

Alex J. Kay, *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder: Political and Economic Planning for German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1940-1941*. Studies on War and Genocide, no. 10. New York: Berghahn Books. 2006. Pp. xiii, 242. \$75.00.

In World War I, the governments of Europe were unexpectedly successful in supplying vast numbers of soldiers and weapons to the front line for years on end. Among critical factors in the final outcome for Germany (as also for Austria, Hungary, and Russia) were not only deficiencies of industrial capacity but also the increasing shortage of food in the domestic market and a declining ability to control the supplies that were available. Interacting with losses and expenditures on the battlefield, hunger destroyed the army's will to fight and dissolved support for the war at home.

This memory plays a key role in the story of *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder*. With World War II in prospect, Hitler took steps to prevent history repeating itself. Self-sufficiency in strategic materials was one of the fundamental principles of the national socialist Four Year Plan for Germany. The idea of self-sufficiency in food through conquest, as Alex Kay reminds us (p. 15), also ran deep in the national socialist vision. His book, based on extensive research in the German archives for a Humboldt University PhD, starts from Hitler's determination to solve the expected wartime food shortage at the expense of the people living in Germany's eastern Empire of the future.

Kay's focus is on planning rather than implementation, so its timeline is the eighteen months from July 1940 to December 1941. In the summer of 1940, British resistance hardened. Fearing that a protracted war had already begun, Hitler contemplated the invasion of the Soviet Union. Germany was already experiencing food shortages at home and there was belt-tightening and grumbling (p. 49). The conquests of 1939 and 1940, if anything, had worsened the food deficit of the region under German control (p. 123). The invasion was launched in June 1941 before plans were complete, so planning and implementation overlapped briefly. Kay tells a little of what actually happened next, but his primary focus is on the plans themselves.

What were the plans? Kay answers that, in the spring of 1941, Hitler's staff designed an occupation regime for the western region of the USSR that would ensure the food supply of Germany. This would involve sealing Soviet food consumers (particularly in the cities of the industrialised north) off from the food producers (particularly in the Ukraine). The supplies on which the former depended in order to live would be diverted to the Germany Army. The inevitable consequence would be death by starvation for tens of millions of Soviet citizens, perhaps as many as thirty millions (p. 163). This plan was developed alongside the better known preparations for political restructuring of the East through racially selective mass killing and resettlement – but, if anything, the starvation policy was elaborated more rapidly and was

at a relatively advanced stage of design before implementation began (p. 53).

The starvation plan is not a complete surprise since some of the key documents (p. 133) were described more than 40 years ago, for example by Alexander Dallin. In *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945* (1957), Dallin identified the plan's proponents as the officials of the Four Year Plan and other "economic agencies," and in particular Herbert Backe, state secretary in the ministry of food and agriculture – also prominent in Kay's account. The structure of the earlier version differs, however. Dallin portrayed national socialist politics as "the product of a continual tug-of-war between feuding 'blocs' and 'coalitions' of various elements within the Nazi parallelogram of forces" (*German Rule in Russia*, p. 20). Kay presents a picture of greater coherence. The champions of starvation were more than just one among many competing interest groups; they articulated an overriding objective of Hitler's dictatorship. The starvation plan did more than just resonate conveniently with the national socialist classification of Slavs as an inferior race, which did not dictate mass murder although it weakened moral inhibitions against it (p. 121). Once he had formulated it, Backe won the "approval of the highest authorities" (p. 136), i.e. of Hitler, Himmler, and Göring, because the plan was entirely in line with their strategic vision of a German victory. Kay also demonstrates that, where the starvation plan provoked dissent, it was on pragmatic grounds alone – that it might not succeed (p. 143).

This is an original, richly detailed, and on the whole readable work. There is more in it than a short review can cover. Although relatively specialised, it has a clear importance. Its weakness is a regrettable neglect of previous scholarship, for example by Dallin (mentioned once), and Alan Milward (completely ignored). The fact that these concentrated on outcomes does not mean that they did not consider plans. The true originality of Kay's work lies in reinterpretation as well as in archival evidence, but readers must work this out for themselves.

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