Hitler's Unpublished Internal Speeches (1937–1939): Key Themes and Rhetorical Approaches

In a series of closed-door speeches from 1937 to 1939, Adolf Hitler addressed select audiences – from industrial workers to press officials and military leaders – with a candor he avoided in public. He explicitly framed these talks as *"not official"* so he could speak freely without every word being scrutinized. Across these transcripts, several major themes emerge in the political, military, ideological, and economic realms. For each theme, Hitler's stance, framing, and tone reveal both his objectives and how his rhetoric evolved on the eve of World War II.

Ideological Vision and National Unity

Hitler's internal speeches consistently stress **national unity under National Socialist ideology**. He portrays society as a unified *Volksgemeinschaft* (people's community) in which class divisions are overcome in service of the nation. For example, speaking to workers in 1937, he insists that *"all [are] trustees of the nation; the worker, the employer, the employee, all…have a certain task to fulfill. No one can say: my self-interest is decisive"*. This framing elevates duty to the collective above any class or individual interest. He boasts that under Nazism, people are valued purely by *"what they can do and what they accomplish,"* whether from a noble family or *"a ordinary worker's home,"* illustrating a meritocratic ideal intended to bind all classes to a common national cause. The tone in such passages is proud and inclusive – Hitler refers to the assembled workers as *"my comrades"* and celebrates the *"wonderful rise"* of humble individuals to important positions under his rule, reinforcing that National Socialism has created opportunities for all loyal Germans.

A key element of Hitler's ideology in these addresses is the **primacy of collective obligation over personal freedom**. He explicitly dismisses liberal individualism, arguing that *"freedom in the sense of individual freedom is not compatible with human culture,"* which instead requires *"disciplined…common effort"* toward national goals. He even uses self-deprecating humor – noting that even he as Führer cannot take a day off – to illustrate that personal wishes must yield to duty. By framing personal freedom as trivial (*"no one has it…I unfortunately don't either"*), Hitler justifies the regime's authoritarian demands as necessary for Germany's resurgence. The **tone is didactic**, as he patiently "explains" why individual liberty must be sacrificed for the greater good, turning authoritarian rule into a virtue in the listeners' minds.

Another dominant ideological thread is **faith in Germany's destiny and racial superiority**. Hitler's rhetoric often takes on a prophetic, almost messianic tone when discussing the nation's future. He vehemently rejects any notion of German inferiority, calling it a *"devilish"* complex implanted in the people after World War I that he was determined to purge. In the 1939 speeches, he exudes confidence that Germany is on the cusp of a new era. *"We are certainly not at the end of a historical epoch in 1938, but at the beginning of a great epoch for our people,"* he proclaims, insisting *"world history is made by men"* and that no other nation has greater "value" than the German nation. He points out that by 1940 Germany will encompass 80 million people of unified stock – *"the largest human bloc"* in Europe –

and declares, *"I am convinced, absolutely, of this future. We once were the greatest empire... now after a 300-year crisis, the recovery of our people has begun"*. Hitler even attributes to Nazi rule a *"gradual racial improvement"* of the German people, claiming it now *"represents the highest value on this earth"*. This extreme racial confidence is presented with fervent conviction; anyone who *"doubts…this future"* is branded *"a weakling"*. The **framing** here is that history and providence are on Germany's side, especially now that Hitler's leadership has "awakened" the nation. By conveying unshakable faith in victory and supremacy, Hitler aims to instill the same faith in his listeners. Indeed, he explicitly urges his officers to be *"bearers of faith and confidence"* for the nation, invoking the proverb that *"faith can move mountains"* – meaning that when logic and reason falter, **ideological belief** and willpower must guide them forward. This blend of pseudo-religious fervor and ultra-nationalism marks a **shift in tone** from the mid-1930s to 1939: early on, Hitler's internal focus was on unity and rebuilding, but by 1939 he speaks in grand, almost mystical terms of an inevitable *"path to greatness"* for a rejuvenated German race and nation.

Foreign Policy and Expansionist Aims

In these private addresses, Hitler is strikingly frank about Germany's **revisionist foreign policy and expansionist ambitions**, outlining a roadmap to overturn the post-World War I order. He portrays each bold move on the world stage not as opportunistic aggression but as the logical fulfillment of a long-term program. Speaking to his military leaders in early 1939, Hitler stresses that *"the year 1938 [with its annexations] is only the consistent continuation of decisions…beginning with 1933"*, and *"all the individual decisions…since 1933…are the execution of an existing plan"*. He enumerates step by step how he deliberately dismantled the Versailles constraints: withdrawing from the League of Nations as *"the first step"* toward German revival, then rearming in defiance of foreign limits, then fortifying the Rhineland – actions he notes were sometimes pulled ahead of schedule when *"circumstances"* allowed. By 1938, this plan reached a climax with the incorporation of Austria and the Sudetenland, problems which *"had to be solved…there could be no doubt"* about that. Hitler makes clear to his inner circle that none of these territorial expansions were improvised; they were *"long-standing plans"* he was *"resolved from the start"* to carry out at the opportune moment. This framing portrays Nazi aggression as *historically inevitable and justified*. His tone in discussing these aims is confident, even matter-of-fact, as if describing a natural political course rather than acts of war. By emphasizing the foresight and consistency behind Nazi moves, Hitler also implicitly demands his listeners' trust in his future agenda.

To domestic audiences like the press (November 1938), Hitler **justifies expansion in more defensive and moral terms**, insisting Germany seeks only equality and rightful national needs. For instance, he argues that the German people *"absolutely…need colonies…to live"* just as other powers do, and that *"we must not be denied these rights"*. *"We want no more; then we'll be happy,"* he claims unconvincingly. This rhetorical strategy paints Germany as merely reclaiming its fair share (such as overseas colonies lost after WWI), not pursuing conquest – a framing meant to reassure and rally his listeners with a sense of grievance and entitlement. Hitler likewise defends his policy of forceful risk-taking by casting it as forced upon him by others' intransigence or weakness. In the same speech, he uses a vivid analogy: a man with a pistol walking through the forest may *"provoke"* robbers, but in reality the pistol deters them – so, too, a militarized Germany supposedly preserves peace by strength rather than inviting attack (an argument aimed at countering critics who said his rearmament courted danger). Through such analogies, delivered in a conversational, almost coy tone,

Hitler frames **German militarization as a defensive necessity** and foreign opposition as unreasonable.

One notable aspect of Hitler's internal discourse on foreign affairs is how he **celebrates the audacity of his gambles** and the importance of seizing the moment. In reviewing 1938's bloodless victories, he admits many *"intellectuals"* and cautious elites had *"more misgivings than approval"* of his bold decisions, *"not understanding"* why he would risk further moves when Germany had already achieved some success. Hitler frames his own stance as one of iron resolve against these doubters. *"You can believe me, gentlemen, it was not always easy to make and hold these decisions,"* he confides to the press chiefs, highlighting the personal nerve required to defy skeptical advisors. Ultimately, he asserts, **bold action was vindicated by spectacular success**, and he uses this to reinforce a cult of his leadership infallibility. He recounts to his audiences the critical factors that made 1938's triumphs possible, implicitly crediting his judgment in each case. Notably, he lists:

- *"the enormous educational work"* National Socialism had done to harden and unify the German people, who *"brilliantly stood the test"* of crisis;
- the *"determination of the leadership"* (his own decisiveness) in pushing through unpopular decisions *"against all resistance"*;
- extensive military preparations – **Hitler points to the massive Westwall fortifications in the west** and other rearmament measures taken in 1938 – which ensured Germany could risk a confrontation and *"had to become effective at a fixed time"*;
- and finally, *"exploitation of circumstances"* in the international arena – *"perhaps the most important"* factor, he says – as 1938 presented a uniquely *"favorable"* world situation for enforcing Germany's demands.

By enumerating these points, Hitler is **framing the annexations of Austria and the Sudetenland as logical, even prudent outcomes** of preparation and opportunity, rather than reckless aggression. The tone here is one of analytic triumphalism: he speaks as a strategist explaining a successful operation, which not only glorifies his foresight but also conditions his listeners (especially the press and officers) to accept that future risks will likewise pay off.

Crucially, as war loomed, Hitler increasingly linked Germany's expansion to **dire strategic necessity**, especially in terms of resources and population pressure. In early 1939, he bluntly argued that Germany's very geography and demography mandated a push for Lebensraum. With *"140 people per square kilometer"* in Germany, Hitler said, *"therein lies the compulsion for all political activity and for all paths we intend to take in the future. No regime can ignore this fact"*. He contrasted Germany's crowded situation with sprawling resource-rich nations like the United States or Soviet Russia, which he noted had as few as 14 people per square kilometer and vast natural wealth. Such nations, he remarked, *"have it in the end not necessary to try so hard"* to feed their people, *"but if I had only 14 people per square kilometer to feed, it would be easy to ensure they live in abundance!"*. Germany, by implication, must exert itself and take *"hard"* measures. He warned that Germany *"cannot feed 140 people on a square kilometer in the long run"* and that merely scraping by through imports and make-shift solutions was akin to *"writing uncovered checks"* that would eventually bounce. This economic-geopolitical argument provided a **grim rationale for conquest**: either gain living space and resources or face ruin. Hitler's **framing** of impending conflict thus shifted from celebratory (1938's victories) to deterministic – even somewhat grim in tone – by 1939: he portrays war for Lebensraum as a fateful duty imposed by

Germany's situation. Notably, he delivers this message to his commanders in a sober, pragmatic tone, as if describing a law of nature. This marks a **shift in emphasis** from earlier rhetoric about overturning Versailles (which was couched in terms of restoring honor or rights) to an almost fatalistic justification of expansion as survival. Internally, Hitler makes it clear that further aggression (e.g. against Poland or the Soviet Union, though not named explicitly) is not a matter of *if* but *when*, given Germany's needs and the *"long road"* of destiny ahead.

Military Strategy and Leadership in Hitler's Rhetoric

When addressing military audiences – whether newly minted officers or top commanders – Hitler adopts a stance that blends **martial idealism with demands for absolute loyalty**. He consistently emphasizes that the Wehrmacht must be imbued with National Socialist spirit and unwavering obedience to the nation's mission. For example, in his speech to young officers on 18 January 1939, Hitler stresses that a German officer's virtues must be identical to those of the common soldier and of the people at large. *"The virtues of the soldier are likewise the virtues of his leaders,"* he instructs, and concepts like loyalty, honor, and courage *"must be as sacred to the officer as to the entire people"*. There is, he insists, *"no special honor in this State that could be different from the honor of everyone. Your honor is the honor of the whole nation"*. This framing erases any division between the army and the people or party – a clear message that the officer corps is not an independent elite but an instrument of the unified national will. Hitler's tone here is firmly paternal and hortatory: he speaks as the supreme commander and *Erzieher* (educator), instilling a code of conduct. By anchoring military ethics in Nazi-popular ethics, he ties the army's identity to his own leadership and ideology.

Hitler also **demands personal example and zeal** from his officers. *"You must not only lead the young German, you must be a model for him,"* he says, making it clear that the younger generation's indoctrination is in their hands. He cautions against any notion that prudence or intellectual strategy can substitute for boldness. In a pointed rebuke to over-cautious military thinking, Hitler argues that *"highest bravery and highest courage are themselves already the highest wisdom"*, rejecting the idea that an officer can prize clever caution over daring action. If *"wisdom"* is defined as understanding the ultimate interests of life, he asserts, then only the man willing *"to stake his whole personal self"* – the truly courageous man – *"can master life"* and claim the **"prize"** of wisdom. Here Hitler employs an aphoristic, almost philosophical tone to elevate the virtue of **aggressive risk-taking**. The rhetorical strategy is clear: he sacralizes courage and self-sacrifice, implying that any hesitation or emphasis on mere intellect is almost cowardly or at least second-rate. This message, delivered to a military audience still haunted by World War I's colossal losses, serves to prepare them mentally for the kind of reckless offensives Hitler will soon demand. It dovetails with his broader theme that **willpower triumphs over material odds** – a theme he also impressed on the officers by invoking *Glaube* (faith) as a strategic asset. He reminds them of the saying that faith can move mountains, explaining that when reason and "wisdom" only breed fear and doubt, *"there [faith] alone can find a way out"*. In effect, Hitler is urging his military leaders to suppress rational skepticism in favor of **ideological confidence** in ultimate victory. The tone is inspirational but also urgent – he acknowledges this is *"easier said than done"*, indicating he knows the psychological difficulty of the trials ahead.

As 1939 progresses, Hitler's private admonitions to the military become even more blunt about the expectation of **hardship and unwavering obedience**. In his January 25, 1939

address to senior commanders, after reviewing Germany's resurgence, he issues a sobering charge: *"One recognizes soldiers not by their victories, but by their defeats… Only he who has learned to endure and overcome defeats is worthy to celebrate victories."* This maxim – essentially preparing the Wehrmacht for setbacks – is remarkable given Hitler's public image of invincibility. It shows that internally, he was conditioning his leaders to withstand potentially *"very hard"* times ahead without losing faith. *"I wish nothing else from you,"* he says, *"than that, if ever the time should become truly hard…,"* – the sentence trails off in the transcript, but the implication is clear: they must stand resolute and loyal to him even then. Indeed, Hitler concludes with an emotional appeal that they remain *"bound together, again and again only by Germany!"*, even if sacrifices are required. The **tone in these closing remarks** is fervent and solemn. Gone is the earlier optimistic bombast; Hitler speaks almost in the register of a commander sending his troops on a difficult campaign, emphasizing duty, endurance, and unity unto death. He reminds them that *"soldiers are unshakeable in times of misfortune, not just in times of luck"*, and that he expects his officers to exemplify that steadfastness. This represents a **notable shift** from 1937, when Hitler's interactions with the military (and others) could still celebrate the avoidance of war and bloodshed. By 1939, he is effectively telling his military leaders that war is coming, that it may be tough, but that they must neither shrink from great losses nor ever question his leadership. Rhetorically, Hitler has moved from praising past victories to steeling his cadre for future trials, using aphorisms and pledges of loyalty to prepare them psychologically for World War II.

Economic Policy and Autarky

In his internal speeches, Hitler frequently addresses **economic topics** – not in technical detail, but in ideological and strategic terms. He touts the dramatic recovery and reorganization of the German economy under Nazi rule, using it as evidence of National Socialism's prowess and as groundwork for war readiness. When speaking to the factory workers in 1937, Hitler's tone is optimistic and congratulatory about economic achievements. He cites concrete improvements: factories expanding several-fold in employment and output. In industries *"where earlier perhaps 300 workers stood, now there are 1,000; where earlier 1,000, now 5–6,000; and where 12,000 were employed before, now 35,000"* – tangible proof, he claims, of Germany's *"enormous upswing"* in production. These statistics serve a dual purpose in his rhetoric: they **validate Nazi policies** (by showing jobs and prosperity) and they reinforce national pride (Germany catching up to great powers). Hitler even addresses skeptics who say Germany can't match the industrial might of the U.S., ridiculing such defeatism as the mutterings of *"the little doubter"*. His framing here is that nothing is impossible for a rejuvenated Germany – a claim that bolsters workers' morale and loyalty.

A cornerstone of Hitler's economic stance is **autarky – the drive for self-sufficiency in key resources** – which he presents as both economically sound and strategically vital. He fervently argues that Germany must escape dependency on imports through synthetic production and resource development at home, even if that means temporary sacrifice. In the 1937 worker address, Hitler gives a passionate example: *"We still have 10,000 miners with no work, and we are importing rubber! That is utter madness!"* he exclaims. Foreign rubber might be cheaper now, he admits others argue, but *"who guarantees that prices will stay so? We cannot determine world prices"*. By **framing import dependence as perilous and illogical**, Hitler justifies massive state projects to produce synthetic rubber (Buna), fuel, and other materials, which were part of the Four-Year Plan. His tone is forceful and sometimes sarcastic when making these points – he shows obvious impatience for *"bourgeois"* concerns about cost or free markets. Instead, he calls the autarkic strategy the *"only true socialist*

economic policy", because it secures the livelihood of the entire nation. If Germany can produce its own petrol, rubber, and oil, Hitler asserts, that guarantees work and income for *"at least 3–400,000"* German families indefinitely – *"that is economic policy in the National Socialist sense. Everything else is capitalist."*. This stark contrast is a recurring theme: **Nazi economics is portrayed as morally superior to capitalist liberalism**, since it prioritizes the people's welfare and the nation's independence over profit. In making this case, Hitler uses **rhetorical polarization** – on one side, the short-sighted capitalist who worries about price and profit; on the other, the visionary National Socialist who thinks in terms of employment and self-reliance for generations. He explicitly invokes a *"higher socialist standpoint"* from which the whole economy must be viewed. To underscore this, he again employs the concept of all members of the economy as trustees of the nation (a parallel to his social unity theme): industrialists and workers alike are *"responsible trustees"* serving the common national good, not their individual gain. The **tone is idealistic yet pragmatic** – Hitler speaks as a national planner balancing resources and needs, all under the ethical cloak of "socialism" (as defined by Nazi rhetoric).

Hitler also addresses wages, living standards, and consumption in a way that reveals his regime's priorities. He dismisses simplistic calls to raise wages, telling his listeners that *"we live only from production"*, not from high wages on paper. In one passage, he explains there are *"two economic philosophies: one says, increase wages; the other says, increase output"* – and he firmly sides with the latter. He even jibes that he could raise everyone's wages *"to double or triple, even a hundredfold"*, but *"the dumbest"* person would realize that is meaningless without more goods produced. Such statements, delivered in a colloquial, almost joking tone, serve to align the workers' thinking with the regime's emphasis on productivity and armament over immediate material comfort. Hitler is essentially asking the population to accept rationing or wage controls in exchange for a stronger nation – and doing so by **framing it as common sense** (making those who disagree sound foolish or selfish). Notably, he assures that when production increases, *"it benefits the masses"*, glossing over the fact that rearmament efforts often diverted resources from consumer goods.

By 1939, Hitler's internal discussions of the economy become increasingly tied to **war preparedness** and the stark reality of resource limits. In March 1939, addressing officers at the military academies, he likens Germany's current economic measures to running on credit that will come due: *"What we do today, I might call nothing other than writing uncovered checks,"* he says, warning that one cannot keep **pretending to feed** a growing nation without securing more resources. This candid admission – that even the Nazi economic miracle had its ceiling – is used to reinforce the urgency of expansion (as noted in the Foreign Policy section). It shows a shift in his economic tone from celebratory (jobs! growth!) to sober and deterministic (we're running out of time and space). Nonetheless, Hitler maintains an upbeat defiance: he expresses absolute confidence that Germany's disciplined, state-directed economy can outlast and out-produce its rivals if it eliminates dependency. He cites, for instance, the success of Germany's motorization and construction programs as proof that *"year by year will build upon the last"* and no power can turn back this progress. By highlighting feats like the Autobahn network or record motor vehicle output (though *"not yet American numbers"*, he concedes with a wink), Hitler reinforces a tone of **inevitability – that Germany will catch up and surpass others**. This **"can-do" propaganda tone** remains even as the substance of his message shifts toward tightening belts for war.

In summary, Hitler's treatment of economic topics in these internal speeches is highly politicized: he uses economic accomplishments to validate Nazi ideology and prepares his

listeners to bear sacrifices for strategic goals. His **rhetorical strategies** include citing impressive statistics to inspire pride, using analogies (like the idle miners vs. imported rubber) to make abstract policies tangible, and moralizing the discussion by contrasting Nazi communal economics with the *"madness"* of capitalist or laissez-faire approaches. The **recurring pattern** over time is that early on he emphasizes the tangible benefits his rule has brought (employment, infrastructure, hope) – often in an upbeat, congratulatory manner – whereas by 1939 he increasingly emphasizes the constraints and imperatives (resource shortages, need for austerity and output) in a tone of steely resolve. What remains constant is the framing of economics as a means to an end: the end being Germany's national greatness and self-sufficiency in preparation for the conflict Hitler clearly sees on the horizon. Each factory worker's output and each policy of autarky are, in Hitler's telling, contributions to the coming showdown – a fact he expects his audiences to understand and embrace wholeheartedly.

Sources: The analysis above is based on Adolf Hitler's unpublished internal speech transcripts from 1937–1939 (Bundesarchiv NS 11, Irving File 88), including his addresses to workers on Feb. 20, 1937, to German press representatives on Nov. 10, 1938, and to military leaders on Jan. 18, 1939, Jan. 25, 1939, Feb. 10, 1939, and March 11, 1939. These transcripts provide insight into Hitler's candid communication of his regime's aims and the evolution of his rhetoric as Germany moved toward war. Each quote is drawn from the archival records as indicated.