

Industrialists: the triumph of hitler plan of the investigation



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The role of big businesses in Hitler's 1933 political victory has been a point of contention among historians. Thus, this investigation seeks to shed light on history's unresolved debate: How significant was the support of big businesses in Hitler's 1933 political triumph?

In assessing the significance of big businesses support, I would provide an overview of events with particular focus on the impact and responses of big businesses. Specific details of support rendered by big businesses would also be included and evaluated to determine the extent it contributed to Hitler's 1933 electoral success. Events after 1933 that led to Hitler's consolidation of power are not assessed in this investigation.

Two of the sources used in this investigation, German Big Business and The Rise of Hitler by Henry Ashby Turner Jr. and I Paid Hitler by Fritz Thyssen, Emery Reves would be evaluated for their origins, purposes, values and limitations.

Summary of Evidence

November 1918 marked the end of the German Empire. With the fall of the monarchy following the revolution, a Provisional Government was tasked to carry out elections to form a parliamentary democracy.

During the 1920s, the major preoccupation of German business leaders was to escape the economic strangulation of the Versailles Treaty. However, the succession of unstable cabinets which struggled unsuccessfully to cope with the Great Depression led to business leaders deepening disillusionment with the Provisional Government. As a result, big businessmen became more susceptible to the one politician who was the most vocal opponent of the

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treaty: Adolf Hitler. On October 1923, Thyssen, a leading industrialist, decided to give 100, 000 gold marks to be distributed between the Nazi party and the Free Corps Oberland, another right-wing paramilitary group.

From 1926 to 1928, Hitler's campaign to win the support among the industrialists was not very successful. During these years, the National Socialist party was, for the most part, financed by membership dues, collection at speeches, and the sales of party newspapers. Certain wealthy individuals like Emil Kirdorf, a reactionary coal tycoon did contribute heavily during the summer of 1927, when the Nazi party was almost bankrupt and Kirdorf's money helped pay off some of the outstanding debts and made the party solvent again.

On July 9, 1929, a national committee was formed to organize a campaign for a plebiscite rejecting the Young Plan and Hugenberg successfully persuaded Hitler to join in alliance. Like Thyssen, big businessmen became convinced that the fight against the Young Plan was unavoidable if a complete collapse of Germany was to be prevented. They decided to provide monetary support to the anti-young campaign and a considerable portion went directly to National Socialists.

Beginning in the summer of 1931, Hitler began a purported campaign to cultivate business support. Of great significance would be Hitler's speech to the Industry Club on 27 January 1932. Recognizing that the audience feared communism more than anything else, Hitler made the danger of Marxism the central theme of his speech. On that day, the Fuhrer achieved a breakthrough with the captains of western German industry. The speech was

certainly a great victory for Hitler because many of the industrialists no longer saw him as a radical but as a reasonable politician with whom they could work and who might be needed to save them from the communists. As Fritz Thyssen later wrote “ As a result of the address, which created a deep impression, a number of larger contributions from heavy-industry sources flowed into the treasury of the Nazi Party.”

Down to the summer of 1932, advancing from one election triumph to another, more money than ever before flowed from the business community to various Nazis. The spring and summer of 1932 were to register the high-water mark for the flow of big business money to National Socialism. Otto Wolff, whose holdings extended to copper mining, shipping, machine manufacturing, and steel production who contributed either 160, 800 or 180, 000 marks to the NSDAP in 1932. Also, in the spring of 1932, 100, 000 marks of coal industry money went to the Nazis.

As for the March 1933 German election, big businessmen played an even further role in supporting Hitler. A total of three million Reichmarks was subscribed by prominent firms and businessmen, suitably “ washed” through an account at the Delbruck Schickler Bank, and then passed into the hands of Rudolf Hess for use by Hitler and the NSDAP.

Evaluation Of Sources

German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler, written by Henry Ashby Turner Jr, published in 1985 provides a detailed, comprehensive, succinct thesis: Nazism was not a manifestation of “ monopoly capitalism”. The source’s purpose is to analyze the extent of business support for Hitler and his Nazi

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party and personally for Turner, to delude the popular belief that German big businesses financed and promoted the attainment of power by Adolf Hitler. In rebuking this belief, Turner uses a myriad of archival and primary sources—corporate archives, pretrial interrogations of leading businessmen conducted by American prosecuting staffs, which gives credence to his argument. In comparison, previous studies of this subject were based on scanty, ambiguous, dubious evidences. The book's value therefore lies in its fresh perspective it offers with the use of previously unused primary evidence. However, the book is limited as Turner is advancing a historiographical cause, seeking to expose the excesses of structuralism that he feels are increasingly dominating scholarship in the area of modern German history. Consequently, he might be inclined to include only evidence that would support his swimming against the historiographical stream.

I paid Hitler, written in 1941 is Fritz Thyssen's memoirs, dictated by Thyssen himself and written by Emery Reves. Fritz Thyssen was a powerful German industrialist, an ardent German nationalist who was an early supporter of the Hitler movement. The source's purpose is to shed proofs of the close collaboration between leading industrialists and Nazism. The memoir details how Fritz Thyssen granted Goldmarks to Hitler and includes primary sources like his letter to Hitler, mailed from Luzern, Switzerland. As such, coming from Thyssen himself, it is valuable in highlighting the intimate reflections of actions and attitudes to Hitler of a leading industrialist. However, the book is limited because Thyssen having regretted supporting Hitler wrote this book possibly as an expression of his deep regret and a confession of his poor judgment. As such, he provides excessive details on why he became

disenfranchised and is an emotional outpouring instead of providing details about the amount of help he rendered to the Nazis. Furthermore, placing great emphasis on his individual contributions and not that of other big businesses, the book is not representative of the support of big businessmen in general and is thus limited in the context of this research.

Analysis

During the 1920s, the sums of money that industrialists like Thyssen gave was of enormous value for propagandizing the idea of moral rearmament especially since it was spent in the worst time of the inflation period when Germans were disillusioned with the Provisional Government. Since continuous propaganda will make even the greatest untruth seem believable to some people, these large donations provided Hitler with the needed tools to win the people over and turn them into a major political force.

However, businessmen in general were still opposed to the Nazis except for “some praiseworthy exceptions”. The pro-Nazi parties that did fund Hitler are conspicuous precisely because they were exceptions. Thus, they were not representative of big businesses in general. Furthermore, even though Hitler in his conversation with journalist Richard Brieting boasted that the Nazi party already enjoyed the backing of Krupp, Schroder and others from big industry, only a few pages later, he told of his plan to win over big businesses. This reveals that he has not done so and views it as a task to be accomplished.

In light of the above, it is clear that big businesses in general did not play a key role in Hitler’s 1930 Reichstag election victory.

While the 1932 Industry Club Speech was seen as a victory for Hitler, attempts to draw significance from the amount or the motivation of the applause elicited by Hitler's words have a limited value for determining the impact of his speech on the important capitalists in attendance. This is because, contrary to an impression widespread both at the time and since, the membership of the Industry Club of Dusseldorf did not consist solely of the industrial elite of Germany but less eminent subordinates as well as executives of medium-sized enterprises, sales representatives. Considering the size and diverse composition of the audience that listened to Hitler's speech, the response of its various components assumes greater importance than the frequency, volume, or timing of the applause. On that score, two well-informed eyewitnesses independently reported that the applause came mainly from the young and the obscure, whereas the important senior industrial leaders remained reserved. Thus, while Thyssen's claim in *I Paid Hitler* of a number of large flows of money from industrialists after the industry club speech cannot be disproved, it is likely that the support did not come from big businesses.

After the Nazis successive election triumphs down to the summer of 1932, big businesses did give money to Hitler. However, most of the big business money that found its way to the Nazis was not given simply, or primarily, with the aim of bringing them to power. They were seeking to buy political insurance against the eventuality of a Nazi capture of the government. The political money was spread across the political spectrum, with the funds reaching the Nazi paltry when compared to those that went to its opponents and rivals. Thus, although big businesses did contribute to Nazi party,

relative to their other support, they went overwhelmingly against the Nazis. In essence, many big businesses were supporting other parties against the Nazi onslaught while covering themselves against the eventuality of a National Socialist victory.

Starting with the campaign for the Reichstag election of March 1933, Hitler had no difficulty in extracting large sums from big business. These contributions unquestionably aided Hitler significantly. However, he had already achieved electoral success without the support of most big businessmen, indeed in spite of its massive assistance to his opponents and rivals. Big businesses merely hastened that process by providing him with the funds necessary to carry on his campaigns which convinced Papen and Schleicher of the political support he commanded leading them to offer him the chancellorship.

Furthermore, the Nazi party was an unprecedented highly organized fund-raising association where money flowed upward within the party from the grass roots, through the regional organizations, and to the national leadership in Munich. Compared to the sustained intake of money raised by membership dues and other contributions of the Nazi rank and file, the funds from the side of big business assume at best a marginal significance.

It must also be noted that sources on which the analysis is based on has its values and limitations, two of which have been evaluated in section C.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the early links between big businesses and Hitler's party,

National Socialist were sporadic. The early growth of the NSDAP took place
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without any significant aid from the circles of large scale enterprise. Only after the Nazi electoral breakthrough of 1930 achieved without aid of big business, did the party garner significant support from big businesses. Most contributions were a form of political “hedging” rather than a sign of explicit form of support for Nazi policies. Furthermore, the few sizeable contributions that appear to have reached the Nazis from big business shrink in significance when compared to the amounts that went to opponents of Nazism. In light of Nazism sweeping through society like an elemental force without big businesses support, industrialists did not play a significant role in Hitler’s rise to power. As a knowledgeable and perceptive observer, Joseph Schumpeter, commented, “The attitudes of capitalist groups toward the policy of their nations are predominantly adaptive rather than causative, today more than ever”. Rather than shaping events, even the mightiest businessmen merely responded to events shaped by others.

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