

Not all cigarette companies were enthusiastic about the rise of German fascism. Indeed, for a time prior to 1933, Germany's largest manufacturer—the firm controlled by Philipp F. Reemtsma in Hamburg—waged a quiet miniwar with the regime; the story is an interesting one, so permit me to digress for a moment.

The rise of the Reemtsma Cigarette Company (Reemtsma Zigarettenfabrik GmbH) is one of the most stunning success stories in the history of German business. The firm had played only a minor role in the trade prior to the First World War and even as late as 1921 produced only 360 million cigarettes per year, or about 1.5 percent of the German market. Capitalizing on the runaway inflation and financial ruin of the early 1920s, however, the company expanded rapidly, primarily by purchasing the working stock of fiscally stressed companies. By the end of the twenties, the firm was producing nearly 20 percent of the cigarettes smoked in Germany. And after negotiating financial agreements with several other companies (notably Neuerburg), the conglomerate came to control roughly three-quarters of all German tobacco manufacturing. Its share remained over 70 percent in 1939, when the company took over the six largest Czechoslovakian tobacco companies. In the twelve years of Nazi rule, the Reemtsma empire produced some 400 billion cigarettes¹⁹¹—enough, by my calculation, to cause some 200,000 deaths from lung cancer and perhaps twice this many from heart disease.

Reemtsma came under attack in the late 1920s for antitrust violations and unethical business practices. These attacks continued in the early 1930s, spurred partly by the fact that Ernst Röhm's *Sturmabteilung*—more commonly known in English as the “brown-shirts” or “storm troopers” or “SA”—had begun to manufacture its own brand of cigarette to raise much-needed cash (see fig. 6.23). In many parts of Germany, proceeds from sales of so-called Storm cigarettes, manufactured by Trommler in Dresden, accounted for a sizable fraction of the SA's total income.¹⁹² At least one other political party tried to cash in on the scheme: the SPD shortly before the Nazi seizure of power introduced its own *Freiheits-Zigarette* (freedom cigarette), though the venture did not last long.¹⁹³

Reemtsma was also vulnerable, however, because one member of his governing board, David Schnur, was Jewish. In 1931 or 1932, SA officials accused the firm of producing “Jewish cigarettes” (*Juden-Zigarette*), prompting Philipp F. Reemtsma's refusal to purchase advertising space in Nazi newspapers and magazines. The tobacco magnate met with Hitler to iron out their differences—the exact date is uncertain, but it was before 1933—who ordered his party press to stop its attacks. Party officials were relieved to recover the advertising revenues, though isolated attacks on the firm continued for some time thereafter. Germany's first Gestapo chief, Rudolf Diels, recalled these events after the war:

The Hamburg industrialist Reemtsma was among the “monopoly-capitalist” hyenas Justice Minister [Franz Gürtner] wanted to neutralize. Reemtsma's empire was charged with corruption and perjury; the SA became involved by virtue of the fact that the cigarette manufacturer Trommler was supported by the SA. SA men were supposed to smoke only Trommler [“Storm”] cigarettes. Retailers of Reemtsma brands were beaten, their display windows smashed. The Berlin SA could not stop Reemtsma by themselves, so they appealed to the police to assist them in this regard. In August [of 1933] a meeting was arranged between Reemtsma and Göring. After professing his honor as an officer, the wheeler-dealer Göring made it clear he had no desire to kill the hen that laid the golden eggs. He proposed a truce—actually a deal—and Reemtsma accepted. Göring needed sponsors for his art addiction, for the Berlin Opera, and for his project to breed bison and elk.¹⁹⁴

The story as it is most often told has Reemtsma providing the Reichsmarschall with three million marks and (later) an additional sum of nine million marks. Göring after the war testified under oath at Nuremberg that the total amount turned over to the “Adolf Hitler Fund” was RM 7.276 million.¹⁹⁵

The SA apparently stopped the manufacture of “Storm cigarettes” shortly after 1933; the decapitation of the SA in the 1934 “night of long knives” may have put an end to the practice, or Trommler may have been bought up by Reemtsma or dissolved as part of the agreement made with Hitler. We need more historical work to answer this question.