

R.J. Overy, *War and economy in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). Pp. xiv+390, 2 figs., 62 tables. £35.00)

This book collects Richard Overy's major articles, the first published 20 years ago, on the economics of Nazi Germany. Divided into four major sections, the chapters deal with the forces behind German recovery from the interwar slump, the relationship between industry and the Nazi regime, the scale and objectives of rearmament, and the sources of the wartime economic effort. Taken together, these make a comprehensive survey of formidable depth.

The book is clearly designed with teaching use in mind. There is some repetition of material among the individual chapters, obvious to the reviewer, but not harmful to the more selective undergraduate reader. There is also a substantial guide to further reading in English.

From a comparative perspective one may ask how Hitler's Germany differed from Stalin's Russia. Some of the answers to be found in Overy's work suggest they were pretty much the same. Government policy was driven by a range of objectives, some civil and some military. The military objectives demanded rearmament, but rearmament in Germany's case rested on prior consolidation of Hitler's regime, together with rehabilitation of the civilian economy and its industrial and transport infrastructure. By the late 1930s the latter had been achieved, while organised opposition to Nazi rule had become impossible. By this time war production was assuming a large scale. This was no "armament in width" (limited to a narrow range of weapons for immediate use), since the plans were comprehensive and long-range in character, and the current output of weapons was limited only by their high cost, and by the competition for resources from investment in long-range, defence-related projects. The arrival of war on two fronts, simplifying objectives and forcing cost reductions, made possible further dramatic increases in war production. A roughly parallel story could be told for Soviet industrialisation and rearmament, the main difference being that, when war finally came, one country won and the other lost.

Naturally, like all analogies, this one has limits. Beyond the obvious differences of history, development, and system, the security considerations driving the two rearmaments were sharply distinct in character. Both were rooted in experiences of encirclement and defeat, but one remained largely defensive in character, while the other was openly aggressive and expansionist.

Over many years, and approaching the subject from many different angles, Overy has succeeded in constructing a satisfying alternative to the preceding orthodoxy. According to Kaldor, Klein, and Milward, Hitler only ever planned limited economic mobilisation for short, victorious offensives; he rearmed Germany at short range, and while things were going well he imposed few sacrifices upon a civilian population whose loyalty he preferred not to test. The huge increase in German war production after 1941, when things started to go badly, supplied by German civilians only from fear (of the Russians) and hatred (of the RAF), came too late. Overy argues that every element in this traditional story was wrong. His alternative story is consistent both internally, and with the vast evidence which he brings to bear.

There are some loose ends. Overy does not ask why Hitler was willing to rearm in depth for a war of long duration. After all, it was a basic tenet of the German military tradition that no one could rationally seek a war of attrition, especially when the opposing coalition had a greater economic potential. Wars were to be won with the maximum speed and concentration. Preparation for a long war was a matter of

preparing for the worst. It was rational for German rearmament plans to incorporate some insurance against this, but the purpose of insurance is always to free some resources for alternative use. Hitler, like Stalin, was no doubt capable of pursuing more than one policy at once; perhaps it is time for comparative historians to move beyond the crude polarities of armament in width and depth, and find ways of measuring the point on the spectrum observed in different countries. They will be in Richard Overy's debt.

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