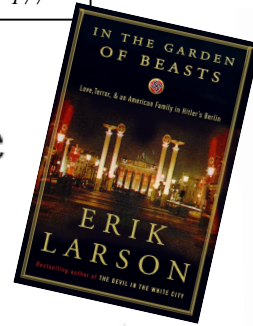


## Getting Out the Vote



On Sunday morning, November 12—cold, with drizzle and fog—the Dodds encountered a city that seemed uncannily quiet, given that this was the day Hitler had designated for the public referendum on his decision to leave the League of Nations and to seek equality of armaments. Everywhere the Dodds went they saw people wearing little badges that indicated not only that they had voted but that they had voted yes. By midday nearly everyone on the streets seemed to be wearing such insignia, suggesting that voters had arisen early in order to get the deed done and thereby avoid the danger almost certain to arise if they were perceived to have failed in their civic duty.

Even the date of the election had been chosen with care. November 12 was the day after the fifteenth anniversary of the signing of the armistice that ended the Great War. Hitler, who flew around Germany campaigning for a positive vote, told one audience, “On an eleventh of November the German people formally lost its honor; fifteen years later came a twelfth of November and then the German people restored its honor to itself.” President Hindenburg too lobbied for a positive vote. “Show tomorrow your firm national unity and your solidarity with the government,” he said in a speech on November 11. “Support with me and the Reich Chancellor the principle of equal rights and of peace with honor.”

The ballot had two main components. One asked Germans to elect delegates to a newly reconstituted Reichstag but offered only Nazi candidates and thus guaranteed that the resulting body would be a cheering section for Hitler’s decisions. The other, the

foreign-policy question, had been composed to ensure maximum support. Every German could find a reason to justify voting yes—if he wanted peace, if he felt the Treaty of Versailles had wronged Germany, if he believed Germany ought to be treated as an equal by other nations, or if he simply wished to express his support for Hitler and his government.

Hitler wanted a resounding endorsement. Throughout Germany, the Nazi Party apparatus took extraordinary measures to get people to vote. One report held that patients confined to hospital beds were transported to polling places on stretchers. Victor Klemperer, the Jewish philologist in Berlin, took note in his diary of the “extravagant propaganda” to win a yes vote. “On every commercial vehicle, post office van, mailman’s bicycle, on every house and shopwindow, on broad banners, which are stretched across the street—quotations from Hitler are everywhere and always ‘Yes’ for peace! It is the most monstrous of hypocrisies.”

Party men and the SA monitored who voted and who did not; laggards got a visit from a squad of Storm Troopers who emphasized the desirability of an immediate trip to the polls. For anyone dense enough to miss the point, there was this item in the Sunday-morning edition of the official Nazi newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*: “In order to bring about clarity it must be repeated again. He who does not attach himself to us today, he who does not vote and vote ‘yes’ today, shows that he is, if not our bloody enemy, at least a product of destruction and that he is no more to be helped.”

Here was the kicker: “It would be better for him and it would be better for us if he no longer existed.”

Some 45.1 million Germans were qualified to vote, and 96.5 percent did so. Of these, 95.1 percent voted in favor of Hitler’s foreign policy. More interesting, however, was the fact that 2.1 million Germans—just shy of 5 percent of the registered electorate—made the dangerous decision to vote no.

Hitler issued a proclamation afterward thanking the German people for the “historically unique acknowledgment they have made in favor of real love of peace, at the same time also their claim to our honor and to our eternal equal rights.”

The outcome was clear to Dodd well before the votes were counted. He wrote to Roosevelt, "The election here is a farce."

Nothing indicated this more clearly than the vote within the camp at Dachau: 2,154 of 2,242 prisoners—96 percent—voted in favor of Hitler's government. On the fate of the 88 souls who either failed to vote or voted no, history is silent.

ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 13, President Roosevelt took a few moments to compose a letter to Dodd. He complimented him on his letters thus far and, in an apparent allusion to Dodd's concerns after his interview with Hitler, told Dodd, "I am glad you have been frank with certain people. I think that is a good thing."

He mused on an observation by columnist Walter Lippmann that a mere 8 percent of the world's population, meaning Germany and Japan, was able "because of imperialistic attitude" to prevent peace and disarmament for the rest of the world.

"I sometimes feel," the president wrote, "that the world problems are getting worse instead of better. In our own country, however, in spite of sniping, 'chiseling' and growling by the extreme right and by the extreme left, we are actually putting people back to work and raising values."

He closed with a jovial "Keep up the good work!"

2) What evidence is there that Germans were intimidated into voting 'yes' (and agreeing to break with the terms of the Treaty of Versailles)?

3) Why do you think Hitler cared so much about winning and winning *big*, in the referendum?

4) How did U.S. officials view the election?

a) on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = not important, 5 = very important) how important does it *seem* that the election was to them?

b) What indicates their view of the election's importance?

c) How important *should* it have been, and explain why?

1) What 2 main issues did the election deal with?