

HITLER'S CRUSADE

*Bolshevism and the Myth of the
International Jewish Conspiracy*

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Tauris Academic Studies

LONDON • NEW YORK

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Introduction

On 1 May 1945, six days before the collapse of the Third Reich, Hamburg Radio broadcast a message to the nation from Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, commander-in-chief of the German navy since January 1943, and now, following Hitler's suicide on 30 April, the latter's reluctant successor as Führer and Chancellor. After the radio announcer had informed his listeners that Hitler had died 'fighting to the last breath against Bolshevism and for Germany', Dönitz came to the microphone and made the following declaration:

German men and women, soldiers of the German Wehrmacht, our Führer, Adolf Hitler, has fallen. In deepest sorrow and reverence the German people bows. He recognized the terrible danger of Bolshevism at an early date and dedicated his existence to this struggle. ... His life was one single service for Germany. His action in fighting against the Bolshevik spring-tide was waged beyond that, for Europe and the entire civilized world.¹

In the circumstances, it is unlikely that these words found any echo save among the most fanatical and deluded Nazi diehards. Indeed, at the point in his address when Dönitz unconvincingly described his predecessor as 'one of the greatest heroes of German history', an unidentified voice broke into the transmission with the remark 'This is a lie.'²

Yet, there was an element of truth in what Dönitz said, for Hitler had indeed dedicated, or at least had professed to dedicate, a substantial part of his political career to the fight against Bolshevism, a process that had culminated in June 1941, when, with their ears ringing with propaganda about a historic European mission, the German armed forces launched a breathtaking assault on the Reich's eastern neighbour, and, in so doing, finally

unleashed Hitler's wrath on the USSR, the undisputed epicentre of 'Jewish Bolshevism'.

During the 1930s, not least due to his own unstinting efforts and those of his foremost political associates, Hitler's name had become synonymous with the theme of the defence of Germany and Europe against the ideological threat posed by the USSR, and the perceived function of the Third Reich as a bulwark against Bolshevism received considerable approbation from the meek and the great alike. In August 1936, for example, Mrs Louise McNair Crawford, a private American citizen currently resident in San Remo, Italy, felt compelled to make a small financial donation to Hitler, with more to follow, so she promised, in recognition of his role as 'our shield and buckler against Bolshevism'.³ The following year, one of the most senior figures in the British Conservative Party, the former Viceroy of India and future foreign secretary, Lord Halifax, personally congratulated Hitler on his success in stemming the Bolshevik tide by acknowledging that he had 'not only performed great services in Germany, but also, as he would no doubt feel, had been able, by preventing the entry of communism into his own country, to bar its passage further West'.⁴

In mid-1936, when the outbreak of civil war in Spain sharply focused international attention on the purported Bolshevik threat to Western Europe, the Third Reich redoubled its efforts to advertise itself to the world as the guardian of civilization, a final barrier across the path of this pernicious onslaught against European values and culture. Indeed, with the obvious exception of the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939, when Hitler was forced into a transient and exceedingly distasteful accommodation with the USSR in order to realize his immediate goals against Poland, anti-Bolshevism was frequently employed to justify or rationalize a range of German foreign policy initiatives, including unilateral treaty breaches, as in the case of rearmament, the acquisition of major allies, as in that of the Anti-Comintern Pact, and even the destruction of independent non-Bolshevik states, such as occurred in the case of Czechoslovakia.

Thus, in March 1936, as German troops marched into the Rhineland, Hitler was earnestly explaining to the Reichstag, and indirectly to the authorities in Paris, that France, the country whose vital interests had been most immediately affected by the

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move, had nothing to fear from this latest assertion of German *Gleichberechtigung*. Indeed, the campaign for equality of rights had had 'no harmful effects on the French people', for only 'the Red revolt and the collapse of the German Reich would have dealt the European order and the European economy a blow having consequences which, unfortunately, are virtually beyond the grasp of most European statesmen'.⁵ Later in his address, the German Chancellor returned to the theme:

When today my international opponents confront me with the fact that I refuse to practice this cooperation with Russia, I must counter this assertion with the following: I rejected and continue to reject this cooperation not with Russia, but with the Bolshevism which lays claim to world rulership. I am a German, I love my people and am attached to it. I know that it can only be happy if allowed to live in accordance with its nature and its way. The German people has been able not only to cry, but also to laugh heartily all its life, and I do not want the horror of the Communist international dictatorship of hatred to descend upon it. I tremble for Europe at the thought of what would lie in store for our old, heavily populated continent were the chaos of the Bolshevik revolution rendered successful by the infiltrating force of this destructive Asiatic concept of the world, which subverts all our established ideals. I am perhaps for many European statesmen a fantastic [*phantastisch*], or at any rate uncomfortable, harbinger of warnings. That I am regarded in the eyes of the international Bolshevik oppressors of the world as one of their greatest enemies is for me a great honour and a justification for my actions in the eyes of posterity.⁶

As the case of the reoccupation of the Rhineland amply demonstrates, it would clearly be misguided to suggest that anti-Bolshevism was never used as a tactical weapon in Hitler's armoury. By the same token, it is equally misguided to dismiss anti-Bolshevism as an element of pure convenience for the Nazi leaders, for to do so is fundamentally to misunderstand one of the core concepts at the heart of Nazi ideology.

During the 1936 party rally at Nuremberg, when Hitler, Goebbels and Rosenberg excelled themselves in a series of sustained and vicious attacks on the 'world peril', thus to an extent affirming Göring's recent announcement at a meeting of the German cabinet that war with Bolshevik Russia was inevitable,⁷ some commentators, prompted perhaps by the very excesses of the occasion, saw ulterior motives behind the anti-Soviet invective that punctuated virtually every major address delivered by the party leaders. In its issue of 20 September 1936, for example, the *Illustrazione Italiana* ran an article entitled 'Conflict of Religion or German Imperialism?' warning its readers not to permit themselves to be seduced or hypnotized by the German arguments that called for the ostracism of the USSR and the rejection of Bolshevism as a political philosophy.

In itself, Bolshevism certainly constituted a threat, noted 'Spectator', the author of the piece; the recent events in Spain alone testified to that. Moreover, the fact that the Comintern fomented unrest and agitation wherever possible meant that vigilance was essential. The point at which 'Spectator' parted company with the Germans concerned the claims that the USSR represented a threat to Germany itself, for not only did the two states lack a common border, but, it was claimed, the armed forces and industrial capability of the Soviet Union were not sufficient to endanger the German Reich, despite the considerable advances made under the five-year plans.

One instinctively wondered therefore 'whether the Chancellor's apprehensions are justified or whether the whole affair is not a colossal comedy staged to win for Germany's increasingly intensive rearmament the approval of the rest of Europe'. Hitler's 'championing' of Western Europe was certainly suspicious, for National Socialist ideology could hardly identify itself with 'the real authentic Western civilization created by two thousand years of history'. Hitler's aims were 'exclusively national and imperial', the article concluded, and, although Nazi ideology was 'by definition unquestionably anti-communist', its basic function was to serve 'modern Germany's plans', which were 'grandiose and unlimited'.⁸

To some extent the historiography of the Third Reich has followed and mirrored the arguments of 'Spectator' in so far as the function of Hitler's anti-Bolshevism is concerned, with the result

that several commentators have concluded that Hitler used anti-Bolshevism largely as a pretext or cover to disguise his real aims and intentions.⁹ Even one of the world's leading authorities on Hitler's foreign policy, Gerhard Weinberg, appears a little uncertain on this issue. In keeping with his focus on Hitler's lust for territorial aggrandisement, and the Führer's eye for the main chance when anything towards that goal might be achieved, Weinberg writes in connection with German policy during the opening phase of the Spanish Civil War that the danger of communism 'may well have influenced Hitler' in his decision to assist Franco. He then immediately dilutes the point by referring to 'important circumstantial evidence' in support of economic motives for intervention.¹⁰

In contrast, 'intentionalist' historians such as Klaus Hildebrand and Andreas Hillgruber have repeatedly emphasized the importance of ideological factors and anti-Bolshevism in their research,¹¹ while Jochen Thies has firmly positioned the destruction of 'Jewish Bolshevism' – not, it should be noted, 'Russia' or the 'Soviet Union' – in the sequence of events that Hitler considered necessary to enable him ultimately to launch his bid for world power.¹²

One aim of this work is to engage some of these questions afresh, and, by highlighting the role of anti-Bolshevism – as opposed to *Lebensraum* – to redress a certain imbalance that has been created between these crucial and interwoven components of Hitler's *Weltanschauung*. Hitler himself would not have denied the connection, unless he wished to renounce much of what he had written and said; in fact, during his speech to the German Labour Front at Nuremberg on 12 September 1936 he actually linked the two by first dilating on the primitive nature of Bolshevism before asking his audience to contemplate the prosperity that Germany would enjoy were it one day to possess the Ukraine.¹³ The aim of conquering additional *Lebensraum* at the expense of the USSR is certainly key to any understanding of Hitler's external policies, but to view it in isolation, as somehow divorced from the notion of anti-Bolshevism, is as ill-conceived as the idea that the emphasis on *Lebensraum* was simply a cloak designed to conceal the primary aim of combating communism.¹⁴

In some parts of eastern Europe there was initially considerable confusion about the depth and virulence of Hitler's anti-

Bolshevism, particularly when in the months after 1933 his words were rapidly translated into action. In a serialized article entitled 'Moscow and Hitler', the Estonian journalist Nicolaus Basseches related the Soviet view that Hitler, in his search for a foreign success, had little choice but to declare war on Bolshevism on behalf of the capitalist nations. With the balance of forces in Western Europe ranged solidly against him, and nothing to be expected from Poland, Hitler's strong stance against Bolshevism was in actual fact a means to achieve the revision of the Treaty of Versailles in so far as it limited German armaments and prevented Germany from exercising its rightful influence in Eastern Europe. Poland, it was anticipated, would be an early victim in this process.¹⁵

Nothing could have been further from the truth, and within nine months Poland and Germany had evidently buried their differences, signed a non-aggression pact and were exploring how they might deepen their collaboration against the USSR. In the German foreign ministry, too, experienced officials, steeped in traditional national-conservative values, and many of them favourable to the Rapallo policy of collaboration with the USSR, were puzzled and alarmed by the rapid and deliberate deterioration of Russo-German relations effected by the Nazi regime after 1933. Ernst von Weizsäcker perhaps spoke for many when he later wrote of his inability to comprehend 'why we should have given our many enemies the advantage of being able to base their policy on the assumption of unwavering German hostility to Russia', for there was 'no dispute between ourselves and the Soviet Union in regard to frontiers, nor did the latter have any perceptible influence on German internal politics'.¹⁶

Were there a simple explanation for Weizsäcker's bemusement, it perhaps lay in his inability fully to comprehend the phenomenon of Hitler, whose foreign policy was determined not merely by notions of *Realpolitik*, the staple diet of the career diplomat, but also by deep-seated prejudices and other ideological elements. After all, very few at the time could claim to have recognized the profound ideological basis that underpinned Hitler's whole political philosophy, or to have foreseen how that might and did impact on policy. It was the classic mistake made by the German conservatives, who, believing they could manipulate Hitler, succeeded only in handing him control of the state.

The claim that anti-Bolshevism was employed as an expedient is in fact far more appropriate in the case of Mussolini, whose opposition to the threat posed by communism is viewed by a recent biographer as a 'rhetorical trope', which Il Duce 'could turn on and off at will'.¹⁷ Moreover, the Italian leader may well have professed a conviction that the majority of the Bolshevik leaders were Jews, and that Jewish bankers in London and New York financed their secret machinations, but the absence of any deep-seated racial dimension to his political concepts, a fact once bemoaned by Hitler himself,¹⁸ meant that hardly had he finished exposing 'these "Jewish conspiracies" than he was writing in favour of the heavily Jewish revolutionaries of Hungary'.¹⁹ As far as Italian foreign policy is concerned, the history of Italo-Soviet relations, which were relatively cordial until 1936, stands in stark contrast to the systematic campaign Hitler waged against the USSR after 1933. Indeed, as I seek to demonstrate, Italy's gravitation towards Germany from 1935 onwards clearly indicates how the Italians consciously used anti-Bolshevism to interest Germany in a rapprochement following the serious deterioration in Italy's relations with the democracies during the Abyssinian crisis.

Whereas Mussolini's world view may originally have lacked this racial, or at least anti-Jewish, dimension, it is beyond question that it lay at the core of Hitler's beliefs. As Sebastian Haffner relates in his perceptive analysis of Hitler's career, anti-Semitism, the 'first thing to take root in Hitler', soon gave rise to the notion that racial struggle between Aryans and Jews was a 'permanent feature of history'. Whereas the Great Powers were ceaselessly engaged in a noble struggle for survival, which was effectively a struggle for living space, the Jews were the 'spoilsports in this pleasant game', for with their 'internationalism and pacifism, their (international) capitalism and their (equally international) communism they were diverting the "Aryan" nations from their main task, and their main preoccupation, and that is why they had to be removed from the world, and not from Germany only'.²⁰ Haffner's conclusions about the nonsensical nature of Hitler's racial dogma can readily be accepted, but that does not mean that Hitler was not absolutely serious in his convictions. Geoffrey Stoakes, one of the foremost authorities on the formative years of Nazi foreign policy, has also taken up the theme of the 'international' Jew. He argues that by

1920, thus long before notions of *Lebensraum* or a 'programmatic' foreign policy, indeed at a time when Hitler was thinking in terms of traditional revisionism, the purported 'internationalism' of the Jews, articulated through capitalism and world revolution, was already beginning to define Hitler's *Weltanschauung*. Only through such media, Rosenberg and others had instructed him, could the Jew 'organize, erect and maintain his definitive world-rule'.²¹

To some degree the combination of a virulent anti-Semitism with the notion of hordes of 'Asiatics' descending on Western and central Europe around which Hitler's anti-Bolshevik ideology essentially revolved was paralleled by currents of thought that were already well established within German politics and philosophy. Towards the close of the nineteenth century Germany had been gripped by the so-called 'yellow peril'²² at a time when, quite coincidentally, several prominent philosophers had left their mark on the growing trend of anti-Semitism witnessed in Germany from the 1880s onwards.²³ Even before the outbreak of war in 1914 had served to unleash a fresh wave of Russophobia in Germany, views and arguments were being advanced across the political spectrum highlighting the Russian tendency towards the 'absorption of individualism', warning of a '*Drang nach Westen*', and calling for a new '*Drang nach Osten*' in order to reclaim ancient territories. Within a year of the German defeat in 1918 the first calls were heard for a new cultural mission for the German nation designed to stave off the spread of Bolshevism, As Gregory Moore notes, it was the juxtaposition of 'Asiatic Bolshevism' with the 'Oriental Jew' that provided the key to National Socialist perceptions of an elaborate Jewish conspiracy, of which Marxism, with its insistence on 'those eminently Jewish values', internationalism, egalitarianism and pacifism, so antithetical to the *völkisch* ideal, was a key component.²⁴

Today, almost ninety years since its outbreak, the revolution that gripped and ultimately transformed the Russian empire into the Soviet Union is generally of little more than academic interest. Unlike the terms 'fascism' and 'fascist', which have been transformed into all-encompassing pejoratives, 'Bolshevism' and 'Bolshevik' have effectively disappeared from everyday usage. For the generation that fought the First World War, however, more so for its leaders, Bolshevism was a new and disturbing phenomenon,

for the sudden transformation of a state, itself the size of a continent, into the self-proclaimed centre of world revolution presented a series of fresh problems, for which there appeared to be no obvious remedies. Nowhere was this more evident than in Germany where the cessation of hostilities was attended by the chaos of the 'November revolution' and the subsequent declaration in Munich of the Bavarian Soviet Republic. As so-called workers' and soldiers' councils began to operate in major German cities, individuals and organizations determined to rescue the Reich from the Marxists produced an array of anti-Marxist and anti-Bolshevik literature. As would later become apparent, Goebbels and his acolytes were not above recycling the ideas and arguments deployed by these early German opponents of Bolshevism if their own ends could thereby be served. The work of Edouard Stadtler, one of Germany's foremost pioneers against Bolshevism and founder in December 1918 of the Anti-Bolshevik League, is a case in point.

As a prisoner of war in Russia, Stadtler had gained first-hand experience of Bolshevism which, he claimed, purposefully fostered anarchy to promote its ultimate goal of world revolution. The triumph of Bolshevism, he announced in November 1918, marked the beginning of a struggle between a new all-encompassing 'world danger' and what he coincidentally termed a 'National Socialism'. Backed by funds from wealthy industrialists and financiers Stadtler went on to become a major agitator and propagandist against the internationalist tendencies of Bolshevism in the immediate post-1918 period, arguing that Germany should reject both Marxism and democracy in favour of a 'third way', which would achieve true socialism through a national revolution.²⁵ Although Stadtler faded into relative obscurity during the 1920s, the Nazis resurrected his anti-Bolshevik message in 1936 with the publication of a collection of his essays, many of which had originated in 1919.²⁶ How far Hitler may have been influenced by Stadtler in 1919–20, indeed whether he even knew of him, is of course impossible to gauge. Nevertheless, the activities and writings of Stadtler and other like-minded anti-Bolsheviks during those precarious years of German history serve not only to give an indication of the atmosphere in which they operated but might also go some way to explain the later receptivity of large sections of the German population to the

anti-Bolshevik message of the NSDAP whose reminders about the red menace may well have touched the nerve of bitter personal experience.

From the outset the Bolsheviks were almost universally derided and despised. Alan Sharpe informs us that for the peacemakers who had gathered at Paris in 1919 Bolshevism represented 'much more than the precepts of Marxism–Leninism. It meant chaos, despair, fanaticism, famine, anarchy and a threat to all orderly government', a fact that goes some way to explain the frustration of the US secretary of state, Robert Lansing, who complained of the delay in finalizing the settlement 'while the flames of Bolshevism eat their way into Central Europe and threaten the destruction of the social order'.²⁷ Lansing's fears of Bolshevik intentions appear to have been fully justified, not least as the Communist International, the body established in 1919 to oversee the process of world revolution, rejoiced at the worldwide instability that attended the end of the First World War and looked forward enthusiastically to making rapid progress in its work.²⁸ Shortly after the armistice, with the fighting finally over, there was time at last to peer towards the east and take stock of the tremendous developments in the former Russian empire. To some the next step was obvious. General Haking, chief of the British section of the Armistice Commission, advised his colleagues in late 1918 to stop worrying about the German danger, which had passed, and to work now towards an alliance with 'any people, in or out of Europe, who were prepared to join hands with them to defeat the international power of Bolshevism'.²⁹ Two years later, Winston Churchill told a gathering of his supporters that, although no one knew what might ultimately emerge from the 'Russian cauldron', it would 'almost certainly be full of menace for Britain', and that consequently, by way of prevention, 'we ought to try and make a real and lasting peace with the Germans'.³⁰ In 1921 the British government appeared to condone at least the first of Churchill's points by establishing an inter-departmental committee to examine, monitor and combat Bolshevik activities against the empire.³¹

In Germany the organization of workers' councils and the establishment of Soviet-style regional governments after 1918 had been a cause for serious concern among the allies, some of whom were beset by considerable social dislocation and unrest. During the

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1920s the fear of a Russo–German rapprochement was cleverly exploited by Stresemann who, by periodically flirting with Moscow, was able to extract concessions from Austen Chamberlain and Briand, for which in other circumstances he might well have had to work considerably harder. Despite the partnership with Russia, which he inherited and subsequently strengthened, Stresemann was too much of a realist to believe that Germany’s recovery and future prosperity were in the long term bound up with the USSR, and, placing his faith in the USA, he was already beginning to reconsider his policy towards the Soviet Union in the months before his death in 1929.³²

Nothing, however, could have prepared the Soviet government for the reorientation of German policy towards the USSR that was introduced after Hitler became chancellor in January 1933. It soon became apparent, even to those unfamiliar with the Führer’s writing and proclamations on the subject, that a distinct ideological edge had been imparted to Soviet–German relations by the new appointment that soon began to manifest itself even in the language Hitler chose to employ about the Bolsheviks, those ‘noxious microbes’ as he described them to the British ambassador in December 1935.³³

In this study I attempt to place international Bolshevism as defined by Hitler and his associates within an overall international context, and to analyse the role of ideology, diplomacy and propaganda in Hitler’s efforts to mobilize support for the policies he intended to pursue against Bolshevik Russia. Although its primary focus is on the international dimension of Nazi anti-Bolshevism, due and appropriate attention has been paid to the origins and development of theories about a Jewish world conspiracy, and to developments in the Jewish question in the domestic German political arena in so far as they impacted on the course of international policy and the origins of the Final Solution. In an attempt to provide a more rounded picture of the German attitude and response to the supposed world conspiracy, some effort has been made to make brief comment as and when appropriate about its plutocratic-capitalist dimension, but the study is primarily concerned with the concept of international Bolshevism as epitomized by the perceived threat emanating from the USSR.

Chapter 1

Hitler, the Jewish Question and the Origins and Development of the ‘World Conspiracy’ Theory

On the evening of 13 August 1920 Adolf Hitler delivered an address to a gathering of 2000 people in the Festsaal of the Munich Hofbräuhaus in which he posed the simple question: ‘Why are we anti-Semites?’ At that time Hitler was making a name for himself in Munich and its environs as a skilled orator and agitator whose speeches habitually contained damning references to the influence of the Jews on Germany’s recent past. Since joining the Deutsche Arbeiter Partei almost one year earlier he had frequently harangued his audiences in the most violent terms about the misfortunes brought upon the Reich by Jewry,¹ and the two-hour address he made that August evening would prove no exception.

In essence, Hitler explained, a series of fundamental differences between Aryans, or Germans, and Jews, made peaceful coexistence between them impossible. Germans, he argued, accepted work as a moral and social duty to be engaged in for the benefit and advancement of the community; Jews, on the other hand, were work shy, exploitative and obsessively materialistic, and concerned only to profit from the labours of others. Second, whereas racial purity was sacrosanct to Germans, Jews were racial polluters who engaged in unlimited and indiscriminate inbreeding and crossbreeding, with

all its lamentable consequences. Finally, whereas a German's inner creative ability produced a vibrant culture that enriched his existence, genuine cultural achievements were beyond Jews, who sought to reduce all art, music and literature to the basest of levels. Building on these arguments, Hitler developed the idea that Jews were parasitic aliens who lacked the qualities that enabled Aryan people to construct, maintain and develop state structures. Jews had thus for centuries lived as nomads, a 'race within other races', a 'state in other states', their aim being to impose their own pitiless dictatorship on unsuspecting host nations, and ultimately to create the conditions for their own domination of the globe. It was therefore the duty of every upright German to oppose Jews, for, as happened wherever a Jew reared his head, there would come a point where Germany would have to make a choice between ejecting the 'undesirable guest' or effectively conniving at its own downfall.²

The kind of extreme anti-Semitic invective Hitler espoused on this and other occasions in 1919–20 was commonplace in Germany in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. From 1916 onwards the inability of the German armed forces to achieve a breakthrough on the battlefield had led to increased agitation against Jews throughout the Reich, as people searched for scapegoats to explain the military stalemate and consequent flagging morale on the home front. As German Jews held a considerable stake in big business, the media and finance, areas quickly identified as hotbeds of war-profiteering and defeatism, they were an easy and obvious target. Hitler's message was neither new nor particularly original, for some of his arguments clearly owed a debt to the likes of Georg Ritter von Schönerer, Heinrich Class, Theodor Fritsch and others who popularized anti-Semitism before, during and after the First World War.³ Yet, in other respects Hitler's address on 13 August 1920 went beyond what had gone before, for it raised the spectre of a global conspiracy orchestrated by international Jewry, which, through a variety of means, notably international finance, Marxism and Freemasonry, sought to establish a Jewish tyranny over the entire globe. For this reason, the speech is indeed of quite 'fundamental' importance, notwithstanding what is generally attached to it as the first surviving full-length record of the future Führer's ideas on the Jewish question.⁴ It also

constituted his first detailed statement on the international dimension of the Jewish conspiracy, and of the links between Jewish international financiers and the revolution that had transformed imperial Russia into the Soviet Union, whose real masters, as he had argued, was the global 'Alliance israelite'.⁵

As many of the core components of his *Weltanschauung* would show, Hitler's views on the Jewish question largely determined his attitude to international Bolshevism. That much is suggested by the fact that until 1920, by which time he was becoming increasingly familiar with the purported links between international Jewry and the Bolshevik revolution, Hitler had never had much to say about either the Bolsheviks or the October revolution.⁶ In his earliest political speeches he focused much more closely on other aspects of Jewry's alleged subversion of Germany, including its complicity in the origins of the war and the subsequent collapse of the Reich,⁷ and in particular its supposed links with capitalism and high finance.⁸ By mid-1920, however, Hitler had accepted that international Jewry and the Bolshevik revolutionaries were intimately connected, and from that point onwards this linkage, once made, was broken only by his death in 1945.⁹ Hitler's attitude to Bolshevism and the related issue of an international Jewish conspiracy thus cannot fully be understood without first assessing the development of his attitude to Jews as a whole. Our first questions must therefore be: how and why did Hitler develop a phobia about Jews, and how does that relate to his understanding of the role of the Bolsheviks in a supposed Jewish 'world conspiracy'?

It is important to register at the outset that Hitler spent his formative years already steeped in the anti-Semitism that had become an integral component of the *völkisch* groups that began to appear in Germany and Austria towards the end of the nineteenth century. Building on existing antipathies to Jewry, and operating in an atmosphere where anti-Semitism was already on the increase, *völkisch* agitators and publicists advocated a strident nationalism coupled with romanticized visions of the German past based on the *Volksgemeinschaft* or 'racial community', which held no place for foreigners or outsiders like Jews. Some, including Eugen Dühring, Wilhelm Marr and, most conspicuously, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the English publicist and writer who enjoyed Hitler's special

esteem, passed beyond nationalism to theories embracing the idea of the superiority of the Aryan race, which, when coupled with agitation against supposed Jewish 'racial inferiors', provided one of the key bases for that brand of extreme racist anti-Semitism that Hitler eventually made his own.¹⁰ At approximately the same time as the *völkisch* movement was beginning to gather momentum, the focus of racist thought in Germany was shifting from that of 'cultural racism', which had its roots in language, history and tradition, to that of a racism focused entirely on 'biological heritage',¹¹ a process grounded in Social Darwinism and given expression in the pseudo-scientific theories advanced by the likes of Hans Günther, and, most notably, Ludwig Woltmann. According to one commentator, Woltmann's major work, *Die politische Anthropologie*, almost certainly constituted the 'primary source of Hitler's racist convictions'.¹²

Although Chamberlain, Woltmann and others probably did exercise considerable influence over the young Hitler, the latter's claim that his personal experiences and impressions conditioned his anti-Semitism seems plausible. While the autobiographical sections of *Mein Kampf* must be treated with caution, there are grounds to believe that Hitler's years in Vienna between 1908 and 1913, and his reaction to defeat and revolution in 1918–19, marked key stages in the development of his hostility towards the Jews. In Vienna, where he came into much more regular contact with Jewry than he had in Branau and Linz, Hitler professed to have become aware of the distinctive nature of the Jews whom, he quickly discovered, were 'not Germans of a special religion, but a people in themselves'.¹³ This crucial identification of the Jews as a race rather than a religious group was a key to Hitler's anti-Semitism, for from it evolved the idea that the 'stateless' Jews undermined and conspired against the national communities they had infiltrated. The claim of the Jews to a common faith was thus no more than a cunning piece of deception, for the 'Mosaic religion' was merely a 'doctrine for the maintenance of the Jewish race'.¹⁴

This realization was due not only to the distinctive physical appearance of Jews he encountered,¹⁵ but, more importantly, derived from his investigations into their purported and decidedly non-religious activities. Spurred on by a range of anti-Semitic literature, such as Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels's *Ostrara* publications,

and inspired by figures such as von Schönerer, and Karl Lueger, the anti-Semitic Christian Socialist mayor of Vienna, Hitler soon detected the complicity of Jews in all forms of 'filth or profligacy', their hand being clearly discernible in prostitution and the slave traffic, as well as in the press, the arts and media, and other aspects of cultural life.¹⁶ Most importantly, the Social Democratic Party, its principles and policies based on the internationalist teachings of Karl Marx, was, Hitler deduced, effectively an instrument of the Jews who had used it to seduce the masses into 'despising their own nationality'.¹⁷ Indeed, social democracy was nothing more than the pathfinder of Marxism, for behind all the commendable slogans calling for workers' rights and an end to exploitation lurked only a 'pestilence, disguising itself as social virtue and brotherly love'.¹⁸ Marxism was thus a vehicle the Jews devised and used to foment social conflict and disintegration, for by deceiving the workers with promises of socialist paradise, and assuring them of the solidarity of the international proletariat, the Jew hoped only to lay the foundations for his own domination of the globe. This not only explained why Marxism was hostile to the preservation of Germanism and contemptuous of nationalism, but also provided the key to its 'disgraceful courting' of Slavic 'comrades', its utter rejection of nationhood and fatherland, and its contempt for morality, religion, education and the authority of law.¹⁹

On a different level, Jews also conspired to pollute and weaken the German race, sometimes through guile and seduction, sometimes through brutal violation and exploitation, in what Hitler termed a systematic attempt to 'lower the racial level by a continuous poisoning of individuals'.²⁰ The goal of the Jew in this process, he noted subsequently, was 'the promiscuous bastardization of other peoples, the lowering of the racial standards of the best' in order to establish his rule over the resulting 'racial hotchpotch' through the elimination of the indigenous intelligentsia and its replacement with members of his own kind.²¹ The purpose and effects of this process could clearly be seen in Russia, he noted in 1927, where, following the 1917 revolution, Jewish Bolshevik leaders had abolished marriage and replaced it with a random licentiousness with the aim of 'breeding a general inferior human mishmash'. The resulting 'chaotic bastardization' would be so totally lacking in leadership qualities that it would ulti-

mately be unable to survive without the Jews 'as its only intellectual element'.²² The Marxists' insistence on equality, or rather democracy, and their promotion of pacifism and international brotherhood, complemented this aim as they were essentially designed to suppress individuality, stifle initiative, deny the inevitability of struggle and conflict, and destroy all vestige of culture. As he wrote in *Mein Kampf*, the 'Jewish doctrine' of Marxism rejects aristocratic principles of nature and replaces the eternal privilege of power and strength by the mass of numbers and their dead weight. Thus, it denies the value of personality on man, contests the significance of nationality and race, and thereby withdraws from humanity the premise of its existence and culture. As a foundation of the universe, this doctrine would bring about the end of any order intellectually conceivable to man. And as in the greatest of all recognizable organisms, the result of an application of such a law could only be chaos, on earth it could only be destruction for the inhabitants of this planet. If, with the help of his Marxist creed, the Jew is victorious over the peoples of the world, his crown will be the funeral wreath of humanity.²³

In a perceptive study of Hitler's political philosophy Rainer Zitelmann makes the important point that Hitler's brand of anti-Marxism bore little relation to the anti-Marxism of the bourgeoisie, indeed it was not even 'directed exclusively against any specific points in the teachings of Karl Marx'.²⁴ What Hitler found objectionable in Marxism was not its programme for social and economic reform, or its political methods and organization, which he rather admired, but its championing of internationalism, pacifism and democracy, which made it so susceptible to Jewish manipulation. Thus, although in Hitler's eyes Marxism was linked inextricably to Jewry, which constituted its 'spiritual backbone',²⁵ 'Marxist' or 'communist' were labels that might be attached to any individual, Jewish or Gentile, who consciously or otherwise served international Jewish interests rather than embraced and promoted *völkisch* ideals that aimed at the national rebirth of Germany.²⁶ This was precisely what he meant when in 1927 he declared that by substituting pacifism for conflict, internationalism for race, and democracy for the individual Marxism was effectively a declaration of war on 'the three basic foundations on which mankind rests'.²⁷ This message, and variants of it, was a prominent and consistent

feature of Hitler's declarations on Marxism during the *Kampfzeit*, and formed an integral part of the evolving Nazi *Weltanschauung*.²⁸ As he said in February 1930, the NSDAP's 'programmatic basis' was firmly rooted in its approach to the 'racial problem, to pacifism and to internationalism'.²⁹

In terms of the development of Hitler's views, the impressions left by his years in Vienna were clearly of considerable significance in forming and consolidating his unique political philosophy. In particular, it seems entirely probable that he had by that stage begun to make some connections between social democracy, or rather Marxism, and Jewry. In Vienna, that 'second Jerusalem' and home to a 'Babylon of races' as he later termed it,³⁰ Hitler had certainly had far more personal contact with Jewry than before. In these circumstances, and under the impact of the anti-Semitic influences referred to earlier, it is unlikely that he failed to register that the poorer sections of the Jewish community, particularly the so-called *Ostjuden*, mainly political refugees from Russia, were attracted to social democracy. By the time he left for Munich in May 1913 Hitler undoubtedly had a keener appreciation of those 'two menaces', Jewry and Marxism, the combating and ultimately extirpation of which would constitute the key feature of his political mission. As he later told the Bavarian authorities during his trial following the Munich putsch, while he had arrived in Vienna as a 'citizen of the world' he had left it as an 'absolute anti-Semite' and 'a deadly enemy of the whole Marxist world view'.³¹

The First World War did nothing to ease Hitler's anxieties about the progress of Marxism or the Jews' destructive influence. Within six months of its outbreak he was expressing the hope that the conflict would result not only in the final defeat of Germany's external adversaries but also in a spiritual purification of the German Reich. As he wrote to Ernst Hepp, an acquaintance from his Munich days, those of his comrades who had dared to dream of seeing the Fatherland again hoped to return to a land liberated from all foreign influence and finally purged of its own 'inner internationalism', a goal which, he noted tellingly, would be of far greater value than any territorial gain.³² The future chancellor was thus understandably horrified when, the following year, during a period of convalescence and leave spent in Berlin and Munich, he found precisely the opposite taking place. Hitler was appalled by

the degeneration he encountered on the home front where 'the most unprincipled agitators' openly encouraged malingering and cowardice,³³ while the bureaucracies and economy were almost entirely in the grip of Jews. From here it was but a short step to the nightmare vision of a conspiracy, led by an enemy within, driven not by concern for the German national interest but by that inner internationalism of which Hitler had earlier written with such disdain.

It thus comes as no surprise to discover that Hitler readily embraced the *Dolchstoßlegende*, the theory of the fatal 'stab in the back', delivered by the Reich's internal enemies, notably the Jews and the social democrats, the so-called 'November criminals' who had wilfully sacrificed the German nation in pursuit of their own perverse internationalist agenda. This preposterous notion not only provided a convenient explanation for the sudden collapse of the Reich in November 1918, but also served as a rallying call for the numerous right-wing, ultra-nationalist, anti-Semitic and *völkisch* groups that proliferated in the immediate aftermath of defeat. Moreover, the *Dolchstoßlegende* furnished Hitler with further ammunition in his campaign against the Jews, as too did developments in Bavaria where for a few weeks in spring 1919 Soviet-style workers' and soldiers' councils had seized control in Munich and other major cities.³⁴ The Jews, Hitler noted in November 1919, in one of numerous articulations of the point, were responsible both for the 'shameful' armistice and for the 'bloody rule of the councils' during the so-called *Räterepublik*.³⁵ At that fateful juncture, he recalled years later, Germany had 'stood on the brink of Bolshevism'.³⁶

The impact of war, defeat and revolution on the development of Hitler's anti-Semitism appears to have altered fundamentally the nature of his attitude to the Jews. As Peter Longerich recently commented, while it is 'highly probable' that Hitler succumbed to anti-Jewish influences during his Vienna years, only from 1918–19 can one speak of the development of 'a programmatic anti-Semitic ideology'.³⁷ A clear indication of the radicalization of Hitler's position is provided by his celebrated letter to Adolf Gemlich, written in September 1919 in response to a request from Gemlich for clarification on current Reichswehr attitudes to the Jewish question. In a lengthy and revealing response Hitler not only

reminded Gemlich of the 'pernicious impact' the Jews had had on Germany, but also called for a 'rational anti-Semitism', the aim of which would be 'the total removal of all Jews from our midst'. Moreover, he also inferred that Jews represented a threat not only to Germany but also to other peoples, referring to them as 'racial tuberculosis of the nations'.³⁸ In this process of the radicalization of his views on the Jewish question, the alleged complicity of Jewry in the downfall of the Reich in 1918, and in the promotion of the attendant and dangerous revolutionary circumstances, made a profound impression on Hitler, so much so, he implied in *Mein Kampf*, that it determined his political destiny.³⁹ The Jews, he felt, had impoverished, divided and betrayed the nation, sucked out its lifeblood, wantonly negated the sacrifice made by millions of German soldiers at the front, and, worst of all, delivered the Reich into the hands of ruthless internationalist tyrants.⁴⁰ It was a lesson he would never forget; indeed, it was one that would continue to haunt him.

By autumn 1919 Hitler was already conversant with literature and acquainted with circles that purported to have uncovered a Jewish conspiracy based on Jewry's alleged exploitation of international finance and its promotion of worldwide revolution through Marxism. In this context, 1919 was a fateful year not only for Germany but also for Hitler, for at that time he first came into contact with Alfred Rosenberg and Dietrich Eckart, two personalities who undoubtedly helped shape his political *Weltanschauung*. Of the two, Rosenberg undoubtedly exercised the greater influence, for it was he who first instructed Hitler on the Jewish nature of Bolshevism and the relationship between the October revolution and the wider international Jewish conspiracy. Moreover, Rosenberg was able to introduce Hitler to other émigrés and political refugees from former imperial Russia, some of whom, notably Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter, may have exercised some influence on the future chancellor's perceptions of Bolshevism and its purported Jewish roots. In autumn 1920 Scheubner-Richter founded the White Russian émigré organization *Aufbau*, some of whose members, according to Michael Kellogg, made a significant contribution to the development of Hitler's view of the Soviet Union as a 'Jewish dictatorship'.⁴¹ Here is not the place to engage in a detailed investigation into the origins of Rosenberg's

anti-Semitism, but, given his undeniable impact on early Nazi ideology, particularly in connection with the purported conspiratorial activities of the Jews, a brief outline of his ideas would seem appropriate.⁴²

Since at least 1917 Rosenberg had been writing and speaking about the threat posed by the international machinations of Jews, arguing that they employed two methods to destroy nations, namely political radicalism, such as Bolshevism, and capitalism. While he had thus approved of the Russian revolution of February 1917, which he had perceived as anti-capitalist in nature, Rosenberg strongly denounced the subsequent Bolshevik revolution of the following October as a Jewish conspiracy, the aim of which was the destruction of Russia as a state. Bolshevism, according to Rosenberg, was nothing more than the 'continuation of Jewish usury by other, more terrible means'.⁴³ Fearful of the advancing Red Army, Rosenberg fled Estonia in 1918 and eventually settled in Munich, where he soon gravitated into the circle of Dietrich Eckart, a disaffected poet and publicist who shared the conviction that the Jews were engaged in a subversive international intrigue. Blaming Jews for the defeat of the Reich in the First World War, and condemning their influence in the capitalist West where they had furiously agitated for the destruction of Germany both during the war and at the Paris Peace Conference, Eckart claimed that the aim of Jewry was the subjugation of national states, and ultimately Jewish domination of the globe.⁴⁴ At the time he met Rosenberg in early 1919, Eckart was already publishing rabidly anti-Semitic views in his own weekly newsheet, *Auf gut deutsch*, to which Rosenberg predictably became a regular contributor.

Rosenberg's first article, a highly polemical essay entitled *Die russisch-jüdische Revolution*, described the calamities the Jews had visited on Russia and concluded with the prophecy that, should the Bolsheviks lose the civil war then raging, not a single Jew would survive the wrath of the incensed Russian population.⁴⁵ It was not only in Bolshevik Russia that the Jews held sway, however, for in Rosenberg's view their influence was also discernible in the major centres of international finance. It is difficult to determine to what extent Gottfried Feder, a political theorist associated with the early history of the DAP, influenced Rosenberg's views on this issue. Although Rosenberg periodically denounced 'interest slavery', the

term coined by Feder and used frequently in his biting attacks on finance capitalism, his own preoccupation with the Jews and their supposed involvement with high finance long predated his arrival in Germany and thus any knowledge of Feder. Moreover, although both Rosenberg and Feder were associated with the DAP by mid-1919, there were significant differences between the views of the two men. Feder was chiefly preoccupied with the evils of capitalism, and, although he occasionally made anti-Semitic statements, he did not subscribe to Rosenberg's view that capitalism was controlled by world Jewry. He was thus more sympathetic to Bolshevism than Rosenberg, even to the point of endorsing the October revolution, which, he argued, had at least freed the Russian people from capitalist exploitation. Feder certainly exercised enough influence on Hitler to merit a special mention in *Mein Kampf*. In a manoeuvre typical of his political opportunism and unscrupulousness, Hitler mixed the theories of Rosenberg and Eckart about Jewry's control of capitalism with Feder's slogans about 'interest slavery' in order more effectively to vilify the Jews for their supposed manipulation of the world's financial markets, even though Feder had denied that this was the case.

As stated earlier, however, it was to Rosenberg that Hitler owed his greatest debt. Combining his own ideas on the Jewish nature of Bolshevism, Eckart's theories on the Jews' manipulation of capitalism, and Feder's arguments about the role of 'interest slavery', Rosenberg was the first Nazi theorist to articulate the idea of an international conspiracy through which the Jews aimed to influence not only domestic policy within states but also the relations between them.⁴⁶ Having exposed the role of the Jews in promoting discord and misery through world revolution and capitalism, Rosenberg's subsequent investigations revealed other strands of the supposed conspiracy, notably in Freemasonry, Jesuitism and, naturally, Zionism.⁴⁷ In the early 1920s he spoke and wrote extensively on Britain's support for Zionism, often referring to the Balfour Declaration as a classic example of British appeasement of the Jews.⁴⁸ Ironically, he was more approving of the Russians, primarily because of their anti-Semitism, and believed that, as the Jews intrigued against nationalism, a Russia freed from Bolshevism might yet join forces with Germany against the common enemy. He also viewed Russo-German collaboration as desirable in strategic

terms, arguing that the postwar European balance of power had pushed Germany and Russia into the same camp. Not only that, but both powers had an interest in the destruction of Poland that had been created at Russian and German expense and was now supported by Jewish politicians in the West. However, he adamantly rejected any notion of collaboration if Russia remained controlled by Bolshevik Jews, fearing that, just as the Bolshevik revolution had been directed by the Jews against the Russian state and the Russian people, a similar fate might well befall Germany. Rosenberg's contribution to early Nazi thinking on the idea of a Jewish world conspiracy should not be underestimated. As one authority observes, it was largely owing to his efforts between 1919 and 1921 that a 'vast web of Jewish intrigue' was uncovered, which in turn served to substantiate the 'suspected collaboration between the Jewish capitalists and Jewish Bolshevism'.⁴⁹

Unlike Rosenberg, Hitler appears to have drawn no connection between the Jews and the Bolshevik revolution prior to 1919, or to have arrived at any independent conclusions about a supposed international conspiracy directed by world Jewry. Having spent the first half of 1919 in various menial capacities in the service of the Reichswehr, he subsequently attended a brief course of instruction in anti-Bolshevism at Munich University as part of his retraining as a propaganda agent and informer whose task it would be to combat sedition among disaffected sections of the German army. Shortly afterwards, after impressing his superiors with his oratorical talents, he was sent to Lechfeld army camp where he instructed the troops on the virtues of nationalism and the terrible dangers of Bolshevism. By that time he was already in personal contact with Dietrich Eckart, and familiar with Rosenberg's views through reading *Auf gut deutsch*. It seems certain that this evolving connection with Rosenberg, whom he eventually met in December 1919, was responsible for the increasing references Hitler made to Bolshevism in his speeches from early 1920 onwards.

The appearance of a German edition of the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*,⁵⁰ also in December 1919, does not appear to have had any profound effect on the development of Hitler's attitude to the Jews or their supposed international machinations, but rather to have confirmed him in the correctness of his own anti-Semitic views. The *Protocols* had in any case been common

knowledge in *völkisch* and other right-wing circles for some time, and it is thus unlikely that Hitler had remained unaware of their existence. Hitler's failure specifically to refer either to the *Protocols* or to the menace of international Jewry in his early political speeches was perhaps due to the need at that juncture to concentrate on purely domestic issues in the wake of the disastrous peace settlement.⁵¹ The *Protocols* nevertheless appeared to substantiate what Rosenberg had told him about the conspiratorial plans of world Jewry, and he soon began to incorporate in his addresses the notion of an international Jewish threat. During 1920, possibly due to further reflections on the *Protocols*, but more probably as a result of his deepening acquaintance with Rosenberg, Hitler gradually worked his way around to the latter's theory of the complicity of the Jews in the Bolshevik revolution. By June 1920, having already alerted his audiences to the abominable conditions prevailing in Russia, he was adamant not only that Bolshevism was 'a Jewish affair through and through',⁵² but also that the Jewish leaders of Russia were operating in league with the Jewish capitalists of the West in an endeavour to subvert national states and ultimately to erect a Jewish world dictatorship. Moreover, if Marxism was not already sufficiently pernicious as a doctrine, in Soviet Bolshevism, the practical manifestation of Marxism in Russian conditions, a new and important factor had to be recognized, for with the advent of the Bolshevik regime theory had suddenly been turned into practice with the result that 'Jewish Bolshevism' now had at its disposal a ready made resource-laden state virtually on Germany's doorstep. What could be more threatening in view of the Jew's mission as the 'great agitator for the complete destruction of Germany', the Bolshevization of which was 'conceived only as a preliminary to the further extension of this Jewish tendency of world conquest'.⁵³ As he explained at his trial in February 1924:

With us the situation is represented as if here it was merely a question of purely theoretical problems, of views held by a few visionaries or maliciously disposed individuals. No! A world view has won over for its own ends a state, and, starting from this state it will gradually shatter the whole world and bring it down in ruins. Bolshevism, if its advance

is not stemmed, will transform the world as completely as in past times did Christianity.⁵⁴

Once Hitler had incorporated the idea of an international conspiracy directed by world Jewry into his political *Weltanschauung* it came to frame many of his attitudes, and determine many of his actions, in both domestic and international affairs following the Nazi assumption of power in 1933. By the early 1920s Hitler had effectively made the Jews responsible for everything detrimental to German interests and well-being, from the peace settlement to the resulting economic privations, from democracy to racial degeneration, and from Marxism to the League of Nations. Worse still was the fact that the Weimar Republic was in the hands of the Jews, either indirectly through the activities of the Jewish 'international bourse bandits' or directly through the control and manipulation by Jewry of Weimar's political elite.⁵⁵ If Germany were to have any hope of survival and regeneration, he argued in early 1922, it must free itself from 'this Jew-republic', this 'Jewish democracy', which was nothing more than a 'machine for the destruction of genius'.⁵⁶ Even in his last political testament drawn up shortly before his suicide in 1945 Hitler continued to preach 'implacable opposition to the universal poisoner of all peoples, international Jewry'.⁵⁷ Having thus unmasked the enemy, and identified him with the cause of Marxism, Hitler relentlessly pursued the 'two menaces' of the Vienna years wherever he found them. The fight had been joined for the soul of the German nation, he declared in 1922. Two worlds had entered into conflict, and an inexorable struggle was now underway between, on the one hand, those elements favourable to national and *völkisch* ideals, and, on the other, the intangible supranational forces of internationalism,⁵⁸ that 'inevitable enemy of human advancement'.⁵⁹ In the domestic arena the first task of the Nazi movement was thus to win back those workers who had already been infected by the Marxist poison, a process only possible through an 'excess of nationalist fanaticism', which National Socialism alone could deliver.⁶⁰ The German worker could not be blamed if bourgeois indifference had driven him towards the Marxists, Hitler argued, for he had been badly served by his political leaders, not one of whom had recognized either the decisive significance of the racial question or the corrosive effects

of internationalism.⁶¹ Nor was that especially surprising, given that the parties of the left were nothing more than 'Jewish mercenaries', their bourgeois antagonists simply the 'right-wing of the Marxist groups'.⁶²

During the *Kampfzeit* the campaign against Marxism, Jewry and internationalism thus inevitably remained at the forefront of the NSDAP's political programme and propaganda campaign. Building on earlier verbal assaults, Hitler's *Mein Kampf* reverberated with violent denunciations of the Jews;⁶³ the *Zweites Buch*, though unpublished at the time, and despite its somewhat narrower focus on foreign policy, essentially confirmed the consistency and intensity of Hitler's views on the Jewish menace towards the close of the 1920s.⁶⁴ During the 1920s and early 1930s the *Völkischer Beobachter* carried scores of articles on the conspiratorial international machinations of the Jews who, as Hitler reminded the readership in April 1925, had already acquired in Bolshevism and capitalism two instruments with which to facilitate their attainment of world domination.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, at grass-roots level, guidelines the party's propaganda leadership issued for use by local and regional speakers routinely recommended works on Bolshevism, Marxism, Freemasonry and the 'Jewish Question' as suitable for addresses and discussion,⁶⁶ while Goebbels, having finally cast off his 'National Bolshevik' pretensions,⁶⁷ zealously instructed his compatriots on the bond between Marxism and the Jew, that 'rootless ... ferment of decomposition'.⁶⁸

While the more radical strains of Nazi anti-Semitism might occasionally be downplayed for tactical purposes, as when Hitler spoke to foreign newspaper correspondents,⁶⁹ the intensity of the onslaught against Marxism remained constant in the years leading up to the Nazi takeover. Between 1930 and 1932, as the NSDAP sought to build on its electoral successes, the agitation against Marxism reached new heights, and hardly any major speech by Hitler passed without some form of attack on the despised 'world plague', as he had referred to it in *Mein Kampf*.⁷⁰ Inevitably, Hitler and other senior Nazis frequently held aloft the Soviet Union as the classic and disastrous example of the Bolshevik experiment. In the USSR, Hitler noted in 1929, the 'Jewish-Bolshevik' overlords were 'more firmly in the saddle than ever', their unyielding aim being the destruction of other nations and the erection of a world

dictatorship presided over by the self-proclaimed 'chosen people'.⁷¹ Stalin was the 'fanatical champion of Jewish world Marxism', intent, like Lenin before him, on pursuing and exterminating the 'last remnants of Aryan culture' in Russia.⁷² Although attacks on the purported Jewish domination of international finance did not disappear completely from the Nazi repertoire, the gaze came increasingly to focus on Russia and Bolshevism, the latter of which he had concluded by 1925, constituted the 'attempt undertaken by the Jews in the twentieth century to achieve world domination'.⁷³

Following Hitler's assumption of the chancellorship the Nazis quickly tightened their grip on the German state with dire consequences for their political and racial antagonists. The forces of the left, already decimated by the factionalism and rivalries that had so severely compromised their ability to combat the Nazis during the final stages of the Weimar Republic, quickly faded from view in the months after 30 January 1933. A series of measures undertaken by the NSDAP, notably the Enabling Act of March 1933, coupled with the Gestapo's rule of terror, which prioritized the persecution and incarceration of all known political opponents, meant that any possibility of an organized and effective communist resistance to Nazi rule had practically ceased to exist. Having persistently underestimated the threat posed by the extreme right – even as Hitler was taking office the German Communist Party (KPD) was still firing its main broadsides at the despised socialists – the KPD fragmented and was driven underground, the prospect of any revival of its fortunes becoming ever more remote as the new regime set about restoring German pride, prestige and employment, plus at least a modicum of prosperity, through its rearmament and public works programmes.⁷⁴ To be sure, the domestic threat of communism was sometimes played up to foreign governments to justify German hostility towards the Soviet Union,⁷⁵ and it would be unwise to take at face value Hitler's statement in 1936 that he and his movement had eradicated all 'Jewish-Soviet ideas' within the borders of the Reich. Nonetheless, despite the KPD's regrouping and the enduring existence of communist cells in Germany, to say nothing of acts of resistance undertaken by individuals, it would be misplaced to speak of any substantial or effective communist resistance to Nazi rule after 1933. As a British visitor to Germany noted in 1936,

although there might well be a good deal of communism 'literally underground, for example in the Ruhr mines', it had effectively 'been stamped under for keeps, so far as one can see at present'.⁷⁶

The Jews, too, were made to pay dearly once Hitler assumed the chancellorship. Almost immediately after taking power the Nazis launched a campaign with the specific aim of impoverishing, marginalizing and isolating Jews in German society through a series of punitive measures, including economic boycotts, exclusion from the civil service and the professions, and racial legislation, all played out against a background of appalling intimidation and violence. In its initial phase, the persecution of Jews was intended not only to damage Jewish interests in Germany but also to serve as a warning to international Jewry, which the Nazis held responsible for the violent press attacks that had greeted the new regime's first steps.⁷⁷ Public attention was also focused on the alleged complicity of international Jewry in the Reichstag fire, which, according to *Der Stürmer*, was to have been the signal for a general uprising across the Reich. The authorities' timely countermeasures had thwarted this latest manifestation of Jewish-inspired 'Bolshevik world criminality', but the German people must forever remain vigilant against Jews who would inevitably devise 'fresh intrigues and crimes', and who would 'not rest until a new attack on Germany is ready'.⁷⁸ This was the kind of message the *Völkischer Beobachter*, *Der Stürmer* and sundry other Nazi publications continually fed the German public.

To be sure, the regime's relentless agitation against communists and Jews in the years before the outbreak of war, which culminated in the *Reichskristallnacht* and Hitler's prophetic warning about the extermination of European Jewry in January 1939, fulfilled a tactical function in terms of domestic politics, but it was primarily driven by genuine fears of racial contamination on the one hand and revolutionary subversion on the other, which could prove to be especially dangerous in time of war or other national emergency.⁷⁹ The notorious Nuremberg laws of September 1935 had been designed precisely to meet these threats. By disenfranchizing citizens deemed 'not of German blood' and outlawing marriages and sexual relationships between Germans and Jews, the Nazis hoped not only to prevent what they termed 'race defilement' but also to counter Bolshevik agitation within the frontiers of the Reich.

One of the principal reasons behind the legislation, Hitler told an American journalist, had been the need to combat Bolshevism, for through it the rights of Germans would be safeguarded against destructive Judeo-Bolshevik influences.⁸⁰ Using the proceedings of the seventh congress of the Communist International as his justification,⁸¹ the German chancellor announced to the Reichstag on 15 September 1935 that the 'Bolshevist International' had 'resumed its open and methodical revolutionizing', and that in Germany, as elsewhere, it was 'almost exclusively Jewish elements which are at work as instigators of this campaign to spread animosity and confusion among the peoples'. Seeking to take advantage of current international unrest, Jewish circles in Germany appeared to have concluded that the time had arrived 'to set Jewish interests up in clear opposition to the German national interests in the Reich'. The Nuremberg laws were an attempt to combat these designs and to place relations between the German *Volk* and Jewish people on a tolerable footing. 'Should this hope prove false,' he concluded threateningly, 'and intra-German and international Jewish agitation proceed on its course, a new evaluation of the situation would have to take place.'⁸²

The struggle against Judeo-Bolshevism was not only proclaimed and played out on the stage of German domestic politics but also increasingly from 1935–36 onwards in the international arena. During those years a series of events beginning with the conclusion of the Franco–Soviet alliance and culminating in the outbreak of a civil war in Spain that came to epitomize the interwar struggle between fascism and National Socialism, on the one hand, and Bolshevism, on the other, brought into ever sharper relief the decisive ideological conflict of the age. Claiming to see in the developments in Spain the beginnings of a fresh onslaught by the 'Jewish Bolsheviks', both within Germany and in the wider world, Hitler warned the party faithful at the 1936 Nuremberg rally not only that attempts to intervene in German affairs conducted by the 'Jewish Soviet authorities' were still continuing, but also that Bolshevism was now seeking 'to draw gradually ever nearer to our frontiers' and that therefore 'we are forced to regard Bolshevism even beyond our frontiers as our mortal enemy'.⁸³

As will be demonstrated subsequently, this reference to the need to combat the external threat of Bolshevism was not, as Hitler

appears to have wished it to be understood, a timely innovation necessitated by Soviet complicity and intervention in the early stages of the Spanish Civil War. It was a longstanding preoccupation of the National Socialist movement, and one which, since the mid-1920s at the latest, had occupied a central position in Hitler's foreign political plans. By the summer of 1936, with the Bolsheviks and Jews within the Reich contained if not eliminated, the German chancellor was devoting a considerable portion of his energies to what he was accustomed to term the struggle of the civilized world against international Bolshevism, partly of necessity as a result of the developments in Spain, partly because he was moving towards the conclusion of an overtly anti-communist agreement with Japan, and partly because he was gearing himself for a final attempt to cement an alliance with Britain on the basis of common opposition to the red menace. Before examining these and related issues in depth, however, we must first gauge the impact of Soviet Bolshevism and the internationalization of the Jewish menace on Hitler's outlook on foreign affairs during the *Kampfzeit*, and seek to assess the extent to which it conditioned and informed his early conduct of foreign policy as chancellor of the Reich.