H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Nathan Stoltzfus. *Hitler's Compromises: Coercion and Consensus in Nazi Germany.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. 416 pp. $40.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-21750-6.

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Published on H-German (May, 2019)

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In some ways Nathan Stoltzfus's *Hitler's Compromises: Coercion and Consensus in Nazi Germany* is an interesting counterpoint to his Florida State University colleague Robert Gellately's book with a similar (but reversed) subtitle: *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (2001). While Gellately emphasizes the popularity of the Nazi regime, which included support for its terror tactics, Stoltzfus examines cases of popular dissatisfaction and protest against some Nazi policies. Stoltzfus argues that when faced with popular opposition, Adolf Hitler sometimes backed down and compromised with the German public, in order to maintain his popularity. His compromises did not contradict his terror tactics, Stoltzfus claims, but rather reinforced them. Stoltzfus makes clear from the outset, however, that Hitler's compromises were matters of timing and tactics. The popularity he gained thereby was intended to further his long-range goals, even if they had to be delayed briefly. Stoltzfus states, "Despite this tolerance in the choice of tactics, Hitler was uncompromising in his ideology and goals" (p. 7).

One of the most persuasive examples Stoltzfus provides is popular opposition to some Nazi religious policies, a theme covered in three of the eight chapters (and another chapter is largely about religious opposition to the Nazi "euthanasia" program). When Nazi officials tried to force compliance with their church policies by putting Protestant bishops Theophil Wurm and Hans Meiser under house arrest in October 1934, popular demonstrations in the streets convinced Hitler to release them. Later attempts by some Nazi Gauleiter to remove crucifixes from Catholic schools produced such popular resistance that they were forced to rescind the orders.

An interesting case demonstrating the ambiguities of Nazi actions against church officials is the treatment of Catholic Bishop Johannes Baptista Sproll of Rottenburg in Württemberg. In 1938 Nazi officials decided to organize street demonstrations against Sproll, because he was not sufficiently supportive of Nazi policies. These backfired by arousing public sympathy for Sproll. However, the Gestapo still banished him from his diocese, cutting him off from his supporters. This suggests that Hitler and his regime were intent on pushing the limits as far as they thought possible, without arousing too much opposition from the general populace. This is also evident from the arrests of hundreds of Catholic priests and Confessing Church pastors in the late 1930s and early 1940s (which Stoltzfus does not discuss because of his focus). Hitler did not always compromise.

Three other areas where Hitler compromised with the German public were in relation to SA vio-

lence (chapter 1), wartime relocations (chapter 7), and treatment of Jews married to Germans (chapter 8). In the early 1930s Hitler hoped to gain power by legal means, and he was concerned that SA violence would endanger his popularity and thus his climb to power. Therefore, he overruled his SA hotheads and catered to German public opinion by curbing SA violence. Before and during World War II Hitler refused either to issue or to enforce unpopular relocation orders. Finally, after arresting Jews married to German women in 1943, their wives gathered at the Rosenstrasse detention center, seeking their release. The Nazis relented. Hitler did indeed compromise at times.

The weakest chapter of the book, in my view, is the chapter on the Nazi program to kill people with disabilities. Stoltzfus is right to point out that the Nazi regime demonstrated concern for public opinion in this matter. One of the T-4 killing facilities, Grafeneck, was closed in December 1940 because of popular pressure, as people became aware of the secret program. However, this was not much of a compromise, because Nazis opened another killing center to take its place. Then, in August 1941, Hitler ordered all five remaining T-4 centers to close because of increasing public awareness and opposition. Stoltzfus argues, "For the regime, the trade-off with the people was fewer murders" (p. 203). However, Stoltzfus bases this conclusion on faulty statistics. He claims that only 30,000 disabled people were killed in the "wild euthanasia" phase after the T-4 centers were shut down (while 70,000 died before then). However, the correct number for the "wild euthanasia" phase is probably closer to 130,000.[1] Contra Stoltzfus, more disabled people were murdered after August 1941 than before (though the pace per month may have slowed slightly). This does not strike me as much of a compromise.

Stoltzfus's work is a helpful corrective to some popular misconceptions about the Nazi regime. He ably demonstrates that in some circumstances Germans were willing to publicly oppose the regime, and sometimes this led to Hitler compromising. One should not assume, however, that compromise was one of Hitler's primary methods. It was one tactic among others, used sparingly but effectively.

Note

[1]. Michael Burleigh, "Nazi 'Euthanasia' Programs," in ***Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race***, ed. Dieter Kuntz (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2004), 152-53.

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Citation: Richard Weikart. Review of Stoltzfus, Nathan. *Hitler's Compromises: Coercion and Consensus in Nazi Germany.* H-German, H-Net Reviews. May, 2019.

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