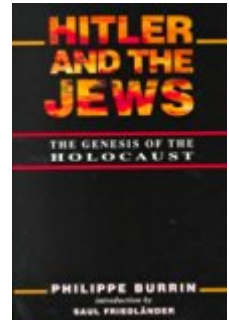


Philippe Burrin. *Hitler and the Jews: The Path to Genocide.* London: Edward Arnold, 1994. 177 pp. \$19.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-340-59362-2.



Reviewed by Meredith Hindley

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The absence of a written order from Adolf Hitler authorizing the "Final Solution" has prompted historians to cull archival material for other suggestive documentation. The uncertainty of events surrounding the decision has made it one of the most contested topics in Holocaust studies. In *Hitler and the Jews*, Philippe Burrin offers a probable account of the sequence of events and Hitler's role in the decision to murder the Jews. This English-language version appears five years after publication in French. Saul Friedlander, to whom the book is dedicated, provides a thoughtful introduction, including a thorough historiographical overview. Friedlander confesses to having been converted to Burrin's interpretation and hopes the reader will follow.

Burrin considers his work a synthesis of the two dominant historiographical schools. In short, the intentionalists believe that Hitler intended to murder the Jews from the outset, while the functionalists believe the Final Solution was a product of circumstances and bureaucratic mechanization. Burrin agrees with the intentionalists, but tempers their position by arguing that extermina-

tion "would be carried out only in the event of a well-defined situation such as the failure of his planned conquests" (p. 23). He also makes a gesture to the functionalists by acknowledging that a confluence of events turned Hitler's plans and rhetoric into policy.

Burrin argues that with the German defeat of 1918, anti-Semitism became a "central obsession" for Hitler. Hitler reached the decision to eradicate European Jewry before his seizure of power. Hitler's political and territorial pursuits remained his main concern as long as they seemed obtainable, but should the fulfillment of these goals be jeopardized, Hitler would turn his full attention to the destruction of the Jews. Once in power, Hitler continued to indicate that the "Jewish question" might be solved in a radical fashion. Burrin emphasizes two events which he believes illustrate Hitler's prewar thinking. Burrin uses a previously uncited document detailing Hitler's 25 September 1935 briefing of his regional chiefs on the Nuremberg Laws. Walter Gross, the head of the Nazi Party's Bureau of Racial Policy, recorded Hitler stating that in the event of "a war on all fronts" Hitler

would be "ready for all consequences" (p. 49). Both Gross and Burrin take Hitler's statement to indicate a radical solution. Like other scholars, Burrin finds further evidence of conditional mass murder of the Jews in Hitler's 30 January 1939 Reichstag speech.

Burrin believes that Hitler carried into the war this notion of conditional mass murder. As long as Hitler continued to win, he pursued a moderate, territorial solution to the Jewish question, as in the Madagascar Plan and the Lublin reservation. The expulsion of the Jews from the Greater Reich into Russian territory remained a possibility during the preparations for the Soviet invasion and even in the weeks following the initial attack. But as the momentum of the invasion slowed, the situation echoed with the lessons of the First World War. Burrin sees Hitler's decision for the Final Solution coming not from the euphoria of victory, but from the slumping military campaign. Hitler, he believes, acted with "the attitude of a man who has long contemplated his fall and decided on his responses to it" (p. 151).

At this juncture Burrin has engaged one of the stickiest parts of the debate: when did Hitler issue the order for the Final Solution? Scholars who believe that an order was given by Hitler are divided over its timing: before the attack on the Soviet Union (Gerald Flemming, Richard Breitman); in the weeks following the initial victories over the Soviets (Christopher Browning); and during the fall (Uwe-Dietrich Adam, Eberhard Jaeckel). Burrin falls in with the last group, arguing that the decision was made in mid-September 1941. In making this determination, Burrin identifies what he considers to be two turning points in the implementation of Jewish policy: 1) August 1941, when the killing of Soviet Jews by the *Einsatzgruppen* reached genocidal proportions, and 2) mid-September 1941, when the decision to deport the Jews to the East was made. Burrin argues: "A full month passed between these two turning-points; the surge in killings in the Soviet Union,

therefore, did not mean that the matter had been definitely settled. Everything seems to suggest that there was a decision-making process lasting several weeks before the fatal verdict was handed down in September" (134). Burrin does not include the activities of the *Einsatzgruppen* as part of the general order for the Final Solution.

Burrin dates the decision to mid-September by emphasizing an overlooked communication from Reinhard Heydrich to the OKH (Army High Command). In the letter, dated 6 November 1941, Heydrich assumes full responsibility for the demolition of Paris synagogues on the night of October 2-3 as part of a retaliation for attacks on sympathetic French politicians. The document states that Heydrich accepted the assistance of French collaborators "only from the moment when, at the highest level, Jewry had been forcefully designated as the culpable incendiary in Europe, one which must definitely disappear from Europe" (p. 124). Burrin argues "if these words have a meaning, it is that the deportation order had been, simultaneously, an extermination order" (p. 124). Burrin argues that Heydrich's language indicates that the Final Solution order would have come from Hitler and was probably given in mid-September. He reasons that it would only have taken one or two weeks to organize the French reprisals once a general order was issued.

To his credit, Burrin has mined frequently trodden ground and brought to the forefront previously ignored documents; however, his work in no way resolves the debate over the timing of the decision. As Burrin's work demonstrates, the entire debate on the genesis of the Final Solution concerns itself with the search for a defining order using explicit language, but the nature of Nazi documents is that of euphemistic deceit. Much could be read into Heydrich's words, especially given the dualism of Nazi rhetoric, and thus we must question Burrin's reliance on language. Browning and Breitman could marshal much counterevidence.

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