

## Hitler's First Hundred Days: When Germans Embraced the Third Reich

By Peter Fritzsche. New York: Basic Books, 2020. Pp. 421. Cloth \$32. ISBN: 978-1541687430.

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In his most recent book, Peter Fritzsche returns to a theme that has been at the heart of his historical *oeuvre* since the beginning of his long and productive career: namely, how does one explain the suddenness and apparently unreserved enthusiasm with which the German people embraced Nazism and the Third Reich? It was there, if only implicitly, in his first book, *Rehearsals for Fascism: Populism and Political Radicalism in Weimar Germany* (1990) and then more explicitly in *Germans into Nazis* (1998).

In many respects, Fritzsche's is an eminently personal book. As he explains in the post-script, his parents grew up in the Third Reich, one the son of a pro-capitalist entrepreneur who supported the creation of a national unity ticket with Hitler, and the other the daughter of an official in the Prussian state finance ministry who lost his job after the infamous *Preussenschlag* of July 1932. One could hardly imagine a more fertile environment than this for exploring the questions that Fritzsche sets out to answer in his book.

To answer these questions, Fritzsche turns to the people who lived through these times and recorded their experiences in diaries, letters, and memoirs. It is through their voices that the reader begins to experience what it must have been like to have lived through Hitler's first hundred days. Fritzsche's description of Germany's descent into violence in the year before the Nazi seizure of power and of the assault that the Nazis launched against the bastions of organized labor in Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, and elsewhere is particularly gripping. Violence was, after all, the *métier* in which the Nazis operated, and this would not change after the charade on the morning of January 30, 1933, when Hitler was appointed chancellor as the head of a government of "national concentration" that included only a handful of Nazis along with representatives of Germany's conservative establishment, who had deluded themselves into believing that they could somehow contain the dynamism of the Nazi movement. But all of this pales in comparison to Fritzsche's gritty description of the abject poverty of the 250 working-class families that lived in the Zille-Burg at Ackerstrasse 132/133 in Berlin. The deftness with which Fritzsche portrays not just the poverty in which these families were trapped but also the hopelessness this produced in young and old alike sets the stage for what was yet to come.

The strength of Fritzsche's study lies in its ability to tap into the feelings and behavior of ordinary Germans, whether a middle-aged schoolteacher and Hitler enthusiast like Luise Solmitz, or an aspiring scriptwriter like Erich Ebermayer, whose desire for national unity overwhelmed his innate antipathy toward the SA and the more vulgar manifestations of the Nazi movement, or a small-time beer distributor like Wilhelm Scheidler from the Odenwald, who in the spring of 1933 gravitated from the Social Democrats through the Young German Order to the Nazis. It is from the private testimony of people like these that Fritzsche tracks the passage of ordinary Germans through the milestone events that defined the history of Hitler's first hundred days, from his appointment as chancellor on January 30 through the Reichstag fire on the night of February 27, the Reichstag elections of March 5, and the passage of the Enabling Act on March 23, to the wholesale onslaught against the remnants of Germany's parliamentary institutions that followed in its wake.

All of this, Fritzsche argues, was accomplished through the diabolical synthesis of propaganda and violence. It was the function of propaganda to identify the enemy and justify the use of violence in its eradication. Nowhere was the lethal impact of this synthesis more devastating than in the wave of violence that was visited upon the German Jewish community in the spring of 1933. Antisemitism had always been a core component of the Nazi worldview, but it was unclear—not the least to Germany's half a million Jews—how this was to be translated into practice once the Nazis were in power. Any hope that Hitler's conservative allies might have a moderating effect on the tone and substance of Nazi antisemitism was shattered by the wanton destruction of Jewish property and the terror that individual Jews felt at the hands of the SA and their Nazi tormentors.

The violence that characterized Hitler's first hundred days and that chaos of which it was a part had a further function in that they demonstrated to the German people the need for order, a new order that only Hitler and the forces at his command could provide. What emerged from the sense of crisis that accompanied the Nazi seizure of power was a German state that was suddenly endowed with greater power over the lives of everyday Germans than it had ever possessed. And the purpose of this new state, as Hitler explained in a speech in early July 1933, was to create a new species of German through a revolutionary project of social, biological, and racial reconstruction. Here, Fritzsche makes a point that requires special attention. The Nazi revolution and the overwhelming support it received from ordinary Germans, concludes Fritzsche, came not from fear or intimidation or terror, but from the fact that Hitler and the Nazi Party possessed and exuded something that no other force in German political life could claim. And that was hope.

*Hitler's First Hundred Days* is not a perfect book. For example, the last part of the book contains a number of digressions that extend well beyond the book's stated timeframe. That aside, Fritzsche's book remains a valuable contribution that sheds light on one of the truly critical moments in the history of the German nation.

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## **Comrades Betrayed: Jewish World War I Veterans under Hitler**

**By Michael Geheran. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020. Pp. 294. Cloth \$34.95. ISBN: 978-1501751011.**

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Being a German-Jewish war veteran in Nazi Germany meant living in a unique and contested space, existing in the interstices between two major Nazi imperatives: the veneration of World War I and eliminationist, racial antisemitism. The cult of the war sacralized Germany's participation in the conflict and hailed wartime comradeship and devotion to the national cause, while racial antisemitism defined Jews as a distinct race and targeted Jews regardless of their political affiliations, religiosity, or levels of acculturation, through discrimination, exclusion from German economy and society, and ultimately extermination. Many Jewish soldiers had forged close bonds with non-Jewish co-combatants or formed relationships in postwar veterans' groups, which spared some the full force of Nazi antisemitic degradation and persecution. Others, especially decorated heroes and former front fighters,