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Timothy W. Mason, Jane Caplan. *Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class.* Cambridge England: Cambridge University Press, 1995. x + 361 pp. $95.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-43212-2; $36.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-43787-5.

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"He was a virtuous man," a reflective Columbia graduate student observed years ago of George Orwell. His supervisor, Lionel Trilling, was as pleased by how he said it as by what he said. The sentence brought out "the primitive meaning of the word virtuous, which is not merely moral goodness, but fortitude and strength," Trilling noted approvingly. The aggregate, in his view, made Orwell a "figure," that is, one of those "men who live by their visions as well as write them, who *are* what they write, whom we think of as standing for something as men because of what they have written in their books." Trilling took it for given that figures in this sense had become uncommon.

It is hard to recall Tim Mason without thinking about Orwell and virtuous men. It is just as hard to read this collection of his essays without thinking about figures in Trilling's sense. From Thucydides onward, history too has produced its figures. But to a degree uncommon in his lifetime, and hardly more common since his death in 1990, Mason's life and work really were one. He really was what he wrote, and practically every sentence in this collection is a reminder of what he stood for.

Ironically, books were not Mason's strength, although he eventually published two of them, both in German. Irony again, neither book was his dissertation, although he was among the earliest of his British cohort to undergo the scholarly rite of passage that his German and American colleagues had long taken for inevitable. In 1971, with even Oxford finally capitulating to the Ph.D., Mason followed where his scholarly conscience led. Characteristically, the result was so monumental that publishers fled before it, and the two senior colleagues who were its examiners screamed for mercy. To this day, it is available only in manuscript.

It was 1975 before his first book appeared – not by chance with a hefty subsidy from the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* [1]. A voluminously annotated, rigorously edited, Mesabi range of primary sources, it included more than a thousand pages of ministerial correspondence, minutes, memos, reports, directives, guidelines, etc., all but forgotten since the bureaucrats, functionaries and party hacks who produced them first consigned them to the archives. The documents were preceded by an introduction, itself a quasi-monograph of somewhat under two hundred pages. The collection established a benchmark in the study of social policy, industrial relations and the workings of the Third Reich. The second book, a revised edition of the introduction to the first, appeared independently two years later [2]. But it was another sixteen years before it finally found an Anglophone publisher.

Mason's long-term goal was the great work on politics, economics and society that was meant to be a kind of unified field theory of Nazi Germany. Like the Tenth Symphony that Beethoven never wrote, or the "King Lear" that Verdi briefly considered as a sequel to "Otello" and "Falstaff," we can only imagine how it might have looked.

But the historical essay, as his executor fully appreciated, was his natural art form. This posthumous collection not only makes ten of his best and most representative pieces available for the first time in one place. In Rosemary Morris's dauntless translations, it even makes three of them available for the first time in English. From the earliest of 1964 to the latest of 1990, the volume traces Mason's course from young lion to troubled old master as surely as Michelangelo's progression from *David* to the heroically struggling torsos in Florence's Academy of Arts traces the portrait of the artist. Among the contents are a heart-warming early scrimmage with A.J.P. Taylor; a trail-blazing speculation on the primacy of politics in Nazi Germany; painstaking reconstructions of the road to Nazi Germany's basic law on industrial relations and the Turinese strikes of March 1943; reflections on the imma-

nence and consequences of systemic bottlenecks as a factor in Nazi foreign policy; the famous polemic on the explanatory value of intention and function; afterthoughts on the uniqueness of National Socialism; as well as the long article on German women, welfare, work and family that many, including the reviewer, consider his masterpiece. Scrupulously edited by Jane Caplan, the collection is as much a service, an example and a challenge to the reader as it is an homage to the author.

As Caplan spells out in an expansive and affectionate introduction, Mason was both product and representative of a conjunction of influences and circumstances as remarkable as it was short-lived. Among them were the Indian summer of the old Oxford history school; the high noon of the new class and social history practiced and personified by his hero E.P. Thompson; the renaissance of continental Marxism in all its contentious splendor; plus a clear shot at the institutional history of National Socialism while the documents were still fresh and eyewitnesses accessible.

Even before his death at age fifty, intellectual fashions had already changed almost beyond recognition under the impact of, among other things, feminism and postmodernism. Mason himself acknowledged the changes in a paper included at the end of this collection. As Caplan confirms, the changes both impressed and baffled him. "I was bemused and depressed by the scholasticism of much methodological left-wing writing," he explained in one exemplary passage. "…militancy congests into clamorous categories, producing works which might be the offspring of a proud union between a prayer wheel and a sausage-machine" (207-8). The passage might be regarded as a kind of Mason digest: regretful, tough-minded and devastatingly on target.

It is pointless, Caplan adds, to speculate on how Mason might have responded had he lived longer – save that he would most likely have done what he always did, which was "to work through the tangle, to produce some conclusions that are historically legitimate and politically meaningful" (28). The collection consistently reflects his readiness to challenge and rethink his own ideas. Caplan herself calls attention to the wails of "not enough is known," and "more research is needed," that recur as persistently in these pieces as the rhymes in a villanelle. In this respect too, the collection is a challenge and a service to Mason's memory, as well as a faithful portrait. In fact, there was – and is – no shortage of things to challenge and rethink. Last words were neither Mason's style nor his intention. On the contrary, his best work was demonstratively open-ended, full of cues and bookmarks to which he and others could return.

Class was among his lifelong preoccupations – to the point, he told friends self-ironically, that once at the New York Yale Club, when filling out a registration card that asked his "class," he answered "middle." Yet he himself knew better than most that class was both a blunt and a notoriously slippery instrument for making sense of Nazi Germany. As he also understood better than most, the bizarre dynamics and statics that he was among the first to chart might have affected working-class Germans somewhat differently from the way they affected other Germans. But they hardly affected them less. In fact, by the end of his life, Mason's lifetime quest for the German working-class resistance, like his brilliant reconstruction of the Turinese strikes of March 1943, looked more and more like the definitive inquest into an historical experience that never happened.

The functionalist-intentionalist distinction that generated so much heat when launched in 1979 illuminated things in some ways, but obscured them in others. Mason himself cautioned against the implied separation of functionalist good guys at the cost of intentionalist bad guys. But the distinction was as unnecessarily exclusive as it was misleading. Neither of his chosen targets, Klaus Hildebrand or Karl-Dietrich Bracher, really argued that Hitler was a sufficient explanation for the Third Reich. Nor would it have occurred to anyone, including Mason, to have argued that Hitler was just another dictator, whose dictatorship would have taken, or retained, the same uniquely murderous form had he been run over by a bus.

The presumed crisis of 1939 that triggered the invasion of Poland was just as elusive. Given the poverty of evidence and the failure of most contemporaries to notice it, it is hard to prove there was a crisis, let alone that it drove a congenitally crisis-prone regime into a premature war of plunder. Though aware of September 1918, when only Ludendorff realized that World War I was lost, and May 1989, when no one foresaw the collapse of European Communism by November, Mason called on neither to support his argument. Each in its way suggests that his case for an unperceived crisis leading to unanticipated consequences was not self-evidently silly. Yet for documentary and epistemological reasons alike, the crisis of 1938-39 remains more an inference than a demonstrated fact.

It is hard to read, or reread, this collection without being struck by blank spaces too. The omissions begin

with the bibliography. Marlis Steinert's pioneer study of German popular opinion under the Nazis is one curious example. Raul Hilberg's great work on the mechanics of the Holocaust is another, perhaps especially for an historian with a weakness for Marxist perspectives and an eye for the political transaction costs of capital formation. One can only wonder what Mason might have done with the 1933 "transfer agreement" that turned German-Jewish assets into Nazi German exports to British Palestine; the political economy of "Aryanization" in the wake of the Nuremberg Laws; or the *Kristallnacht* pogrom and the radical expropriation of Jewish property in the wake of the Sudeten crisis and the run-up to the invasion of Poland – had he been willing or able to take them on, that is. But this too is among the conspicuous omissions.

Actually, Mason was well ahead of many of his New Left contemporaries in acknowledging that genocide was at least as basic to Nazi purposes as was class war. That some of his best friends were Jews is, for once, neither a cliche, a fig leaf, nor an irrelevance. Yet even the index confirms the self-imposed blind-spot. Till the end of his life, Mason inclined to agree with Max Horkheimer that it was impossible to speak about fascism without also speaking of capitalism. Throughout his career, he nonetheless managed to speak about National Socialism with only the most oblique references to Auschwitz. Although the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial appears once in the text of this collection, Auschwitz itself is symptomatically absent from the index. There is one entry under "Nuremberg race laws." But it refers to a passage on women and breeding. There are two entries under "anti-Semitism," and seven under "genocide" ("and capitalism," "of the European Jews," "and fascism," "and the German economy," "and intentionalism," "Italian participation," "and the politics of struggle"). There are eight under "Jews" ("persecution of," "and economic considerations," "and functionalist theories," "as geno-cide," "and intentionalist theories," "in Italy," "skilled workers"). But there are twelve entries under "family," thirteen under "Labor Front," and fourteen under "rearmament," to name a few alternative examples. "He admitted that he was psychologically incapable of dealing with the record of inhumanity and suffering generated by Nazi anti-Semitism," Caplan reports candidly (22). There is no reason to doubt either her credibility or his.

The scarcity of Jews is just one of several miscues the reader can only note and regret. The Soviet Union too is visible only on the margins of Mason's argument. Significantly, it then appears not for itself but as Germany's ally and a major and voluntary supplier of the materials the Nazi machine so urgently needed. As he grew older, Mason took Germany's affinities with Italy more and more seriously. He also devoted a large part of his working life to demonstrating the urgency of German economic needs and speculating on their consequences. Yet the political implications and economic benefits of the Nazi-Soviet alliance; the peculiar symbiosis of its antecedents as far back as World War I; the common enemies who made it plausible; the affinities of world-view that both joined and sundered the unlikely allies; even the tantalizing resonances of "Four-Year Plan" and "Five-Year Plan," all went by the boards.

The thoughts on fascism of his last published paper display a similar tilt. "Fascism, as I recall from many discussions in Berlin in the 1960s, was not just an epoch which ended in 1945, but was also something which the Christian Democrats and the right wing of the Social Democrats were then trying to reinstate in a less barbaric form," Mason noted at a 1988 conference. But then came the 1969 election, "and the 1968 movement went off in forty directions, one of them terroristic" (326).

Looking back at the basically irenic Ludwig Erhard and his hired guru Ruediger Altmann by the light of day and with another thirty years' perspective, it takes a strenuous effort to see either as a credible New Right, let alone as kinder, gentler fascists. Mason himself referred to the "tragically belated" and "to a degree misconceived" anti-fascist dimension of the German 1968. If there was a disposition to overlook the crisis-that-was in the Berlin of 1939, there was arguably a similar disposition to see a crisis-that-wasn't in the same place 30 years later.

Yet two further omissions from the argument are again revealing. As it happens, Mason at the time recognized and savored the irony of one of them. Old German-Jewish Social Democrats like Richard Loewenthal and Ernst Fraenkel had been through the Nazi coming the first time. Their own anti-Nazi credentials were unchallengeable. Rightly or wrongly, they heard historical alarm bells too. But what set them off was not position papers and speeches in stick-in-the-mud Christian Democratic Bonn. It was the fuzzy young activists, who now jammed the campuses and streets, and incidentally smashed the windows, of West Berlin in the name of anti-fascism.

The second omission, hardly unique to Mason, was a general unwillingness or inability to extrapolate European circumstances to the so-called Third, extra-European, world. By the mid-1960s a smorgasbord of post-colonial states extended across three continents.

Common to virtually all of them were the generic challenges of modern statehood: legitimacy, identity, security, and economic development. With them came an assortment of what looked remarkably like Mussolinis-of-color, ethnic nationalisms of at least D'Annunzian fervor, and socialisms and anti-capitalisms, not to mention thuggery, corruption and organized violence, for every taste and pocketbook. By 1988, the year of Mason's final paper, every corner in downtown Baghdad was hung with billboard-size portraits of the Leader, architects filled acres of the capital with monuments explicitly dedicated to blood, soil, youth and struggle, and Iraq's mothers were systematically awarded medals for the heroic labor of reproduction. The great debate on the past and future of fascism nonetheless remained largely confined to Europe, and Western and Central Europe at that.

Yet, for at least three reasons no less apparent in this collection, Mason is still mandatory reading for anyone even remotely interested in the history of women, labor and the human condition in this century, let alone the histories of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

The first reason is practically Rankean in its simplicity. Mason knew, understood, and managed to explain more about one of the century's great challenges, Nazi Germany and how it worked, than most of his predecessors and contemporaries. No one can therefore talk seriously about Nazi Germany without acknowledging his work. At the same time, Humboldt-like, he discovered, collected, deciphered and assembled whole jungles of documentation that others had overlooked or failed to find. Like few others, he therefore left what may well be lasting marks on both the big and little picture. It is improbable, for example, that graduate students yet unborn will either want to or have to reconstruct the origins of the Nazi Law on the Organization of National Labor, or the wage protest at the Mirafiori plant. But if they do, they will not only have to start with Mason's sources. They will also have to start from his argument that the German law and the Turin protest are not mere details, but are essential to the understanding of National Socialism and Italian Fascism.

The second reason, only seemingly a paradox, is the power of creative error. Like most historians, Mason had his good, and not so good, days. But even wrong, he was usually more interesting than most of us right. As anyone who met him quickly realized, he was also uncommonly bright and articulate, with a gift as well as a passion for argument.

His inferences and hunches were sometimes inspired, sometimes askew, sometimes emphatically wrong-headed. But they invariably deserved to be taken seriously. His argument on Hitler's decision to go to war in 1939, with all its consequences, is an obvious example. The decision may or may not have been a response to an insoluble domestic crisis. Yet consciously or not, anyone seriously interested in the Nazi regime, World War II and Europe in the mid-twentieth century will remain indebted to Mason's work in the same way that students of early capitalism still profit from the great debate on Weber's views of the Protestant ethic, and students of America from the great debate on Turner's frontier thesis.

But the ultimate virtue of this collection should still be visible when even the Third Reich has gone the historiographical way of the War of the Roses and the Hundred Days. What remains after all the particular debates is a remarkable historian writing remarkable history, blind spots and all. Right or wrong, right or left, Mason was never boring and never trivial. He believed in sources, though he also understood their limits. But he followed where they led him, e.g., to the "forty-year-old male metal worker, ex-union member, who got a wage increase the month after his brother had been stuck in a concentration camp, then found his eldest son called up for Labor Service in the middle of his apprenticeship, who received family allowances for the first time, felt that the incorporation of Austria was a good thing, took time off work to try to secure his brother's release and thus became politically suspect himself, then got an offer of a cheap holiday on the North Sea while also being asked to do eight hours' overtime instead of four…." (238) He aimed consistently high. He referred as a matter of principle to "National Socialism" and the "Third Reich," rather than the softer, pseudo- generic "German fascism." He did not make things simple for himself or others.

As almost all of these essays confirm, he also wrote with the intention of being understood and internalized the historian's responsibility to speak the unspeakable while articulating for the inarticulate. To an uncommon degree he also tried to act it out. In ways no longer to be taken for granted, he believed too that it was the historian's responsibility to pursue not only historical knowledge, but historical truth in some larger sense. With only the rarest of lapses, he addressed adversaries as colleagues – provided, at least, that they were as willing to master the sources as he was, and think honestly about what they found.

In a famous essay, Orwell described "the face of a man

who is always fighting against something, but who fights in the open and is not frightened, ...who is generously angry – in other words, a nineteenth-century liberal, a free intelligence, a type hated with equal hatred by all the smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls." Orwell was referring to Dickens. But the same passage could as well be taken as a recognizable sketch of Mason. If these essays served no other purpose, they would still be a reminder of the virtue and virtues he exemplified, and what was lost with his death.

[1] Timothy W. Mason, *Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft. Dokumente und Materialien zur deutschen Arbeiterpolitik 1936-39* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1975).

[2] Timothy W. Mason, *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich. Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1977).

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