to the opening lines of his massive volume, *Hitler's War*.

In addition to the author's chronological, analytical narrative of these salient developments and their relation to Hitler, there are many other matters related to the Führer which Irving intersperses in the narrative, including descriptive portraits of the people closest to Hitler, his personal household—secretaries, adjutants, and doctors—and his chief party and military leaders. He describes the roles they played and gives an account of the interviewed evidence they

provided him. He depicts the Berghof, the Eagles Nest, the new Reich Chancellery, and the activities of Hitler and others therein. He tells us about Hitler's likes and dislikes, his talents and weaknesses, his relation to women, his attitude toward the Church, his intentions and inner ambitions, and his views about his foreign opponents.

Some of the especially important private documents, which Irving obtained personally for writing his book, should be mentioned. These included the unpublished diaries of Hitler's army liaison officer, Nikolaus von Vormann, of his personal adjutant, Max Wünsche, of State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker, of Generals von Bock, Milch, and Leeb, and of Colonel Eduard Wagner, whose wife gave Irving some 2,000 pages of Wagner's letters. Other sources were contemporary papers of Hitler's secretary, Christa Schroeder, Julius Schaub's manuscripts and writings over a period of twenty years as Hitler's aide, the papers of State Secretary Herbert Backe, the diaries, notebooks and papers of Fritz Todt. Other documents, which Irving obtained in Moscow, include previously unknown private manuscripts written by General von Fritsch, which relate, through his eyes, the entire Blomberg-Fritsch crisis.

Lastly it should be pointed out that international developments are also seen from the non-German side. He analyzes and describes the foreign policies of the other European powers and characterizes the foreign statesmen. *The War Path* is, in fact, a brief history of the European international situation and German affairs, as well as a biographical portrait of Hitler. Irving's new book is a splendid scholarly contribution to our knowledge of the period, exciting, absorbing, sometimes shocking, filled with keen insights and some new interpretations of men and events, and illuminated by rare photographs and new and convincing evidence of Hitler's will and path to war.

Reviewed by HENRY M. ADAMS