

Rüdiger Barth & Hauke Friederichs

## THE GRAVEDIGGERS

*How Hitler and his enemies buried Germany's first  
democracy*

Approx. 320 pages  
to be published in Spring 2018  
© S. Fischer Verlag GmbH

November 1932. The Weimar Republic is teetering. The economy is in ruins, the political climate is becoming increasingly brutal and street battles rage between Communists and National Socialists. In the Reichstag and the Chancellery, fixers, adventurers, extremists and demagogues are engaged in a ruthless power struggle, rife with feints, lies, fighting and deception.

Over these few weeks, five men decide the fate of Germany. Along with the National Socialists Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels, Chancellors Franz von Papen and Kurt von Schleicher spin a web of intrigue around the elderly President Paul von Hindenburg in a dramatic *House of Cards*-like scramble for power.

The historians Rüdiger Barth and Hauke Friederichs have drawn on diaries, letters, little-known files and personal notes by a number of actors and observers to produce a thrilling day-by-day account of the final ten weeks of the Weimar Republic. The result is a colourful, multi-layered portrait of a period that was by no means predestined to plunge into the abyss . . . but now seems uncannily familiar.

**Thursday, 17 November**

*Papen offers resignation*

*Centre declares war – South German trip cancelled –*

*Entire cabinet to resign? – Hindenburg speech today*

*Vossische Zeitung, morning edition*

“The election hopes of the united opposition to National Socialism, from von Papen to Thälmann, have crumbled in the face of the movement’s inner strength and unity. The NSDAP has passed its trial by fire with flying colours, proving once and for all that it is a decisive power factor that can no longer be eliminated from German political life . . . Only a tiny percentage of opportunists and wavering voters have been swayed by the empty promises of Mr von Papen and the splinter parties supporting him. National Socialism views only its own intrinsic advantage in this process, leading to a rekindling of its inner fighting strength.”

*Völkischer Beobachter, 6 November*

The German Reich is ruled from the Prussian capital of Berlin. In fact, power is concentrated within a handful of adjacent blocks. This small area is named after the adjoining street, Wilhelmstrasse.

On leaving the Reichstag turn left, walk through the Brandenburg Gate and turn right behind the Hotel Adlon at Pariser Platz, and you’ve reached it. Continue past the British Embassy and the Ministry for Agriculture and soon afterwards the palace complex appears on the right, the chancellery’s bright travertine extension, built a year ago, sticking out like a sore thumb.

From the street, the architectural uniformity of the façades makes for a forbidding sight, yet behind them stretch large, old gardens. Underground passages lead

from one building to the next on this side of Wilhelmstrasse, and a secret route runs between the attics. The gardens are also connected by gates, through which one can slip unseen when it is better not to be seen.

The cabinet meeting, at which Franz von Papen will fight for his career before the spotlight falls on General Kurt von Schleicher, takes place in the garden room of the Reich Chancellery. During the bright months of the year, the floor-length windows bath the room in light, and this morning too, soft light comes streaming in; it is early on a sunny autumn day. The leaves dangle in a blaze from the oaks, elms and lime trees; some of these trees were already tall when Frederick the Great used to stroll through these grounds.

On the rear walls overlooking Friedrich-Ebert-Strasse, the terracotta eagles of the Prussia monarchy still stand to attention, gilded bronze crowns upon their heads. Otto von Bismarck, the first Imperial Chancellor, lived in this house for 27 years. In this garden lie the graves of Tyras, his faithful mastiff, and the Trakhener stallion he rode across the battlefields of Königgrätz in 1866. Paul von Hindenburg also fought in that battle as an 18-year-old lieutenant in the 3rd Foot Guards regiment of the Prussian army.

Hindenburg is now 85 and the most important man in Germany. He continues to dine out on his fame as the victorious commander who surrounded and defeated the Russians at the Battle of Tannenberg. He has been President since 1925, and everyone seeks to curry favour with him, including the ministers and secretaries of states gathered in the garden room this morning.

\*

For the past two days the American trade union official Abraham Plotkin has been roaming around Paris. He came here on a freighter from New York to Le Havre, one of five passengers travelling without any creature comforts, in the modest manner he prefers and his wallet permits. He is 40 or 41 years old; we cannot be quite sure. Back home, he lost his job with the textile union when the Great Depression devastated every branch of industry.

His family emigrated from the Tsarist Russia to America when he was small. Now Plotkin has returned to Europe with not much more than the clothes on his back, his walking cane and his typewriter.

He wanders through the Latin Quarter, visits Notre Dame and plans a trip to Chartres at a later date. During his conversations with local people, he notes their lasting mental scars of the war and senses their fear of what may lie in store; he is conscious of a prevailing unease.

He keeps a diary from the very first day. Plotkin is inquisitive and articulate, and he has an eye for the details of common people's lives. But he did not come to Europe to see France. In five days' time, he will continue his journey.

His destination is Germany, where he wants to see for himself the workers' struggle to claim their rights. He's heard that left- and right-wing extremists are fighting pitched battles in the streets, and people have been killed. The German capital pulls him towards it like a magnet. He devoured Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, and now he wants to plunge himself into the environment so impressively described in that novel. He wants to meet whores, hucksters, beggars and henchmen. He wants to take a look at the National Socialists the whole world's talking about with a mixture of anxiety and awe. People say that the thrillingly suggestive power of Joseph Goebbels'

speeches at Berlin's Sportpalast was like nothing they'd ever heard before.

For any other tourist, November might not be the best time to explore Berlin, as it is then that winter usually settles over the city. But this doesn't bother Plotkin. Plotkin is coming to learn from the Germans.

\*

Defence Minister Kurt von Schleicher, his girth somewhat ampler since he turned 50, enters the garden room. His pate has been bald for some time and he is not tall, but he's still a hit with the ladies. He often works far into the night, gets little sleep and rides for an hour in the Tiergarten park soon after daybreak. He shows barely any signs of this workload, though. He always talks insistently, with charm or chutzpah, however the fancy takes him: he is a master at working a room. Schleicher is known to be Hindenburg's confidant. He too began his army career in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Foot Guards regiment and was a comrade-in-arms of Hindenburg's son, Oskar. In 1919 Schleicher served the then commander-in-chief of the German army, and they have remained close ever since.

In the intervening years, the officer worked in the murky realm where politics and military matters converge. Before being appointed a minister, Schleicher was chief of ministerial affairs – a top-level fixer. The “army department” at the ministry fell under his direct orders. In addition to regular staff, it called on external constitutional experts such as the Berlin-based constitutional law theorist, Professor Carl Schmitt. This think tank still strives to strengthen the power of the president within the Weimar Republic – and simultaneously diminish the influence of parliament.

No German citizen has ever had the chance to vote for Kurt von Schleicher, and yet it is he who whispered the chancellor's name to Hindenburg that summer, of that there is no doubt.

\*

The 53-year-old Chancellor Franz von Papen, their host, enters the room a few minutes after nine o'clock. He takes his seat in the middle of the table, opposite the long windows, so that he can let his eyes wander over the garden. Schleicher sits down to his left: it is to his friend that Papen owes his unexpected career leap six months ago – six months in which Papen has replaced Schleicher in the president's confidence. Six months is ample to make foes of friends.

\*

Only a few yards away, President Paul von Hindenburg is brooding over his papers. In early June he moved out of the dilapidated presidential palace, in which the furniture had to be stabilised with wedges because the wooden floors had subsided dangerously in places. Since then, he has worked and held meetings in the chancellery.

The next session of the Reichstag is only due to begin on 6 December, and the new chancellor must have made up his mind by then. But whom should Hindenburg appoint? According to the constitution, he must ask the representative of the largest party in the Reichstag to form a government. That would be a man named Adolf Hitler, the leader of the NSDAP and Hindenburg's opponent in the April presidential elections. Hermann Göring is the party's first President of the Reichstag, the third highest position in the Reich. The NSDAP's MPs often heckle and

provoke clashes, disturbing the institution's procedures and even beating up a left-wing journalist – they are a disgraceful bunch. No one could truly believe that the affairs of state were in safe hands, should these politicians come to power.

Hindenburg would prefer Franz von Papen – a conservative whose constant good humour appeals to him – to stay on as chancellor. But another option would be Kurt von Schleicher, who mainly talks about making the country great again by strengthening the military. Some people say Schleicher is moody, but Hindenburg has come to count on his alert and resourceful intellect.

The president's task is certainly not an easy one. Politics is a tricky business, especially for an eternal soldier like himself – compromise does not come about on command – and democracy is the trickiest form of politics. Yet whatever Hindenburg decides, he must protect the German people – and his own reputation, needless to say – from harm.

\*

Hindenburg's man in the garden room is Otto Meissner, who has been the president's chief of staff since 1920. The 52 year old is the son of a postal worker from Alsace, and he speaks German and French equally well, along with fluent Latin and Russian. Having gained a PhD in Law, he worked before the Great War as a government assessor for the Imperial General Directorate for Railways, which is where Hindenburg first met him in 1915. That was when the field marshal awarded the Iron Cross to this captain of the reserves for his swift completion of a railway bridge.

Otto Meissner is a pragmatist. Back on 7 May, Hindenburg's son (and adjutant) Oskar, General

Schleicher and Meissner met influential National Socialists close to Adolf Hitler. They discussed how the cabinet around the headstrong Heinrich Brüning could be neatly forced to resign to prepare the ground for a fresh start.

The plan worked. Now, only a few months later, the malleable Papen is himself under pressure.

\*

No one had reckoned with Papen. Hardly anyone even knew his name when he was appointed chancellor in June 1932, and he has no intention of stepping down again so soon. He used to be a backbencher in the Prussian parliament. Rumour has it that he was made chancellor primarily because Schleicher thought he would be easy to manipulate. Now, even Schleicher would probably admit that he made an error of judgment.

Papen had actually intended to travel to Mannheim for the inauguration of the new bridge over the Rhine, and Württemberg and Baden were expecting the chancellor for a “state visit”. But those plans have all been cancelled. Yesterday, the leaders of the Centre Party informed Papen that although they “agreed in principle with the idea of a policy of national concentration”, they did not regard him as the right chancellor for this coalition. They drivelled on about the risk of imminent chaos if he stayed, saying that the best thing would be for Papen to resign with immediate effect. Neither the Social Democrats nor the National Socialists even deigned to turn up to the discussions about emergency cooperation.

Papen has noted all of this. Naturally, the centrists are sulking: he used to be one of their own, so they feel betrayed. They didn’t even achieve twelve per cent of the vote in the most recent elections.

Papen has a very personal conception of loyalty. He served the Kaiser as a cavalry major in the war. He represented reactionary, nationalist positions for the centre as a member of parliament and now he governs the Republic he despises as chancellor without a majority. Papen envisions constitutional reform: he would paralyse the Reichstag for six months and then put a new constitution, stripped of the bothersome disadvantages of parliamentarianism, to a popular vote. That would be a first important step towards Papen's dream – reinstatement of the monarchy. It would be a form of coup, however.

He needs allies to accomplish his plan, but that is precisely the sticking point: his only remaining supporters are the German Nationalists and the People's Party. Those two parties together will only have 63 of the 584 seats in the new Reichstag – a ridiculously small number. Even yesterday, Papen had been counting on the National Socialists to support his policies. Since July they represent by far the largest group in parliament: they got 37.9% of the vote in July! Papen's idea was that the NSDAP at least would tolerate a presidential government under his leadership. If necessary he would have offered their leader, Adolf Hitler, the vice-chancellorship to bring the fascists under control while also making them jointly responsible. Yet Hitler rejected this proposal out of hand.

This is the first time his cabinet has met since the harrowing outcome of the most recent Reichstag elections. More than ever, Papen needs the support of his close allies. He begins to speak.

The president must once more call on the party leaders and argue on behalf of his chancellor's government, he says. But for the time being, the cabinet should continue to govern, don't they think?

No, replies Kurt von Schleicher of all people. The cabinet must resign.

But Hindenburg wishes to keep me on as chancellor, says Papen.

He certainly does, says Schleicher, but the cabinet's resignation is the first and only appropriate response to such disastrous election results.

There are mumblings of agreement from around the table. This gathering is popularly known as the "cabinet of barons". Most of these gentlemen have a "von" in their name and come from aristocratic families. Papen didn't only select them for their bloodline, though. Some are reputable experts and they are not indifferent to the fact that many of the people suffering from the recession are angry at cuts to social security benefits and Papen's industry-friendly economic policy.

Papen is bewildered. Well, in that case, he says laconically, he could also stand down as chancellor.

\*

Schleicher hides his glee. Papen long ago proved himself an amateur at domestic politics, incapable of forging broad alliances. What's more, he no longer listens to well-meaning advice. When someone remarked to Schleicher after Papen's appointment that the new man was no "head" (i.e. no thinker), Schleicher replied, "But he *is* a hat."

For days he has been contemplating how he might persuade Papen to give up his position, and now the chancellor has put his resignation on the table himself.

Perfect.

\*

There is silence in the room. Outside in the garden, the sun's slanting rays catch in the leaves of the trees. None of his ministers contradicts the chancellor, and State Secretary Meissner doesn't say anything either.

Papen nods. Is this the end? Is the highest position in the land about to slip from his grasp? Is that how few words it takes?

There are only a few doors between him and the presidency.

\*

Has Adolf Hitler's time come?

The self-designated "Führer" of the National Socialists wants to come to power, at last. His written reply to Papen a few weeks back left nothing to the imagination: "What fills me with bitterness is to have to look on, every day, as the unfortunate hand of your governance, Mr Chancellor, squanders the national good that history will judge I played a considerable part in creating." Thus Hitler announced the end of their cooperation before it had even begun. These are forceful words from a party leader who strikes a forceful note in public these days.

His determination may not be faked, but his optimism certainly is. The NSDAP is very jittery at the moment. For the first time, the National Socialists lost massive numbers of voters at the 6 November elections – two million of them! – and their popularity with the German people seems to have peaked. The party is dogged by financial problems. The election campaign was horrendously expensive: Hitler flew from event to event every day with the aim of appearing ubiquitous, and tens of thousands of SA men don't fight in the streets for free. The banks won't grant them any new loans, and their industrialist backers are hesitant to make any further

donations. Within the organisation, Hitler's adversary Gregor Strasser is causing trouble with his pleas for a pragmatic approach, and several members of the NSDAP group in the Reichstag have backed him. Then there are Hitler's personal debts of five million Reichsmark.

The state of the coffers of the important Berlin district party is also grim. Its leader, Joseph Goebbels, is just informing his underlings about this: "At a low ebb: nothing but debts and liabilities." Raising money is "completely impossible," he says. But it's better to be beggars than out of the game, so Goebbels sends the SA men back out into the streets with their begging bowls.

If the National Socialist movement doesn't manage to seize power this time, it could lose its momentum, its appeal and its credibility this winter – and it might even fall apart.

**Friday 18 November**

“Never before has the entire political context of a cabinet crisis been as grave, as sombre, even as menacing as it is now. This time it is about more than a change of personnel, a choice between right, left and centre; it is about a decision that will shape Germany’s destiny for a long time to come. Its unusual importance explains the president’s unusual choice of procedure.”

*Vossische Zeitung*, morning edition

*Proletarian offensive blows Papen’s cabinet apart*

*Papen government resigns – Schleicher press demands Hitler as Chancellor – Extreme danger for working people (...) Storm warning for German proletarians. Risk of the National-Socialist terror organisation entering government.*

*Die Rote Fahne*, central news agency of the German Communist Party (KPD)

\*

This morning Transport Minister Peter Paul Freiherr von Eltz-Rübenach invites people to a ceremonial breakfast. He is honouring the pioneering pilot Wolfgang von Gronau for setting a number of long-distance records in his Dornier aeroplane. In his toast, the minister praises the first German to fly around the globe. A little earlier, the president received veteran pilots from the Great War – a matter of honour, which is why he made space for it in his diary.

\*

Negotiations to form a government begin the same morning. The first party leader Paul von Hindenburg meets is the conservative DNVP leader Alfred Hugenberg, well known for single-mindedly representing his interests, which happen to be those of large industrialists and landowners. Hugenberg expresses serious reservations about Hitler.

That afternoon, however, Ludwig Kaas of the Centre Party recommends a “loyalty pact” between three or four “brave party leaders”. He seems unconcerned by Hitler. Eduard Dingeldey of the German People’s Party also make an appearance; unlike Kaas, he can easily imagine Papen staying on as chancellor.

Again and again, the democratic decision-making process proves a tortuous business for Hindenburg. Before standing in the 1925 presidential elections, he first sought a blessing from his exiled former emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II. Hindenburg has never converted to republicanism, but he is filled with love for his fatherland and a sense of duty, and he is aware of his responsibilities as president. He knows his rights too, of course: he is not required to speak to everyone.

He didn’t invite the Socialist SPD for a conversation. The 60-year-old party, which brought the Republic into being, is now under attack from all sides, especially from the Communists. The SPD gave its support Hindenburg in his 1932 re-election campaign to stop his rival, Hitler, but the old man hasn’t shown any gratitude to the SPD; quite the opposite, in fact. “Who elected me? The socialists elected me. The Catholics elected me. My own people didn’t elect me,” Hindenburg once told his press officer. He is embarrassed by the votes of his social-democratic supporters. His people – the monarchists, the anti-republicans and the right-wing conservatives – have gone over to Hitler.

Hindenburg wants them back.

\*

In its Berlin showroom the Adler factory is selling the new 1.5-litre Adler Trumpf, with an independent axle and front-wheel drive, as a four-seater all-steel limousine for 3,550 Reichsmark, and a very elegant four-seater cabriolet version for 4,200 Reichsmark. The company has taken out a newspaper advert to vaunt the car's advantages: "The TRUMPF is not inconvenienced by bad roads, potholes or ruts. It simply glides over them, with no jolts and no slipping and sliding. It takes bends at full speed with ease. The ADLER TRUMPF is the latest design in automobile manufacturing. Low-slung, long and sleek, it is a vision of sheer beauty."

\*

A U.S. tennis star has arrived. Bill Tilden is making a special appearance in Berlin to play some exhibition matches with his Tilden Troop at the Sportpalast, where the National Socialists also like to hold their events. Tilden is known simply as "Big Bill". He used to play for the U.S. Davis Cup team and has won ten Grand Slam titles. 6'<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" and full of muscle, he's also amazingly handsome – and then there's his notorious cannonball serve. He's a legend.

\*

The season at her Red & White club, Berlin's most exclusive tennis club, has come to a close, and for tennis players like Bella Fromm, the long wait for spring has begun. She used to write about tennis and ice hockey in her late twenties, but other

sportswriters replaced her long ago. Did she buy a ticket to see Big Bill play? We have no idea.

Fromm, the lady with the coquettish lips and the dark eyebrows, is now 41 and a society reporter for the *Vossische Zeitung*. This paper is required reading for anyone in Berlin who is involved in politics, plays a leading role in society or would like to do so. Ministers read it, as do members of parliaments and their assistants, civil servants, the military, lobbyists, diplomats and their wives. Bella Fromm's column is very popular with readers. She generally passes on harmless tittle-tattle about "Berlin diplomats". She doesn't vent her venomous political analysis in the paper; she reserves that for her diary.

She doesn't shy away from undercover investigations to obtain her exclusive reports. When the president received the diplomatic corps for a reception a year ago, the press were not invited, but Fromm slipped into men's clothing, parked her car at the Kaiserhof and mixed with onlookers outside the presidential palace to see who came when and with whom – and, more importantly, who left when and with whom.

She is also well informed about the people who hang around at the Hotel Kaiserhof. Bella Fromm calls the National Socialist "Führer" "Kaiser Adolf" to her close friends. She is sometimes in the lobby, taking in the spectacle, when the NSDAP party leader holds court at the Kaiserhof.

Once, not so long ago, she waited there for hours. At first nothing happened: Hitler is in the habit of making people wait. Excited National Socialists, who had come in hope of an audience, stood at the bar and stilled their impatience with beer. Foreign newspaper correspondents peeked into the room, hung around for an hour, then gave up.

Finally, at seven in the evening, doors opened and leading party officials in brown shirts flooded into the hotel lobby. To Fromm this looked like a to-do at the country fair because the men were wearing light-blue, bright-red, gold and God-knows-what-coloured brassards and insignia.

The brownshirts strutted around like peacocks, and she thought, It's lucky they don't realise how silly they look. Their brown trousers seemed to have been tailored too wide, so it looked as if these men had wings on their legs.

The men lined up in rows with a clatter of feet, a mumbling filled the room and then Adolf Hitler appeared. She noted the serious, belligerent expression on his face, saw arms shoot into the air and heard the men's thundering shouts of "Heil". One word popped into Bella Fromm's mind: "Manitu" – an American Indian god.

Adolf Hitler strode across the room without so much as a glance to his left or his right – and immediately disappeared through a side door.

When this spooky episode was over, some isolated onlookers began to laugh, all of them foreigners. They can afford to laugh, thought Bella Fromm.

And today – today, Hitler is expected back in Berlin. The Kaiserhof is already shaking.

\*

When he is in Berlin, Adolf Hitler, who only became a German citizen in March of this year, stays at the Kaiserhof as a matter of principle. The "Yellow Room", with its heavy chandeliers and stucco decorations, has virtually become the campaign headquarters of the National Socialists.

This plush 260-room establishment – the Hotel Adlon’s great rival – is an ideal base for them and a highly symbolic location. The major attraction of the building on the Wilhelmsplatz is the vaulted-ceilinged dining room – a light-filled space where they serve exquisite meals.

When it opened fifty years ago, the hotel already boasted an array of modern conveniences such as pneumatic elevators and private radiators in every room. Its location is unbeatable too: from here one can see directly over to Wilhelmstrasse 77. As soon as Adolf Hitler steps out of the Kaiserhof’s four-pillared entrance, there it stands, almost within reach – the Reich Chancellery.

\*

The Christmas period is just coming into full swing at the Nathan Israel department store – one of the biggest in the city – in Spandauer Strasse. The shop’s adverts read “Be smart and buy now.” “Superlative quality” printed pyjama flannel – a modern flower pattern, approx. 80 cm – cost 65 pfennig at the fabric department. A genuine-hair velour hat with a broad ribbon trimming in black, navy-blue and brown for 3.90 marks. From 5 to 7 p.m. Nathan Israel offers Christmas handiwork advice. The children’s department opens at 10 o’clock, so that parents can linger while their little ones are being looked after.

\*

The fifth criminal division of Leipzig imperial court sentences three communists to long prison terms. They are accused of “high treason in coincidence with crimes against the explosions law and a breach of the law on firearms and military equipment”. A 31-year-

old carpenter is sentenced to six years in jail and ten years deprived of civil rights (which includes losing his right to vote), and a 25-year-old and a 28-year-old construction worker are each sent to prison for three years. The police had found 65 kilograms of explosives, rifles, pistols and ammunition at the men's homes. The judges presume that the condemned men were planning attacks.

Four National Socialists are standing trial in Hofgeismar near Kassel. They had built an armoured car and intended to use it before the July elections. However, Kassel police were able to secure the car in the early hours of 1 August. The accused had covered the cabin with bullet-proof armoured plating, then inserted several shooting slits; there was also an opening for a machine gun at the front. The accused told the court that this armoured car was designed to protect their NSDAP from communist assaults. The public prosecutor requested fines of between 50 to 200 marks for the men.

\*

This is a joyful day for Harry Graf Kessler, a former aspiring diplomat, now an art collector and intellectual. Papen has finally resigned. That constantly smiling amateur has caused more harm in six months than any previous chancellor in such a short space of time. Perhaps his worst crime has been to show the world-war hero Hindenburg in a bad light.

Kessler is a figure on the Berlin cultural scene, an inquisitive man with a taste for a good story. The English journalist Alexandro Shaw recently had breakfast with the chancellor, later telling Kessler that he was not sure whether Papen was rash or still relatively capable. Kessler rules out the latter notion.

He voted for the Socialists in the Reichstag election, like every fifth German voter. After all, the SPD is one of the last parties still defending the Republic, isn't it?

\*

Bella Fromm won't shed any tears for the departing chancellor either. Papen represented no one but the large landowners in the eastern part of the country, who are now desperate to seize power. She thinks that "they underestimate the radical movement", by which she means the National Socialists.

She writes a worried note to herself: "One lovely morning they'll wake up and realise that in their search for willing instruments, they have created a new ruling class."

Only two months ago she spent a Sunday at the races with Schleicher and Papen. The chancellor came over as she was standing with Schleicher and a friend. Papen kissed her hand; he was smooth and wilfully charming. "Mrs Bella, wouldn't it be a brilliant idea to take a group photograph for your newspaper?" he asked. All so people would believe he was still on the best terms with the Defence Minister, of course, thought Fromm. And she knew it was a complete masquerade: the two men had long been estranged.

\*

At "Karstadt's Lebensmittel" at Hermannplatz underground station, a pound of real dairy butter costs 1.44 marks this 18 November, a pound of pork belly 64 pfennig and a litre of Edenkobener wine 60 pfennig, as long as you buy ten.

A worker earns 164 Reichsmarks per month at the going rate.

“This is how they live,” it says on a leaflet Communists are handing out in the streets. “Hitler’s bill at the Kaiserhof: 23 marks for one breakfast, times twelve equals 276 marks! And 28,890 marks for the room! While you starve!”

Propaganda or the truth? The KPD doesn’t say how many rooms they have counted here. Actually, Hitler avoids the much-vaunted dishes of the Kaiserhof’s head chef: one never knows who might be concocting evil plans. Besides, Hitler has a far better option: Magda Goebbels, Joseph’s wife, is a fantastic cook and prepares the vegetarian dishes her Führer likes. The Goebbels live a few minutes away by car, towards the German Stadium, but their apartment is spacious with high ceilings. Magda brought it into their marriage. Her ex-husband, the millionaire Günter Quandt, paid for it. There is a grand piano in the living room, and Hitler likes someone to play it for him.

Their address has an attractive ring to it: Reichskanzlerplatz 2.

\*

Joseph Goebbels is 35 years old, a short, thin man with a slight upper body, a large head, brown eyes and black hair. He developed a clubfoot after suffering from osteomyelitis as a child and has had a limp ever since. He looks awkward when he walks. His opponents mockingly call him the “shrunk German”. Yet he is a powerful speaker and his demagogy has brought the National Socialists thousands of new supporters. What’s more, he has Hitler’s trust.

Goebbels hopes that when Hitler and Hindenburg finally stand face to face again, they will shake hands, look each other in the eye and come to trust each

other. It is said that Hindenburg secretly calls Hitler “that bohemian private”.

An aeroplane from Munich lands at Tempelhof airfield at one o'clock. On board are Hitler, the leader of the NSDAP group in the Reichstag, Wilhelm Frick, and Gregor Strasser, the party's head of operations. They have come to negotiate their takeover of power. At the airport, Hitler orders the driver to take him to the Goebbels' apartment in Charlottenburg. Here, the party's district leader for Berlin updates his guest on political happenings in Berlin over the past few days. Then he must be off to his next meeting.

\*

How was the Austrian-born Adolf Hitler able to acquire German citizen so quickly this year? He wouldn't have been allowed to stand for president without it. A number of people in Germany are wondering the same thing, including the SPD state diet member, Oskar Thielemann.

The official explanation is that the Free State of Braunschweig granted Hitler German nationality for “valuable services”. Valuable services? What kind of services? Thielemann submitted a question to the National-Socialist-led Interior Ministry of the Free State of Braunschweig: “What orders has Councillor Hitler been able to acquire for the economy of Braunschweig so far, and what, if any, work has he done for the state of Braunschweig to date?”

The answer arrived yesterday. “According to the Interior Minister of Braunschweig, Councillor Hitler provided valuable services as a special adviser, particularly in safeguarding the mining industry in Unterharz.”

Hitler a mining expert? The SPD politician is not the only one who's surprised.

\*

Abraham Plotkin is a mystery even to himself. He tries to put down in writing what is driving him, tries to understand what he's doing here in Europe. When he was a child, his family fled to America from the "dark terror of Tsarist Russia", as he calls it. "Now I'm going back. Why? I can't say. Maybe I'm going back to escape the apathy in my country's cities. Maybe my eyes have grown tired of seeing shapes and people and things. I suspect that the reason lies buried deep inside me – so deep inside that I have neither seen nor heard it until now. Maybe I will feel stupid later, if and when I ever realize what it was. It is impossible to be sure in advance that one is not, in fact, an idiot."

## The Gravediggers

### *Dramatis personae*

Abraham Plotkin (\*1892 or 1893)

*A Jewish Russian-American left-wing activist in the German winter*



Russian-born Jewish American who has been investigating in Germany since 22 November 1933. Unemployed textile union official with contacts to German labour leaders. Wanders around Berlin, listens to Goebbels' speeches at the Sportpalast, meets whores and workers, trades unionists and policemen, SA men and Communists.



Bella Fromm (\*1890)

*A society reporter who knows everyone*

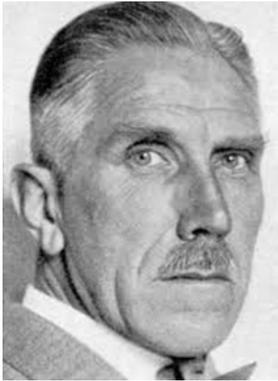
Journalist for the *Vossische Zeitung*, organises balls and fashion shows. She comes from a good family, divorced her husband early, brings up their daughter on her own and hobnobs with the upper crust. Her "Berlin Diplomats" column is required reading for politicians.



Paul von Hindenburg (\*1847)

*A living legend of the Great War. An old man. A president who despises democracy*

An imperial general, head of the army chiefs of staff during the Great War and second President of the Weimar Republic. The moderate parties pinned their hopes on this old man to save democracy and stop Hitler becoming president, although Hindenburg loathes the Republic. He decides who will become Chancellor and frets about his reputation.



Franz von Papen (\*1879)

*A risk-taker who unexpectedly comes to power, then does everything to stay there*

Officer during the Great War, member of the Prussian Parliament and the reactionary *Herrenclub*, and Chancellor since June 1932. He governs without a majority, dependent on the President's emergency directives. Power transforms him from a backbencher into a careerist.



Kurt von Schleicher (\*1882)

*General and chancellor-maker who suddenly becomes chancellor himself*

General in the *Reichswehr*. Hoists Franz von Papen into the top office, serves under him as Defence Minister before being appointed chancellor himself in December 1932. Tries to split the NSDAP and bring the left wing into his camp.



Adolf Hitler (\*1889)

*Radical right-wing demagogue who wants to establish a dictatorship*

Party chairman of the radical right-wing NSDAP since 1932. Has party supporters call him the "Führer". Failed attempted coup in Munich in 1932.

Imprisoned. Tries several times to come to power legally in 1932. In November he stakes everything on one card.



Otto Meißner (\*1880)

*State secretary who serves power instead of the state*

As state secretary, he runs the president's office, first under the Social Democrat Ebert and then under the reactionary ex-general von Hindenburg. Part of the *camarilla* that advises and controls the president. An unprincipled pragmatist.



Ferdinand von Bredow (\*1884)

*Schleicher's spy*

Makes his career in the army, then from 1930 runs the *Abwehr*, the military intelligence service. Spies on the National Socialists and keeps an eye on right-wing politicians, sharing his findings with Schleicher. Takes over the most senior position in the War Ministry: Chief of the Ministerial Office. Plans a coup d'état with other senior officers to stop Hitler.



Joseph Goebbels (\*1897)

*Chief strategist of the radical right-wing party*

Party leader for the district of Berlin and one of the NSDAP's most strident demagogues. Chief strategist. Loyal to Hitler and fights Gregor Strasser, who is in favour of a more moderate course.



Magda Goebbels (\*1901)

*A "Führer" groupie*

Joseph Goebbels' wife, who brings money into their marriage along with a distinguished apartment on Berlin's Reichskanzlerplatz. A fervent National Socialist and admirer of Hitler. Cooks for Hitler and accompanies him to official appointments.



Camill Hoffman (\*1878)

*Powerless observer from a neighbouring country*

Journalist, translator and press attaché at the Czechoslovakian embassy in Berlin. A keen observer of political life, who knows many journalists and politicians and takes notes on what is going on in the capital and who is in league with whom.



Alfred Hugenberg (\*1865)

*Conservative ringleader*

Former large industrialist who moves into the media. As party leader of the conservative DNVP, he competes for voters with the NSDAP and collaborates with Adolf Hitler to bring down the Republic. An opponent of Hitler in November.



Harry Graf Kessler (\*1868)

*Socialite*

Officer during the Great War, after which he tries to become a diplomat, ending up as a publicist and art collector instead. Mixes with Berlin's leading cultural and political figure. Keeps a diary for over 57 years and is one of the most important chroniclers of the Weimar Republic.



Carl Schmitt (\*1888)

*Defender of reactionary forces*

Legal scholar who teaches in Berlin. Helps Papen's cabinet to justify the *Preussenschlag*, the illegal removal of the Prussian government, and produces an expert report for the Imperial Chamber Court. Also works as an adviser to Schleicher.



Gregor Strasser (\*1892)

*Hitler's greatest adversary*

NSDAP's head of operations and a member of its anti-capitalist left wing. Second most powerful man in the party. Rejects Hitler's all-or-nothing approach and negotiates with Kurt von Schleicher for some NSDAP politicians to enter government.



André François-Poncet (\*1887)

French ambassador in Berlin, who is politically very well connected. On friendly terms with Schleicher, excellent contacts within Schleicher's circle, including to the NSDAP. Hitler respects the diplomat.



Kurt von Hammerstein-Equod (\*1878)

As commander-in-chief of the Reichswehr, Hammerstein commands over 100,000 soldiers. As Defence Minister, Schleicher is not only his boss but also an old friend, since both of them served in the same regiment. Hammerstein tells Hitler that he will order his troops to fire on the National Socialists if they try to seize power illegally.