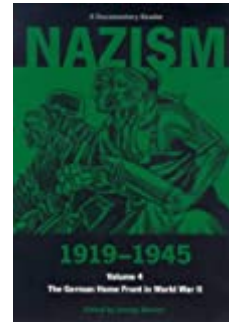


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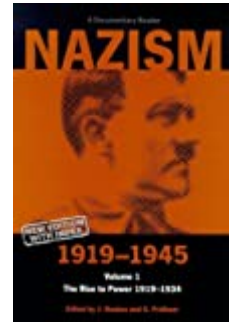
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



J. Noakes, ed. *Nazism 1919-1945: The German Home Front in World War II: A Documentary Reader.* Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998. 450 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-85989-311-4.



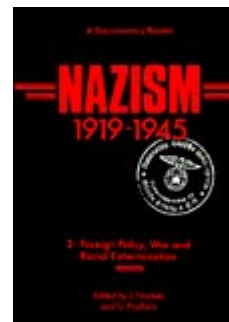
J. Noakes, G. Pridham, ed. *Nazism 1919-1945: The Rise to Power: A Documentary Reader.* Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998. 220 pp. \$15.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-85989-598-9.



J. Noakes, G. Pridham, ed. *Nazism 1919-1945: State, Economy and Society 1933-39: A Documentary Reader.* Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1995. 412 pp. \$30.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-85989-461-6.



Jeremy Noakes, Geoffrey Pridham. *Nazism 1919-1945: The Rise to Power 1919-1934: A Documentary Reader.* Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1998. 4 v. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-85989-474-6.



Reviewed by Milton Goldin (National Coalition of Independent Scholars (NCIS))

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A major problem in understanding World War II is dealing with its ironies. Germans mastered most of the military lessons of World War I, but lost; Anglo-Americans and Russians learned little or nothing from the earlier conflict, but won. Germans hailed Adolf Hitler as the greatest German in history; but had Otto von Bismarck rather than Hitler ruled the Third Reich, there would probably not have been a Holocaust and a German Century might have begun after the French collapse, in 1940. Instead, National Socialism's "Thousand-Year Reich" ended twelve years, four months, and eight days after it began, the worst genocide in history occurred between 1941 and 1945, Hitler committed suicide in his bunker, and terrified Germans hid in ruins on V-E Day.

Describing the Third Reich's near miss ending Western Civilization has understandably interested tens of thousands of writers during the past fifty years. Unfortunately, many scholarly as well as popular histories have been long repeating conventional wisdom and short reviewing evidence. Yet, unless we know the precise how, why, when, and in what ways Germans interpreted and reacted to National Socialism and its ironies, and the precise how, why, when, and in what ways Hitler interpreted and reacted to domestic and foreign developments (including ironies), the Nazi experience becomes difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend.

Noakes and Pridham analyze National Socialism between 1919 and 1945 in a particularly useful way. First, they judiciously chose documents to buttress concise commentaries and, like conscientious attorneys (no irony intended), prove what they advocate. And second, they see the history of the Third Reich as a whole, an increasingly infrequent phenomenon as writers deal (sometimes at great length) with previously unexplored details.

Thus the editors view the Holocaust not as a separate Nazi total war against Jews during total wars against Anglo-Americans and Russians but as a continuation of the Jew-hatred that was integral to Hitler's *Weltanschauung* from his first anti-Semitic writing in September 1919 (Vol. 1, pp. 12-14) to his "Political Testament," written in the bunker on April 1945 (Vol. 4, pp. 668-670). From beginning to end, Hitler was convinced that the

war was about Jews, a belief not shared by Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Joseph Stalin, or any other wartime leader.

Noakes and Pridham's preparation for this series cannot have been easy. Major decisions had to be made about which documents to put in and which to leave out. Not only are there countless published documents available from which to choose and/or documents cataloged in American, British, and German archives but countless uncataloged documents in Washington's National Archives. No one will even venture a guess how many unknown but possibly critical documents exist in Moscow's archives.

The editors had to curtail numbers of documents and discussions of some topics or the series would have been of infinite length. Whether or not these omissions are critical will depend on an individual's interests; for example, a reader searching for a detailed analysis of the New Order in theory and practice will not find it here. What they will find is a highly-useful introduction to the ways in which National Socialists approached this desideratum.

Volume One takes us from the founding of the Nazi Party in 1919 to the *machtergreifung*, in January 1933. Some documents will be immediately familiar to readers of Third Reich histories. These include the Party's 1921 "Unalterable Program" (pp. 111-16), which was, in fact, altered. Another such document is Hitler's remarks to construction workers at his Berchtesgaden estate in May 1937 (Vol. 2, pp. 264-5):

I am not there to subsidize incompetent business leaders for the sake of the State. I wouldn't dream of it. I place orders. Who completes them I regard as irrelevant. If you tell me that a thousand will go bust if I don't subsidize them, they'll go bust. That's fine by me.

On the other hand, what was not fine by him was super-aggressive National Socialists mucking about in the economy. When Nazi radicals went too far attempting to eliminate free enterprise at the beginning of the Third Reich, Hitler and the SS had no compunctions about murdering old comrades to calm down conser-

vatives. Eventually, the super-radical SS, whose membership included few highly competent business leaders, would become a “State Within A State.” To this, Hitler had no objections.

Other documents in Volume One may be less familiar but of particular help in grasping how Hitler raised money for a relatively insignificant Bavarian Party during the 1920s, and how he curried favor with national conservative media—both essential activities if he intended to bring himself and National Socialism to the attention of a mass public.

With respect to the latter objective, during the autumn of 1929 Alfred Hugenberg, a press and film mogul, called on Germans to reject the Young Plan and that blueprint’s implication that war guilt articles in the Versailles Treaty and German reparations were justified. When he invited “all willing to cooperate” (pp. 64-65) to join him in demanding an end to German reparation payments, Hugenberg, a far better mogul than politician, brought National Socialism into the limelight at exactly the wrong time for mankind.

In connection with Party finances, it would have been useful for the editors to have included selections from such works as Otto Wagener’s memoirs.[1] From Wagener, a Hitler confidant and head of the Economic Policy Section of the Party during its early days, we learn that Hitler was extraordinarily adept at finding opportunities to argue his message, although (another irony) it would be wrong to see him as an opportunist. Large numbers of people wanted to hear him speak, and the Party (under Hitler’s tight control) charged admission fees to rallies at which he appeared. It was the only political party in Germany to levy such charges. Big Business, it develops, had little use during the 1920s for that “nobody” from Vienna.

Volume Two offers views of National Socialism’s workings after the *machtergreifung* and prior to World War II. Its documents should put to rest any lingering beliefs that Germans supported Hitler during the 1930s mainly because they lived in constant terror of the Gestapo and the SS. It should also put to rest any lingering beliefs that Hitler knew what he was doing in the economy. Through mid-1945, no one abroad or in Germany, including Hitler, was clear what a National Socialist economy should look like. The result was endless confusion and ceaseless bickering between rival groups.

Meanwhile, strict wage and price controls and constant pump priming jump-started an economy devastated by the Depression. The overall pre-war economic pro-

gram is described in Chapter Thirteen of this volume; succeeding chapters cover the policies of Hjalmar Horace Greeley Schacht, the Four Year Plan, Business, and Agriculture, and include extensive statistical charts.

Clearly, the major problem that Nazi economists could never solve was how to create an autarchic state—that is, economic self-sufficiency for Germany. This was an impossibility given that the country, within its existing boundaries, did not have the raw materials to make such a policy feasible. Worse, Hitler, a Social Darwinist, regarded economic life as the perfect arena in which to prove that the law of survival of the fittest could govern a modern state and that the state must only minimally interfere with the economy.

But if business had to carefully gear its activities to the needs of the state, if raw materials could be found only outside Germany’s borders and had to be imported under the regime’s strict supervision, and if both business and the state had to operate within the dictates of the *Fuehrerprinzip*, how could an autarchic state be created? In practice, the goal was impossible, and Germany embarked on massive campaigns to defraud its trading partners, spoliating Jews, and finally seize the raw materials it required, in Eastern Europe.

These last processes are described in this second and succeeding volumes. Unfortunately, what we do learn is about a critical issue in the Nazi economy that has recently received much attention in the media, the role of gold. The regime declared that gold had no role.[2] But Schacht, who served Hitler as president of the Reichsbank before he became Economics Minister, knew full well that only gold could sustain the economy on a long-term basis.

In December 1933, Germany had monetary gold stocks of only \$109 million. In comparison, Belgium had \$380 million, the United Kingdom had \$933 million, and France had \$3015 million.[3] By the late 1930s, no country in the world, with the exception of the Soviet Union, looked forward to doing business with the Third Reich, unless Berlin paid in gold. (Moscow accepted German credits. The Soviets paid in gold for what they received, as well as with food and raw materials.)

Schacht’s greatest services to the Nazi cause immediately after he became Economics Minister were not only to maintain Germany’s foreign trade through the “New Plan,” a tragicomic barter system, but to obtain gold on Germany’s behalf. Without gold, and assets stolen from Jews, the Third Reich would not have been able to main-

tain financial cohesion during the 1930s. And without already having begun spoliations at levels never before seen in Europe, Nazi Germany would have been hard-pressed to launch World War II.

The final one hundred sixty-nine pages of Volume Three are devoted to the Holocaust and follow accounts of Nazi foreign policies, military operations, and analyses of German occupation policies, particularly in Poland. This way to present the Holocaust—that is, distinguish it from pre-war persecutions of Jews (described in Volume e, pp. 521-67)—makes its horror unique and yet addresses that uniqueness in the context of overall and unspeakable Nazi racial policies. It also strengthens the belief that the longer a very large number of Germans of all classes derived benefits from genocide—that is, such things as businesses, homes, furniture, clothing, and proceeds from the use of Jewish slave labor—the less were they inclined to see much wrong with genocide. They similarly became unable to see anything especially wrong with using Slavs as beasts of burden.

This brings us to the fourth and final volume, and a subject about which a great deal more published research would be helpful: Germany's wartime home front. Fifty years after the conflict we still know relatively little about the effects of Anglo-American bombing on civilian morale, about the degree to which Joseph Goebbels's propaganda actually propped up the average German's will to fight, and about when Germans realized that the war was lost, no matter what the regime told them.

What may surprise readers is not the hopeless confusion that characterized the National Socialist state at its end (as at its beginning) but findings contrary to cherished conventional wisdom. Despite the regime's constant reiterations that women should stay at home, their employment markedly increased during the war and they literally bore the brunt of the war on the home front. It crossed Hitler's mind that given the large percentage of German men serving abroad in the armed forces and huge casualties, "we shall win the war militarily but lose it in national terms" (pp. 375-79), meaning that a post-war population decline could be disastrous.

Meanwhile, what to do about the increasing influx of young male prisoners of war and foreign workers, many of whom lived and worked in close proximity to Germans? Himmler had the answer, as early as January 1940 (p. 385):

Any social intercourse (e.g. at parties, dances) and, in

particular, sexual intercourse is to be regarded as a serious offence against healthy popular feelings.

Among the last documents in this volume is an account by Hans Fritzsche, press division head at the Propaganda Ministry, of a conversation with Goebbels, who, like Hitler, would pin blame for the collapse of the Third Reich on Germans:

[Goebbels] suddenly announced: the German people had failed. In the east they were fleeing, in the west they were preventing the soldiers from fighting and receiving the enemy with white flags.

His pale face became red with anger, his veins and his eyes bulged as he shouted that the German people deserved the fate that awaited them. And then, suddenly, calming down, he remarked cynically that the German people had after all chosen this fate themselves. In the referendum on Germany's quitting the League of Nations they chose in a free vote to reject a policy of subordination and in favour of a bold gamble. Well, the gamble hadn't come off. (p. 667)

No, the gamble hadn't paid off. But main losers were non-Aryans, not Aryans. When the fighting stopped, there were four million dead Germans and eight times as many dead *Untermenschen*—six million Jews and perhaps twenty-seven million Russians. That may have been the greatest irony of all.

Notes

[1]. Edited by Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., and translated into English by Ruth Hein as *Hitler: Memoirs of a Confidant*. (New Haven and London, Yale, 1985).

[2]. As late as July 1940, Germany's wartime Economics Minister and Reichsbank President, Walther Funk, would declare, "Währungsmaessig hat das Gold fuer uns keinen Wert. Wir benoetigen es nicht als Deckungswer fuer unsere durch Preis, Menge und Lohn manipulierte Waehrung, sondern nur zur Bezahlung der Spitzen." See Steinberg, Jonathan, *et als*, *The Deutsche Bank and Its Gold Transactions during The Second World War*. Online posting. Deutsche Bank. 7 September 1998, p. 8.

[3]. *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

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