

The People Vs. Fritz Bauer (2015)

(Der Staat gegen Fritz Bauer)

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 45 min.

Our content ratings: Violence 1; Language 2; Sex/Nudity 3.

Our star rating (1-5); 5

*Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes;
cease to do evil...*

Isaiah 1:16

*The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord,
and the neediest people shall exult in the Holy One of
Israel.*

*For the tyrant shall be no more, and the scoffer shall cease
to be;*

*all those alert to do evil shall be cut off—
those who cause a person to lose a lawsuit,
who set a trap for the arbiter in the gate,
and without grounds deny justice to the one in the right...*

Isaiah 29:19-21

If ever there was a people needing to “wash” themselves, it was the German people following the defeat of Adolf Hitler and his fellow butcherers in 1945. There were purges of Nazis when the Allies took over (the worst were tried at the famous

[Nuremburg](#) Trials) but by the Fifties, when democracy returned to the people of West Germany, many of those Nazis had been allowed to return to government and business posts, no questions asked. A new generation was arising that wanted to lay aside the past without dealing with their nation's guilt. Those who resisted Hitler, such as the martyred [Sophie Scholl](#) or Dietrich [Bonhoeffer](#), were still regarded as war-time traitors. Even the popular premier Konrad Adenauer included an unrepentant Nazi in his cabinet.

We have been blessed with two excellent German films this year that examine this troubled period. In [Labyrinth of Lies](#) a fictitious young prosecuting attorney named Johann Radmann decides to investigate the Nazi past, zeroing in on Dr. Josef Mengele. His immediate superior is opposed to his crusade, but Radmann has the backing of Attorney General Fritz Bauer, so he continues his investigation. In director/co-writer Lars Kraume just-released *The People Vs. Fritz Bauer* the Attorney General is the main character, and still another made-up character is one of the prosecutors under him, Karl Angermann (Ronald Zehrfeld), an earnest young man who becomes close to him.

Bauer, a Jew who had been briefly imprisoned by the Nazis, had fled the country when Hitler came to power. He had worked in Denmark, but fled just ahead of the invading Nazis to Sweden, returning after the war to again enter government service. The Attorney General has solid information that the architect of the Final Solution, Adolf Eichmann is hiding out in South America. However, the government shows no interest in pursuing the mass murderer. Both Interpol and German intelligence lamely claim they were "not responsible for political crimes." It seems that a trial of such a high-ranking criminal in Germany would drag in other influential Nazis hiding in plain sight (besides the one in Adenauer's cabinet, another holds a high post at Mercedes-Benz!). The Allies also, who strongly support Adenauer, do not want to allow anything that might

embarrass his government, so they offer no encouragement or support for tracking down the murderers.

Taking Angermann into his confidence, the frustrated Bauer decides to inform the Israelis about Eichmann's whereabouts. "If we really want to do something for this country, we'll have to betray it in this case." Indeed, sharing such information would be considered treason. Nevertheless, Bauer flies to Israel and meets with agents of Mossad. Believing that the fugitive is elsewhere, they tell him that he must obtain one other witness before they devote their limited resources to pursue this lead. When he at last succeeds, and meets again with Mossad, he asks that when they seize Eichmann that they agree to extradite him to Germany so he can be put on trial there.

Bauer's single-minded pursuit of justice becomes complicated when we learn that he stands in peril not only of being arrested and tried as a traitor, but also outed as a criminal pervert. There are Danish police reports that he had visited male prostitutes while living there. During the Nazi regime Paragraph 175 had been enacted into law, making homosexual behavior a major crime—and it was still on the books.

The filmmakers insert a subplot into the film in which the married Angermann gives in to his own homosexual tendencies, visiting at a gay nightclub a female impersonator. This makes him vulnerable to blackmail by Bauer's enemies when they confront the young man with incriminating photos taken by a spy camera in the club's dressing room. Will he betray his boss in the campaign to derail Bauer's campaign. or risk all for what he believes is the right and just cause?

Despite the fictional additions, this is a first-rate glimpse into post-World War II Germany and the events leading up to the now famous Auschwitz trials held during 1963 in Frankfurt. It would be a good film to see before *Labyrinth of Lies*, both films being profiles in courage.

This review with a set of questions will be in the Nov. 2016 issue of VP.