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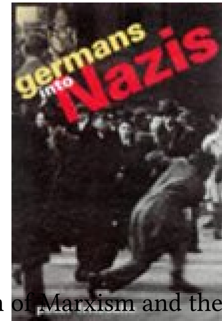

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Among the assaults on structural history that have characterized the German history field in recent years, the emphasis on the subjectivity, self assertion, and autonomy of ordinary Germans has been the most pronounced. Where historians used to focus on political, social, and economic elites and especially their ability to domesticate mass politics, the opposite approach now rules. Scholars stress the weakness of the traditional right in the face of a determined radical nationalist challenge that began before World War I. That challenge culminated in the rise of the National Socialists, whose talent for cutting across class lines to reach a mass constituency transformed them into the first real *Volkspartei* in German history. Peter Fritzsche's well-written and stimulating account, geared to a general audience as to well as to more specialized readers, well represents that shift in perspective, for it reveals not only its merits but also its problems.

Fritzsche argues that the electoral growth of the Nazi movement did not simply reflect resentment against the Versailles settlement or the hardships of the Depression. Rather, the Nazi assumption to power was the terminus of a longer period of popular awakening. Although recognizing that a non-Socialist popular politics began to flower in the 1890s, Fritzsche sees World War I as the defining moment in populist activism. Total war spawned an unprecedented level of volunteerism in support of the troops and an outpouring of popular self expression that articulated the common experience of anxiety and loss. At the same time, the duration and costs of the war encouraged dissatisfaction with both the Reich's and the Kaiser's deficiencies, and they brought increased pressure for democratization from circles well beyond the constituencies of the left. Petit bourgeois and peasant populism championed the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the solidarist national community that rejected the selfish claims of special interests, the class egoism of Marxism and the arrogance of big-business capitalism while insisting on greater political participation and social reform. Wilhelm's abdication and the difficult birth of the Weimar Republic witnessed the proliferation of petit-bourgeois organization of sufficient scale to contain the left. Although indeed divided along the occupational lines it deplored, such populism imagined a (lower case) "national socialist" consensus.

The political realization of that consensus, however, proved beyond the ability of Weimar bourgeois parties to achieve, despite their attempts to broaden their support. Moreover, such putschist alternatives as the Freikorps were too nihilistic to construct an effective political strategy. Instead, the National Socialists became the first party to actualize the populist consensus in existence since 1914. The Nazis stood for social inclusivity, economic productivity, and a racially-infused ethnic nationalism that championed the resurgence of German power. Although consistent with the scholarly consensus that antisemitism did not figure prominently in the growth of the Nazi vote, Fritzsche underscores the significance of ideology in the Nazi rise. Yet against Thomas Childers, who emphasizes the Nazis' appeal to voters by occupation, Fritzsche underscores the party's ability to reach the common ground above interest-group fragmentation. Whereas most historians consign the Nazis to the political wilderness after the failure of the Munich putsch, Fritzsche finds them expanding their influence in the burgeoning number of bourgeois associations, thus capitalizing on the presence of a populist civic unity that transcended occupational divisions. Furthermore, the Nazis did what other bourgeois parties promised but did not deliver, for they achieved social inclusivity in practice. To wit: Unlike the German National People's Party

(DNVP), the Nazis' principal antirepublication rival, the Nazis drew their leaders and activists from all classes, including workers, who were attracted by the party's promise of upward mobility and a state responsive to the needs of the *Volk.* Yet unlike the special-interest parties, the Nazis rose above the fragmentation of interests, thus justifying confidence in their attack on economic egoism. To be sure, Fritzsche does not discount the salience of issues, such as the Versailles Treaty, that historians normally invoke to explain the Nazi rise. Nevertheless, had the party not exploited the *leitmotif* of German populism, the imagining of the national community, the more contingent issues would not have distinguished it from other bourgeois parties.

Germans into Nazis combines a thorough command of recent literature with interpretive clarity, which in this case develops observations that Fritzsche conveyed in his first book, *Rehearsals for Fascism.* To support his argument regarding the significance of World War I in the development of populism, Fritzsche provides fascinating detail on the engagement of ordinary Germans, women especially, on the illustrated press as a medium for expressing popular grief, and on the ration lines and trainloads of food scavengers that forged a common bond among consumers. Taken together, those episodes spoke to the "subtle militarization" (p. 42) of civilian life that explains why, despite the evanescence of the *Burgfrieden*, the myth of the "national community" of self-sacrifice and perseverance became so tenacious. Fritzsche could have made much more of his recognition as to the racism embedded in the popular nationalist imagination (p. 65), yet his suggestion as to the war's contribution to eliding the divisions that persisted in Germany after unification offers a possible explanation for why German nationalism in particular became so lethal. Finally, Fritzsche not only gives a lucid discussion of the populist aspects of Nazism, which revealed an impatience with elitist authoritarianism and the *Honoratiorenpolitik* of the traditional right; he underscores the centrality of the *Volksgemeinschaft* to National Socialism, the ideological scaffolding for the party's ambitious and destructive agendas. The party's emphasis on the ethnic community of solidarity and sacrifice merged seamlessly with productivism, expansionism, and the latent consumerist promise of a better life.

Fritzsche's study indicates why it is now impossible to deny the contested nature of German politics and the assertiveness of petit bourgeois and peasant activists. Yet in common with the recent emphasis on radical nationalism, Fritzsche places the traditional right so clearly on the defensive as to minimize its contributions to the rise of the Nazi party and to the terror of the Third Reich. One does not have to accept stereotypes of wire-pulling field marshals, estate owners, and business tycoon paymasters that Fritzsche argues are still common (p. 210-11), to recognize the symbiosis between populists and elites that coexisted with their mutual contempt. Even the fragmentation of Weimar politics, one evidence of the traditional right's "decline," not only magnified the impact of decisions at the highest levels of state, but also that of elites with access to Hindenburg, who saw the Nazis as useful to undermining Versailles and destroying the left. In addition, the electoral growth of Nazism itself owed something to the radicalization of the traditional right in the field. This was especially true of many nobles in the countryside, who, if they did not explicitly endorse the Nazis, became sufficiently militant as to discredit cooperation with the Republic. The economic and structural foundations of elites remained even if their political representation disintegrated to the benefit of the Nazis. Finally, the extent to which the quest for *Lebensraum* depended on the civil service, the military, and business suggests why Germany became so murderous, because the "new order" in Europe would not have been possible without an advanced state apparatus and military-industrial complex. Fritzsche asserts that the triumph of a popular, radical nationalist politics and its mobilization of violence became "Germany's twentieth century revolution" (p. 230) even as he recognizes that birth and status still mattered. Yet it is hard to conceive of the regime's extraordinary brutality as simply the product of ambitious, upwardly-mobile populists. If the relationship between conservative elites and Nazis was hardly harmonious, the Nazis nonetheless represented an effective antidote to "Marxism" and a way out of the Depression.

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