

Stinnes, Hugo

By [Moritz Föllmer](#)



Hugo Stinnes (1870-1924)

Hugo Stinnes (1870-1924) strides out in the street with an umbrella over his arm and bag in hand. Stinnes was an important industrialist in Germany during and after World War I. As a nationalist he advocated the invasion of Belgium.

Bain News Service: Hugo Stinnes, black-and-white photograph, n.p., n.d.; source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-B2- 5268-10 [P&P], <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ggb2006006489/>.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Stinnes, *Hugo*

German entrepreneur

Born 12 February 1870 in Mülheim an der Ruhr, Germany

Died 10 April 1924 in Berlin, Germany

Summary

Hugo Stinnes was a highly successful and politically influential heavy industrialist. During the First World War, he adopted a German nationalist position and advocated the colonisation of Belgium and parts of France. After the defeat, Stinnes negotiated with both the trade unions and Germany's former enemies, while also flirting with authoritarian ideas.

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Early Career and Wartime Mobilisation

Hugo Stinnes (1870-1924) was an exceptionally influential businessman in early 20th century [Germany](#). His career began as a coal merchant in the Ruhr area, before he became a major heavy industrialist in the two decades before the war. Moreover, he branched out by importing wood from [Russia](#) and iron ore from [Sweden](#), as well as by spearheading regional electrification and public [transport](#). His entrepreneurial skills were matched by a knack for cooperating with fellow industrialists and for networking with bankers and politicians.

Despite his transnational outlook, Stinnes turned into a staunch [nationalist](#) once the First World War began. Adapting to, and striving to shape, a drastically altered environment, he produced for [armament purposes](#) and advocated the colonisation of [Belgium](#) and parts of [France](#). Later on, he supported the authoritarian approach led by [Paul von Hindenburg's \(1847-1934\)](#) and [Erich Ludendorff's \(1865-1937\)](#) third [Supreme Command](#). He also supported Germany's decision to launch unrestricted [submarine warfare](#), and lobbied for the [forced labour](#) of young Belgian men in Germany.

A Symbol of Weimar Business

After the [Empire](#) surrendered and [gave way to the Republic](#), Stinnes again adapted. He negotiated a compromise with the trade unions and sought an understanding with France and [Britain](#), albeit on German terms. Complex arrangements and new investments enabled his businesses to flourish during inflation – so much so that he came to epitomise this turbulent period. However, in 1923 he failed to find a means against the occupation of Germany's industrial west by France and Belgium, and he also flirted with the radical right. Throughout his career, Stinnes viewed politics from the perspective of a uniquely imaginative and often ruthless businessman.

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Selected Bibliography

- [Feldman, Gerald D.: **Hugo Stinnes. Biographie eines Industriellen, 1870-1924.** Munich, 1998: C. H. Beck.](#)

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External Links

- [Gründung der "Arbeitsgemeinschaft der industriellen und gewerblichen Arbeitgeber und Arbeitnehmer Deutschlands" \("Zentralarbeitsgemeinschaft"\), 15. November 1918 \(100\(0\) Schlüsseldokumente\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Hugo Stinnes 1870-1924 \(Lebendiges Museum Online\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Kampf um die Republik 1919-1923, 23 December 2011 \(Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Nr. 21. Besprechung mit Hugo Stinnes. 13. Dezember 1923, 18.30 Uhr, 13 December 1923 \(Bundesarchiv\) \(Primary Source\)](#)
- [Stinnes, Hugo: Nr. 255. Hugo Stinnes an Reichsfinanzminister Luther. 14. November 1923, 14 November 1923 \(Bundesarchiv\) \(Primary Source\)](#)
- [Zilkenat, Reiner: Ein US-Dollar für eine Million Mark! \(Förderkreis Archive und Bibliotheken zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung e. V.\) \(Article\)](#)

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