

# Hitler and the German Coal Industrialists: Passing the Keys to A Kingdom

## Karsten Heinz Schönbach\*

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### ABSTRACT

Ever since the publication of Henry Turner's *German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler*, most historians in both Germany and the United States have dismissed the idea that support from German major industry played a key role in bringing Hitler to power. This consensus is wrong, as I have shown in a series of works that began with my doctoral dissertation at the Free University of Berlin and now extends to more than ten different works, including two books. These works rely extensively on archival resources that were either inaccessible or only selectively open to earlier researchers.

This paper analyzes in detail one of the most crucial episodes in Hitler's rise to power – one that previous historians, particularly Turner, have profoundly misjudged thanks in part at least to the shortcomings in the documentary sources available to them. This is the history of the political relations between Hitler, the NSDAP leadership, and the German "coal industrialists" in the period from 1926 to 1933 and the key role these firms played in supporting and financing the eventual Nazi triumph.

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\* Dr. Karsten Heinz Schönbach completed his doctorate in 2012 at the Free University of Berlin under Professor Dr Wolfgang Wippermann with the thesis "Die deutschen Konzerne und der Nationalsozialismus 1926 – 1941."

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## I. Introduction

*"So the fear and concern for the future of the fatherland culminates in the anxious question: Will Germany once again have a leader who will lead it back up from its fragmentation and impoverishment?"<sup>1</sup>*

These words were written by the German industrial magnate Emil Kirdorf in the late 1920s - in other words, during the rise of the National Socialist German Worker's Party (the "Nazi" Party) and Hitler's dictatorship in Germany. The sentiment is far from alone among his colleagues in German major industry. Earlier in 1923, for example, the major German industrialist Hugo Stinnes had declared:

*"Therefore [...] a dictator must be found, endowed with the power to do whatever is necessary. Such a man must speak the language of the people and be bourgeois himself."<sup>2</sup>*

The list of such examples, in which the majority of Germany's leading industrialists spoke out against democracy and thus in favor of dictatorial conditions in Germany in the early 1930s at the latest, could be multiplied indefinitely.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, ever since the publication of Henry Turner's *German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler*, most historians in both Germany and the United States have dismissed the idea that support from German major industry played a key role in bringing Hitler to power.<sup>4</sup> But the consensus is wrong, as I have shown in a series of works that began with my doctoral dissertation at the Free University of Berlin and now extends to more than ten different works, including two books. These works rely extensively on archival resources that were either inaccessible or only selectively open to earlier researchers.<sup>5</sup>

This very comprehensive research cannot, of course, be exhaustively presented in a single essay. Instead, this essay deals in detail with one of the most crucial episodes in Hitler's rise to power – one that previous historians, particularly Turner, have profoundly misjudged thanks, in part at least, to

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<sup>1</sup> Kirdorf, Emil, *Erinnerungen 1847 - 1930*, Düsseldorf 1930, p. 180 - Note: This book by Kirdorf was expressly not intended for the public. The copy I have access to is in the "Kirdorf Estate", in the GBAG files, in Germany in the Bochum Mining Archives, fonds 55, no. 2938.

<sup>2</sup> Hallgarten, George, Hitler, *Reichswehr und Industrie - Zur Zeitgeschichte der Jahre 1918-1933*, Frankfurt/Main 1955, p.65.

<sup>3</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Faschismus und Kapitalismus - Bündnis zur Zerschlagung von Demokratie und Arbeiterbewegung*, Berlin 2020, pp. 47 - 73.

<sup>4</sup> Turner, Henry A., *German Big Business and Hitler*, New York, 1985 was the most comprehensive statement. This essay references this and other works by Turner in German translation unless otherwise specified.

<sup>5</sup> The doctoral thesis was submitted in 2012 and published at the Free University of Berlin after the defense as part of a library publication: Schönbach, Karsten, *Die deutschen Konzerne und der Nationalsozialismus 1926 - 1941*, Dissertation der Freien Universität, Berlin 2012 (doctoral thesis - university publication). The later book publication (2016) is: Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne und der Nationalsozialismus 1926 - 1943*, Berlin 2016.

shortcomings in the documentary sources available to them. This is the history of the political relations between Hitler and the NSDAP leadership and the German "coal industrialists" in the period from 1926 to 1933 – based on profound analysis of first-class source materials from several German economic archives.<sup>6</sup> Or in plain English, the part that the German coal industry played in the rise of Hitler at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s.

The essay begins by clarifying who the German coal industrialists actually were and the place they occupied in large-scale German industry. *Secondly*, the political and economic situation in Germany at the time must be briefly outlined in order to show why the coal industrialists supported Hitler and ultimately saw him as the solution to their political problems. *Thirdly*, the process of forming the relationship between Hitler and the leading German coal industrialists must be delineated. *Fourthly*, in relation to the question of the essay, the effect of the political alliance between Hitler and the coal industrialists on Hitler's rise must be shown.

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<sup>6</sup> These archives are all located in Germany and are named and abbreviated as follows:

- 1.) Bergbauarchiv Bochum – BBA; (Bochum Mining Archive)
- 2.) Bundesarchiv Berlin – BA Berlin; (Federal Archive Berlin)
- 3.) Landesarchiv Berlin – LAB; (Berlin State Archive)
- 4.) Rheinisch-Westfälisches Wirtschaftsarchiv – RWWA, Köln; (Rhenish-Westphalian Economic Archive)
- 5.) Konzernarchiv ThyssenKrupp, Duisburg; (ThyssenKrupp Group Archive)
- 6.) Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz – GStA PK, Berlin; (Secret State Archive of Prussian Cultural Heritage)
- 7.) Stadtarchiv Essen – StAE; (City Archive Essen)
- 8.) Westfälisches Wirtschaftsarchiv – WWA, Dortmund; (Westphalian Economic Archive)
- 9.) Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz; (State Main Archive Koblenz)

## II. Who were the German "coal industrialists"?

*"With the contract of March 5, 1873, he [Kirdorf] had joined a circle of personalities who were among the most important men in German business life at the time."*<sup>7</sup>

With these words, the biographer of the major industrialist Emil Kirdorf described the leading German coal industrialists - they were *"among the most important men in German economic life at the time"*. This is a very important point, because historical research in the second half of the 20th century constructed an artificial contrast between "mining" and large-scale industry in the form of the so-called large "conglomerates" of German heavy industry in Germany and promoted the idea that the "coal industrialists" were only industrialists of a smaller format on the fringes of German large-scale industry.<sup>8</sup> The question of who these coal industrialists actually were is therefore crucial in order to be able to correctly assess and classify the significance of their relationships with Hitler and the NSDAP leadership.<sup>9</sup>

The term "coal industrialists" has a political and not a technical connotation. Technically speaking, German heavy industry consisted of large corporations that covered the entire metallurgical production cycle, from mining their own raw materials (coal and iron ore) to the processing of steel, the manufacture of semi-finished products (raw materials), machinery, and weapons.<sup>10</sup> Occasionally, these groups are also referred to as "conglomerates", although this term is in principle a tautology, as the German Stock Corporation Act still defines a group as a combination of several companies.<sup>11</sup> The major German heavy industry groups together accounted for 80% of total German steel production and 36% of total German coal production. Together, these groups had a share capital of 1.65

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<sup>7</sup> Bacmeister, Walter, *Emil Kirdorf - Der Mann, Sein Werk*, 2nd edition, Essen 1937, p. 36.

<sup>8</sup> Turner, Henry Ashby, *Die Großunternehmer und der Aufstieg Hitlers*, Berlin (West) 1985, pp. 230 - 231.

<sup>9</sup> This group of industrialists is referred to in very different ways in Germany. They are often simply referred to as "mining entrepreneurs". However, this term is very imprecise. Germany's economy in the first half of the 20th century was characterized by many forms of mining. Germany was the world leader in potash mining at the time. Copper and iron mining also played major roles. However, we are ultimately talking here about industrialists from the coal mining sector and these should also be precisely distinguished from the rest of the mining companies. The more exact term "coal industrialists" is therefore used here. - See: Born, Karl Erich, *Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte des Deutschen Kaiserreichs (1867/71 - 1914)*, Stuttgart 1985; Stoepel, Karl Theodor, *Die deutsche Kaliindustrie und das Kalisyndikat - Eine volks- und staatswirtschaftliche Studie*, Halle 1904; Radandt, Hans, *Kriegsverbrecher-Konzern Mansfeld*, Berlin 1958; Przigoda, Stefan, *Unternehmerverbände im Ruhrbergbau - Zur Geschichte von Bergbauverein und Zechenverband 1858 - 1933*, Bochum 2002; Turner, Henry Ashby, *Großunternehmer*, pp. 230 - 231.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, the comments by the business journalist Paul Ufermann in his book *Der deutsche Stahltrust* (The German Steel Trust) published in 1927 (p. 46 ff.).

<sup>11</sup> German Stock Corporation Act (AktG), Book I, §18, Sentence 1 - See: Hefermehl, Wolfgang (ed.), *Aktiengesetz - GmbH-Gesetz*, 34th edition, Munich 2002, p. 6 - Quote: *"If a controlling company and one or more dependent companies are combined under the uniform management of the controlling company, they form a group..."*

billion marks.<sup>12</sup> At the time, this was an absolutely unimaginable sum, which today (2024) would be more than 50 times higher in euros or dollars.<sup>13</sup> This industry was mainly concentrated in the so-called "Ruhr area". This is why the leading large corporations in heavy industry were referred to as "Ruhr corporations" or "Ruhr industry".

Almost the entire coal mining industry in the Ruhr area was grouped together in the "Rheinisch-Westfälisches-Kohlensyndikat" (RWKS), meaning that the individual small company that only mined coal no longer existed, even outside of the large corporations.<sup>14</sup> The RWKS was a "syndicate", i.e. a highly organized cartel that itself functioned like a company. It regulated the purchase and sale of coal for all its members, so that the individual companies themselves no longer had any contact with the market.<sup>15</sup> The RWKS was a public limited company and was fully controlled by the leading Ruhr groups.<sup>16</sup> These leading Ruhr groups or rather the major groups in German heavy industry at the time, were primarily: "Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG", "Gelsenkirchener Bergwerks AG" (GBAG), "Mannesmannröhren-Werke AG" (abbr: Mannesmann), "Gutehoffnungshütte" (GHH), "Hoesch-Köln-Neussen AG" (Hoesch or Hoesch Group for short), "Klöckner-Werke AG" (Klöckner for short) and "Rheinische Aktiengesellschaft für Braunkohlenbergbau und Brikettfabrikation" (Rheinbraun for short). The two most important heavy industry groups outside the Ruhr area or outside the Ruhr industry were the "Röchling'sche Eisen- und Stahlwerke GmbH" in Saarland and the companies of the industrial magnate Ernst von Borsig in the Berlin area and in Silesia.<sup>17</sup>

While the RWKS was primarily of a technical and economic nature, the "Verein für die Bergbaulichen Interessen" ("Mining Association" for short) was the central political organization of the coal industrialists. The leading coal industrialists sat on the board of this organization - these were primarily, among others:<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> All the figures given here were calculated on the basis of the information in the annual reports of the companies mentioned for the period between 1926 and 1933 and the information in the „*Handbuch der deutschen Aktiengesellschaften*“ (*Handbook of German Stock Corporations*) for 1933. However, the companies of the industrial magnate Ernst von Borsig were not taken into account, so that the figures given here would ultimately be even higher.

<sup>13</sup> Based on average earnings at the time, taking into account the index development of the cost of living at the time, this would be around EUR 100 billion at the time of this study (2024). - For the data mentioned, see: Kuczynski, Jürgen, *Die Geschichte der Lage der Arbeiter in Deutschland*, Volume I, 5th edition, Berlin 1949, pp. 325 - 331.

<sup>14</sup> Kuczynski, Jürgen, *Studien zur Geschichte des Deutschen Imperialismus*, Volume I ("Monopole und Unternehmerverbände", Berlin 1948, pp. 113 - 114.

<sup>15</sup> Cf.: Koberstein, Günther, *Steinkohle als Welthandelsgut*, Würzburg-Aumühle 1940, pp. 63 - 64; 2) Dietrich, Peter, *Konditionen-Kartelle - Eine wirtschaftsrechtliche Untersuchung über ihre Bedeutung in Theorie und Praxis*, Bühl-Baden 1935, pp. 39 - 67.

<sup>16</sup> The RWKS had a "share capital" of 7.5 million marks, which was divided into 25,000 shares. Of these, shares were held by the following large corporations or mining companies belonging to large corporations: GHH (779), Harpener Bergbau AG (1384), Essener Steinkohle AG (1312), Hoesch AG (1116), Klöckner-Werke AG (878), Krupp AG (491), Mannesmann AG (862), Rheinische Stahlwerke (1218), Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG (4565), IG Farben (170) → together: 12,775 shares (51.1%). It should be noted that most of the small mining companies not listed here that were shareholders in the RWKS also belonged to large corporations. - See: Roll of deeds no. 581/1942, hearing of December 16, 1942, files of the RWKS, BBA, 33, no. 341.

<sup>17</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne*, p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> See the lists of the Board of the Mining Association in the annual reports of the "Verein für die bergbaulichen Interessen" (engl.: Association for Mining Interests) for 1927 - 1930.

- 1) Ernst Brandi, Chairman of the Mining Association, also Head of the Mining Directorate of Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG
- 2) Albert Vögler, Deputy Chairman, Chairman of the Management Board of Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG and Chairman of the Supervisory Board of GBAG
- 3) Alfred Hugenberg, Deputy Chairman, Member of the Supervisory Boards of Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG and GBAG
- 4) Fritz Thyssen, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG
- 5) Fritz Winkhaus, Chairman of the Management Board of Hoesch-Köln-Neussen AG
- 6) Ernst Tengelmann, Chairman of the Management Board of GBAG
- 7) Fritz Springorum, General Director of Hoesch-Köln-Neussen AG

If one takes into account as well that Hermann Kellermann (GHH) and Peter Klöckner (Klöckner AG) also sat on the board of the Bergbauverein, then it can be said without question that the leading Ruhr companies dominated the board. They occupied half of the 36 board seats of the Bergbauverein in the form of supervisory board or executive board chairmen, as well as in the form of supervisory board or executive board members. Kirdorf, who remained honorary chairman after his resignation from the board, is not included in this count.

With Ernst Brandi, Albert Vögler, Fritz Thyssen, Fritz Springorum, Alfred Hugenberg and Emil Kirdorf, six of the 19 leading major industrialists in Germany at the time were represented there - in other words, around a third of the absolute top of German industry, who as industrial association leaders or in the form of supervisory board or management board chairmen represented almost the absolute majority of German major industry in person.<sup>19</sup> Of this group of coal industrialists, Albert Vögler and Fritz Thyssen were probably the most important. Vögler was the Chairman of the Management Board and Thyssen the Chairman of the Supervisory Board of "Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG". This was by far the largest steel group among the German corporations. The Vereinigte Stahlwerke alone accounted for around 40% of all German steel production in Germany and around 30% of all hard coal production.<sup>20</sup>

Up to this point, the question "Who were the German coal industrialists?" can be summarized as follows: They were an economically very influential group of major German industrialists. They formed a very important core group among the leading German heavy industrialists who had a decisive influence on the entire business community in the Ruhr region.<sup>21</sup>

The idea that the "coal industrialists" were only small-scale industrialists on the fringes of major German industry who were in conflict with the Ruhr companies or the major German heavy industry groups is therefore not true. Of course, there were also small mine directors among the German coal

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<sup>19</sup> See: Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Faschismus und Kapitalismus - Bündnis*, p. 50 - 54.

<sup>20</sup> In 1928/29 exactly: 27.2% of hard coal production (a), 39.7% of crude steel production (b) - See: On a) Prepared on the basis of statistical material from the files of Deutsche Bank, BA Berlin, R 8119 F, microfiche P 1564; on b) see: *ibid.*; Geschäftsbericht der Vereinigten Stahlwerke AG für 1928/29, p. 18, BBA, Akten der GBAG, 55, Nr. 482. - On the history of the company, see the most comprehensive work on the subject: Reckendrees, Alfred, *Das Stahltrust-Projekt, Die Gründung der Vereinigten Stahlwerke AG und ihre Unternehmensentwicklung 1926 - 1933/34*, Schriftreihe zur Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte - Band 5, Munich 2000.

<sup>21</sup> See also: Przigoda, Stefan, p. 145.

industrialists, but they were subordinate to the group management and did not act on their own authority. The leading coal industrialists were also the leaders of the Ruhr companies and the large corporations of German heavy industry. The large corporations they led (Vereinigte Stahlwerke, Hoesch, GBAG and Klöckner) even formed the largest part of German heavy industry - regardless of whether one judges this in terms of production capacity or in terms of the share capital of these companies.

The term "coal industrialists" therefore had no technical but a political background. Technically speaking, the large corporations of German heavy industry - as shown - covered the entire metallurgical production cycle, which included everything from the mining of their own raw materials (coal and iron ore) to the production of steel, the manufacture of semi-finished products (raw products), machines and weapons.

The political reason behind this prominent position of the German coal industrialists was a political split in German heavy industry. German heavy industry split into the so-called "iron side" on the one hand and the so-called "coal side" or - to use a more pointed term - the so-called "coal wing" on the other.<sup>22</sup> This political division was also expressed in the industrial associations. As already mentioned, the political platform of the coal industrialists or the coal wing was the Mining Association. It was founded on November 20, 1858 and was probably the oldest German industrialists' association.<sup>23</sup> The political platform of the "iron side" was the "Association of German Iron and Steel Industrialists" (VDESI).<sup>24</sup> The VDESI was founded on October 21, 1874.<sup>25</sup> The coal wing and the iron side were also organized in the overall organization of the Ruhr industry, the "Verein zur Wahrung der gemeinsamen wirtschaftlichen Interessen in Rheinland und Westfalen" ("Langnamverein" for short). In my judgement, the chairmanship of the Langnamverein indicated whether the coal wing or the iron side was the politically more influential group in heavy industry. For the sake of completeness, it should also be added that, depending on the region or sector, there were various political industrial associations in Germany, all of which were organized in the "Reichsverband der deutschen Industrie" (RDI for short) - the superordinate Germany-wide industrial association.

The deeper reason that distinguishing the large industrialists of the coal wing from those of the iron side lay in their fundamentally different political mentality. The coal industrialists were politically much more aggressive than the industrialists on the iron side. Even before the First World War, they

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<sup>22</sup> See: 1) Minutes of the meeting on June 26, 1932 afternoon 4½ o'clock in the Kaiserhof/Essen, files of the Zechenverband; BBA, 14, no. 01; 2) Letter from Jacob Wilhelm Reichert to Ernst Poensgen and Fritz Springorum, December 4, 1930, files of the VDESI/Wirtschaftsgruppe eisenschaffende Industrie, BA Berlin, R 13/I, no. 602, sheet 227; 3.) Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne*, p. 111 - 114; 4.) Turner, Henry Ashby, *Großunternehmer*, p. 230 ff.; 5.) Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Faschismus und Kapitalismus - Bündnis*, p. 126. - Note: Dirk Stegmann also makes such a subdivision in a modified form. - See: Stegmann, Dirk, *Kapitalismus und Faschismus in Deutschland 1929 - 1934, Thesen und Material zur Restaurierung des Primats der Großindustrie zwischen Weltwirtschaftskrise und beginnender Rüstungskonjunktur*; in: *Gesellschaft - Beiträge zur Marxschen Theorie* 6, 1st edition, Frankfurt/Main 1976, pp. 29 - 30.

<sup>23</sup> Przigoda, Stefan, p. 31.

<sup>24</sup> See the correspondence of the managing director of the VDESI, Jacob Wilhelm Reichert: files of the VDESI/Wirtschaftsgruppe eisenschaffende Industrie, BA Berlin, R 13/I, Nr. 602.

<sup>25</sup> Przigoda, Stefan, p. 43.



provided all political forces in Germany that were pursuing a policy of imperialist world conquest with the largest political money fund that existed in the German Empire.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, the coal industrialists identified with the imperialist state of what was then Germany and felt connected to it. This was due to their education. The coal industrialists studied at a state-owned mining academy, which not only provided them with sophisticated technical training, but also trained them as state officials. After their training, the coal industrialists received the title of "Bergassessor" (mining assessor) which felt like a title of nobility to them.<sup>27</sup>

In domestic policy, they favored Bismarck's anti-socialist laws and police state policy. They were therefore extremely hostile to the trade unions and the labor movement. They were characterized by a decidedly authoritarian habitus and socio-political conservatism.<sup>28</sup> Their particularly aggressive political stance was expressed in their political proximity to the "Alldeutscher Verband" (ADV). The ADV was a kind of elite club for the top echelons of politics, business, the military, the press and senior civil servants. Among its 99 founders were 12 major industrialists and bankers, 30 politicians from the industrial-junker spectrum, leading aristocrats, members of the diplomatic corps as well as countless large landowners and influential representatives of the press.<sup>29</sup>

The ADV propagated a racist ideology of the "racial and cultural unity of all German people" and the conquest of large parts of the world by Germany, with members worshipping war as the great "doctor and gardener" who "accompanies humanity on its path to higher development".<sup>30</sup> Anti-Semitism had also been an official part of the program since 1909.<sup>31</sup> At the time, coal industrialist Emil Kirdorf was a member of the main management of the ADV<sup>32</sup> - as a representative of the entire German heavy industry.<sup>33</sup> He also campaigned for the ADV to be financed by heavy industry,<sup>34</sup> whereby the largest sums of money, up to millions, came from the coffers of coal industrialists.<sup>35</sup> Alfred Hugenberg, deputy chairman of the mining association, also worked with the ADV.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the chairman of the ADV, Heinrich Claß, was held in high esteem by the leading coal industrialists.<sup>37</sup> Even the most conservative historians of conservative historiography could not help but attest that the "coal

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<sup>26</sup> Fricke, Dieter, *Der deutsche Imperialismus und die Reichstagswahlen von 1907*; in: *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, Heft 3, Berlin 1961, pp. 560 - 562.

<sup>27</sup> Przigoda, Stefan, pp. 146 - 147.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 145 - 146.

<sup>29</sup> See the lists of the "constituent members" and the first board of directors: Files of the ADV, BA Berlin, R 8048, no. 2, sheets 11 (back) and 16.

<sup>30</sup> Kruck, Alfred, *Geschichte des Alldeutschen Verbandes 1890 - 1939*, Wiesbaden 1954, pp. 10 - 69.

<sup>31</sup> Claß, Heinrich, *Wider dem Strom - Vom Werden und Wachsen der nationalen Opposition im alten Reich*, Leipzig 1932, pp. 130 - 131.

<sup>32</sup> Bonhard, Otto, *Geschichte des Alldeutschen Verbandes*, Leipzig - Berlin 1920, p. 269.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Heinrich Claß to Emil Kirdorf, November 14, 1910, files of the ADV, BA Berlin, R 8048, No. 411.

<sup>34</sup> Letter from Heinrich Claß to Emil Kirdorf, February 02, 1914, *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> See the following documents: Letter from Emil Kirdorf to Heinrich Claß, October 6, 1915, files of the ADV, BA Berlin, R 8048, No. 411; Letter from Emil Kirdorf to Heinrich Claß, February 17, 1914, *ibid.*; Note/Hugenberg, January 20, 1921, files of the Zechenverband, BBA, 14, No. 01.

<sup>36</sup> Cf: Bonhard, Otto, pp. 18, 77 - 78, 242 - 250; Kruck, Alfred, pp. 8 - 11, 16 - 29, 98 - 104, 98 - 104, 172 - 178, 202 - 216.

<sup>37</sup> Cf.: 1) Letter from Karl Klingspor to Heinrich Claß, May 12, 1921, files of the ADV, BA Berlin, R 8048, no. 207; 2) Letter from Hans von und zu Loewenstein to Heinrich Class, undated (according to pencil note 1934), BBA, 16, no. 8023.

barons" were "reactionary" in the truest sense of the word.<sup>38</sup> The continuous intellectual line of the German coal industrialists from the ADV to the later NSDAP ideology - which differed only in nuances - was demonstrated at the funeral of the coal industrialist Ewald Hilgers in August 1934.<sup>39</sup> In his eulogy, Ernst Brandi, the chairman of the mining association, praised the hard "old Prussian discipline", which had ensured "order and continuity of the people", and the "clarity of the monarchist constitution". Brandi explained that, like Ewald Hilger, Adolf Hitler also expressed the same values "in every expression of his life: clear leadership, unconditional discipline, national community through all parts and for all people..."<sup>40</sup>

In contrast, the major industrialists on the iron side of German heavy industry were much more politically reserved, cautious and diplomatic, even if they often did not pursue fundamentally different political goals than the major industrialists on the coal side. They also cooperated with the ADV, but quickly withdrew if political headwinds and public criticism were to be feared. The best example here was the major industrialist Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach, who first enthusiastically sought cooperation with the ADV and immediately withdrew as soon as the political situation changed unfavorably.<sup>41</sup>

Many of the major industrialists on the iron side were closely related to major industrialists in the "newer industries" - i.e. the chemical and electrical industries. These were modern, publicly committed to the Republic, such as the chemical industrialist Carl Duisberg,<sup>42</sup> and flirted with Social Democracy, such as the electrical industrialist Robert Bosch.<sup>43</sup> Through their dealings with the major industrialists of the "newer industries", the major industrialists on the iron side had acquired something of their "suaveness" and "cosmopolitan" aura.

The prime example of such a major industrialist on the iron side was Paul Reusch. Reusch was the general director of the "Gutehoffnungshütte" (GHH), and at the same time chairman of the northwest German group of the VDESI and the "Langnamverein" for many years.<sup>44</sup> He knew the social democrat Karl Kautzky from his student days and was close friends with him and the electrical industrialist Robert Bosch.<sup>45</sup>

To summarize, the German coal industrialists were an economically very influential group of major German industrialists who were politically aggressive and tended to make political pacts with extreme

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<sup>38</sup> See: Turner, Henry Ashby, *Großunternehmer*, p. 229.

<sup>39</sup> Ewald Hilger: Board member of Ewald-Kohle AG, Recklinghausen, and chairman of the mining section of the RDI, died on August 20, 1934. - For his personal details, see: Verein für die Bergbaulichen Interessen (ed.), *Jahrbuch für den Ruhrkohlebezirk*, Essen 1932, p. 42.

<sup>40</sup> Speech by Ernst Brandi at the funeral service on the occasion of the death of Privy Councilor Ewald Hilger, August 25, 1934, Ewald-Kohle AG files, BBA, 4, No. 19.

<sup>41</sup> Claß, Heinrich, pp. 326 - 327.

<sup>42</sup> Duisberg, Carl, Welcome address at the RDI conference in Cologne on June 23, 1925; in: *Veröffentlichungen des RDI*, Heft 28, July 1925, p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> Cf: Heuss, Theodor, Robert Bosch - Leben und Leistung, Munich 1981, 2nd edition, p. 246; Maschke, Erich, *Es entsteht ein Konzern - Paul Reusch und die GHH*, Tübingen 1969, p. 40.

<sup>44</sup> Turner, Henry Ashby, *Faschismus*, p. 120.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Maschke, Erich, pp. 35, 39; Heuss, Theodor, pp. 76, 246.

political groups that did not exactly represent a figurehead for democracy and international understanding. Even the racist views of such organizations, including anti-Semitism, were no obstacle to cooperation.

### III. The political situation of German heavy industry

*"Never has another state proclaimed such an undisguised struggle for power as socialism under the slogan 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. The attempt to implement this slogan had to lead to conflicts with the economy as well as with all the realities of state life, especially at a time when state and socialism were one."*<sup>46</sup>

These words come from a speech given by the industrial magnate Albert Vögler at the RDI conference in 1924. His words refer to the revolution in Germany that had ended the First World War. This was the time "when state and socialism were one" under the "dictatorship of the proletariat".

As already mentioned in the introduction, the political and economic situation in Germany at the time has to be at least briefly outlined in order to answer the question of why the coal industry supported Hitler and ultimately saw him as the solution to their political problems. Two events are central to this: *Firstly*, the revolution in Germany in 1918/1919, which had also immediately ended the First World War, and *secondly*, the economic crisis that followed the World War, which was ultimately primarily an armaments crisis in Germany.<sup>47</sup>

The revolution in Germany was triggered by a sailors' uprising and quickly spread to the population, who were tired of the war and suffering under its conditions. The majority of Germany's working class - and the sailors and soldiers of the imperial armed forces were also just workers in uniform - had socialist ideas about the world already for a long time and therefore sought a socialist revolution.<sup>48</sup> This meant the expropriation of large-scale industry and banks in order to turn them into social property in the hands of the working class. The Stuttgart Workers' and Soldiers' Council, for example, demanded:

*"Banks and industries are to be expropriated in favor of the proletariat."*<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Lecture by the major industrialist Albert Vögler: "Staat und Wirtschaft" (engl.: "State and Economy") at the RDI conference in Berlin in March 1924; in: Veröffentlichungen des RDI, Heft 21, April 1924, pp. 33 - 35.

<sup>47</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne*, pp. 60 - 72.

<sup>48</sup> The identity-forming power of Marxism, which included the socialist revolution as a goal, cannot be denied in the then social democracy influenced working class. - See for example: Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Reformismus und Kapitalismus im Deutschen Kaiserreich*; in: Jahrbuch für Forschungen zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung 2014/II, p. 187; Schönhoven, Klaus, *Gewerkschaften als Massenbewegung im wilhelminischen Kaiserreich von 1890 bis 1918*; in: Borsdorf, Ulrich (ed.), *Geschichte der deutschen Gewerkschaften von den Anfängen bis 1945*, Cologne 1987, p. 191 - 202.

<sup>49</sup> Revolutionary demands of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Stuttgart, November 4, 1918; taken from: IML (ed.), *Dokumente und Materialien zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, Reihe 2 (1914 - 1945), Vol. II, Berlin 1986, Document No. 112.

And such demands were not uncommon.<sup>50</sup> The major German industrialists were aware that the revolution of 1918/1919 was a socialist one. This is clear from the documents of the RWKS and the VDESI.<sup>51</sup> The coal industrialist Otto Krawehl, a member of the management and supervisory boards of several mining companies,<sup>52</sup> made the position of the major German industrialists clear when he openly declared at a meeting of the Rhenish-Westphalian Coal Syndicate (RWKS) in view of the revolution:

*"...and I see such an extraordinarily bleak outlook for us that all that matters to me is to actually try to save the property of their share- and stakeholders in any way."*<sup>53</sup>

The major German industrialists had no intention of leaving their fate to circumstances and took the initiative. At two secret meetings with the key trade union representatives on October 18, 1918 and November 14, 1918, the leading representatives of the German coal industrialists entered into political negotiations for the first time, made many concessions, and developed a plan with the trade union representatives to stifle the revolution. The "who's who" of the leading coal industrialists were represented - including Alfred Hugenberg, Fritz Winkhaus, Emil Kirdorf and Hans von und zu Loewenstein, the managing director of the Mining Association.<sup>54</sup> Ultimately, an alliance with the right-wing Social Democrats and Friedrich Ebert emerged, leading to a secret alliance between Ebert and the Reichswehr under General Wilhelm Groener, followed by a military suppression of the revolution.<sup>55</sup>

As soon as the revolution had been crushed and the immediate danger of upheaval had passed, German major industry went on the political offensive. At the RDI conference in 1924, the major industrialist Albert Vögler openly called for a "non-party state", i.e. a state that was to be above the parties and thus also above parliament, and was therefore a dictatorship.<sup>56</sup> The major industrialist Ernst von Borsig, Chairman of the General Association of German Metalworkers and Chairman of the "Federation of German Employers' Associations", called for the abolition of the right to strike and, in effect,

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<sup>50</sup> See, among other things: Appeal of the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils from the beginning of November; taken from: IML (ed.), *Dokumente und Materialien zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung, Reihe 2 (1914 - 1945)*, Band II, Berlin 1986, document no. 108; Aufruf des Arbeiter- und Soldatenrates von Chemnitz; taken from: Ibid., Dokument Nr. 135; Ruge, Wolfgang, *Novemberrevolution - Die Volkserhebung gegen den deutschen Imperialismus und Militarismus 1918/19*, Frankfurt/Main 1978, pp. 77 - 78.

<sup>51</sup> Cf: Minutes of the meeting of the executive committee of the RWKS, December 21, 1918, files of the RWKS, BBA, 33, No. 81; minutes of the meeting of the main board of the VDESI, 14.11.1918; files of the VDESI/Reichsgruppe eisenschaffende Industrie, BA Berlin, R 13-I, No. 155.

<sup>52</sup> Verein für die bergbaulichen Interessen (ed.), *Jahrbuch für den Oberamtsbezirk Dortmund*, Essen 1923, pp. 18, 194, 325, 414, 420, 531, 660, 681, 727, 736, 745, 749, 774, 798.

<sup>53</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the executive committee of the RWKS, December 21, 1918, files of the RWKS, BBA, 33, No. 81.

<sup>54</sup> Cf: Appendix with the names of those present in the minutes of the negotiations of the business committee of the colliery association of October 18, 1918 with the representatives of the miners' associations, BBA, 14, No. 48; minutes of the meeting of the extended business committee of the colliery association with representatives of the miners' associations, November 14, 1918, *ibid.* - Note: Trade union representatives included: Otto Hue, Hermann Gottfried Sachse, Robert Schmidt, Hermann Vogelsang, Heinrich Imbusch, Friedrich Husemann. (Enclosure with the names of those present in the minutes of the negotiations of the business committee of the colliery association of October 18, 1918, *op. cit.*)

<sup>55</sup> Ruge, Wolfgang, *Weimar - Republik auf Zeit*, Berlin 1969, pp. 18 - 25.

<sup>56</sup> Lecture by the Albert Vögler: „Wirtschaft und Staat“ at the RDI conference in Berlin in March 1924; in: Veröffentlichungen des RDI, Issue 21, April 1924, pp. 33 - 35.

the trade unions.<sup>57</sup> All in all, the revision of all concessions made to the workers during the revolution and the return to an authoritarian state of authority were demanded. The fact that these aggressive demands were put forward by a leading representative of both the "iron side" (Borsig) and the "coal wing" (Vögler) shows the unity of heavy industry in this offensive against the foundations of the Weimar Republic.

The big industrialists often portrayed the conflict with the workers and the trade unions as if society had unfortunately broken into two parts, making further development almost impossible. They dreamed of "unity" between themselves and the workers - under their leadership. For example, in February 1920, leading industrialists, including Karl Haniel, Albert Vögler, Emil Kirdorf and the banker Georg Solmssen, discussed the problem of exerting political influence on the workforce. Their aim was to create "unity" with the workers through "national sentiment". The big industrialists and the workers at least had nationality in common, but nothing beyond that. They came up with the plan to "create a central organization" through which "a public opinion is created that works purposefully towards the rebuilding of the fatherland and forms the bridge between leaders and the led."<sup>58</sup>

The big industrialists wanted to "lead" society, to be the "leaders" with everyone else to "follow" them - in other words, to be the "followers". They saw nationalism as the key to explaining to the workers that they - the capitalists - were "in the same boat" as the workers. At the RDI conference in 1924, the major industrialist Ernst von Borsig used the term "Volksgemeinschaft" (people's community). This is interesting because the "Volksgemeinschaft" was one of the core ideologies of "National Socialism" and was actually used there in exactly the same context.<sup>59</sup> The point was confirmed by none other than the coal industrialist Emil Kirdorf himself when he wrote about Hitler:

*"Only if the masses of the people are awakened nationally will there still be salvation, and Hitler is campaigning for this. If he achieves this, then in my opinion the nationally united masses of people and workers can still be brought to their senses, while under the leadership of the Marxist and Christian-socialist trade unions they accelerate their own downfall along with that of the German fatherland."*<sup>60</sup>

The agreement between major industry and NSDAP ideology cannot be overlooked. The big industrialist Fritz Springorum himself stated that he and the big industrialist Albert Vögler were "sympathetic to Hitler" as early as 1923 because Hitler "had made a breach in the Social Democratic working class with his movement".<sup>61</sup> This aspect of the ideological agreement between big industry and NSDAP thinking also shows that the fight against the working class was precisely one of the two reasons for the sympathies of the coal industrialists and also many industrialists on the "iron side", which led them to Hitler.

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<sup>57</sup> Lecture by the major industrialist Ernst von Borsig: "Industrie und Sozialpolitik" at the RDI conference in Berlin in March 1924; in: Veröffentlichungen des RDI, Issue 21, April 1924, pp. 39 - 42.

<sup>58</sup> Letter from Georg Solmssen to Hugo Stinnes, April 28, 1920; taken from: Erwin Könnemann/Gerhard Schultze (eds.): *Der Kapp-Lüttwitz-Ludendorff-Putsch*. Dokumente, Munich 2002, Doc. No. 334.

<sup>59</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Faschismus und Kapitalismus - Bündnis*, pp. 172 - 179.

<sup>60</sup> Kirdorf, Emil, *Erinnerungen 1847 - 1930*, Düsseldorf 1930, p. 196.

<sup>61</sup> Franz-Willing, Georg, *Der Ursprung der Hitlerbewegung 1919 - 1922*, Preußisch Oldendorf 1974, 2nd edition, p. 288.

The other reason was the economic crisis that followed the world war, which was ultimately primarily an arms crisis in Germany. It should not be forgotten that German heavy industry had emerged from a decades-long arms race before the First World War. As a result, German heavy industry was the most efficient in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century. German companies mined more coal, smelted more pig iron and produced more crude steel than France and Great Britain combined.<sup>62</sup> Alongside Russia, Germany had the largest coal reserves in Europe.<sup>63</sup> Even after the loss of territory after 1918, 10% of the world's total hard coal reserves were still on German territory.<sup>64</sup> Between 1900 and 1912, Krupp-Werke mainly rebuilt and expanded its production facilities for armaments.<sup>65</sup> During the war from 1914 to 1918, production increased further and reached unprecedented production peaks.<sup>66</sup> The armies had an insatiable demand for weapons and ammunition. New factories were therefore built everywhere, and the state reimbursed the companies for all costs from the state coffers. The war became a huge business.<sup>67</sup>

The "Gelsenkirchener Bergwerks AG" (GBAG) group, which was headed by the industrial magnate Emil Kirdorf, for example, recorded rising net profits in the last ten years before the start of the war, from 4.4 million marks in 1903 to 24.1 million marks in 1913.<sup>68</sup> At the height of the war, in 1917, net profits rose to 30.9 million marks.<sup>69</sup> During the war, war profits had risen to such an extent that General Wilhelm Groener accused the companies in a "confidential submission" to the German government of "profiteering", in which "love of country" was not the decisive factor, but "almost exclusively the incentive to make money", as the companies tried to "exploit the armaments boom to the best of their ability".<sup>70</sup>

The defeat in the First World War in 1918 put an end to the armaments boom and brought an abrupt end to war profits. In that year, the net profit of GBAG, cited here as an example, fell abruptly to 13.3 million marks.<sup>71</sup> In absolute figures, this was roughly the same as in 1908 and 1909.<sup>72</sup> The defeat not only put an end to the armaments boom and war profits, but the peace terms also made any further armaments and thus any further profits from them impossible. The Treaty of Versailles stipulated that instead of an army of millions, the German army could no longer exceed a strength of 100,000 men

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<sup>62</sup> Kuczynski, Jürgen, *Studien zur Geschichte des Deutschen Imperialismus*, Volume I: Monopole und Unternehmensverbände, Berlin 1948, p. 15.

<sup>63</sup> Koberstein, Günther, *Die Steinkohle als Welthandelsgut*, Würzburg-Aumühle 1940, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Thöne, Karin, *Entwicklungsstadien und Zweiter Weltkrieg - Ein wirtschaftswissenschaftlicher Beitrag zur Frage der Kriegsursachen*, (West) Berlin 1974, p. 38.

<sup>65</sup> Tenfelde, Klaus, *Krupp in Krieg und Krisen - Unternehmensgeschichte der Friedrich Krupp AG 1914 bis 1924/25*; in: Gall, Lothar (ed.), *Krupp im 20. Jahrhundert - Die Geschichte des Unternehmens vom ersten Weltkrieg bis zur Gründung der Stiftung*, Berlin 2002, p. 24.

<sup>66</sup> Hugo Stinnes' demand for war aims, June 1915, BA Berlin, files of the Reich Chancellery, R 43, No. 2442, sheet 220 ff.

<sup>67</sup> Ufermann, Paul, *Der deutsche Stahltrust*, Berlin 1927, p. 43.

<sup>68</sup> See: Annual Report of GBAG for 1904, p. 30; Annual Report of GBAG for 1913, p. 46.

<sup>69</sup> Annual report of GBAG for 1917, p. 22.

<sup>70</sup> A memorandum by Lieutenant General Groener from 1917 when he was head of the War Office, Frankfurt/Main 1918, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> Annual report of GBAG for 1918, p. 24.

<sup>72</sup> See: Annual reports of GBAG for 1918, p. 48; for 1908, p. 46.

in the future, and that all modern weapons such as tanks, combat aircraft, submarines and long-range large-caliber artillery were prohibited.<sup>73</sup>

These peace terms meant a de facto death knell to the German heavy industry. During the Weimar Republic, the production of pig iron and crude steel only reached around 60% of the 1913 level, even in the phase of economic recovery (1924 - 1928), and in 1932 fell to its lowest level since the beginning of the 20th century.<sup>74</sup> This enormous decline to 60% of the original production capacity can be observed not only in total but also at the level of individual companies. At Hoesch-Stahlwerke, for example, capacity utilization in crude steel production in 1926 was also at a maximum of 60%,<sup>75</sup> while the company's break-even point was only at 80% utilization of production capacity.<sup>76</sup>

The decline in production cannot be explained by any territorial losses as a result of the Treaty of Versailles. Even if one does not take the pre-war capacities in German steel production as a reference value, but instead the production peaks of the so-called "economic peak" of the post-war period (1927 = 100%), then crude steel production averaged only 67.72% during the 13 years of the Weimar Republic and was therefore certainly still below its profitability threshold.<sup>77</sup>

The factories of German heavy industry were not profitable and were not in the black for most of the time. These deficits in capacity utilization can only be accounted for by the elimination of wartime armaments, which is why the economic decline extended to all sectors of the economy primarily dependent on armaments, such as mechanical engineering, the automotive industry and other related sectors such as the brass and zinc industries. Here, bankruptcies followed one another and the companies were mostly rescued by state subsidies and bank loans, with state aid often being justified by the importance of the companies for armaments.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Auswärtiges Amt (ed.), *Der Vertrag von Versailles - Endgültige amtliche Ausgabe in drei Sprachen*, Berlin 1924, Articles 159, 160, 163, 167, 171, 181, 198.

<sup>74</sup> Cf.: 1) Haarmann, Gerd W., p. 66 - 67; 2) Weisbrod, Bernd, *Schwerindustrie in der Weimarer Republik - Interessenpolitik zwischen Stabilisierung und Krise*, Wuppertal 1978, p. 41 – Note that these works present insignificant differences in the figures for crude steel and pig iron production. The author of the first book was a member of the board of the "Verein für die Bergbaulichen Interessen" (Mining Association for short). This was an association of coal industrialists. In my opinion, both Haarmann's and Weisbrod's data can be considered reliable, especially as they also largely correspond - with only insignificant deviations - to the statistical data from various company files. - For comparison, see among others: a) Deutsche Bank files, BA Berlin, R 8119 F, microfiche P 1564 - 1566; b) GBAG files, Bergbauarchiv Bochum, 55, No. 482 - 484.

<sup>75</sup> Cf: Memo/Karl Kimmich, October 5, 1935, Deutsche Bank files, BA Berlin, R 8119 F, microfiche P 1212; Memo/Karl Kimmich, October 16, 1937, Deutsche Bank files, BA Berlin, R 8119 F, microfiche P 1228.

<sup>76</sup> Memo/Karl Kimmich, October 5, 1935, Deutsche Bank files, BA Berlin, R 8119 F, microfiche P 1212.

<sup>77</sup> See: Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne*, pp. 63 and 69.

<sup>78</sup> Cf: Memo/Arnold v. Borsig, Nov. 17, 1931, files of Borsig-Zentral GmbH, Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB), A Rep. 226, No. 247/2; minutes of the meeting of the Board of Directors of Borsig AG, Feb. 4, 1932, files of Borsig-Zentral GmbH, *ibid.* 1932, Deutsche Bank files, BA Berlin, R 9119 F, microfiche P 3187; note by Regierungsrat Krebs on a meeting at the Reich Ministry of Economics, 09.06.1931, Erdmann, Karl Dietrich (ed.), *Akten der Reichskanzlei - Die Kabinette Brüning I und II*, Vol. 2, Boppard 1982, pp. 1184 - 1185; Ministerbesprechung vom 4. Juli 1931, *ibid.*, pp. 1284 - 1285; Radandt, Hans, *Kriegsverbrecher-Konzern Mansfeld*, Berlin 1958, pp. 5 - 7.



The biggest problem was bank loans. In 1928, the total amount borrowed by German industry from abroad alone amounted to over 1.5 billion marks, around 50% of which was raised in the USA.<sup>79</sup> This corresponded to almost the entire share capital of German heavy industry. Then there were the domestic loans. The bank debts of Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG to the German banks alone rose from 23 million marks in 1929 to 75 million marks in 1931, which meant that the Group's bank debt had more than tripled in just three years.<sup>80</sup> The bank debts had the effect of an iron cannonball on the neck of a drowning man, because the huge interest rates exacerbated the effects of the arms crisis, as they were offset by hardly any income from ongoing business in the midst of the global economic crisis.<sup>81</sup> In addition, the prospect of corporate bankruptcies also threatened to drag the banks down into the abyss of collapse because they could not afford to default on such loans.<sup>82</sup>

The only realistic solution for German companies was demonstrated by the "Reich Association of the German Automotive Industry". In August 1932, the association of industrialists demanded that the Reich Chancellor award armaments contracts.<sup>83</sup> The demand for a return to the armaments business was also openly voiced at the conferences of large industry associations and at general meetings of leading corporations.<sup>84</sup>

However, the return to the arms business also meant breaking the Treaty of Versailles and this step in principle also meant the overthrow of the Weimar Republic, for which the Treaty of Versailles was an essential basis for the framework conditions of its existence in international political relations. Therefore, fundamentally different political conditions had to be created. Both Hitler and the leading industrialists were aware of this. When Hitler held a meeting of representatives of all leading corporations in February 1933 and held out the prospect of overthrowing the republic and re-entering the armaments business to the major industrialists, the management of all major German corporations joined him.<sup>85</sup> The major industrialist Fritz Springorum reported on this meeting:

*"In this meeting, Mr. Hitler gave an account of the political development of the last fourteen years and explained his fundamental attitude to political events, as well as to the economy, individual personality and private property in such a way that he probably received the complete approval of all 27 gentlemen who were present."*<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Kuczynski, Robert, *Deutsche Auslandsanleihen seit 1924*; in: Schriften des Vereins für Sozialpolitik, Band 174/III, Munich/Leipzig 1928, p. 13.

<sup>80</sup> Notes to the balance sheet and profit and loss account of Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG, February 1932 and the note on the financial position of Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG as of September 30, 1931, Deutsche Bank files, BA Berlin, R 8119 F, microfiche P 1564.

<sup>81</sup> Memo from the banker Max v. d. Porten dated May 1, 1932, files of the Flick Group, BA Berlin, R 8122, No. 1078.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Petition from the Reich Association of the German Automotive Industry to Reich Chancellor Franz von Papen, August 16, 1932, Deutsche Bank files, BA Berlin, R 8119 F, P 32.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. inter alia: Bosch, Carl, speech to the General Assembly of IG Farben on May 10, 1932, IG Farben files, BA Berlin, R 8128, No. 15985, sheets 1 - 4; Bücher, Hermann, lecture: "Volkswirtschaftliche Einheit von Wissenschaft, Unternehmertum und Arbeiterschaft im Produktionsprozess"; in: Veröffentlichungen des RDI, Heft 37, October 1927, p. 60.

<sup>85</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne*, p. 364 - 376.

<sup>86</sup> Letter from Fritz Springorum to Paul Reusch, February 21, 1933, GHH files, Rheinisch-Westfälisches Wirtschaftsarchiv (RWVA) 130-400101290/36b, sheet 139.

It is clear that the revolution in Germany in 1918/1919 and the resulting political struggles with the German working class along with the dilemmas created by the armaments crisis, especially as the Depression deepened, made Hitler very attractive to German major industry and to heavy industry in particular, with the coal wing, leaning most strongly towards him.

#### IV. The role of the industrial magnate Kirdorf

*"At this time (1931 at the earliest) I learned of the existence of friendly relations between Privy Councillor Dr. Emil Kirdorf, a leading man in the coal industry in the Ruhr, and the Führer. [...] Through Kirdorf and later through Fritz Thyssen, the Führer was introduced to the circles of Rhenish-Westphalian industry, which supported him and the party financially."<sup>87</sup>*

These words come from a statement made by Walter Funk to the Allied investigating authorities after the Second World War. Even before 1933, Funk was an intermediary between the NSDAP leadership and German major industry. Professionally, he was editor-in-chief of the *Berliner Börsenzeitung* and later also worked as Reich Economics Minister and Reichsbank President.<sup>88</sup> So these are the words of an insider.

The role of the major industrialists Emil Kirdorf and Fritz Thyssen has been greatly downplayed in historiography in order to deny the links between German major industry and Hitler.<sup>89</sup> The reasons for this apologetics are beside the point here. In any case, in later works on this subject, Kirdorf was in principle no longer dealt with at all and Thyssen was often assigned the role of a loner.<sup>90</sup>

Fundamentally, it should be noted that these positions and accounts of Kirdorf and Thyssen have already been debunked in detail by the author of this essay, both in his dissertation (2012) and in later publications on the subject.<sup>91</sup> As chairman of the supervisory board and major shareholder of *Verenigte Stahlwerke* - the largest steel group in Europe at the time - and as a member of the board of the *Bergbauverein*, Thyssen was without question one of the 19 leading major industrialists of the Weimar Republic and was therefore certainly one of the absolute leaders of major industry in Germany at the time.<sup>92</sup>

In the case of Emil Kirdorf, it was argued that he was over eighty-years old and in "retirement" when he met Hitler, and despite his fifty years as a leading industrialist and multiple association chairman, he suddenly had no political contacts and of course no political influence whatsoever, as well as no

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<sup>87</sup> Statement by Walter Funk on relations between German industry and the NSDAP, June 28, 1945, Document EC-440, Office of the United State Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Washington 1946, Supplement A, p. 1194 ff.

<sup>88</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Faschismus und Kapitalismus - Bündnis*, p. 337.

<sup>89</sup> Turner, Henry Ashby, *Faschismus und Kapitalismus*, pp. 9 - 114.

<sup>90</sup> See the following works, among others: Neebe, Reinhard, *Großindustrie, Staat und NSDAP - Paul Silverberg und der Reichsverband der Deutschen Industrie in der Krise der Weimarer Republik*, Göttingen 1981; Luntowski, Gustav, *Hitler und die Herren an der Ruhr - Wirtschaftsmacht und Staatsmacht im Dritten Reich*, Frankfurt/Main 2000; Eglau, Hans-Otto, *Fitz Thyssen - Hitlers Gönner und Geisel*, Berlin 2003; Turner, Henry Ashby, *Großunternehmer*, op. cit.

<sup>91</sup> See, among others: Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne*, pp. 122 - 145; Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Faschismus und Kapitalismus - Bündnis*, pp. 47 - 55.

<sup>92</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Faschismus und Kapitalismus - Bündnis*, pp. 50 - 51.

access to the money pots of big industry or the industrial associations. At most he was an old man who could at best be described as a kind of "ghost driver" or loner.<sup>93</sup>

As already mentioned, the reality was quite different and the only grain of truth in this apologetic is that Kirdorf gave up his position as Chairman of the Board of GBAG - the largest German mining company - in 1926. However, this was not because he wanted to "retire", but because his old company was suddenly to become the main shareholder of Vereinigte Stahlwerke. Although Vereinigte Stahlwerke was the largest steel group in Europe, it was impossible for GBAG to become the main owner of this completely indebted group in the midst of the arms crisis. With this new role, the banks risked GBAG's existence in the poker game for Vereinigte Stahlwerke.<sup>94</sup> This was the company that Kirdorf had built up since 1873 and he was understandably unwilling to accept this new situation. Kirdorf therefore resigned from the board.<sup>95</sup>

In 1927, when Kirdorf met Hitler a year later, he was still deputy chairman of the supervisory board of "Discontogesellschaft" - one of the most important major German banks - and after the merger of this bank with Deutsche Bank in 1929, he moved first to the supervisory board and from 1932 to the main committee of Deutsche Bank.<sup>96</sup> In addition to Kirdorf, the Supervisory Board of Deutsche Bank alone included 13 corporate leaders from the coal and steel and heavy industry sectors, many representatives of other branches of industry, such as board members of IG Farben, Siemens-Werke and eight bankers from other banks.<sup>97</sup> Kirdorf was also a member of the Rhenish-Westphalian Committee of Deutsche Bank, where a "who's who" of Rhenish entrepreneurship was also to be found. In addition to Kirdorf, the Rhenish-Westphalian committee included group leaders from Klöckner-Eisen-AG, Rheinische Braunkohlen AG, Rheinisches Braunkohlesyndikat, Deutz AG, Hoesch AG and others.<sup>98</sup>

The coal industrialist Karl Wilke, a mine director at GBAG, reported on the extent of Kirdorf's influence among German industrialists. He wrote in his memoirs that Kirdorf's villa became a "place of pilgrimage" at the end of the 1920s, where the "Nestor of German heavy industry" - as Kirdorf was called - was revered as a "patriarch".<sup>99</sup> That was no exaggeration. On Kirdorf's birthday alone in 1927 - when he first met Hitler - over 300 industrialists undertook a torchlight procession to Kirdorf's villa in pouring rain. The list of participants in this torchlight procession included Gustav Knepper, Ernst

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<sup>93</sup> Here is just one example of this argument: The American historian Henry Ashby Turner wrote about Kirdorf: "...he had given up his many years of activity in the associations of heavy industry [...] Even before his contact with Hitler, the eighty-year-old industrialist thus had direct access neither to the funds of the large companies with which his name was associated nor to those of the associations of heavy industry." And elsewhere he wrote that one should: "...not overestimate Kirdorf's role as Hitler's guarantor in industry. One must not forget that he [...] was already eighty years old and had given up any active involvement in the economy." - See: Turner, Henry Ashby, *Faschismus*, pp. 80 and 85.

<sup>94</sup> See the details of the Gelsenkirchen deal in: Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne*, p. 122 - 145.

<sup>95</sup> Cf.: Letter from Arthur Salomonsohn to Emil Kirdorf, March 31, 1926, GBAG files, BBA, 55, no. 2870 and letter from Emil Kirdorf to Adolf Pohlmann, March 29, 1926, GBAG files, BBA, 55, no. 2868.

<sup>96</sup> See: Annual reports of Disconto-Gesellschaft for 1919 - 1928 and annual reports of Deutsche Bank and Disconto-Gesellschaft for 1929, p. 9; for 1930, p. 30; for 1931, p. 30.

<sup>97</sup> Annual Report of Deutsche Bank und Disconto-Gesellschaft for 1931, p. 29 - 31.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40 - 41.

<sup>99</sup> Wilke, Karl, *50 Jahre im Dienste des Ruhrbergbaues - Aus meiner Arbeit bei der Gelsenkirchener-Bergwerks-Aktien-Gesellschaft und der Vereinigten Stahlwerke A.G.*, *Erinnerungen eines 80jährigen*, Kettwig 1952, p. 124.

Tengelmann, Albert Hoppstetter, Karl Ruschen, Hermann Kellermann, Erich Fickler, Ernst Büskül and Gerd Haarmann - in short, the who's who of leading coal industrialists who sat on the board of the mining association.<sup>100</sup> Arriving at Kirdorf's villa, Alfred Hugenberg, who was also on the board of the mining association,<sup>101</sup> gave a speech where he said the following about Kirdorf:

*"Today the torches speak [...] As students, we honored our teachers and leaders with torches. Today, the managers and directors of the Ruhr coal mines honor their teacher and leader Emil Kirdorf."*<sup>102</sup>

Little more needs to be said about Kirdorf's influence in the economy and his political role - except that he had direct access to the Bergbauverein's funds, as he was a member of the Bergbauverein's executive committee until the early 1930s, and it was there that decisions were made about the use of the organization's funds.<sup>103</sup> One a side note, the association's correspondence also demonstrates clearly that Kirdorf was involved in the decisions on the use of these funds.<sup>104</sup>

Finally, it must be said that the coal industrialists Emil Kirdorf, Fritz Thyssen and Albert Vögler were close friends.<sup>105</sup> All three were among the 19 leading major capitalists of the Weimar Republic.<sup>106</sup> It was precisely because of their close personal relationship that they played a major role in opening doors for Hitler and other Nazi leaders in the business world, giving them access to the political influence and money of German heavy industry.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> List of participants in the torchlight procession on the occasion of Kirdorf's birthday, March 26, 1927, files of the mining association, BBA, 16, No. 155.

<sup>101</sup> Hugenberg had been on the board of the mining association since 1910 and his mandate was extended again in 1929 until 1932. - See: Annual Report of the Association for Mining Interests, for 1929, p. 95 - 96.

<sup>102</sup> Annual Report of the "Verein für die bergbaulichen Interessen", for 1927, p. 92.

<sup>103</sup> Cf: Minutes of the meeting of the executive committee of the mining association on September 26, 1927, files of the mining association, BBA, 16, no. 130, sheet 25; annual report of the "Verein für die bergbaulichen Interessen" for 1930, p. 137.

<sup>104</sup> Letter from Hans von und zu Loewenstein to Ernst Brandi, November 10, 1927, Mining Association files, BBA, 16, no. 8066.

<sup>105</sup> Letter from Emil Kirdorf to Count Cuno Westrap, February 26, 1927, GBAG files, BBA, 55, no. 2871.

<sup>106</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Faschismus und Kapitalismus - Bündnis*, pp. 50 - 51.

<sup>107</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne*, pp. 115 - 151, 310 - 358.

## V. The approach of the German "coal industrialists" to Hitler

"Gentlemen!

*Words of introduction are actually unnecessary with the guest we have the honor of seeing with us this evening. He made a name for himself in a short space of time through his political activities. He only came to public attention after the end of the war. His manly advocacy of his convictions earned him respect and admiration in the widest circles. We are delighted that he has joined us this evening. The club members have also expressed this joy by attending in such large numbers this evening [...] tonight's event is better attended than perhaps any other club event to date."*<sup>108</sup>

These words come from Dr. Vorwerk, the head of the "National Club" in Hamburg. The "National Club" was an elite organization of leading industrialists, bankers, aristocrats, right-wing conservative politicians and senior civil servants in Germany. On the evening of 28 February 1926 in Hamburg, Dr. Vorwerk used these words to introduce Adolf Hitler to the approximately 400 - 450 members consisting of shipowners, shipyard owners, bankers and merchants. The chairman of the club, the Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, explained the significance of the "National Club" in a letter as follows:

*"It is obvious that [...] the scope for action of a club like the National Club is extraordinarily large, especially in view of its very important goals and the composition of its membership."*<sup>109</sup>

Other local "gentlemen's clubs" made up of regional industrialists, large landowners and bankers also invited Hitler. The chairman of the so-called "Mecklenburg Gentlemen's Society", in which the "leading personalities" of a northern German region from the aforementioned upper-class circles socialized, invited Hitler several times from 1927 onwards to speak to the club's "select circle of gentlemen" about the goals of the NSDAP leadership. In October 1928, for example, he wrote that "Mr. Hitler" must be interested in speaking to the "gentlemen's society", as the circle of its select and influential members "could and would do very considerable things for the National Socialist cause if he were to win it over."<sup>110</sup>

Hitler was as sought-after as a rock star among the "upper ten thousand" of Germany's "high society" and therefore had to think carefully about which invitations he accepted due to time constraints. Hitler's problem was that the NSDAP was banned for a time due to the putsch in Munich in 1923. Hitler himself was imprisoned during this time. All his early relationships with business circles and influential supporters had been severed.

The NSDAP had to be re-established in January 1925. All this cost a great deal of money. Hitler was forced to look again for financially strong and influential supporters and began a veritable advertising

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<sup>108</sup> Quoted from: Gossweiler, Kurt, *Aufsätze zum Faschismus*, Berlin 1986, p. 467.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Behrens, Beate, *Mit Hitler zur Macht, Aufstieg des Nationalsozialismus in Mecklenburg und Lübeck 1922 - 1933*, Rostock 1998, p. 131.

tour through the clubs and salons of the "upper ten thousand" of Germany's "high society" in order to meet influential industrialists and bankers and convince them to support the NSDAP.

His travels primarily took him to the Ruhr region, as he was most likely to meet with interest from heavy industry, which suffered from struggles with German workers since the revolution and the armaments crisis. Hitler's tour began on February 28, 1926 and ran until February 20, 1933, when it ended with an intimate meeting between Hitler and almost the entire leadership of all major German corporations in Berlin. A total of more than 40 meetings between Hitler and various industrialists and bankers have been identified for this period.<sup>111</sup> Of course, these are only the meetings between Hitler and leading industrialists and bankers that can still be traced today.

The size of these gatherings varied greatly. On the one hand, there were major events attended by between 200 and 600 industrialists or their direct representatives. Other meetings between Hitler and leading industrialists or bankers took place in a much more intimate atmosphere - in villas, luxury hotels or expensive restaurants, with a maximum of 20 to 40 industrialists and bankers present.<sup>112</sup>

There is also a longstanding apologetics in the research literature regarding these meetings. Analysts claimed that major industrialists or their direct representatives were not present at these Hitler events in the Ruhr area because they were allegedly not interested in Hitler at all, and instead the halls were filled with random people.<sup>113</sup> The author has already debunked these claims in much more detail in his doctoral thesis.<sup>114</sup>

Nevertheless, regarding these meetings the following shall be mentioned here briefly: As the private secretary of the major industrialist Ernst von Borsig wrote in a letter about the course of such Hitler events, they were organized in Berlin at the initiative of the "National Club" and were clearly "closed events" to which only people from the circle of major industrialists, aristocrats and bankers had access.<sup>115</sup> Emil Kirdorf reported the same thing about the events in the Ruhr region, namely that a "closed circle" was invited from industry, which ensured a corresponding composition of the audience.<sup>116</sup> In Bavaria, too, the local industrialists' association acted as host and organizer of the Hitler events for the local industrialists and also sent out the invitations.<sup>117</sup>

Of course, some major industrialists preferred to stay in the background and sent representatives instead to these events. For example, Ernst von Borsig was initially represented by his private secretary Fritz Deckert while Gustav Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach was represented by his lobbyist Jakob Herle at Hitler's famous speech to the Düsseldorf Industrial Club. In a letter from the club management to Krupp, it says:

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<sup>111</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Faschismus und Kapitalismus - Bündnis*, pp. 327 - 331.

<sup>112</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne*, pp. 115 - 151.

<sup>113</sup> Turner, Henry Ashby, *Großunternehmer*, p. 111.

<sup>114</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne*, pp. 119 - 122.

<sup>115</sup> Letter from Fritz Deckert to Ernst von Borsig (Junior), 23.10.1938; taken from: Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Faschismus und Kapitalismus - Bündnis zur Zerschlagung von Demokratie und Arbeiterbewegung*, Berlin 2020, Appendix, Document No. 7, pp. 221 - 223.

<sup>116</sup> Kirdorf, Emil, *Erinnerungen*, p. 180.

<sup>117</sup> Letter from Franz Frh. v. Gebsattel to Paul Reusch, April 19, 1932, GHH files, RWWA 130-400101293/2, sheet 102.

*"The number of club members actually exceeds my wildest expectations and unfortunately the largest room in the Parkhotel cannot be made any bigger than it is. I have therefore had to turn down similar requests to admit non-members for reasons of fairness. But your case, I realize, is a special one. [...] As the owner of the Krupp company and also Chairman of the Reich Association of German Industry, you naturally have a legitimate interest in obtaining the most precise knowledge of all important economic policy events. I will therefore ensure that Mr. Herle [...] receives an invitation under all circumstances."*<sup>118</sup>

This example also confirms what has already been said: even at Hitler's speech in the Parkhotel to the Düsseldorf Industrial Club, the association acted as organizer and also sent out invitations to the relevant circles, whereby the "rush of club members" "exceeded the boldest expectations" of the club management and "the largest hall in the Parkhotel" could unfortunately "not be made larger than it is". Hitler's lecture was counted among the "economically important events".

The assertion that the majority of industrialists or direct representatives of industrial interests did not attend Hitler events because there was no interest in Hitler in these circles and the halls were therefore filled with random people is - to put it mildly - ridiculous and can be easily refuted by the now easily accessible and rich source material.

Hitler's secretary, Rudolf Hess, reported on one such Hitler event for the big industrialists in the Ruhr area as follows:

*"The Tribune's speech is over. He spoke to economists for about 2½ hours. It was unheard of! He outdid himself! I've hardly ever heard him like that. Irritated by the first hour of icy silence, he escalated to such an extent that towards the end, in ever shorter intervals, the 400 or so people present virtually erupted into waves of applause! One of the oldest and most respected captains of industry, Kirdorf, was present: a gnarled old man [...] He himself stood up at the end, visibly moved, and squeezed the tribune's hand. (This between us!)"*<sup>119</sup>

Hess reported on this Hitler event for the major industrialists in the Ruhr area in a handwritten postcard dated April 27, 1927. As Kirdorf himself confirmed, the event in question took place on that very day - Kirdorf wrote:

*"On April 27 [1927], I heard Adolf Hitler speak at a meeting in Essen, to which a closed circle was invited, and his lecture made such a powerful impression on me that I shook his hand after he finished."*<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Quoted from: Trumpp, Thomas, *Zur Finanzierung der NSDAP durch die Großindustrie - Versuch einer Bilanz*; in: Bracher, Karl Dietrich et al. (eds.), *Nationalsozialistische Diktatur 1933 - 1945, Eine Bilanz*, Düsseldorf 1986, p. 144.

<sup>119</sup> Handwritten postcard from Rudolf Hess to Ilse Pröl, April 27, 1927; taken from: Heß, Wolf-Rüdiger (ed.), *Rudolf Hess, Briefe 1908 - 1933*, Munich - Vienna 1983, document no. 375.

<sup>120</sup> Kirdorf, Emil, *Erinnerungen*, p. 180.



Kirdorf then met Hitler personally in Munich for a private conversation<sup>121</sup> and became convinced that Hitler needed to be supported by a wider circle of major heavy industrialists. Kirdorf therefore decided to introduce Hitler to some personalities from his circle of coal industrialists. Kirdorf wrote about this:

*"I have arranged to bring him [Hitler] together with some leading figures from this side of industry in the next month. If I succeed in winning him supporters in these circles, my hope of saving the Fatherland will be strengthened."*<sup>122</sup>

Kirdorf organized a meeting in his villa for 26 October 1927 *"with some leading people from this side of industry"* and asked Hitler to put the most important contents of his speech on paper in advance so that the major industrialists invited had an overview of the topic in advance. The result was a small brochure entitled *"Adolf Hitler: The Road to Resurgence - Presented by Emil Kirdorf"*.<sup>123</sup> Hitler's and Kirdorf's names even appeared together on the cover of the brochure. Kirdorf was so proud of this brochure and his collaboration with Hitler that he even printed it in full in his memoirs published in 1930.<sup>124</sup>

This brochure is important because it basically contains Hitler's speech on the evening of October 26, 1927 in Kirdorf's villa to the *"leading figures of this side of industry"*.<sup>125</sup> Hitler's speech addressed the problems of German heavy industry in particular. Hitler openly addressed the fact that German exports were increasingly declining because these importing countries were becoming increasingly industrialized themselves.<sup>126</sup> In addition, the industrial corporations of the countries that had won the First World War had pushed the German corporations out of the world market and broken their "monopoly positions" through the post-war order that their governments themselves had created, including through the Treaty of Versailles and the associated provisions<sup>127, 128</sup> However, Hitler offered the industrialists present a simple and obvious solution to this problem - he declared:

*"...the final decision in economic battles in this world has never been based on the greater or lesser prowess of the individual competitor, but rather on the strength of the sword they had to throw into the balance for their business and thus for their lives."*<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 182 ff. - Note: It is quoted from here, but with reference to the actual author: Hitler, Adolf, *Der Weg zum Wiederaufstieg* etc.

<sup>125</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne*, pp. 127 - 128.

<sup>126</sup> Hitler, Adolf, *Der Weg zum Wiederaufstieg*; taken from: Kirdorf, Emil, *Erinnerungen 1847 - 1930*, Düsseldorf 1930, p. 185.

<sup>127</sup> For example, the foreign capital of German companies was expropriated. This primarily affected the banks. With regard to this process concerning the German banks, the correspondence between Disconto-Gesellschaft and BHG is particularly recommended (a). With regard to the German heavy industry, an analysis written by the heavy industry is recommended, which can be found in the VDESI files (b). With regard to the German chemical industry, reference should be made to the explanations in a contemporary study on the history of IG Farben (c). - For a) BHG files, BA Berlin, R 8127, No. 14257; for b) exposé of German heavy industry dated August 24, 1937, VDESI files/economic group for the iron and steel industry, BA Berlin, R 13/I, No. 597, sheets 95 - 105; for c) Wickel, Helmut, *IG Deutschland - Ein Staat im Staate*, Berlin 1932, p. 118 ff.

<sup>128</sup> Hitler, Adolf, *Der Weg zum Wiederaufstieg*, p. 185.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

The gentlemen from the armaments industry did not need a translator to explain to them what the "power of the sword" meant, "which they had to throw into the balance for their business and thus for their lives". Hitler thus offered them an obvious solution that would also lead them out of the armament crisis: the Second World War.

It has already been mentioned above that on February 20, 1933, when Hitler gave a similar speech to the leaders of all major German industry, the major industrialist Fritz Springorum wrote that Hitler "probably received the complete approval of all 27 gentlemen who were present."<sup>130</sup> It is incomprehensible how some historians are still able to claim that Hitler left the major industrialists in the dark about his war intentions in the face of such open confessions, and must be attributed to the already mentioned apologetics.

Furthermore, the Nazi leaders as a whole made no secret of their intentions of war in their conversations with major industrialists. On November 23, 1931, the head of the NSDAP's economic policy department stated at one such meeting that "National Socialism will not shy away" from "creating new space, even by force" if ultimately "the living space of the German people is not sufficient".<sup>131</sup> That Germany's leading industrialists should not have understood the constant repetition of such formulas at their events is - to put it mildly - extremely implausible.

But on that evening of October 26, 1927, in Kirdorf's villa before the "leading people of this side of industry", Hitler was already extremely successful with his speech. Kirdorf reported on it:

"The success of Hitler's almost three-hour presentation seemed to meet my expectations in full, as all the participants were undoubtedly deeply moved by his gripping explanations..."<sup>132</sup>

That is an understatement. That evening, Krupp director Kurt Sorge was among those present and told his son that Hitler "carried away his audience of industrial leaders to such an extent that one of them dared to compare him to Christ!"<sup>133</sup> Since Hitler offered them a way out of the armaments crisis - the only way out - through the "power of the sword", he must have seemed like the "Messiah" to them.

It must be said that apart from the names of Kirdorf and Sorge, no other names of the major industrialists present at the time have been passed down, as Kirdorf kept the guest list secret. But it is interesting to know that Hitler's audience is said to have belonged to the 'industrial leadership'. Anything else would not have made sense as the setting for such an event. In my opinion, it can therefore be assumed that it was mainly industrialists who attended who, *firstly*, were among Kirdorf's closest friends - i.e. Thyssen and Vögler in particular - and *secondly*, who had already been in contact with

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<sup>130</sup> Letter from Fritz Springorum to Paul Reusch, February 21, 1933, GHH files, RWWA 130-400101290/36b, sheet 139.

<sup>131</sup> Stegmann, Dirk, *Mitteleuropa 1925 - 1934 - Zum Problem der Kontinuität der deutschen Außenhandelspolitik von Stresemann bis Hitler*; in: Wendt, Bernd-Jürgen et al. (eds.), *Industrielle Gesellschaft und politisches System - Beiträge zur politischen Sozialgeschichte*, Bonn 1978, p. 218.

<sup>132</sup> Kirdorf, Emil, *Erinnerungen*, p. 180 - 181.

<sup>133</sup> Stresemann, Wolfgang, *Wie konnte es geschehen? - Hitlers Aufstieg in Erinnerungen eines Zeitzeugen*, Berlin - Frankfurt/Main 1987, pp. 52 - 53.

Hitler in 1922/23 and who had already supported him at that time - i.e. Thyssen, Vögler and Springorum. That is to say that the participants were not only "industrial leaders", but also mainly came from the board of the mining association.

## VI. Initiation of cooperation between the coal wing and the NSDAP

*"While the NSDAP had placed the anti-Semitic and anti-Marxist slogans and the nationalist side of its program at the center of its struggle in the earlier years, it has recently emphasized its social revolutionary goals and the struggle against the bourgeoisie and capitalism."*<sup>134</sup>

These sentences come from a report by the police in Germany, which investigated the NSDAP's election rallies and election propaganda in the course of the Reichstag elections of 1928. This police report is interesting in several respects, as it clearly states that the NSDAP did not approach voters with anti-Semitism or nationalism, but that it placed *"its social revolutionary goals and the fight against the bourgeoisie and capitalism"* at the forefront of its agitation. The much-vaunted anti-Semitism had obviously not attracted voters in previous years.

It was only logical to focus on *"social revolutionary goals and the fight against the bourgeoisie and capitalism"*, as the NSDAP claimed to be a "workers' party". From 1928 onwards, it tried to appear as such. The NSDAP leader Joseph Goebbels promised voters "German" or "national socialism". He wrote, for example, about the so-called "National Socialism":

*"It is about more, and we solemnly declare that we have not come to fob off the worker with small makeshift remedies, but on the contrary, to solve the question of the liberation of the working man from the ground up."*<sup>135</sup>

This seemingly anti-capitalist agitation led to misunderstandings, as the coal industrialists in particular were very sensitive in their struggle with the labor movement. And indeed, this led to resentment even in the camp of the most convinced Hitler supporters. Even Kirdorf himself wrote an angry letter to the Reich leadership of the NSDAP in which he resigned from his membership in the NSDAP, which he had only recently joined.<sup>136</sup> Some industrialists accused Hitler of having socialist ideas.<sup>137</sup>

This misunderstanding forced Hitler to undertake another trip through the Ruhr region in order to inform the industrialists about the purely agitational nature of this election propaganda and to calm the waves.<sup>138</sup> A police report provided information on this, which continued to keep a close eye on the activities of the NSDAP. The police report stated:

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<sup>134</sup> Police report on the election of May 20, 1928, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (GStA PK), I. HA, Rep. 77, Tit.: 4043, Nr. 283, sheet 5.

<sup>135</sup> Article by Joseph Goebbels in the NSDAP newspaper "Der Angriff" from April 22, 1931; taken from: Hörster-Phillips, Ulrike, *Großkapital und Faschismus, 1918 - 1945 - Dokumente*, Cologne 1981, Document No. 85.

<sup>136</sup> Letter from Emil Kirdorf to the Reichsleitung of the NSDAP, August 12, 1928, GBAG files, BBA, 55, no. 2872.

<sup>137</sup> Letter from the Industrial Committee of the DVP to Director v. Benningsen, August 15, 1930, files of Borsig Zentral GmbH, Landesarchiv Berlin, A Rep. 226, No. 11; Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Faschismus und Kapitalismus - Bündnis*, pp. 95 - 103.

<sup>138</sup> Letter from Rudolf Heß to Emil Kirdorf, December 28, 1930, GBAG files, BBA, 55, no. 2874.

*"The leader of the NSDAP, Adolf Hitler, is said to have visited Essen several times (about three times) in recent months for negotiations with the leading men of the Ruhr large-scale industry. He is said to have arrived here in his own car on these visits, but used a car provided by an industrialist to travel within the city. The negotiations are said to have been conducted with the general counsel of the 'Association for Mining Interests' in Essen, mining assessor Dr. von und zu Löwenstein, with the assistance of several other gentlemen who are not known by name. Following an election meeting in Essen on August 15, 1930, Hitler is said to have stayed with Mr. von und zu Löwenstein."*<sup>139</sup>

The aim of the "negotiations with the leading men of Ruhr-Gross-Industrie" was described in the police report as follows:

*"The purpose of the negotiations was twofold: to inform big industry about Hitler's actual position on the various labor issues, and to raise funds for the NSDAP from industry."*<sup>140</sup>

According to this police report, Hitler explained to the Ruhr industrialists that "...today's propaganda must not be made the basis of the practice to be practiced later. The attitude of today's propaganda was necessary in order to withdraw the working masses from Marxism and to attract them to the NSDAP", because the "actual position of the NSDAP" on the political questions of the German working class was "different from what is expressed in the present propaganda".<sup>141</sup> According to the police report, Hitler succeeded in convincing the Ruhr industrialists of the necessity of this propaganda strategy. The police report states:

*"On the basis of this view of Hitler, which was closer to the employer's point of view, some gentlemen of big industry made very substantial funds available to Hitler, namely two donations amounting to 700,000 and 400,000 RM. These contributions were not transferred directly from the donor to the recipient, but passed through the accounts of two inconspicuous intermediaries."*<sup>142</sup>

This police report has been qualified by recent research as absolutely authentic, even if the exact reproduction of the sums of money mentioned remains questionable.<sup>143</sup> Ultimately, the decisive factor in this development is that Hitler succeeded in convincing the Ruhr industrialists of the necessity of this NSDAP propaganda strategy. Rudolf Hess also reported on the success of Hitler's campaign as follows:

*"Probably the best thing H[itler] accomplished recently was a speech to about 25 of Germany's leading economists (industrialists), after which almost all of them subscribed to his views..."*<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Report of the Düsseldorf District President dated January 14, 1931, Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz, Abt. 403, Nr. 16734, sheets 285 - 286.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne*, pp. 132 - 136.

<sup>144</sup> Letter from Rudolf Hess to Klara and Fritz Hess, December 8, 1930; taken from: Heß, Wolf-Rüdiger (ed.), *Rudolf Hess, Briefe 1908 - 1933*, Munich - Vienna 1983, document no. 399.

It is also important to note here, as stated in the above-mentioned police report, that "*almost all of them subscribed to his views*". According to the diary of the Essen press entrepreneur Theodor Reismann-Grone, this meeting between Hitler and the "*25 of Germany's leading economists (industrialists)*" named by Hess had taken place at the end of November 1930, with Kirdorf once again acting as the organizer and inviting the "*25 of Germany's leading economists (industrialists)*" to his villa for another intimate meeting with Hitler.<sup>145</sup>

Jacob Wilhelm Reichert, the managing director of the VDESI, who was informed by Ludwig Kastel, member of the RDI executive committee, that this event had a great and extremely positive effect for Hitler, wrote as follows:

*"Kastel was, however, able to suggest to me that it was not only Thyssen's appearance before the presidium, board and main committee of the Reich Association of German Industry that played a role in this development, but that Adolf Hitler's influence was actually unmistakable here. He, Kastel, had been informed of how Adolf Hitler had appeared before the leading gentlemen in the district and what a strong impression this had made. Dear Schlenker, this is a matter of the utmost importance."*<sup>146</sup>

The "*leading gentlemen*" in the "*district*" were the "*25 of Germany's leading businessmen (industrialists)*" who had received Hitler in Kirdorf's villa. And it was not only Hess who reported that "*almost all of the leading big industrialists subscribed to his*" - i.e. Hitler's - "*views*", but Kastel also reported that Hitler's appearance had left a "*strong impression*" on "*the leading gentlemen*" and that "*the influence of Adolf Hitler had recently become unmistakably apparent here*". By "*here*" he meant the ranks of major industry. Hitler's critics in the ranks of "*Germany's leading economists (industrialists)*" became a minority.

The most important result of this campaign was that Hitler succeeded in convincing the Ruhr industrialists of the necessity of anti-capitalist NSDAP propaganda, because this would ultimately not be the basis of the "*practice to be practiced later*." This was because the "*actual position of the NSDAP*" on the political issues of the German working class was in reality "*different from what is expressed in the current propaganda*" and that therefore all well-known industrialists "*almost all subscribed to Hitler's views*".

The majority of industrialists in the Ruhr area were ultimately able to live with the anti-capitalist NSDAP propaganda, even if criticism of it still surfaced from time to time later on. Resistance to this propaganda died down almost completely. The industrialist Rupprecht Schott, for example, wrote to the managing director of the mining association, Hans von und zu Loewenstein, that there had been "*agitation*" against individual companies in central Germany by the NSDAP.<sup>147</sup> Loewenstein replied to him as follows:

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<sup>145</sup> Opencast mining entry by Theodor Rheismann-Grone dated November 12, 1930, typewritten copy, Volume III, Stadtarchiv Essen (StAE), 652/148.

<sup>146</sup> Letter from Jacob Wilhelm Reichert to Max Schlenker, December 4, 1930, VDESI files, BA Berlin R 13 I / 606, sheets 228 - 232.

<sup>147</sup> Letter from Rupprecht Schott to Hans von und zu Loewenstein, July 31, 1931, files of the mining association, BBA, 16, No. 8022.

*"In general, we have not had any incidents of the kind you have described. We do not attach any importance to the occasional inconsistencies and loudmouthing in individual local Nazi newspapers..."*<sup>148</sup>

The industrial lobbyist August Heinrichsbauer, who complained to the NSDAP leader Gregor Strasser about the NSDAP's "socialist" propaganda during the 1932 Reichstag elections on behalf of a number of industrialists, also ended up writing:

*"It is perfectly understandable that National Socialism also expresses its opposition to the government through agitation [...] At the same time, it is also convinced that the way things have now come to a head may perhaps take account of a temporary need for agitation, but in no way reflects the true interests of the party."*<sup>149</sup>

There is nothing to add to this. The decisive factor in Hitler's campaign was that the majority of Ruhr industrialists developed a firm position and political trust in Hitler together with the conviction that it was necessary to support Hitler. As far as can be ascertained from sources still available today, this mainly concerned the major industrialists Emil Kirdorf, Fritz Thyssen, Fritz Springorum and Albert Vögler from the Ruhr industry.

Despite his brief differences and his resignation from the party, Kirdorf remained firmly convinced of Hitler and his cause. In 1930, for example, he wrote to Hitler:

*"Searching for every ray of hope, every ray of hope for Germany's salvation, I would like to have found in Adolf Hitler the man who can accomplish the work of German national unification and salvation."*<sup>150</sup>

Kirdorf therefore continued to act as an NSDAP supporter and even attended the NSDAP party conference in 1928. He wrote Hitler a letter of praise about the NSDAP,<sup>151</sup> which he also sent to other industrialists in order to draw them into the camp of NSDAP supporters. Albert Hoppstädter, general director and board member of the mining company "Konstantin der Große AG" and board member of the mining association, replied to Kirdorf, for example:

*"The copy of your heartfelt letter to Hitler has reached me in a roundabout way here, where I am staying with my wife for a spa cure. I thank you most sincerely for sending it, especially that you also thought of me when you sent it. I would not fail to confess that I fully agree with you in your assessment of the Hitler movement. I gladly acknowledge its importance for the recovery of our fatherland and hope that it will not fail to succeed."*<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Letter from Hans von und zu Loewenstein to Rupprecht Schott, August 5, 1931, files of the mining association, BBA, 16, no. 8022.

<sup>149</sup> Letter from August Heinrichsbauer to the NSDAP functionary Gregor Strasser, September 20, 1932, BA Berlin, NS 51/222, sheets 135 - 144.

<sup>150</sup> Kirdorf, Emil, *Erinnerungen*, p. 181.

<sup>151</sup> Letter from Emil Kirdorf to Adolf Hitler, August 8, 1929, GBAG files, BBA 55/2874.

<sup>152</sup> Letter from the mining industrialist Albert Hoppstädter to the major industrialist Emil Kirdorf, August 24, 1929, GBAG files, BBA 55/2873.

Fritz Thyssen, chairman of the supervisory board of Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG and member of the board of the mining association, had a firm position on Hitler and the NSDAP, which he explained to Max Schlenker, managing director of the industrialists' association "Langnamverein", among others, as follows:

*"National Socialism knows only one leader, whose ideas form the foundation of the movement and who alone is called upon to give Germany the form of government, beyond all compromises and obstacles, which alone is capable, according to human judgment, of defying the overthrow and destruction of European civilization. Let us make no mistake about it, events have progressed too far for there to be any possibility of compromises of a fundamental nature. Only Adolf Hitler can put the true ideas of National Socialism into practice."*<sup>153</sup>

Thyssen often spoke out in favor of Hitler and the NSDAP in industry circles in similar ways, often giving away Hitler's book *Mein Kampf* to industrialists.<sup>154</sup> With the help from the major industrialist Paul Reusch, he also distributed NSDAP propaganda brochures among industrialists in the Ruhr region.<sup>155</sup> Thyssen and Kirdorf actively drew other industrialists into the camp of NSDAP supporters from industry. This went so far that on February 18, 1931, for example, three of the most important coal industrialists - Fritz Thyssen, Friedrich Springorum and Ernst Tengemann - officially appeared as guests at an NSDAP rally in front of 22,000 people in Dortmund.<sup>156</sup> Goebbels made a note of this in his diary:

*"The whole of big industry is here. Thyssen, Tengemann, Springorum. The government will lose the battle."*<sup>157</sup>

Fritz Springorum campaigned for the financing of the NSDAP<sup>158</sup> and rejected Papen's further support as a counterweight to Hitler in January 1933 because he wanted "*a stable national government with the inclusion of the NSDAP*",<sup>159</sup> which for him also meant a government under Hitler's leadership. In January, Springorum, together with the major industrialists Albert Vögler and Fritz Thyssen, advo-

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<sup>153</sup> Letter from Fritz Thyssen to Max Schlenker, November 11, 1932, NL Bracht, BA Berlin, N/2035, vol. 2, sheets 130 - 131.

<sup>154</sup> Estate of Ernst Poensgen, WWA Dortmund, N 7/18, unpublished manuscript: "Hitler und die Ruhrindustriellen", p. 6.

<sup>155</sup> Circular letter from Paul Reusch to the members of the Ruhrlade, March 31, 1932, GHH files, RWWA 130-40010124/14.

<sup>156</sup> Goebbels diary entry from February 18, 1931; in: Frölich, Elke (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels - Sämtliche Fragmente*, Munich - New York - London - Paris 1987, Part 1 - Volume 2, p. 23.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. - Note: Friedrich Springorum was the father of Fritz Spingorum. Fritz Spingorum had already taken over the business of Hoesch AG as CEO. At this time, however, Friedrich Springorum was still an active industrialist - not only as a member of the board of the mining association, but also as chairman of the supervisory board of Hoesch AG. - See also: Annual report of Hösch-Köln Neussen AG for 1931/32, p. 2 (Deutsche Bank files, BA Berlin, 8119 F, microfiche P 1226).

<sup>158</sup> Letter from Fritz Springorum to Tilo Frh. v. Wilmowsky, March 22, 1932, GHH files, RWWA 130 - 400101290/36b, sheets 238 - 241.

<sup>159</sup> Letter from the industrial magnate Fritz Springorum to Franz von Papen, January 24, 1933, Hoesch AG files, H/252, ThyssenKrupp Duisburg Group Archive.



cated clearing the way for Hitler's chancellorship during intimate negotiations with the Reich President. One of the Reich President's closest confidants, the Reich Commissioner for Job Creation Günther Gereke, testified to this.<sup>160</sup>

Alongside Kirdorf, Springorum and Thyssen, the Chairman of the Board of Vereinigte Stahlwerke, Albert Vögler, can undoubtedly be regarded as one of the most eager supporters of Hitler. As early as 1930, Vögler recommended the book "The Economic System of Fascism" to his friends from big industry, which presented fascism in an extremely business-friendly way, with Vögler emphasizing that he wanted "*above all to underline the conclusions drawn from it*".<sup>161</sup> That was an interesting remark, because the conclusion in the book was that fascism was the "pathfinder of capitalism".<sup>162</sup>

According to former Reich Chancellor Brüning, Vögler had acted as Hitler's financier to a large extent, especially during the elections for Reich President in 1932.<sup>163</sup> Whether this was true or not remains to be seen, although Günther Gereke also reported something similar.<sup>164</sup> It would certainly have been conceivable, as Vögler joined the Keppler Circle in 1932,<sup>165</sup> which not only developed the concrete concept for Hitler's rise to dictatorship, but was also one of the most effective groups in paving Hitler's way to power.<sup>166</sup> In November, Albert Vögler openly declared his support for the NSDAP in front of the "Verein deutscher Eisenhüttenleute" (Association of German Ironworkers),<sup>167</sup> and this commitment was well received by German major industry.<sup>168</sup>

It was a very significant success that Hitler had not only succeeded in convincing the majority of Ruhr industrialists of the necessity of "socialist" NSDAP propaganda despite tactical differences, but had also succeeded in gaining a firm position and political trust from the majority of Ruhr industrialists. Above all, Hitler gained powerful advocates through the top echelons of coal and heavy industry, consisting of Vögler, Thyssen, Springorum and Kirdorf, who all sat on the board and/or in the business committees of the Bergbauverein.

The support of Vögler, Thyssens, Springorum and Kirdorf led to a strong dam burst like influx of further supporters, especially among the coal industrialists. Fritz Winkaus, Chairman of the Hoesch Group, and Hans von und zu Löwenstein, Managing Director of the Mining Association, circulated a letter from some smaller coal industrialists in the ranks of the Bergbauverein in the summer of 1932 with some satisfaction,<sup>169</sup> in which the NSDAP was described as an opponent of "*Judaism and the lodge*" as well as "*Bolshevism and Satanism*" and presented in an absolutely positive way as the "*outer*

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<sup>160</sup> Gereke, Günther, *Ich war königlich-preußischer Landrat*, Berlin 1970, p. 220.

<sup>161</sup> Letter from Hans Reupke to Martin Blank, July 01, 1930, Reusch estate, RWWA 130-4001012024/7, sheet 257. - Note: The aforementioned letter from Vögler is quoted in this document.

<sup>162</sup> Reupke, Hans, *Das Wirtschaftssystem des Faschismus*, Berlin 1930, p. 116.

<sup>163</sup> Brüning, Heinrich, *Memoiren 1918 - 1934*, Stuttgart 1970, p. 531.

<sup>164</sup> Gereke, Günther, p. 184.

<sup>165</sup> Helfferich, Emil, *1932 - 1946 Tatsachen – Ein Beitrag zur Wahrheitsfindung*, Jever 1969, p. 8 and p. 25 - 26.

<sup>166</sup> See: Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Faschismus und*, pp. 135 - 147; Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne*, pp. 310 - 337.

<sup>167</sup> Vögler, Albert, *Ansprachen an die deutschen Eisenhüttenleute*, Düsseldorf 1936, pp. 112 - 114.

<sup>168</sup> Information from Dr. Scholz to Franz Bracht, November 1932, Bracht estate, BA Berlin, N/2035, vol. 2, sheet 167.

<sup>169</sup> Letter from Hans von und zu Loewenstein to Fritz Winkhaus, August 29, 1931, BBA, 16, No. 8017.

wing" of "national Germany" in the fight against "godlessness and moral corruption".<sup>170</sup> This inevitably amounted to a confession.

The chairman of the Bergbauverein, Ernst Brandi, openly declared that he and the Bergbauverein had "steadfastly supported" the NSDAP Gauleiter Terboven "in all the difficult last years for him", referring to the "personal friendship" of the major industrialist Herber Kauert with Terboven.<sup>171</sup> Herbert Kauert, the "personal friend" of Nazi Gauleiter Terboven, was a member of the "Kassen-Kuratorium" of the Bergbauverein and a member of the board of Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG.<sup>172</sup>

On August 13, 1932, even a member of the Board of Management of Vereinigte Stahlwerke joined the NSDAP directly - namely Erich Winnacker.<sup>173</sup> He is described in the correspondence of the NSDAP party chancellery as an active member and supporter of the NSDAP even before 1933.<sup>174</sup> The coal industrialist Walter Borbet reported that he had met Hitler personally in 1927 and already then recognized him as one of the "most valuable figures in German history", in whom the future lived and who, in his opinion, represented the "source of strength for the renewal of Germany".<sup>175</sup> Another board member of Vereinigte Stahlwerke, Gustav Knepper, even acted as a second Kirdorf and organized events at which other Ruhr industrialists could get to know the NSDAP leader Gregor Strasser.<sup>176</sup>

Finally it should be mentioned that Walter Funk - a middleman between the NSDAP leadership and German major industry before 1933 - gave a detailed statement to the Allied investigating authorities after 1945 about which of the leading Ruhr industrialists had been in favor of or against NSDAP support before 1933:

*"In these early days (1931 - 1932), the following men (among others) kept their distance within Rhineland-Westphalian industry: Krupp,<sup>177</sup> Peter Klöckner,<sup>178</sup> Reusch<sup>179</sup> (Gutehoffnungshütte) and the young Hugo Stinnes, who, however, no longer played a role after the collapse of his company. In addition to Kirdorf, the following were definitely in favor of National Socialism: his nephew*

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<sup>170</sup> Enclosure of the letter from Hans von und zu Loewenstein to Fritz Winkhaus, August 29, 1931, BBA, 16, No. 8017.

<sup>171</sup> Letter from Ernst Brandi to Herbert Kauert, July 4, 1934, files of the colliery association, BBA, 14, no. 445.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. 1) the lists of the Board of Directors in the annual reports of Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG, GBAG files, BBA, 55, no. 449 - 484; 2) the lists of the Board of Directors of the Mining Association in the annual reports of the Association for Mining Interests.

<sup>173</sup> Letter from the NSDAP local group Munich-Bogenhausen to the Gaupersonalamt, February 18, 1943, BA Berlin, microfilm PK T 137, image number 1918.

<sup>174</sup> See the correspondence and documents in the Winnacker NSDAP file: BA Berlin, microfilm PK T 137, image number 1918 - 1952.

<sup>175</sup> Seebold, Gustav-Hermann, *Ein Stahlkonzern im Dritten Reich - Der Bochumer Verein 1927 - 1945*, Wuppertal 1981, pp. 241 - 242.

<sup>176</sup> Letter from Gustav Knepper to Hans von und zu Loewenstein, November 28, 1931, files of the mining association, BBA, 16, No. 8024.

<sup>177</sup> Gustav Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach: Chairman of the Supervisory Board of "Friedrich Krupp AG".

<sup>178</sup> The original text says "Peter Klinker". However, this probably refers to the industrial magnate Peter Klöckner: Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Klöckner-Werke AG.

<sup>179</sup> Paul Reusch: General Director and Chairman of the Management Board of "Gutehoffnungshütte" (GHH).

*Kauert,<sup>180</sup> Thyssen, Tengelmann,<sup>181</sup> Springorum,<sup>182</sup> Vögler,<sup>183</sup> Knepper,<sup>184</sup> Winkhaus,<sup>185</sup> Büskühl,<sup>186</sup> Kellermann.<sup>187</sup> Thyssen was in very close contact with Göring, especially through the later State Secretary Grauert,<sup>188</sup> who was the head of an industrialists' association in Düsseldorf at the time."<sup>189</sup>*

The names Winnackers and Brandis could also be added here. The absolute majority of these major industrialists sat on the board or on the committees of the mining association.<sup>190</sup>

Based on this evidence it must be concluded that Hitler, despite tactical differences and temporary disagreements, succeeded in winning over a majority of the leading heavy industrialists for the support of the NSDAP and his own political rising in the years from 1927 to 1931/32.

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<sup>180</sup> Herbert Kauert: Member of the Management Board of Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG.

<sup>181</sup> Ernst Tengelmann: Chairman of the Management Board of "Gelsenkirchener-Bergwerks AG".

<sup>182</sup> Fritz Springorum: General Director and Chairman of the Management Board of Hoesch AG.

<sup>183</sup> Albert Vögler: Chairman of the Management Board and General Director of Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of "Gelsenkirchener Bergwerks AG".

<sup>184</sup> Gustav Knepper: Member of the Management Board of Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG.

<sup>185</sup> Fritz Winkhaus: General Director and Board Member of the "Köln-Neussener Bergwerksverein"; Board Member of Hoesch AG.

<sup>186</sup> Ernst Büskühl: Member of the Management Board of "Mannesmannröhren-Werke AG".

<sup>187</sup> Herrmann Kellermann: Major industrialist, board member of the "Gutehoffnungshütte" (GHH), member of the board of the "Verein für die Bergbaulichen Interessen".

<sup>188</sup> Ludwig Grauert: Managing Director of the north-western group of the VDESI.

<sup>189</sup> Statement by Walter Funk on relations between German industry and the NSDAP, June 28, 1945, Document EC-440, Office of the United State Chief of Counsel For Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, Washington 1946, Supplement A, p. 1194 ff.

<sup>190</sup> See the lists of the Board of Directors and the committees in the annual reports of the Mining Association for 1927 - 1931.

## VII. The financing of the NSDAP by the Ruhr industry

*"The Führer tells how he once wanted to shoot himself because he was over his head with bills of exchange. Kirdorf helped him with 100,000 marks."*<sup>191</sup>

These words come from the diary of NSDAP leader Joseph Goebbels. This statement is confirmed by two other, independent sources: *Firstly*, by the industrial lobbyist August Heinrichsbauer, who, according to his own statement, was a connection to some circles of heavy industry to the NSDAP,<sup>192</sup> and who dated the handing over of this sum to Hitler to the year 1927.<sup>193</sup> *Secondly*, by Albert Speer, who, like Goebbels, claimed to have heard this anecdote about the 100,000 marks from Hitler's own lips and who used almost the same words as Goebbels when telling this story.<sup>194</sup> As this report is confirmed almost word for word by three independent sources, it must be assumed that the story about Kirdorf's 100,000 marks for the NSDAP is true.

What is particularly interesting here is Heinrichsbauer's statement that, according to his recollection, Kirdorf had given this sum to the NSDAP in 1927. This sum would correspond exactly to the NSDAP's calculated annual budget for 1927.<sup>195</sup> The first donation from a major industrialist after the NSDAP was founded would therefore have been of decisive importance.

This sum certainly did not come from Kirdorf's private coffers. Since Kirdorf resigned from the GBAG Executive Board on September 30, 1926,<sup>196</sup> his only source of income had been a relatively small block of shares in the group, which would have earned him a few thousand marks a year at most, even with favorable dividends.<sup>197</sup> It is much more likely that this sum came from the Bergbauverein's coffers. At the time when Kirdorf procured the money for Hitler, he still had access to the mining association's fund, as he was a member of the executive committee of the mining association until at least 1930.<sup>198</sup>

The financing of the NSDAP by German major industry is a very extensive topic that cannot be fully covered here in the brevity of this essay. Anyone wishing to deal with it exhaustively should read the

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<sup>191</sup> Goebbels diary entry from November 15, 1936; in: Fröhlich, Elke (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels - Sämtliche Fragmente*, Munich 2001, Part 1 - Volume 3/II, p. 252.

<sup>192</sup> Affidavit of August Heinrichsbauer dated January 31, 1948 before the NMG, WWA, S1, Rep. 501, D 2.

<sup>193</sup> Heinrichsbauer, August, *Schwerindustrie und Politik*, Essen/Kettwig 1948, p. 38.

<sup>194</sup> Speer, Albert, *Spandauer Tagebücher*, Frankfurt/Main 1975, p. 123 - Hitler's quote according to Speer: "*I swore to myself at the time that I would not accept the bankruptcy of the party. I would rather have put a bullet through my head.*"

<sup>195</sup> Trumpp, Thomas, *Zur Finanzierung der NSDAP durch die Großindustrie - Versuch einer Bilanz*; in: Bracher, Karl Dietrich et al. (eds.), *Nationalsozialistische Diktatur 1933 - 1945, Eine Bilanz*, Düsseldorf 1986, p. 137.

<sup>196</sup> Letter from Arthur Salamonsohn to Emil Kirdorf, September 30, 1926, GBAG files, BBA, 55, no. 2871.

<sup>197</sup> No. 251 of the notarial register for 1925, GBAG files, BBA, 55, no. 49.

<sup>198</sup> Annual report of the "Verein für die bergbaulichen Interessen" for 1930, p. 137.

dissertation by the author of this essay, which was published as a book in 2016.<sup>199</sup> Only a few basic aspects of this NSDAP financing by major industry can be addressed here in advance.

First of all, the surviving records in this area are fragmentary and make it impossible to create a full picture of the extent of the financing of the NSDAP by German major industry. An additional important constraint is these German industrialists themselves kept the total extent of their financing secret from the NSDAP. When the treasurer of the NSDAP district "Westphalia South" wrote to various Ruhr industrialists in order to compile statistics on the money that the NSDAP had received from the Ruhr industry since 1932, he received the following reply from Ernst Brandi, the chairman of the mining association:

*"I can imagine that the Gau leadership has a certain interest in ascertaining what sums have flowed from the private sector to the party and its various subdivisions. However, I feel obliged to point out to you that the result would undoubtedly not give you a correct picture, since - as I would like to inform you in all candor - some amounts were certainly given under the assurance of confidential treatment."*<sup>200</sup>

This was the only answer given at the time. The "*assurance of confidential treatment*" was precisely the crucial point. Those insiders who commented on NSDAP financing at all stated that the relevant funds were usually handed over personally in a briefcase.<sup>201</sup> The chemical company IG Farben had not recorded political donations to the NSDAP or its organizations (SA, SS) in its company records,<sup>202</sup> although documents from the NSDAP's main archives show that the company had in fact made very generous donations to the SA.<sup>203</sup>

The deliberate secrecy of the financing processes on the part of the industry makes it considerably more difficult to deal with this topic. Overall, this funding from industry was decisive for the NSDAP's income. If we take the money for 1932 alone, for which due to particular circumstances there is actually evidence in the files of German major industry, the sum corresponds to around 60% of the income of the Reich leadership of the NSDAP from membership fees.<sup>204</sup> As mentioned, these are only the amounts that have become known, which means that the real sum, which is unknown to us, would be significantly higher. But even with external financing that corresponds to 60% of the income of the Reich leadership of the NSDAP from membership fees, it can no longer be said that this financing was insignificant - or even worse, that it did not exist.

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<sup>199</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne*, pp. 176 - 207; see also Schönbach, *Ruhrkohle für Hitler - Die Finanzierung der NSDAP durch die Großindustrie 1928 - 1933*; in: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*, 2015/1.

<sup>200</sup> Letter from Ernst Brandi to Josef Wagener, October 06, 1934, files of the Association for Mining Interests, BBA 16/150.

<sup>201</sup> Koch, Peter-Ferdinand, *Die Geldgeschäfte der SS - Wie deutsche Banken den schwarzen Terror finanzierten*, Reinbek (Hamburg) 2002, pp. 33, 265 + note 46.

<sup>202</sup> See the files on IG Farben donations: IG Farben files, BA Berlin, R 8128, No. A200/192, No. A200/162, No. A4011, No. A4010.

<sup>203</sup> Audit report dated December 14, 1934 on the Administrative Office OSAF Munich, the auditing department of the Reichsleitung of the NSDAP, BA Berlin, NS 26, No. 000319, sheet 25.

<sup>204</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Faschismus und Kapitalismus - Bündnis*, pp. 89 - 90.

When it comes to the financing of the NSDAP by German major industry, a distinction must be made between different levels. As stated in the Brandis letter quoted above, the "*sums flowed from the private sector to the party and its various subdivisions*". This means that both the NSDAP as a whole and various party organizations - such as the SA or the SS - were financed "*by the private sector*". For example, the financing of IG Farben was generally directed directly to the SA and not to the party.<sup>205</sup>

There was also separate funding for individuals in the leadership of the NSDAP. For example, the mining association financed the NSADP leader Gregor Strasser with 10,000 marks a year.<sup>206</sup> That was almost ten times what an ordinary worker earned on average at the time.<sup>207</sup> Incidentally, Gregor Strasser was the very person in the NSDAP leadership who was responsible for "socialist" agitation. This is an exceptionally good example showing that the large industrialists of the coal wing in particular had accepted the necessity of this agitation and no longer personally assumed that the party leadership took the "socialist" content seriously beyond empty promises to the voters. The industrial lobbyist August Heinrichsbauer himself ultimately wrote that this propaganda only met "*a temporary need for agitation*", which "*in no way corresponds to the true interests of the party.*"<sup>208</sup>

Furthermore, a distinction must be made between two forms of NSDAP financing - on the one hand, one-off or occasional donations and, on the other, regular ongoing financing, which the party leadership could plan as a fixed budget. The one-off or occasional donations were mostly campaign donations from the business community for the NSDAP.

As already mentioned, the topic of the financing of the NSDAP by German major industry is too extensive to be dealt with here in more detail. The following will only deal with the portion that is relevant to the topic of this essay - the financing of the NSDAP by the Ruhr industry - especially the coal wing - that can still be proven today.

To begin with, it is helpful to ask what the total income of the NSDAP was. The party and some of its leaders owned press companies and were therefore "entrepreneurs" themselves. But this NSDAP press brought in nothing. By the spring of 1932, the NSDAP itself ran a total of 49 daily and 45 semi-weekly newspapers with an estimated total circulation of 6 - 7 million.<sup>209</sup> Almost all of these NS newspapers were heavily in debt.<sup>210</sup>

So, even for financing the NSDAP press, German major industry had to step in. For example, almost all NSDAP party newspapers on the Rhine and Ruhr were allocated funds in 1932, the source of which was the major industrialist Fritz Thyssen.<sup>211</sup> The "*National-Zeitung*", which was run by the

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<sup>205</sup> Audit report dated December 14, 1934 on the Administrative Office OSAF Munich, the auditing department of the Reichsleitung of the NSDAP, BA Berlin, NS 26, No. 000319, sheets 4 - 55.

<sup>206</sup> Heinrichsbauer, August, p. 40.

<sup>207</sup> Kuczynski, Jürgen, *Die Geschichte der Lage*, pp. 328 - 331.

<sup>208</sup> Letter from August Heinrichsbauer to the NSDAP functionary Gregor Strasser, September 20, 1932, BA Berlin, NS 51/222, sheets 135 - 144.

<sup>209</sup> Böhnke, Wilfried, *Die NSDAP im Ruhrgebiet 1920 - 1933*, Bad Godesberg 1974, pp. 162 - 163.

<sup>210</sup> Broszat, Martin, *Der Staat Hitlers - Grundregelung und Entwicklung seiner inneren Verfassung*, Munich 1989, p. 70 ff; Böhnke, Wilfried, p. 162 - 163.

<sup>211</sup> Eglau, Hans-Otto, *Fitz Thyssen - Hitler's patron and hostage*, Berlin 2003, p. 125.

NSDAP in Essen, received 60,000 marks from the Ruhr industry (most likely from the mining association), according to the major industrialist Ernst Brandi.<sup>212</sup>

Beyond these indebted party-owned commercial enterprises, there were only two other possible sources of income - namely the monthly membership income from party contributions and various forms of external financing. Membership income from monthly subscriptions had not even amounted to five million marks in 1932.<sup>213</sup> This modest income was offset by enormous expenditure. Theodor Heuss described his impressions of the NSDAP's expenditure in 1932 as follows:

*"The party apparatus costs money, a lot of money. The financing of the NSDAP is opaque. Certainly no other political movement has invested such large sums in political agitation in recent years: meetings, military shows with large transportation costs, brochures and leaflets, press foundations and so on..."*<sup>214</sup>

The NSDAP operated two private armies (SA and SS), which together comprised more personnel than the country's regular armed forces. In addition, there was an extensive party apparatus with thousands of party officials whose salaries had to be paid by the party leadership. This income of less than five million marks was offset by a total of 34 million marks in expenditure in 1932 alone, which at the height of the world economic crisis could certainly not be raised by the "middle class" or ordinary people.<sup>215</sup> Translating these sums into contemporary Euro or Dollar values, a roughly 50 times higher nominal value must be applied at the time of this study (2024). So, in today's reality, these amounts would run in the billions - a sum that could only be collected by the very wealthiest circles at the height of an all-consuming and long-lasting economic crisis.

The mining association also played its part in supporting the NSDAP. The Bergbauverein had great domestic political ambitions and from 1928 fought a difficult battle against the Brüning government in Germany, which culminated in the so-called "Harzburg Front".<sup>216</sup> In order to build up an adequate "war chest" for the conflict, the mining association secretly operated its own political fund. This fund was fed by a levy on all mining companies of 12 pfennigs on every ton of hard coal mined.<sup>217</sup> According to the coal production figures for the last years of the Weimar Republic, this would have raised more than 10 million marks per year.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> An official account by the editors of the Nazi newspaper in question states that this money was allegedly provided by a wealthy party friend named Fritz Schmidt from Dortmund (a). However, the newspaper owner Reismann-Grone, who had close ties to the circle of Hitler supporters in Rhineland-Westphalian industry, was able to find out through Ernst Brandi that this money came from industry (b). - See a) *Nationalzeitung*, BA Berlin, NS 26, No. 1066; b) Diary entry by Theodor Reismann-Grone, November 12, 1930, Diary of Theodor Reismann-Grone, typewritten copy, Volume III, Essen City Archives, 652/148.

<sup>213</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne*, p. 191 - 192.

<sup>214</sup> Heuss, Theodor, *Hitlers Weg - Eine historisch-politische Studie über den Nationalsozialismus*, Stuttgart - Berlin - Leipzig 1932, p. 121.

<sup>215</sup> Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne*, p. 191 - 192.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 209 - 227.

<sup>217</sup> Letter from Gustav Dechamps to Ernst Brandi, September 22, 1930, files of the Bergbauverein, Bergbauarchiv Bochum, 16/8018.

<sup>218</sup> The information on the output of hard coal in the Ruhr region for 1930 is taken from statistical material in the files of Deutsche Bank, BA Berlin, R 8119 F, microfiche P 1564. The development of output in the hard coal sector for the whole of Germany for the years in question is shown in detail in: Haarmann, Gerd W., *Die*

However, the political funds of big industry were not only a matter of great confidentiality on the part of the donors when it came to the NSDAP. The Bergbauverein cleverly kept this fund secret by *not* reporting 80% of its income in its official statements.<sup>219</sup> The coal industrialists were experienced and hard-boiled businessmen who did not need to be told how to falsify a balance sheet and make money disappear before the eyes of the public. Even today, you have to delve deep into the surviving correspondence of the Bergbauverein's management to find the relevant documents.<sup>220</sup> The NSDAP was supported from this fund in the form of ongoing regular financing. The industry lobbyist and insider August Heinrichsbauer wrote about this:

*"Initially there were individual discussions, in which the then deputy head of the Reich organization, Paul Schulz, was particularly involved, and then ongoing subsidies from spring 1931. In these payments, the mining industry proceeded from the consideration that it was essential to establish and maintain closer ties with the party, which was best guaranteed by ongoing subsidies."*<sup>221</sup>

These "ongoing subsidies" to the NSDAP quickly reached such a level that the DNVP leader Alfred Hugenberg complained about them to the mining association as early as 1931. The managing director of the mining association wrote to the chairman about this:

*"Hugenberg recently wrote to me with some concern about the large donations from the mining association to Hitler..."*<sup>222</sup>

The extent of these "ongoing subsidies" can no longer be determined, especially since neither the relevant contemporary witnesses - i.e. the political middlemen of industry Funk and Heinrichsbauer - nor the files of the Ruhr companies or their industrial associations have anything to say about it.

The witnesses mentioned, who had survived the war as political middlemen in the industry, mainly talked about the occasional donations. Funk, for example, testified:

*"...whenever I brought these people into contact with Hitler - then a conference was held with Hess or someone else and they organized collections for the party. That only happened in some situations during the 1932 election. When the party was in serious financial distress, they contacted me and I organized a fund from industry for the party."*<sup>223</sup>

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*Eigenart des Konjunkturverlaufes in verschiedenen Wirtschaftszweigen*, Jena 1940, p. 66. With regard to the Bergbauverein, however, only the output of the Ruhr area is relevant here.

<sup>219</sup> Comparison of the mining association's income and expenditure 1930 - 1933, Akten des Bergbauvereins, BBA, 16, No. 122, sheets 148 - 149 - For an evaluation of the source cited, see: Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Die deutschen Konzerne*, pp. 136 - 137.

<sup>220</sup> The corresponding letter from the correspondence of the Bergbauverein has already been published in Germany by the author of this article. - See: Schönbach, Karsten Heinz, *Faschismus und Kapitalismus - Bündnis*, document appendix, Doc. No. 16, pp. 235 - 236.

<sup>221</sup> Heinrichsbauer, August, p. 39.

<sup>222</sup> Letter from Hans von und zu Loewenstein to Ernst Brandi, June 05, 1931, files of the Association for Mining Interests, Bergbauarchiv Bochum (BBA) 16/8018.

<sup>223</sup> Interrogation of Walter Funk by representatives of the International Military Tribunal on June 4, 1945, Document PS 2828, Office of the United State Chief of Counsel For Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, Washington 1946, Volume V, p. 480.



According to Funk's statement, all these contributions from the Ruhr industry to the NSDAP in the years 1931 - 1932 did not exceed the total sum of one million marks.<sup>224</sup> Heinrichsbauer put this total sum even lower in his statement. He claimed that the total sum that the NSDAP had received from the Ruhr industry in the years from 1930 to the beginning of 1933 was only around 500,000 to 600,000 marks.<sup>225</sup> According to Funk, however, the sum mentioned by Heinrichsbauer would have corresponded to the Ruhr industry's election campaign donations to the NSDAP in 1932 alone.<sup>226</sup> Here, the contradictory nature of such statements becomes obvious. Since Heinrichsbauer explicitly stated that the financing of a maximum of 600,000 market shares that he referred to had taken place in a period up to the beginning of 1933, it is easy to show on the basis of industrial files that the figures in such testimonies are always lower than the actual figures. Based on the correspondence of General Director Paul Reusch in the GHH files, it can be established that the NSDAP had received more money from the Ruhr industry in February 1933 alone than Heinrichsbauer stated for the entire period from 1930 to the beginning of 1933 - namely 1,000,000 marks.<sup>227</sup>

The individual donations of the Ruhr industry to the NSDAP for the year 1932 alone, that can still be demonstrated by surviving sources would by themselves almost exceed the totals suggested in the witness statements. A brief reckoning on the basis of the payments made by the Ruhr industry to the NSDAP in 1932, as confirmed by the witnesses Funk and Heinrichsbauer and by industrial files, shows the following: In the course of 1932, the NSDAP received 185,800 marks from the Ruhr industrialist Otto Wolff, according to his own list.<sup>228</sup> The NSDAP also received 100,000 marks from the Fritz Thyssen via the industrial association functionary Ludwig Grauert.<sup>229</sup> In the spring of 1932, the NSDAP received 100,000 marks from an election fund of big industry.<sup>230</sup> The industrial magnate Friedrich Flick declared that he had also paid around 100,000 marks to the NSDAP in 1932 alone.<sup>231</sup> According to the major industrialist Otto Steinbrinck, the NSDAP received a further 30,000 marks from the Ruhr industry via Walter Funk at this time.<sup>232</sup>

In addition, the NSDAP was financed during the Reichstag elections in the summer of 1932. The minutes of a meeting of the board of the so-called "Zechenverband" - a sub-organization of the mining association - show a donation to the NSDAP of 150,000 marks alone.<sup>233</sup> The overall picture for 1932

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<sup>224</sup> Statement by Walter Funk on relations between German industry and the NSDAP, June 28, 1945, Document EC-440, Office of the United State Chief of Counsel For Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, Washington 1946, Supplement A, p. 1194 ff.

<sup>225</sup> Heinrichsbauer, August, p. 39.

<sup>226</sup> Interrogation of Walter Funk by representatives of the International Military Tribunal on June 4, 1945, op. cit.

<sup>227</sup> Letter from the industrial magnate Fritz Springorum to the industrial magnate Paul Reusch, February 21, 1933, GHH files, Rheinisch-Westfälisches-Wirtschaftsarchiv (RWWA), Cologne, 130-400101290/36b, sheet 139.

<sup>228</sup> List of the merchant Otto Wolff dated October 20, 1933 on his donations to political parties, personalities and press organs in 1931 and 1932, Bundesarchiv Berlin (BA Berlin), R 3101, No. 18797, sheets 209 - 211.

<sup>229</sup> Estate of Ernst Poensgen, WWA Dortmund, N 7/18, unpublished manuscript: „Hitler und die Ruhrindustriellen“, p. 7.

<sup>230</sup> Heinrichsbauer, August, *Heavy Industry and Politics*, Essen/Kettwig 1948, p. 44.

<sup>231</sup> Affidavit by Friedrich Flick, Nov. 29, 1946, GStA PK, I. HA, Rep. 335, Case 5, No. 177, NI 3122.

<sup>232</sup> Interrogation of Otto Steinbrinck by the NMG on August 6, 1947, WWA, S1, Rep. 501, D 3.

<sup>233</sup> Minutes of a meeting of leading industrialists on June 26, 1932, files of the colliery association, BBA, 14/01.

is as follows: According to these sums, which can inevitably only show the tip of the iceberg of NSDAP financing due to the fragmentary nature of the records, the NSDAP received a total of 665,000 marks from the Ruhr industry alone in 1932.

If one considers that the Reich leadership of the NSDAP only received a 40% share of the income from membership fees<sup>234</sup> out of a total sum of around 4.8 million marks for 1932 (1,920,000 marks), then these 665,000 marks would already amount to 34% of the regular annual income of the NSDAP leadership. And this does not even take into account the regular payments to individual NSDAP leaders such as Strasser or the subsidies to the NSDAP press from the Ruhr industry. This confirms that only the tip of the iceberg is visible here.

So, even from the vague existing evidence it is very clear that the NSDAP leadership itself was very substantially financed by the Ruhr industry. In 1927, the entire annual budget was paid and in later years a fairly substantial share of their cost was covered compared to the share from membership fees.

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<sup>234</sup> New regulation of NSDAP membership fees June 06, 1930, GStA PK, XX. HA, Rep. 240, B 7a, sheet 43.

## VIII. Summary

The question of this essay was: What part did the German coal industry play in the rise of Hitler at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s?

The answer is clear: the German coal industrialists were an economically very influential group of major industrialists who were politically aggressive and tended to make pacts with extreme political groups. Any racist views held by such organizations, including anti-Semitism, were no obstacle to cooperation.

This group of major industrialists had two main reasons for their cooperation with Hitler and the NSDAP - *firstly*, the revolution in Germany in 1918/1919 and the resulting political struggle with the German working class. *Secondly*, the arms crisis in Germany after the First World War with their hopes for a return to the arms business. Overall, these reasons and the associated tendency towards radical political solutions also existed in other branches of industry in Germany, although it was primarily heavy industry, led by the coal wing, that leaned most strongly towards Hitler.

The most influential industrialists at the top of the coal wing played a major role in supporting Hitler and the NSDAP. These included the major industrialists Emil Kirdorf, Fritz Thyssen, Albert Vögler and Fritz Springorum. All of them acted as intermediaries for contacts and advocates of the NSDAP both within German major industry and in the highest circles of the German government, and repeatedly as supporters and financiers of the NSDAP.

Although there were disputes between German major industry and the NSDAP leadership between 1928 and 1930 over the NSDAP's anti-capitalist advertising strategy, Hitler, with the support of these individuals, managed to win over a majority of the leading heavy industrialists to support the NSDAP and his political rise.

The financing of the NSDAP can also be seen as a significant consequence of this support. Despite the vast literature in the last thirty years that insisted that the opposite was true, the NSDAP leadership itself was very substantially financed by the Ruhr industry and the coal industry's role in that was deeply significant.

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