Speer: Inside the Third Reich

By Alex Mokewski

One of the few competent men in the upper echelons of the Nazi bureaucracy was Albert Speer, who rose from an inferior architect to direct Germany's armaments production during the latter half of the Second World War. For his use of slave labor to mass a hard-pressed industrial organization, Speer was sentenced at Nuremberg to 20 years in prison, and the memoirs he compiled, upon his release, from a rough draft assembled during his early years in the Spandau prison form the main body of Inside the Third Reich. Speer's story lacks much of the impact of the other well-known work on Nazi Germany, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich. Although his work within the country's economy placed him in a better position to see what was actually going on in Germany than anyone else in Hitler's entourage could (or wanted to) claim, Speer still missed a lot. But the book does offer a tantalizing and informative view of life within Germany's circle of power, and gives the exactness so important for the MIT students and faculty and post-Hitler bureaucrats within government and industry — what responsibility a technician has for the results of his efforts?

Through the pages of Inside the Third Reich Speer describes a succession and melange of palaces, gardens and art, from the refined precision of Nazi justice to the power plays of a much earlier era. Obvious to the reality of a Germany collapsing around him, Hitler's men relied on each other to carry the favor and support of their leader. Hitler was the magnetic presence, the fountainhead of personal and political satisfaction, and the book describes the often Byrattlesome plots his men resorted to in his esteem. Speer himself, the practical and realistic manager who kept Germany's industrial plant humming under the heavy pressure of Allied bombings, was loath to re- main aloof, and allowed himself to be drawn into the game. Such is probably the fate of any government that isolates itself from the interests of its people: its inaccessibility may shelter it from the natural consequences of its marginal thinking.

What of the treatment of the technocrats' responsibility? To begin with, Speer probably wasn't a technocrat in the exact sense of the word — his technical study was probably limited to what he needed for his first love, architecture. When Hitler cast about for someone to direct his economic war effort, Speer was the only competent thinker within the inner circle. He had seen a few smaller jobs through earlier, and the Further felt safe entrusting him with control over the supply of war materiel.

From the early days of their association, Speer's admiration for Hitler had always blinded him from the consequences of Nazi rule in Germany. He designed buildings for the new Germany oblivious to the horrors that were mounting, and pushed ahead with armaments production, indifferent to the cold of the society he was protecting. As armaments minister his duty (and personal trust and obligation) was to deliver to the armed forces the weapons they needed, and until near the end of the war he was satisfied that maximizing production was a legitimate goal for his efforts. Only late in the war, when Hitler began pressuring a scorched-earth policy on the enemy stumbling back in defeat, did Speer realize exactly what the Nazis had in mind for the German people. And only after the war, at Nuremberg, did he learn exactly what the Nazis had in mind for the conquered peoples of Europe. His decision at the war crimes tribunal was to agree with the prosecution's main thesis: that even within a totalitarian regime subordinates have a responsibility to question the sanctions for their actions.

Parallels between the World War II era and current times begin to emerge. Though Americans bulk at comparing this country's deeds with the horrors of the Third Reich, some terrifying deeds have been committed in the name of protecting American ideals. Should criminal responsibility be assessed? Are the parallels with the Nuremberg proceedings valid?

And what of the role of the individual, not necessarily the leader but the technician? Speer doesn't deal directly with his responsibility, and perhaps he would suggest the Germanic tradition of obedience, since the individual technicians have no real contact with the policy-makers. But it seems that some question must be drawn from his own and Germany's experience, and each technician has a responsibility to determine what his efforts are doing.

Traffic followed Alice Cooper last week, and gave two fine, extended sets. As always, Steve Winwood dominated the proceedings, and "ReeboYs" Kvakku flash shone on conga. Though not terribly exciting, the music was flawless and tight, with the best numbers being the title song from the group's latest album, "The Low Spark of High Heeled Boys." "John Barleycorn" with Winwood soloing, and an excellent "Forty Thousand Headsmen."

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Satch from making transcriptions of songs like "Roll Over, Beethoven," "Good Golly Miss Molly," "Great Balls of Fire" and such. This record should be called Hands of Lord Satch the Rip Off. Yes! What an album!

Off The Shelf — Butdorff and Rodney (Atlantic)

With the help of such musicians as Johnny Burdats and Chris Etheridge, and with Atlantic Records president Ahmet Ertegun doing production, John Butdorff and Mark Rodney have put together a fine clear album. Musically they range from slight country touches to soft folk to gypsy music, with nice vocal harmonizing.

—Neal Vitale

Gonna Take A Miracle — Laura Nyro (Columbia)

I can think of one person who must like this album, and that is Laura Nyro. She is obviously showing her true affection for the music by recording this album. She has picked some popular rhythm and blues numbers of the last ten years or so (probably her personal favorites) and recorded them with the backup singing group Labelle. The album was produced by Gamble and Huff, but this is not a Gamble-Huff record. This is all Laura Nyro, right down to the whiny vocals and the endlessly repeated endings. —Jay Pollack

Nilsson Schmilsson — Harry Nilsson (RCA)

If you always felt that Harry Nilsson was a good writer but that his albums were a little too lightweight for you, then listen to this one. He's backed up by the likes of Jim Gordon, Klaus Voorman, John Uribe, Jim Price and others and it is meatier than most of his previous work. Among other things is a really good version of 'Let The Good Times Roll." The softer stuff puts up a good contrast.

After seven albums with the Greatful Dead, Jerry Garcia has made a record of his own. The songs written by Garcia with Bob Hunter and Bill Grech appear on vocals, guitars, keyboard and just about everything else. Lay a hand on Garcia's first — an Werner Bros. Records (and tapes, distributed by Aämpex).

Garcia's First 3.59

Appearing live at Symphony Hall, Jan 26, 8 pm