



Hitler's Thirty Days to Power: January 1933

Henry Ashby Turner

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In *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power*, distinguished Yale historian Henry Ashby Turner makes an important and influential addition to his life-long study of Nazi Germany. Providing vivid portraits of the main players of the drama of January 1933, and using newly available documents, Turner masterfully recreates the bewildering circumstances surrounding Hitler's unexpected appointment as chancellor of Germany. The result is a work that *Booklist* calls "first rate ... a gripping, foreboding narrative."

Hitler's Thirty Days to Power: January 1933 Details

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Bryn Young-roberts says

This book covers a matter that is usually overlooked in other books, and the detail is enlightening, while the conclusions are a fresh non-determinism approach to history.

John says

So a rabble rousing politician -- seen by elites as an embarrassing buffoon that excites the masses based on demagoguery and racism -- is on the verge of losing all power in 1933. And then conservative elites decide they can live with him because he'll enact their policies and moderate once in power. Obviously, no one is Hitler. But there are interesting parallels regarding how he obtained power -- and it's a good lesson about both historical contingency and why you shouldn't give crazy people political power.

Supriyo Chaudhuri says

This is a great book about the political machinations that brought Adolf Hitler to power in January 1933, not because his party was popular, but rather its opposite - the Nazi Party was in existential crisis and others, such as Franz Von Papen, thought that Hitler could be tamed and controlled. It is an extraordinary story of politics and personalities that reminded me often of The House of Cards, with more lethal and real consequences that would follow. By focusing on people's actions, it makes an interesting point that more detailed analysis of the origins of the Third Reich often misses, that while many social and economic factors made the Nazi take-over of power a distinct possibility, it was not certain and contingent on the actions and vanities of few key individuals who held the levers of power in 1933 Germany. Indeed, how it became so narrowly defined, dependent on the mood swings of a vain old man and his son, and a disgruntled courtier, is another interesting story, to be read elsewhere.

Raúl Fernández says

Excelente narración sobre los conflictos políticos en Alemania que llevaron "de la mano" a Hitler al poder. Critica la teoría determinista argumentando múltiples episodios por los que se pudo evitar la Segunda Guerra Mundial y demás consecuencias.

Una especial mención a la explicación del armado constitucional de la República de Weimar con una serie de pesos y contrapesos que dieron lugar a un caos político.

Randy says

Republic.

I also strongly agree with much of Mr. Turner's conclusion that Hitler's appointment was not inevitable, but rather the result of luck, and of the flaws and mistakes of a handful of men. In that respect Mr. Taylor agrees, at least in part, with William Shirer's belief that so much of history is random.

And yet in one crucial way I found this book lacking: its portrayal of two of the principal players: Hindenburg and Schleicher, both of who reluctantly accepted political power not for a love of power, like so many politicians, but to save the Weimar Republic and to stop Hitler.

And so, here's my two cents:

Part of the problem is that Mr. Turner devotes so little time to what happened before the crucial month of January 1933. For example, he hardly mentions that Germany faced very real threats from a civil war, a communist takeover and an invasion on their Eastern border. (Because of the last threat Schleicher felt he had no choice but to try to use the Nazi paramilitary to strengthen Germany's small military.)

Also, Mr. Turner states that when Hindenburg retired from the military his career was unexceptional. From what I read Hindenburg was very well-respected in the military. Also, he was one of the few generals who predicted that, if Russia invaded, they would do so in the Masurian Lakes region. He therefore he studied the terrain, and railroads, of the region and was well prepared when he arrived took command at Tannenberg. (During the Great War he proved to be a very capable, defensive commander who, unlike other generals, cared for the lives of his men.) Furthermore, Mr. Turner ignores the reality that Hindenburg hated being forced to govern by presidential decree, which he properly felt was a threat to the republic.

Schleicher, on the other hand, hated Hitler and deeply cared about the working man and their economic plight; yet we never read about his compassion in this book. (Yes, Mr. Turner is right: Because of a lack of documentation, we know relatively little about Schleicher. I don't believe we should, therefore, assume almost the worst about him and view him in a one-dimensional light. (His plan to try to bring Strasser into the government and hopefully split the Nazis was realistic and almost worked.)

During the final years of the republic Hindenburg and Schleicher were lodged between rocks and hard places, especially because they had to work with so many petty, partisan politicians.

IMHO to truly understand history we must look beyond events and into the often complex personalities of the men and women who shaped and lived it. Settling for simple characterizations, and then for easy answers to the predicaments they faced limits our understanding.

Yes, Hindenburg and Schleicher were flawed - like most of us - and made crucial mistakes. After all, they had no playbook to go by. So, in light of what unfolded, should they be forgiven?

Mr. Turner and most people don't think so. I'm, however, not so sure.

Steve Herreid says

Very well done, I loved this book. The last chapter was particularly interesting, in which Turner speculated on possible alternative courses of history had some of the key parties acted differently at the time of these events. Highly recommended.

Guerin Shea says

Ran the gamut of emotions with this book. I loved the well documented attention to detail, but was angered by the bumbling bureaucrats - namely Paul von Hindenburg and Franz von Papen - in allowing this monster to come to power.....

Lewis Weinstein says

UPDATE 6/9/14 ...

This is probably the last major research I will do before beginning to organize and write Part Two of my new novel. It is a superb place to finish. Turner has done a magnificent job reporting the events and capturing the feelings of so many of the participants in the momentous events of January 1933.

... at the beginning of January, Hitler was judged to be finished ... Frankfurter Zeitung - Jan 1, 1933: The mighty Nazi assault of the democratic state has been repulsed. The republic has been rescued.

... There was widespread disillusionment in the Nazi ranks. Many who had joined in expectation of sharing quickly in the spoils of victory were beginning to despair: resignations occurred daily; dues arrived irregularly.

... If the Nazis had to face the voters again, they would have no resources to do so. Goebbels: "it must not come to another election"

... Then the ambitions of former-Chancellor Papen and current Chancellor Schleicher, and the gross incompetence of President Hindenburg, re-opened the door for Hitler. Papen convinced Hindenburg that Hitler was ready to join with conservative forces in a coalition cabinet [this was not true!]. Hindenburg concluded that Hitler's involvement precluded Schleicher, which made Hindenburg part of a conspiracy to depose the chancellor (Schleicher) he had just appointed.

... Hitler maintained his composure in 2nd half of January; he betrayed no loss of nerve, retaining his unshakable belief in his calling to lead Germany.

... on Jan 30, after a dizzying series of events well reported by Turner ... Papen led the assembled group up the stairs to Hindenburg's office. At about 11:30, Hindenburg administered the oath of office to Hitler.

... Hitler had not seized power or won it at the polls. It had been handed to him.

... Turner's sad conclusion ... Those who favored republican government failed to realize that an

unconstitutional interlude under a general like Schleicher would be a far lesser evil than the constitutional installation of a dictatorial fanatic like Hitler. It was one of the greatest political blunders of all time

ORIGINAL REVIEW

A fascinating, day-to-day, person-by-person review of the 30 days that ended with Hitler being appointed Chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933. Turner's conclusions in the final chapter pull no punches. He assigns culpability and guilt, making it clear that it was the ignorance, ineptitude, personal grudges, mendacity, and ambition of the characters in power (mainly Hindenburg, Schleicher and Papen) who gave Germany to Hitler and thus Hitler to the world. Those who supported democratic government in Germany simply gave it up without much of a fight, often because they were fighting with each other. It is true, Turner asserts, that Hitler played the weaknesses of the others brilliantly, but he was only playing the cards he was dealt.

Mark Greenbaum says

A methodical, and frankly infuriating chronicle of January 1933 in Germany. While the study and language Turner uses is fairly dry and academic, the prose is made lively both by his framing of events, and the impending doom he knows we all feel as near the fateful January 30.

Hitler's ascendance to absolute ruler was not inevitable, as the Nazi party was weak entering 1933. He was enabled by his own canniness and demands for the chancellorship, but more by the political greed of powerful players, all of whom either negligently or willfully ignored what was known about Hitler's thugs and the future Fuhrer's intentions even then. As Turner notes, Hitler's intentions for total war and future genocide were announced by Mein Kampf, and men like Hindenburg and his son, von Papen, and others either ignored them, or incredibly never sought to learn them.

The strongest lesson of the book seems ever-applicable, now in America 2016 especially so, that no one can grab great power all by themselves. They must be helped along the way by luck and fortuitous circumstances, yes, but more by eager leaders who look past the good of their nation and the responsibility of their post for purely selfish aims.

Turner's close: "Although the Nazi dictator's career left only a negative legacy, it provides a powerful example for subsequent generations of the crucial need to exercise the utmost care in selecting those to whom control is granted over the most powerful -- and potentially the most lethal -- institution created by humanity: the modern state. As for how Hitler got the power to commit his crimes, that story serves as a reminder that nothing except change itself is inevitable in human affairs, that the acts of individuals make a difference, and that heavy moral responsibility weighs upon those who wield control over the state."

SharonJH Harman says

For the right person who loves history, this book would be invaluable. It contains a very detailed account of German politics that lead up to Hitler's appointment as chancellor. Especially valuable were the "what ifs",

what might have happened if a different course had been chosen, and also personal insights into why certain persons may have made the choices they did. For myself, I couldn't finish it due to the deep detail that buried the story. I was wishing that Bill O'Reilly had written it!

Recommended for research.

Paul Spence says

In the book *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power*, Henry A. Turner argues that Adolf Hitler's rise to power is most evidently illustrated by examining the last thirty days before his appointment to chancellor of Germany in January 1933. Prior to reading *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power* I had been under the impression that Hitler had a much more active role in securing his position as chancellor of Germany before ascending to Fuhrer. Turner by taking the microscopic approach of only analyzing these thirty days clearly demonstrated that this was not the case. According to the author, Hitler's rise to power was the result of luck, the egos of other political figures, as well as the belief that he could be used simply as a pawn to gain favor of his dwindling amount of supporters. Had any one of these differentiate Hitler would not have been successful in securing the position as chancellor. Turner substantiates his claims through a variety of resources ranging from personal memoirs and newspaper articles from the period to journal publications of modern historians. The information he presented was mostly well known to the scholarly world, however, the manner in which it manifested was innovative. By using a magnifying glass-like method to examine the month leading up to Hitler's establishment in power rather than the all encompassing approach, Turner gives the generally educated reader, such as me, a better insight to the schematics of Hitler's rise.

Furthermore, the individuals of the text come to life through an intense focus on what propelled them to reach conclusions that allowed Hitler power. The personalities of people like Franz von Papen and Paul von Hindenburg are revealed through these decisions. Turner does not simply state the events that occurred, but rather allowed his reader to envision internal turmoil that was suffered by these individuals in coming to their resolutions. An example of this would be the German President Paul von Hindenburg. Originally he vowed that Hitler would never gain the position of chancellorship. However, numerous overtures made by Papen, a good friend and former chancellor under Hindenburg, combined with the encouragement by his son Otto the President was convinced to allow Hitler the position he so coveted. Turner illustrates throughout the book the difficulty Hindenburg faced in reaching this conclusion. The narration permits the book a novel-like reading often reserved for fiction rather than history. Many other texts compel the audience to feel as if they had read solely the outcome of the events leading up to January 1933 instead of getting a vivid understanding of its cause. *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power* answers the problem of how Hitler came to power in a compelling and easy read. The narrative and the individuals engage the audience regardless of any negative or positive connotations surrounding them.

The only major flaw that I see with *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power* is the last chapter of the text. This chapter, "Determinacy, Contingency, and Responsibility," attempts mainly to answer two questions: Should anyone, other than Hitler, be held accountable for the atrocities of his reign because of their involvement in his rise to power and what would have happened had Hitler's reign not existed? The author answers the first charge with the assertion that "although impersonal forces may make events possible, people make events happen." Unforeseeable events might have occurred, but it is individuals like Papen and Hindenburg who are ultimately responsible for Hitler's reign regardless of their original intent. Although others like Hindenburg's son Otto might have played a lesser role they still had a significant part therefore they are also to blame. I agree with these assertions, however, they led me to disagree with Turner's assessment of the public. Turner sees the German public only at fault because of their lack of understanding of the importance of their ability to

replace their government figures. After WWI, Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated the throne at the demand and revolt by the general public. At this moment the power the people held was not failed to be recognized. I have a difficult time believing that less than twenty years later this power had all but been forgotten. Instead after reading Turner's text I have come to the conclusion that much like Hindenburg and Papen, the German public underestimated Hitler. Turner asserts that responsibility for Hitler's reign rests on those like Hindenburg and Papen for their underestimation of Hitler, than the general German public should also share the blame.

In addition, Turner's answering the question of what would have happened had Hitler not come to power seems unreasonable. The author suggests that had Hitler not come to power a military coup would have overtaken the government and the atrocities of WWII would have been avoided. It is difficult to make assumptions of what might had happened if Hindenburg or other resisted Hitler's rise to power. No one can say for certain the fate of the government at the end of the Weimer Republic had alternate approaches been taken. In addition, it is difficult to say that the atrocities of WWII would have been completely avoided. There had been for some time a growing resentment for both communism and the Jews. Perhaps, these crimes might have been on a lesser scale in which all of Europe was not involved. However, these atrocities regardless of their extent seemed destined to be committed because of the complacency of the German republic (refer to the book "The Butcher's Tale").

Overall Henry Ashby Tuner's Hitler's Thirty Days to Power was an excellent text. It provided a microscopic look into the last thirty days before Hitler obtained chancellorship which eventually led to his dictatorship. This approach was helpful in understanding how Hitler's rise to power. It allowed his audience to witness the key figures involved and their reasoning for being a part of the scheme. In addition, the reader also is provided with the sense that there were several opportunities to prevent Hitler's reign yet they were pushed aside. Furthermore, Turner showed the audience that although Hitler took advantage of the conflict between several key figures in government, it is these individuals like Papen and Hindenburg that are responsible for Hitler. They underestimated Hitler and their large egos led them to believe that they could ultimately control him. Turner's text is valuable to not only the study of history but also as a study for the future. The book teaches the world's governments that we should not underestimate those seeking or holding power. Most importantly, when an individual claims or even more brazenly writes a book on their political goals, like Hitler did with [...], perhaps we should see these claims or writings as absolute truths. Goals which people like Hitler intend to reach.

Philip Kuhn says

Awesome book. Turner just covers the period of January 1st 1933 to Jan 31st. He sticks to his topic. Turner lays everything out in the last chapter, who was most responsible for Hitler being appointed Chancellor, and what their motives were. He also goes over in a few sentences what each person specifically did to bring Hitler to power, leaving nothing uncertain as to his reasoning. Turner also lays out a hypothetical scenario if Hitler was not granted power on Jan 30, 1933 and the global effects of this.

Mikey B. says

This is a very well written account of Hitler's instatement as Chancellor of Germany in January, 1933 and definitely one of the key turning points on the path to World War II. The author presents the series of events

that led to Hitler's grab for power and also gives us excellent descriptions of the characters involved and how their personalities culminated in Hitler's becoming Chancellor of Germany.

The three main people were Schleicher, who was Chancellor in January, Hindenburg who was President and Papen who was ex-Chancellor (prior to Schleicher). We are given thorough portrayals of what occurred behind the scenes in this grab for power. As the author correctly states these three men were still in the "driver's seat" – any one of them could have prevented the Nazi leader from acquiring power. After January – it was Hitler who was solely in charge. These three, plus their advisors, are presented as vacillating in their various roles and unable to understand how to maintain their various positions (especially Schleicher). It was only Hitler who knew what he wanted – to become Chancellor – in other words: power.

This is truly an epic account of this historically critical period. For these three political leaders – if it were not for the profound catastrophe of World War II – it would make a fine Shakespearean tragedy.

David Hill says

It is a common misconception that Hitler was elected by the German people. He was not, and in fact the popularity of the Nazi party was on the decline by January 1, 1933. This book details the machinations that led to Hindenburg appointing Hitler chancellor. Here we learn how a man who vowed to take power through violent means if necessary, who had no intention of sharing power, was gifted the chancellorship due to conspiracy and bungling. Turner introduces us to the major players; describes the functioning of the presidency, chancellorship, and Reichstag; details the events that set the table for the conflagration that was WW II; and parses out responsibility for the events.

Usually, man made disasters have long chains of causation where if any one link is broken the disaster is averted. This is one of those cases. Here we see how many times, had somebody done or said something different, the misery of 50 million people could have been averted.

Socraticgadfly says

Easy read, and a lucid and well-thought one, of one of two transitional points in the 20th century; the other being 1917 in Russia, of course.

Turner shows that three people were primarily responsible for Hitler coming to power: current Chancellor Kurt von Schleicher; his predecessor, Franz von Papen; and President Paul von Hindenburg. Lesser roles were played by Hindenburg's son Oskar and his presidential secretary, Otto Meissner, along with Alfred Hugenberg of the German National People's Party.

A key point is that Hitler's rise was not inevitable, and Turner lays out a detailed case for its contingency.

The crux of the matter was the Weimer constitution. The German president had plenty of non-ceremonial powers, including the right to issue emergency decrees. From 1930 on, no Chancellor was able to form a parliamentary majority, so all governed in part by use of these decrees, and their cabinets were known as presidential, rather than parliamentary, cabinets.

Papen tried to rope Hitler into his late-1932 cabinet as vice chancellor, a title he showed as useless himself when he got the same role in Hitler's cabinet. Hitler, with his all-or-nothing strategy, refused.

Hindenburg, also in late 1932, offered Hitler the chance to govern, but only if he could form a parliamentary majority; he declined.

Schleicher, who had put Papen in power as a tool, then grew tired and distrustful of him, so he resigned his Army commission and stood for the Chancellorship himself.

Turner makes clear that all three major players, and the two main secondary ones, consistently underestimated Hitler. None apparently had read *Mein Kampf*, even though at the state level, the state of Prussia, when under control of the Social Democrats, had civil servants do an analysis, based on the book, on what exactly the Nazis would do if they got power.

Also, Papen and Schleicher both, naively, thought they could control Hitler.

Once the Hindenburgs took a personal dislike to Schleicher, and Papen convinced them that he could control Hitler and (according to Turner) deceived them that Hitler would have a parliamentary cabinet pending the filling in of a few blanks, and Hugenberg decided that this was the best brass ring he could grasp and that he could join Papen in controlling Hitler, the die was cast.

===

Turner concludes with something that will always get my attention: alternative history.

He asks, "What if the Three Stooges, and the Three Lesser Lackeys, hadn't given in to Hitler?"

It's a very good question.

As for Hitler himself, he notes, as all history aficionados of the period know, that the Nazis' vote declined from summer 1932 to the end of fall election, and that the party was nearly broke.

So, Turner says, if only Schleicher had waited him out, Hitler and the Nazis would have continued to slide.

Of course, Hitler could have called out the storm troopers and made a putsch attempt.

But Turner notes that the WWI allies had already agreed to remove the 100,000 man limit on the Germany Army. He thinks a resolute chancellor could have put down such a coup.

As for Hitler's reviving the Germany economy? A large part of that was actions undertaken by a Schleicher cabinet minister.

So, what might have happened? Turner notes that by 1933, a fair chunk of central and eastern Europe had already gone to traditional-type military dictatorships; arguably, Franco a few years later fit this mold. Given German militarism, such a dictatorship, probably with some degree of anti-Semitism but far less than that of Hitler's, could easily have been implemented by coup.

Schleicher himself was in position, but irritated Hindenburg and hit his Peter Principle limit as chancellor.
