

# CURRENT BOOKS

## FELLOWS' CHOICE

*Recent titles selected and reviewed by Fellows of the Wilson Center*

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### **WHO VOTED FOR HITLER?**

by Richard F. Hamilton  
Princeton, 1982  
664 pp. \$50 cloth,  
\$16.50 paper

This long, intricate, fascinating book is a frontal assault on 50 years of received wisdom. Sociologists, political scientists, and historians have for years approvingly quoted one another's claims that National Socialism was a revolt of depression-enraged Archie Bunkers. Hamilton, a professor of sociology at McGill University, shows that these claims are based on flimsy evidence at best, and

often on no evidence at all. He offers instead an analysis of voting and census data in large German cities, and concludes that the lower middle classes were if anything less Nazi than the upper middle class, or the middle class as a whole.

The failure of German scholars to do opinion research during the years before Hitler came to power in 1933 unfortunately makes it impossible to establish precisely who voted for Hitler and why; the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, Hamilton quips, was too occupied with Hegel's World Spirit to stoop to anything so empirical as polling. But Hamilton's analysis nevertheless leaves supporters of the "Archie Bunker" thesis in serious embarrassment. Nor does he hesitate to rub it in, describing his targets as victims of post-Marxist academic group-think, small minds who, in words of de Tocqueville that Hamilton quotes, have summoned up "a few mighty reasons to extricate them from the most difficult part of their work" and to "indulge the indolence or incapacity of their minds while . . . confer[ring] upon them the honors of deep thinking."

Hamilton certainly does not shrink from the difficult task of constructing an alternative explanation for the Nazi vote. He starts with the heretical premise that class structure and economic pressures do not directly determine political behavior. The depression did not much encourage equivalents of Nazism in Scandinavia, Britain, or the United States, although all shared deep economic distress and had large lower middle classes.

In Germany, Hamilton points out, religion was dramatically more important than class. Catholics, on the whole, did not vote for Hitler; Protestants, by the end, mostly did. He also suggests that the non-Nazi bourgeois press, often involuntarily, helped present the Nazis as the only bulwark against the alleged Red threat. Finally, he argues that the most important factor in Nazi success was the party organization, which com-

bined incessant grass-roots agitation and organized violence in a manner other parties, particularly parliamentary parties of local notables and professional politicians, could not match.

Hamilton's explanation is a major improvement over the conventional unwisdom, but perhaps his zeal to debunk materialist interpretations does not go far enough: He still tends to place a disproportionate emphasis on economics. While he recognizes the galvanizing effect the memory of the "classless society" of the World War I trenches had on the Nazi cadres, and theorizes that the German equivalent of Britain's deferential and nationalist "Tory workers" contributed to the urban Nazi vote, he also ascribes Nazi success in the countryside primarily to demagogic promises of debt relief for the peasants. But if, as Hamilton concludes, economic conditions in Catholic and Protestant farm areas were similar, why did so few Catholic peasants vote for Hitler? Obviously something besides economics was at work. Hamilton suggests that Catholic village notables kept the peasants' loyalties, notes the Church's strong disapproval of Nazism before 1933, and leaves it at that.

Understanding the split in the farm vote might have been easier had Hamilton systematically considered the possibility that the Nazis were more or less what they claimed to be: the militant mass party of German nationalism. The party made skillful appeals to the protest votes of innumerable interest groups, but owed much of its support to its ideology—its vociferous promises to abolish with fanatical energy the class, regional, religious, and political divisions of German society, exterminate the Left, and restore the national self-respect lost in 1918. Historically, German Protestantism and nationalism were intertwined, while Catholics and Socialists, although patriots, gave first claim to ideologies other than nationalism. Hence, the tendency of the Protestant small towns and countryside to vote lopsidedly for Hitler.

But whatever the deficiencies of Hamilton's own explanation, this brilliantly destructive book has helped to undermine many of the ancient clichés and open the way for fresh thought about the origins of the "Twelve Year Reich."

—MacGregor Knox

**MEXICO'S  
AGRICULTURAL  
DILEMMA**

by P. Lamartine Yates  
Univ. of Ariz., 1981  
291 pp. \$19.95 cloth,  
\$8.95 paper

Every blessing brings its curses, and one curse of the new abundance of Mexican oil and natural gas is that it has allowed Mexico to postpone crucial decisions on its "farm front." So argues P. Lamartine Yates, a British agronomist and adviser to the Mexican government, in this balanced analysis of Mexico's current agricultural woes—inefficiency, outdated land laws, and official corruption. The govern-

ment's failure to address these and other basic economic problems has already produced dramatic consequences, as Mexico teetered last year on the