The Death of News? The Problem of Paper in the Weimar Republic

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Cambridge University Press in Central European History 50, no. 3 (2017), pp. 328–346. Access the version of record here: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938917000619

Abstract: In the early 1920s, the press faced an existential challenge. Publishers proclaimed the death of news, not because nothing was happening, but because there was insufficient paper to print newspapers. While historians of the early modern period have long investigated material constraints on the spread of information, the problem of paper in Weimar Germany shows that the economics and politics of supply chains continued to shape cultural production in the twentieth century as well. Rationing during World War I subsequently became a crisis in the 1920s, when paper shortages, which had started as an issue of prices and supply chains, ballooned into a discussion about the role of the press in political and economic life, about the relationship between the federal states and the central government, and about the responsibility of a democratic government to ensure an independent press. Paper became a litmus test for the relationship between politicians and the press. The failure to resolve the crisis not only undermined the trust of publishers in Weimar institutions, but, this article argues, also enabled greater control by right-wing media empires. The public sphere, it turned out, had a very material basis.

In den frühen 1920er Jahren sah sich die deutsche Presse mit einer existentiellen Herausforderung konfrontiert. Verleger verkündeten sogar den Tod der Nachrichten, nicht etwa aufgrund eines Neuigkeitsmangels, sondern aufgrund des ungenügenden Papiers für den Zeitungsdruck. Die Historiker der frühen Neuzeit untersuchen zwar schon lange den Einfluss materieller Engpässe auf die Informationsverbreitung. Doch der Papiermangel in der Weimarer Republik zeigt die noch im 20. Jahrhundert bestehende Einwirkung der wirtschaftlichen und politischen Aspekte von Lieferketten auf die kulturelle Produktion. Die Rationierungen während des Ersten Weltkrieges weiteten sich in den 1920er Jahren zu einer regelrechten Krise aus: Die Diskussionen über den von den Preis- und Beschaffungskettenproblemen verursachten Papiermangel entwickelten sich bald zu Grundsatzdiskussionen über die Rolle der Presse im politischen und wirtschaftlichen Leben, die Beziehung zwischen den Ländern und der Zentralregierung sowie die Verantwortung einer demokratischen Regierung zur Bewahrung einer unabhängigen Presse. Das Papier wurde somit zur Feuerprobe für die Beziehung zwischen Politik und Presse. Die Unfähigkeit des Weimarer Staats, die Krise zu lösen, schwächte nicht nur das Vertrauen der Verleger in die Weimarer Institutionen, sondern stärkte auch die Kontrolle durch die nationalkonservativen Medienimperien. Es stellte sich heraus, dass die Öffentlichkeit auf einer sehr materiellen Grundlage fußte.

In April 1920, Robert Farber, the head of the Association of German Newspaper Publishers (Verein Deutscher Zeitungsverleger, VDZV), sent a desperate telegram to the president of the National Assembly, Konstantin Fehrenbach, who would soon become chancellor. "The most important elements of the German press are on the eve of collapse," the telegram ominously began. If the government did not intervene, catastrophe was "unavoidable."[1] The reason was simple: the exorbitant rise in the price of paper.

Paper is a curious commodity. It is an industrial commodity, like steel, that requires access to raw materials and involves mass production. But paper also creates the material conditions for the dissemination of information. The control of paper production was and is about more than just distributing materials. Under certain conditions, discussions about paper become discussions about the political role of information in society as a whole. In the early 1920s, heated debates between newspaper publishers and Weimar officials about the allocation of paper turned into debates about the meaning of information in a fledgling democracy. That was why supply chain problems became political and philosophical. The debate circled around how far Weimar bureaucrats would subsidize the private newspaper industry in the belief that the press served the public interest.[2] Not far enough, thought many newspaper publishers. Not in the right way, thought editors of prestigious newspapers, like Georg Bernhard of the *Vossische Zeitung*. At any rate, all editors and publishers agreed that the press

* I am grateful to the editor of *CEH*, Andrew Port, for his meticulous editing, and to the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions. Thanks to Janet Ward for commenting on an earlier version presented at the annual conference of the German Studies Association in 2016, as well as to Suzanne Marchand and James McSpadden for their useful questions. I am deeply indebted to Ann Blair and Michael Stamm for their insights about paper in other times and places. A final word of thanks to Claudia Sandig for supporting my interest in paper.

[1] Telegram sent from Farber to Fehrenbach on April 9, 1920, reprinted in *Zeitungs-Verlag* 21, no. 16 (April 16, 1920): 554. *Zeitungs-Verlag* was the weekly journal of the Verein Deutscher Zeitungs-Verleger (Association of German Publishers, VDZV), founded in 1894. On the history of the VDZV, see Thomas Daubenbüchel, "Verleger zwischen Widerstand und Anpassung: Organisation und Rolle des Vereins Deutscher Zeitungs-Verleger von 1928 bis 1935" (PhD diss., Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 1998); Rudolf Stöber, *Pressefreiheit und Verbandsinteresse: Die Rechtspolitik des "Reichsverbands der Deutschen Presse" und des "Vereins Deutscher Zeitungs-Verleger" während der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin: Colloquium-Verlag, 1992); Heinrich Walter, *Zeitung als Aufgabe. 60 Jahre Verein Deutscher Zeitungsverleger, 1894-1954* (Wiesbaden: Verein Deutscher Zeitungsverleger, 1954).

[2] Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (henceforth BArch) R43I/2462, 163, letter from Interior Minister, Dec. 24, 1924.

could not be free if it could not pay for the paper to print information. The public sphere, it turned out, had a very material basis.

The history of media and communications has become a vibrant part of German historiography in recent years.[3] This has become a more mainstream concern in historiographies of other countries and regions, too, particularly Britain, the British Empire, and the United States. Scholars have explored the political economy of news, the intersection between news as a business and forms of government subsidies, as well as how anti-colonial thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi approached news.[4] The growing body of work on media has intersected over the past few decades with increased interest in information, book production, and reading practices, driven by scholars of the early modern period like Ann Blair and Robert Darnton, as well as by modernists like Paul Edwards and Paul Duguid.[5]

In 1975, Modris Eksteins called for historians to move beyond merely parsing the content of newspaper articles and to understand the newspaper "both as a multi-dimensional institution in its own right and as part of a wider social and political context."[6] Historians only began to take up this call consistently over the last decade or so. In the scholarship on Germany, some have focused on the press and on politics during the *Kaiserreich* and the Weimar Republic.[7] Others have explored the intersection

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[3] Corey Ross, "Writing the Media into History: Recent Works on the History of Mass Communications in Germany," *German History* 26, no. 2 (2008): 299–313; idem, *Media and the Making of Modern Germany: Mass Communications, Society, and Politics from the Empire to the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[4] See, e.g., Isabel Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Richard R. John and Jonathan Silberstein-Loeb, eds., *Making News: The Political Economy of Journalism in Britain and America from the Glorious Revolution to the Internet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Media Nation: The Political History of News in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

[5] Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Robert Darnton, "An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris," *American Historical Review* 105, no. 1 (2000): 1–35; John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, *The Social Life of Information* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2000); Paul N. Edwards et al., "Historical Perspectives on the Circulation of Information," *American Historical Review* 116, no. 5 (2011): 1392–435.

[6] Modris Eksteins, *The Limits of Reason: The German Democratic Press and the Collapse of Weimar Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), vii.

[7] See, e.g., Frank Bösch, *Öffentliche Geheimnisse: Skandale, Politik und Medien in Deutschland und Großbritannien 1880-1914* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009); Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Bernhard Fulda, *Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Dominik Geppert, *Pressekriege: Öffentlichkeit und Diplomatie in den deutsch-britischen Beziehungen (1896-1912)* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2007); Jörg Requate, *Journalismus als Beruf: Entstehung und Entwicklung des Journalistenberufs im 19. Jahrhundert: Deutschland im internationalen*

between law and the press, especially in the realms of intellectual property rights and hate speech.[8] Recent work has also examined the role of advertising, including how commercial advertising legitimized the Nazi regime and maintained many elements of a consumer society.[9] A few have pursued comparative projects, particularly ones contrasting Germany and the United Kingdom or the United States.[10] This work has not concentrated solely on the written word. For example, a special issue of *Central European History* in 2015 drew attention to the role of visual media, particularly photography, in twentieth-century German history.[11] A significant body of literature has also examined new media like radio during this early period from the perspectives of gender, class, and culture.[12]

The scholarship has thus mostly focused on social, cultural, legal, and political aspects of the media. Yet, much of the excellent work on media has omitted the material basis that created media in the first place. One exception is Anke te Heesen's book on newspaper clippings, which explores clippings businesses that collated information from newspapers for myriad customers.[13] There is, of course, a large literature on paper itself, much of it on the pre-nineteenth-century period. The

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Vergleich (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995); Chase Richards, "Ernst Keil vs. Prussia: Censorship and Compromise in the Amazon Affair," *Central European History* 46, no. 3 (2013): 533–67. None of these studies examines paper in depth or mentions the crisis described in the present article.

[8] Eva Giloi, "Copyrighting the Kaiser: Publicity, Piracy, and the Right to Wilhelm II's Image," *Central European History* 45, no. 3 (2012): 407–51; Ann Goldberg, "Hate Speech and Identity Politics in Germany, 1848–1914," *Central European History* 48, no. 4 (2015): 480–97; Heidi J. S. Tworek, "Journalistic Statesmanship: Protecting the Press in Weimar Germany and Abroad," *German History* 32, no. 4 (2014): 559–78.

[9] David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Pamela E Swett, S. Jonathan Wiesen, and Jonathan R Zatlin, eds., *Selling Modernity: Advertising in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

[10] Frank Bösch and Dominik Geppert, eds., *Journalists as Political Actors: Transfers and Interactions between Britain and Germany since the Late 19th Century* (Augsburg: Wissner, 2008); Daniel Gossel, *Medien und Politik in Deutschland und den USA. Kontrolle, Konflikt und Kooperation vom 18. bis zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2010); Wolfgang Hagen, *Das Radio: Zur Geschichte und Theorie des Hörfunks - Deutschland/USA* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2005).

[11] Elizabeth Harvey and Maiken Umbach, eds., "Photography and Twentieth-Century German History," *Central European History* 48, no. 3 (2015): 285-454.

[12] Konrad Dussel, "Deutsches Radio, Deutsche Kultur: Hörfunkprogramme als Indikatoren kulturellen Wandels," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 41 (2001): 119–44; Daniel Gilfillan, *Pieces of Sound: German Experimental Radio* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Michaela Hampf and Ursula Lehmkuhl, eds., *Radio Welten: Politische, soziale und kulturelle Aspekte atlantischer Mediengeschichte vor und während des Zweiten Weltkriegs* (Münster: LIT, 2006); Kate Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio, and the Public Sphere, 1923-1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Inge Marßolek, "Radio in Deutschland 1923-1960: Zur Sozialgeschichte eines Mediums," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 27 (2001): 207–39; Heidi J. S. Tworek, "The Savior of the Nation? Regulating Radio in the Interwar Period," *Journal of Policy History* 27, no. 3 (2015): 465–91.

[13] Anke te Heesen, *Der Zeitungsausschnitt: Ein Papierobjekt der Moderne* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2006).

production of paper in China marks the start of Frank Bösch's historical survey of the media, for instance.[14] Markus Krajewski has provided a four-hundred-year examination of how paper enabled sorting systems like card catalogues—or what he calls "paper machines"—in the pre-computer era.[15] Historians of American media and literary scholars have been particularly attentive to the materiality of media products.[16] Detailed investigations of modern paper in Germany tend to examine the paper product industry itself more than the broader ramifications of paper production.[17] A particularly engaging transnational history of paper by Lothar Müller explores the material in three ways: as a physical product, as a cultural technique and infrastructure to store and circulate information, and as a metaphor used in the history of science and ideas. Müller focuses more on the interactions of literary and intellectual figures with paper, and while his chapter on newspapers notes the challenges of producing paper in Germany during the early 1920s, he does not systematically address how the paper crisis of that period affected newspapers.[18]

This article, by contrast, explores how the paper crisis intersected with broader political and economic crises and how it influenced the relationship of newspapers with Weimar politicians and bureaucrats. The "problem with paper" in the early Weimar Republic started as an issue of prices and supply chains, but soon ballooned into a discussion about the role of the press in political and economic life, about the relationship between federal states and the Weimar government, and about the responsibility of a democratic government to ensure an independent press. In the process, this article

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[14] Frank Bösch, *Mediengeschichte. Vom asiatischen Buchdruck zum Fernsehen* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2011). For an overview specifically dealing with paper, see Nicholas Basbanes, *On Paper: The Everything of Its Two-Thousand Year History* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2013).

[15] Markus Krajewski, *Paper Machines: About Cards & Catalogs, 1548-1929* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

[16] Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Ben Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork* (New York: Zone Books, 2012); Michael Stamm, "The Space For News," *Media History* 21, no. 1 (2015): 55–73.

[17] Heinz Schmidt-Bachem, *Tüten, Beutel, Tragetaschen: Zur Geschichte der Papier, Pappe und Folien verarbeitenden Industrie in Deutschland* (Münster: Waxmann, 2001); Heinz Schmidt-Bachem, *Aus Papier: Eine Kultur- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Papier verarbeitenden Industrie in Deutschland* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).

[18] Lothar Müller, *White Magic: The Age of Paper*, trans. Jessica Spengler (London: Polity, 2014), 180-200. The book originally appeared in German as Lothar Müller, *Weiße Magie: Die Epoche des Papiers* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2012). In this article, I refer to the English translation.

argues, paper became the ultimate litmus test for the relationship between politicians and the press. The failure to resolve the paper crisis not only undermined the trust of newspaper publishers in Weimar institutions from the early 1920s onward, but also opened the door to greater control by larger newspaper conglomerates and right-wing media empires. The Weimar constitution proclaimed the freedom of the press, yet the inability of Weimar leaders to handle the paper crises of the early 1920s undermined the material basis of that freedom.

The Mass Production of Paper

Paper provides the physical material for any reading public, enabling the creation and exchange of information and communication. In the early modern period, paper was produced from rags, which made it an urban commodity. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, producers tried to find cheaper ways to make paper and turn it into a mass product. In 1843, Friedrich Gottlob Keller of Saxony managed to create paper from wood fibers, though it took nearly twenty-five years before paper made from groundwood pulp was even exhibited at the World's Fair in Paris in 1867—paper that still needed some rags to prevent it from turning yellow and becoming brittle too swiftly. Finally, in the 1880s, chemists developed cellulose (as a substitute for rags) to stabilize paper. Because wood was now the main component, paper became a more rural product with factories based in small towns and near forests.[19]

Paper was more than product, however: it was intimately tied to politics and to Weltanschauungen. For one, prominent political figures invested in the paper business. Otto von Bismarck's estate in Varzin housed the Hammermühle pulp and paper factory, which was a key innovator in using steam power to produce wood pulp for paper. At the same time, some academics suggested paper usage as a proxy for measuring a population's cultural advancement. Carl Hofmann,

[19] Müller, *White Magic*, 185-86.

who founded the trade journal for paper producers, *Papier-Zeitung*, in 1876, claimed that the best way to assess a nation's degree of civilization was to measure average per capita paper consumption.[20] Germany continued to use the most paper in Europe into the 1920s: out of the 8 million tons produced globally in 1925, Germany used 16 percent (1.28 million tons), whereas the United Kingdom used 11.2 percent (0.9 million tons).[21] Newspapers accounted for a significant portion of paper consumption, and half of all paper was produced for newspapers in Germany in 1925.[22]

Despite the large volume of paper production, scarcity of newsprint remained a constant concern. In fact, it was a continual feature of and challenge for the newspaper business. The cost of paper, alongside the relative inability to print swiftly prior to the mid-nineteenth century, were two key reasons for the small print runs of early newspapers, which usually numbered in the hundreds.[23] Paper shortages also plagued book publishers in the early modern era for practical and political reasons. One of the major publishers of the French Enlightenment, Charles-Joseph Panckoucke, confronted "a severe paper shortage" and a doubling in the price of paper during the first years of the French Revolution.[24] Across the Atlantic, there were shortages of the rags needed to produce paper during the American Revolution, which is why early American newspapers were filled with requests for this vital raw material necessary for knowledge production.[25]

The paper industry became increasingly intertwined with newspaper companies in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. American publishers not only bought domestic production facilities,

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[20] Ibid., 187-90.
[21] "Papier-Gewinnung," *Deutsche Presse* 13, no. 32 (Aug. 12, 1925): 7. *Deutsche Presse* was the trade journal for the *Reichsverband der deutschen Presse*.
[22] "Papier-Gewinnung," *Deutsche Presse* 13, no. 32 (Aug. 12, 1925): 7.
[23] On how newspapers were invented in the sixteenth century but did not become mainstream sources for news until the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, see Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know about Itself* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).
[24] Robert Darnton, *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1775-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 492.
[25] Roger Mellen, "The Press, Paper Shortages, and Revolution in Early America," *Media History* 21, no. 1 (2015): 23-41.

but also purchased facilities in Canada, which grew to supply nearly half the world's paper by 1949.[26] In the United States, the *Chicago Tribune*'s Robert McCormick purchased a vast tract of forest in the Canadian province of Quebec, where he built the city of Baie Comeau in the 1930s to house his paper mill and supply newsprint for McCormick's newspaper. The newspaper business subsequently led McCormick to the paper business.[27] Similar developments would occur later in the United Kingdom, where, in the 1920s, British publishers started to procure paper mills for newsprint.

The German dynamic was generally reversed. One of the leading newspaper publishers in Imperial and Weimar Germany emerged from working with paper: the Ullstein family got its start when Leopold Ullstein founded a wholesale paper company in Berlin in 1855. He bought his first newspaper in 1877 and the business blossomed from there. The Ullstein family started *B.Z. am Mittag*, the first German tabloid, in the early 1900s, and the company purchased the venerable *Vossische Zeitung* just before World War I.[28]

The cost of newsprint remained a perennial problem for publishers. In the United States, rising prices after 1900 made the private marketplace of paper "an issue of operational economics," as Michael Stamm has put it.[29] In theory, anyone with sufficient start-up capital for personnel and a printing press could start a newspaper. But in practice, the cost of paper presented a high barrier to entry: anyone had the right to publish, but very few could afford the paper to do so. The price of newsprint became such an issue that Congress held several hearings on the issue, one in 1909 in the House of Representatives and one in 1920 in the Senate.

While economic concerns drove congressional hearings in the United States, political concerns motivated the German government to pay greater attention to paper. The latter also intervened much

[26] Intelligence Unit, *The Economist*, London, *The Problem of Newsprint and Other Printing Paper* (Paris: UNESCO, 1949), 39 (http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0004/000439/043907eo.pdf).
[27] Michael Stamm, *Dead Tree Media: The Industrial Newspaper in the Twentieth Century* (Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming).
[28] On the history of Ullstein, see W. Joachim Freyburg and Hans Wallenberg, *Hundert Jahre Ullstein: 1877-1977* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1977).
[29] Stamm, "The Space for News," 58.

more directly in supply chains. German governments would have to ration and control paper during and after World War II, where newsprint shortages were similarly, if not more, severe. The Nazi government even used paper shortage as an excuse to shut down newspapers. Only in the Weimar Republic, however, did the problem of paper create such heated disputes about the boundaries of legitimate government intervention. In essence, the discussion revolved around the government's responsibility to ensure the material basis for democratic deliberation. During the 1920s, then, government attention to paper arose for political, rather than economic, reasons.

Prior to the 1920s, political decisions had actually contributed to increasing the circulation of paper. The emergence of mass circulation papers was fostered by the elimination of stamp duties and the Imperial Press Law of 1874, which allowed for greater freedom of speech. These newspapers were very much the products of industrialization and late nineteenth-century urbanization, which created concentrated groups of readers eager to absorb material about the city they now inhabited. The new mass-circulation newspapers were largely comprised of advertisements, whose revenue subsidized the cost for readers. Finally, the technological innovation of rotary printing presses enabled publishers to print thousands of editions very quickly. Still, the reduced cost of paper was the main key to lowering prices and making newspapers an affordable mass product. A printing press could produce as many editions as possible, yet paper remained a fixed cost for each edition: the more copies a publisher sold, the greater the proportion of costs came from the physical material of paper. The price for one hundred kilograms of newsprint paper dropped from 73 marks in 1873 to just 22.50 marks in 1900, as paper shifted to chemical and mechanical pulp.[30] In the golden age of "reading Berlin," there seemed to be no resource constraints whatsoever on newspapers.[31]

[30] Müller, *White Magic*, 192.
[31] Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900*.

Paper Shortages during World War I

Like any age of plenty, an end was nigh: resource constraints returned with a vengeance during World War I, which vastly increased costs, just as the Spanish-American War had earlier driven up newsprint prices in the United States. Germany lost access to essential raw materials, particularly wood, which had previously been imported from countries like Russia. Cellulose and sulfite—two essential materials for paper—became important for sanitation at the front, which is why their prices skyrocketed. Because Germany had previously supplied much of the world's sulfite, this caused problems for publishers in countries ranging from the United States to Australia, India, and China. Germany itself turned to Sweden for sulfite and used most of that country's supply.[32] Paper quality also decreased in Germany because the army needed the chlorine, iron disulfide, and resin used to bleach the pulp. Paper consequently became greyer and more brittle. This was why many factories switched to producing more lower-quality paper products like envelopes or bags.

Government intervention in the paper sector to try to solve these shortages followed a similar pattern to other staple commodities, such as food.[33] In 1916, for example, the state began to coordinate the allocation of paper—but paper was a way to ration knowledge as well. Multiple, interlocking committees formed in 1916 and 1917 to coordinate relations among the government, military, and representatives from the paper industry.[34] This included the Reichsarbeitsgemeinschaft für das Papierfach (RAG), also known as the "Paper Parliament," which oversaw the allocation of higher-quality paper to produce substitute textiles because of rationing in that sector. The Reichsausschuss für Druckgewerbe, Verlag und Papierverarbeitung (Reich Committee for Printing, Publishing, and Paper Manufacture) was similarly created in October 1916 to coordinate among three other committees in the

[32] "Co-Operation to Avert Famine in News Print," *Editor & Publisher* 49, no. 15 (Sept. 23, 1916): 4. *Editor & Publisher* is the trade journal for American newspaper publishers and editors.
[33] Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).
[34] The Nazi and East German governments used similar systems of paper control that drew on this model. See Schmidt-Bachem, *Aus Papier*, 213.

War Ministry, the Interior Ministry, and the Economics Ministry, with an eye to producing plans for the production, processing, and price regulation of paper; the committee was only dissolved in 1919.

Still, paper prices posed different problems from those posed by other commodities. For one, the war had exacerbated the crisis. In March 1915, the US Consul General in Berlin wrote that the German paper industry "has suffered from the war more than almost all the other industries of the empire."[35] If the price of paper fluctuated, publishers could not easily pass the added cost onto their consumers, i.e., newspaper readers. The decrease in newsprint supply intersected with the loss of many journalists, who had enlisted or been drafted to serve on the front. This, too, crippled the ability of newspapers to report news independently, leaving them more reliant upon the government to provide information. Finally, the government subsidized those organizations that it trusted most by supplying them with more paper.

From almost the outbreak of the war, the press was required to print for free all announcements about war measures. The government had a vested interest in ensuring that particular news items reached a wide swath of German readers. The government had, in fact, revoked freedom of the press at the start of the war, a measure foreseen in times of conflict by the 1874 press law. The Supreme Army Command (Oberste Heeresleitung, OHL) provided news first to the semiofficial news agency, Wolff's Telegraphisches Bureau (WTB), and issued an order in August 1914 allowing the press only to print Wolff's version of army reports. The press also had to name Wolff as their source, and the censorship handbook of 1917 even noted that the "reprint of WTB messages is desired."[36] Because the censorship rules issued at the start of the war were fairly complex, newspapers tended to reprint Wolff's news verbatim. This partially compensated for the loss of journalists, but did not help with the cost of newsprint.

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[35] "German Paper Plants Hit," *Editor & Publisher* 47, no. 41 (March 20, 1915): 820.
[36] "Oberzensurstelle. Kommunikationsüberwachende Vorschriften des Jahres 1917," printed in Heinz Dietrich Fischer, ed., *Pressekonzentration und Zensurpraxis im Ersten Weltkrieg: Texte und Quellen* (Berlin: V. Spiess, 1973), 272.

By mid-1915, the Verleger-Verein "Lokalpresse" (Association for Local Newspaper Publishers) was complaining that costs were becoming too great. If the war had been of short duration, Carl Busch, the association's vice president, claimed, the newspapers would have borne the cost of printing war news as part of their patriotic duty. But if the war were to last much longer, they would no longer have the financial means to print announcements for free.[37] Some smaller newspapers stopped publication or ceased publication temporarily by October 1916. Others cut the length of their newspaper, prioritizing government-supplied news.[38] The War Ministry recognized the problem and tried to pay some newspapers for announcements. The simpler method was, however, to subsidize access to paper. To that end, the Interior Ministry assumed responsibility for allocating paper to the press at the start of the war. A July 1916 edict prescribed the price of newsprint and legislated that it had to be cheaper than other types of paper. In addition, just as the government rationed cloth, it also tried to encourage citizens to use less paper. (This was somewhat undermined by the fact that citizens started to make clothes from paper because they no longer had much access to cloth.) It also created fourteen new sulfite mills to supply the material for paper manufacture. By October 1916, the American trade journal *Editor & Publisher* declared that German newspapers were "no longer threatened with a paper famine."[39]

Scarcity nevertheless proved to be the mother of invention. Cloth, for example, was so heavily rationed that paper was now used to make clothing (after being treated with a solution that made it stronger and water-resistant). This meant the clothes could be washed multiple times. After having been read, newspapers themselves were reused for everything from toilet paper to wrapping food. The culture of reuse and substitution pervaded every part of German life during the war — even art. Maria Makela has argued that the German avant-garde's use of paper in the 1920s arose in response to the lack of materials like canvas. Artists like Kurt Schwitters and Hannah Höch turned to photomontage

[37] BArch R1501/114224, 27, letter to Interior Ministry, Feb. 25, 1915.
[38] "News Print Scarce in Germany," *Editor & Publisher* 49, no. 18 (Oct. 14, 1916): 10.
[39] "German Paper Shortage Ends," *Editor & Publisher* 49, no. 20 (Oct. 28, 1916): 7.

and mixed-media assemblages as ways to make art when there were few conventional materials available. These artists created new techniques, but they did so out of necessity and in the spirit of this new and widespread German *Ersatzkultur*, where creative substitutes were used to compensate for material scarcity.[40]

For government officials, it was most essential that newspapers had sufficient paper to print official notices and to prevent rumors from spreading.[41] Committees were formed to regulate distribution and keep prices in check, resulting in the establishment in April 1916 of the Kriegswirtschaftsstelle für das deutsche Zeitungsgewerbe (War Economic Office for the German Newspaper Industry), which was housed in the War Economics Ministry.[42] The multiple overlapping committees created to deal with paper further illustrated its importance to the German government. Paper supply was about more than just a physical material: it also underpinned the German government's ability to convey news to the German population through newspapers. Given all the difficulties of quality newsprint creation under wartime conditions, rationing became a key component of maintaining newsprint supply. More than anything, the war had suggested that government intervention in paper production might be the only way to keep many newspapers financially solvent when paper prices were high and access to paper scarce.

Paper in the Weimar Republic

The war not only reoriented the entire industry of paper production, but also left a lasting impression that government allocation of paper might be best even in peacetime. The first economics minister of the Weimar Republic from February to July 1919, Rudolf Wissell of the Social Democratic Party (SPD),

[40] Maria Makela, "Media and Material in the Early Weimar Republic: The Dilemma of Germany's Modern Artists," paper presented at the annual meeting of the German Studies Association, San Diego, CA (Oct. 2016).
[41] On alternative communications such as rumors and jokes, see Ute Daniel, "Informelle Kommunikation und Propaganda in der deutschen Kriegsgesellschaft," in *Der Erste Weltkrieg als Kommunikationsereignis*, ed. Siegfried Quandt and Horst Schichtel (Gießen: Köhler KG, 1993), 76–94.
[42] Schmidt-Bachem, *Aus Papier*, 211–14; Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 241-46.

even suggested to the National Assembly's economic committee that it consider creating a planned economy for the paper industry. Many of the wartime committees continued to allocate paper after the war, in fact, but now did so under the aegis of the Economics Ministry.

Ironically, reducing such government intervention sparked an existential crisis for the newspaper industry. The end of government price controls in mid-1919 sparked a dramatic rise in the price of paper. There were several reasons for this. First, paper factories needed coal to produce steam power, but the occupation of the Rhineland and the Ruhr region made coal a difficult commodity to procure. Second, some of Germany's major forests were no longer a part of Germany. Finally, workers in the paper industry secured better rights and pay hikes in 1919 and 1920, which led to increased production costs. Unconstrained by government price controls, paper producers passed on all these costs to newspaper publishers, and saw the 1919 dissolution of wartime committees as their chance to reap returns for income they had lost over the previous five years. At the same time, the government abolished its subsidies for the price of newsprint in September 1919 because the Finance Ministry no longer had the means to provide them (it was paying 16 marks per 100 kg that March).[43] By May 1920, paper cost publishers twenty times as much as it had in 1914.[44]

Prices were no longer subject to government control, but government-industry joint committees still regulated the distribution of paper. At the same time that newspaper publishers complained about prices, the Interior Ministry remained well aware that control over paper meant control over information. Paper rationing, wrote one civil servant in February 1920, was "far more important than all attempts to create an artificial propaganda of pamphlets and leaflets" because daily newspapers were more influential.[45] But even at the time, the distribution of paper was based on newspaper circulation levels from 1915, when the system had first emerged. This was why, despite vast

[43] BArch R43I/2462, 8, letter from Reich Treasury Ministry, Apr. 5, 1919. The Treasury Ministry was folded into the Finance Ministry in 1923.
[44] "Die Ablehnung der Papierholzverordnung," *Zeitungs-Verlag* 21, no. 22 (May 28, 1920): 753.
[45] BArch R43I/2464, 66, letter from Interior Ministry to chancellor, Feb. 17, 1920.

political changes, newspaper publishers who had fostered close relationships with the wartime imperial government still held an advantage because they had received more paper. It is ironic that the early Weimar government, which was so dependent on popular support, bolstered inadvertently the strength of the right-wing press by maintaining the wartime system of paper distribution, probably because Weimar officials did not initially understand how paper distribution had political ramifications. What had begun as a "purely economic means of distribution, as in other industries" (according to the Interior Ministry in a letter to Chancellor Gustav Bauer in February 1920), had failed to adapt to the rise of new political parties and their newspapers. The ministry went on to note that the distribution of paper had created the "peculiar impression that there is enough paper for immoral, futile, harmful purposes, while the paltry assignment of paper has removed the ability of the pro-government press to expand in proportion to its [potential] market."[46]

This was also a problem throughout the 1920s in the occupied borderlands, which, ministers worried, did not receive enough "good German press."[47] This was compounded by the added difficulty of customs duties there for paper imports from the unoccupied areas of Germany. The Interior Ministry consequently intervened by requiring the syndicate for newsprint factories to reduce paper prices for occupied areas. Still, by December 1921, there remained "an extraordinary lack of paper" in places like the Rhineland.[48] This was particularly troubling for a government deeply concerned about the Belgian, American, French, and British occupation of Germany's border regions. Besides introducing reforms of the Foreign Office's press department, the Weimar government retained the Zentrale für Heimatdienst, now renamed the Reichszentrale für Heimatdienst (Reich Central Office for *Heimat* Services, RfH), for creating propaganda materials. Officially confirmed as a department by the

[46] Ibid.
[47] BArch R43I/2466, 191, letter from Reich Minister for Occupied Areas to state secretaries in the Chancellery and Foreign Office, Mar. 31, 1924.
[48] BArch R1601/1643, memo, Dec. 30, 1921.

Reichstag in July 1921, the RfH provided "sachliche Aufklärung" (factual instruction) as a form of political education for German citizens.[49]

The lack of paper had other possible political consequences. For example, it may have hampered the Weimar government's extensive propaganda campaign in the Rhineland against the twenty-five thousand colonial soldiers from North Africa, Senegal, and Madagascar who belonged to the French occupation army. In what Julia Roos has called "one of the most important propaganda efforts of the Weimar period," the campaign aimed to conflate alleged sexual violence by soldiers with German suffering under the Versailles Treaty. The campaign fizzled out by 1922 once it began to undermine Germany's image abroad and exacerbate tensions between the Rhineland and Berlin.[50] But the government also printed less materials because it did not have unlimited access to paper for such political projects.

All government ministries agreed that paper was political, with the Economics Ministry arguing that political departments within the government should allocate paper.[51] In April 1920, the latter established the Druckpapierbeschaffungsgesellschaft mbH for this very purpose, but did not invest the requisite time and effort to pursue active reallocation strategies. One reason was that representation at the governmental level came from those selling the raw materials for paper but not from those producing paper.[52] This meant that industry-government committees focused on problems like access to forests rather than on access to coal, which produced steam power. This also gave undue weight to Junkers who owned forests. At the same time, the rise in prices even deeply concerned publishers with ample access to paper, and, by February 1920, the provision of paper had become "an existential

[49] Klaus Wippermann, *Politische Propaganda und staatsbürgerliche Bildung: Die Reichszentrale für Heimatdienst in der Weimarer Republik* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1976).
[50] Julia Roos, "Nationalism, Racism and Propaganda in Early Weimar Germany: Contradictions in the Campaign against the 'Black Horror on the Rhine,'" *German History* 30, no. 1 (2012): 45–74. On the military occupation of the Rhineland, see Elspeth O'Riordan, "The British Zone of Occupation in the Rhineland," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 16, no. 3 (2005): 439–54; Margaret Pawley, *The Watch on the Rhine: The Military Occupation of the Rhineland, 1918-1930* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007).
[51] BArch R43I/2464, 105, letter from Economics Ministry to chancellor, March 27, 1920.
[52] Schmidt-Bachem, *Aus Papier*, 7.

question" for the press.[53] Paper had become so costly by this point that newspapers would have to raise prices for consumers—or go bankrupt. They started to reduce their size in response, often downsizing from eight pages to four. Size mattered. A UNESCO report would claim nearly 30 years later: "experience shows that the press cannot provide for the needs of all claimants for space unless it is able to publish at least eight pages."[54] Even trade journals had to reduce their output: *Deutsche Presse*, for example, combined two issues in July 1923. Their paper also became much more brittle: historians reading through trade journals from the period can tell the difference, in fact, because the pages of editions from the early 1920s start to crumble far more easily.

Many of the problems with paper were not unique to Germany, of course. The British mass daily *News of the World* had reduced its length from sixteen pages in 1914 to four by 1918.[55] As noted earlier, the crisis had prompted the US Congress to hold a session to study the newsprint paper industry and the costs of paper in 1920, after the cost of newsprint per ton delivered to New York City had risen dramatically that year to $112.60, from $64.30 in 1918.[56] The president of the American Press Association, Courtland Smith, testified in terms that were strikingly similar to those of German publishers that the problem of procuring paper was "a question of life or death," particularly for smaller newspapers.[57] As in Germany, smaller newspapers were disproportionately affected. The American trade journal *Editor & Publisher* responded by recommending changes in style and layout in order to save paper: these ranged from shrinking headlines to trimming margins to cutting content. As journalism in the United States moved from more partisan political reporting to ideals of "objectivity" and "neutrality," the scarcity of paper provided one way to instruct journalists on how to write news

[53] "Die Stellung der Lebensfrage," *Zeitungs-Verlag* 21, no. 6 (Feb. 6, 1920): 230.
[54] *The Economist*, *The Problem of Newsprint and Other Printing Paper*, 58.
[55] Stamm, "The Space for News," 67.
[56] Royal Kellogg, *Newsprint Paper in North America* (New York: Newsprint Service Bureau, 1948), 49-50.
[57] Cited in ibid., 60.

based on emerging professional standards of reporting.[58] In fact, such suggestions were made at the same time that the trade journal sought to mold emerging professional standards, such as neutrality, and to promote particular types of journalistic writing. This came just before the adoption in 1923 of the Canons of Journalism, the first formal code of ethics, by the American Society of Newspaper Editors.[59]

Unlike those in the United States, trade journals in Germany did not offer advice for altering reporting or adapting newspaper style in response to the lack of paper and other changing material conditions. Instead, they focused on the issue of paper procurement rather than on editorial changes. Newspaper editors and journalists were thus left to make individual choices about which articles to omit and how to cut down material. This may have reflected Germany's journalistic culture, which tended to valorize the subjectivity of journalism and the judgment of journalists with respect to the analysis and presentation of news to their particular audiences. The layout of German newspapers was also already more cramped than American newspapers, which left less room for maneuver. Unlike American newspapers, for example, German newspapers generally had small headlines already and thus could not save space by reducing their size.

The paper production industry's return to international trade compounded these problems. For example, American companies imported tens of thousands of tons of German newsprint as early as November 1920.[60] Here inflation had proved a valuable asset: it had depreciated the value of German currency, which, along with low wages, encouraged exports to countries like the United States. In December 1921, a spokesman for the American Paper and Pulp Association nevertheless testified before the Senate Finance Committee that American paper manufacturers were suffering partly because

[58] Jeff Rutenbeck, "The Triumph of News over Ideas in American Journalism: The Trade Journal Debate, 1872-1915," *The Journal of Communication Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (1994): 63; Michael Schudson, *Origins of the Ideal of Objectivity in the Professions: Studies in the History of American Journalism and American Law, 1830-1940* (New York: Garland Pub., 1990); Michael Schudson, "The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism," *Journalism* 2, no. 2 (2001): 149–70.
[59] Jeff Rutenbeck, "'Journalism Is a Loose-Jointed Thing:' A Content Analysis of *Editor & Publisher*'s Discussion of Jouranlistic Conduct Prior to the Canons of Journalism, 1901-1922," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 22, no. 1 (2007): 66–82; Stamm, "The Space for News," 61–65.
[60] "The Newsprint Situation," *Editor & Publisher* 53, no. 25 (Nov. 20, 1920): 6.

German and Swedish manufacturers could "make paper at a price which American producers could not approach." This competition, the spokesman claimed, had contributed to a drop-off in the amount of paper produced in the United States.[61] Still, what was cheap in America was too expensive in Germany.

German newspaper publishers blamed these problems on their government rather than on paper production companies. As early as June 1920, they began to accuse the government of making a "grievous error" by failing to intervene in the increasingly dire situation.[62] To make matters worse, a great deal of paper that could have been used for newsprint was being diverted to the printing of banknotes, especially with the advent of hyperinflation in 1922-1923. To meet growing demand, one printing company, Giesecke & Devrint in Leipzig, even invented a much thinner paper for banknotes, which it could feed into twelve printing machines running simultaneously.[63] The crisis in paper production also led to the first serious attempts to recycle paper. At the time, recycled paper was so grey that it was unusable, but it still spurred concerted efforts to reuse the precious material.[64]

The government reacted slowly to these challenges—but it did act, in the end. It had stopped subsidizing newsprint in September 1919, but began once again in March 1920, supplying 10 million marks monthly to subsidize paper prices; that amount rose to 40 million beginning in July.[65] This provided some relief, but it was comparatively little given the thousands of newspapers that appeared at the time. The galloping inflation on the horizon would also swiftly erode the value of apparently massive sums. In July 1922, the Reichstag finally promulgated a Gesetz über Maßnahmen gegen die wirtschaftliche Notlage der Presse (Law for Measures against the Economic Emergency Situation of the Press), after negotiating for two years with the Reichsrat to provide some form of relief. The negotiations had taken so long partly because the wood-producing federal states (*Länder*) remained

[61] "U.S. Paper Makers Ask Tariff Protection," *Editor & Publisher* 54, no. 30 (Dec. 24, 1921): 40.
[62] "Die Bedeutung der Papierfrage als Existenzfrage der Presse," *Zeitungs-Verlag* 21, no. 23 (June 4, 1920): 775.
[63] Müller, *White Magic*, 226.
[64] "Papier," *Deutsche Presse* 13, no. 34 (Aug. 26, 1925): 5.
[65] *Zeitungs-Verlag* 21, no. 32 (Aug. 6, 1920): 1024.

obstreperous, lobbying against the government's initiatives through their representatives in the Reichsrat. As a result, the price of newspaper was ninety-four times higher in July 1922 than it had been a year earlier.

Despite the lengthy negotiating period, the 1922 law seemed to offer some potential relief from the sharp rise in prices. It allowed the government to fix prices for wood, cellulose, and newsprint, and to declare that these prices were the maximum that could be demanded. The law also obliged larger wood producers to provide compensation to the German press: they were required to pay 0.5 percent of their wood sales to their *Land*—money that was to be given to the German press as compensation for the price of paper.[66] This law represented an extraordinary instance of state intervention into private enterprise for the benefit of the press. Some journalists, such as Georg Bernhard, the editor of the *Vossische Zeitung*, condemned the move as "a subsidy of newspaper production by trade and industry." Although his newspaper and others would benefit, Bernhard worried that it was irresponsible to accept this type of subsidy: it would not increase German industrialists' respect for the press, he thought, if they believed it could only survive through subsidies. Bernhard also argued that it would contribute to the increasing belief in some business circles that the press should simply serve business interests and that it "best exercises its profession" when it "prints blurbs from lobbying organizations with little criticism."[67]

Little changed, however, despite this legal intervention. The law's main flaw was one that hindered much of Weimar politics: its delegation of enforcement to the *Länder*, which made it difficult to implement reforms across-the-board, particularly in the more conservative federal states.[68] Overwhelmed by hyperinflation, the Economics Ministry also swiftly abdicated its responsibility to set

[66] See §2 of the Law for Measures against the Economic Emergency Situation of the Press, July 21, 1922, in *Reichsgesetzblatt* 25, no. 53 (July 25, 1922): 629-30. The law was valid until March 31, 1924.
[67] Georg Bernhard, "Das Notgesetz für die Presse," *Deutsche Presse* 10, no. 33 (Aug. 25, 1922): 2.
[68] On the relationship between the central government and the *Länder*, see Anthony McElligott, *Rethinking the Weimar Republic: Authority and Authoritarianism, 1916-1936* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013): 157-80,

prices. As a result, newspaper publishers' pleas in July 1923 for the Economics Ministry to stop newsprint factories from raising prices went unanswered. The trade journal for German journalists, *Deutsche Presse*, saw this as symptomatic of how the government had left newspapers "defenseless against the capriciousness of producers, as one unfortunately sees with regard to other essential items as well."[69] Journalists themselves also condemned the government for not taking action to reduce other costs under its control, like that of transportation or telegrams.

The material of paper became a litmus test of sorts for the relationship between politicians and the press. If the Weimar government could not even provide the material basis for printing newspapers, what did it matter that the Weimar constitution guaranteed a free press? Paper rationing was a critical reason for much of the press's disillusionment with Weimar governance, one that has remained largely unacknowledged by most scholars.

The Political Consequences of Problems with Paper

Beyond the economic problems caused by a shortage of newsprint, publishers claimed that it had created concrete consequences in the political realm, too. The Association of German Newspaper Publishers declared at an extraordinary meeting on May 5, 1920, that, "if the government and parties in the election campaign are still relying on the press, then energetic steps must be taken at once to guarantee the continued appearance of newspapers. Otherwise the fate of the free German press will determine the fate of those parties that were unwilling or too shortsighted to sustain that press."[70]

In fact, it is very difficult to draw links between paper supply, newspapers, and voting behavior. Bernhard Fulda has shown for referenda in the 1920s that citizens did not necessarily vote as the newspapers they read instructed.[71] In the American context, Allan Lichtman has argued that election

[69] "Die Papierkatastrophe," *Deutsche Presse* 11, no. 27/28 (July 6, 1923): 3.
[70] Report on Extraordinary Meeting of VDZV in Dresden, *Zeitungs-Verlag* 21, no. 19 (May 7, 1920): 655.
[71] Fulda, *The Press and Politics*, 107-30.

results throughout American history are less influenced media coverage than "judgments on the performance of the party holding the White House."[72] Even if it is impossible to draw a direct connection between newspapers' political orientation and voting patterns, the reduction in paper supply left newspapers, at the very least, with less space to inform their readers about political developments in the first place. In addition, the paper supply system continued to privilege more right-wing sources of news, largely because the Weimar government was still allocating paper under the 1915 system, which privileged right-wing papers such as those supporting the German National People's Part (DNVP), which gained twenty-seven seats in June 1920. The SPD, the largest party in the governing coalition, lost over a third of its seats. Even if readers did not vote as newspapers instructed them to do, the paper supply system still exposed more readers to right-wing points of view.

These existing problems were compounded by the broader problems created by inflation and later hyperinflation, which led to a decrease in the consumption of paper for a combination of reasons. First, many readers could no longer afford to buy newspapers, which reduced circulation levels. Second, advertising decreased substantially, as companies could no longer afford to buy advertisements.[73] Finally, as was the case for all goods, the value of money depreciated significantly during the time lag between paying bills and receiving payment from readers for the newspaper. Newspapers could no longer afford to purchase as much paper—nor did they necessarily need to because citizens could not afford newspapers. By the time hyperinflation hit hard in 1922-1923, the price of paper had already weakened many newspapers financially: some three hundred folded as a result.[74] The remaining smaller

[72] Lichtman predicted Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 US presidential election on September 23, 2016. See https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/09/23/trump-is-headed-for-a-win-says-professor-whos-predicted-30-years-of-presidential-outcomes-correctly/?utm_term=.4a7a186517a2. For Lichtman's comments after the election, see "What Happened? How Pollsters, Pundits, and Politics Got It Wrong," Hidden Brain on NPR (Nov. 15, 2016) (http://www.npr.org/2016/11/15/502074201/why-polls-predicted-a-hillary-clinton-win-and-were-so-wrong-about-the-election).

[73] On advertising, see Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire*; Corey Ross, "Mass Politics and the Techniques of Leadership: The Promise and Perils of Propaganda in Weimar Germany," *German History* 24, no. 2 (2006): 192-94; idem, "Visions of Prosperity: The Americanization of Advertising in Interwar Germany," in Swett, Wiesen, and Zatlin, eds., *Selling Modernity,* 52–77.

[74] Otto Groth, *Die Zeitung. Ein System der Zeitungskunde*, vol. 1 (Mannheim: J. Bensheimer, 1928), 207.

newspapers struggled to pay wages and turned increasingly to syndicated services to save on the cost of journalists.

These developments created an opportunity for industrialists eager to increase their influence over the press. Alfred Hugenberg and Hugo Stinnes were at the forefront of efforts to use the paper crisis to purchase newspapers and create media conglomerates larger than any Germany had ever seen. In 1926, Walter Aub declared in the left-wing journal *Die Weltbühne* that Hugenberg's media empire made him "Germany's secret king."[75] The phenomenon was as closely associated with Stinnes, prompting contemporary journalists to refer to this period as the "Stinnisierung" of the press.[76] Stinnes died in 1924, but left-wing academics like Paul Baumert still worried in the late 1920s that the magnate had only bought newspapers to boost the profits of his paper factories. In effect, instead of paper facilitating news, news and "public opinion" only served to increase demand for coal, cellulose, and paper.[77]

The paper crisis allowed Hugenberg, who also owned numerous paper companies, to take advantage of newspapers that were in financial straits and integrate them into his media empire. A member of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Verband (Pan-German League), Hugenberg's career had begun with stints from 1894 to 1903 in the Ansiedlungskommission (Prussian Settlement Commission) in Posen, and from 1903 to 1908 in the Preußisches Finanzministerium (Prussian Finance Ministry). After departing state service, he not only became the chairman or a board member of various industrial companies, such as Krupp and the Centralverband Deutscher Industrieller (Central Association of German Industrialists), but also became increasingly involved in the press.

Hugenberg began to build his media empire on the eve of World War I, and strove to create one that vertically integrated all aspects of the newspaper business. To that end, he and a group of

[75] Walter Aub, "Der Fall Hugenberg," *Die Weltbühne* 22 (1926): 287.
[76] For a biography, see Gerald Feldman, *Hugo Stinnes: Biographie eines Industriellen, 1870-1924* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1998).
[77] Paul Baumert, *Die Entstehung des deutschen Journalismus in sozialgeschictlicher Betrachtung* (PhD diss., University of Berlin, 1928), 96.

fellow industrialists used trusts and holding companies to buy myriad media companies. In 1916, for example, Hugenberg purchased the ailing publishing house, August Scherl, which published many leading newspapers, such as the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* and *Der Tag*, as well as popular magazines, including *Die Gartenlaube* and *Berliner Illustrierte Nachtausgabe*. The complicated financial structures of the companies he acquired were designed by Hugenberg to obfuscate their ownership, which often consisted of his close friends.

These men were interested in political as well as financial control. Prior to World War I, they and other industrialists had subsidized multiple newspapers like the liberal *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten* and sought to change their political direction. These industrialists tried to dictate everything from personnel to the politics of individual articles. Ham-fisted direct intervention reduced the circulation of one previously liberal newspaper, *Münchner-Augsburger Abendzeitung*, from selling 50,000 copies a day before World War I to 13,000 by 1927. Ironically, this meant the newspaper needed direct subsidies to stay afloat.[78] After these disastrous attempts to dictate journalistic practices to individual newspapers, Hugenberg and his circle retreated from such direct interference. Instead, they sought to promote nationalist sentiment more generally.

After 1918, Hugenberg's media companies did not commit explicitly to supporting his own political party, the DNVP, but they did continue to spread right-wing ideas. Hugenberg also attempted to disseminate such ideas by creating companies that would allow for subtler financial control of ailing newspapers. With the Vera-Verlagsanstalt GmbH, for example, which he founded in October 1917, Hugenberg began to provide consultation and financial aid to failing newspapers. Stinnes commented in a letter to Hugenberg in October 1920 that Vera could "not be an instrument for North German party politics." Rather it had to function as "a body for economic consultancy for the press standing on

[78] Gossel, *Medien und Politik in Deutschland und den USA*, 261-2.

a national footing that has no other party political ambitions."[79] Hugenberg later took advantage of the newsprint crisis and used the hyperinflation of 1922-1923 to subsidize and influence even more newspapers indirectly. Hugenberg had already held partial ownership of at least fourteen provincial papers by 1922, the year he created Mutuum-Darlehens A.G. and Alterum-Kredit A.G., which were designed to help right-wing newspapers that found themselves in financial trouble.[80] The conditions attached to his loans ensured greater control over papers that accepted his financial help: if a publisher received a loan, he had to agree to allow Vera to take over his accounting, and to subscribe to the Hugenberg-owned news agency, Telegraph Union. At the same time, because many newspapers remained in straitened financial circumstances throughout the 1920s, they increasingly relied on stereotype services (i.e., ones that provided newspapers with templates of pages that left space for editors to insert their newspaper's title and local news, before printing the template on their own presses), as well as syndicated material from press and news agencies such as Hugenberg's.

Alongside other developments, such as lower advertising revenue, the paper crisis created an opportunity for Hugenberg to remove editorial autonomy from wide swathes of the newspaper market. He could do so because hyperinflation only increased the difficulties of smaller provincial newspapers, pushing them ever close to insolvency. Hugenberg responded to their predicament by creating a syndicate service called Wipro, which lowered its prices to make it the only financially viable option for struggling papers at a time when approximately 1,200 of the 3,200 newspapers in Germany only used syndicated services. Soon, Wipro supplied about a third of the syndication market, i.e., some 400 newspapers.[81]

Many of the fears about the German press were paradoxical. Journalists and those on the left feared control of newspapers by industrialists. At the same time, the German newspaper landscape was

[79] Bundesarchiv Koblenz NL Hugenberg N1231/27, 423, letter from Stinnes to Hugenberg, Oct. 11, 1920.
[80] Gossel, *Medien und Politik in Deutschland und den USA*, 255-63.
[81] Groth, *Die Zeitung*, vol. 1, 475.

far more decentralized than it was in Britain or France. In 1919-1920, Germany had 3,689 newspapers, but only 0.7 percent had a circulation over 100,000.[82] The number of newspapers suggested great variety in the sources of news, yet the small circulation figures meant that most publications operated on a shoestring budget and had very little room to absorb the additional costs of paper. These papers were thus highly dependent on advertising. Inflation compounded these challenges by pushing up labor costs, as well as the cost of newsprint and postage. The remaining newspapers printed largely uniform material because, as we have seen, industrialists used the paper crisis to increase their control over the newspaper landscape in Germany. Thousands of newspapers nevertheless remained free of direct control by industrialists: approximately 80 percent were still owned by individual families in 1926. Still, many of these papers relied on the syndicated services provided by Hugenberg or became more susceptible to pressure from wealthy interest groups.[83] The higher price of paper had increased the outlays of smaller newspapers so substantially that they became far more dependent on advertising—or increasingly worried about printing political statements that might alienate readers.

Journalists and those on the political Left were right to fear the problems that financial troubles posed for newspapers. These challenges never really dissipated in the Weimar Republic: some increases in fixed costs (e.g., salaries, taxes, and production) did not decrease after hyperinflation subsided. As a result, publishers' costs were four to five times higher in 1927 than they had been in 1913.[84] To add insult to injury, advertising revenues effectively declined by half from 1928 to 1931, and paper prices never returned to pre-World War I levels. [85] These problems particularly affected smaller newspapers published outside the major cities of Germany, which explains in part why historians have paid relatively little attention to how the issues with paper discussed in this article undermined the free press. The German press looks vibrant if one focuses on newspapers published in Berlin and Frankfurt am

[82] Eksteins, *The Limits of Reason*, 74.
[83] Ibid., 82.
[84] Ibid., 79, 83.
[85] Grünbeck, "Die Deutsche Presse in der Weltwirtschaftskrise," *Zeitungswissenschaft* 6 (1931): 388.

Main, or on journalists like Kurt Tucholsky and Siegfried Krakauer. The later 1920s seemed in other ways as well like a golden age of newspaper production. Films like *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927) featured images of newspapers with dramatic headlines spinning into the camera. Newspapers drove the filmic story of the city and depicted the vertigo-inducing speed of urban life. That was less true, however, for smaller towns and provinces. The many problems related to paper were one of many factors underlying these developments—but their significance has thus far escaped the attention of historians.

Conclusion

Scholarship and contemporary discussions often present newspapers solely as intellectual products. As readers increasingly encounter news online and historians examine digitized newspaper archives, they forget that newspapers were also products of an industrial age. The biggest expense for newspaper publishers was not personnel, but paper, a chokepoint in the production of knowledge largely unacknowledged by historians. Historians commonly use newspapers as sources in their work with little attention to the problems of how newspapers themselves were produced. But political and economic factors determined access to information through the material base of media. The problem of paper shifts our focus from readers to the political and economic networks behind the newspaper—networks that fundamentally shaped the volume and type of news that readers could consume. The problem of paper reminds historians, in short, how the economics and politics of supply chains could shape cultural production.

The Weimar government's inability to intervene sufficiently in the news market and continue wartime price controls ended up allowing for the creation of a more homogenized media than ever before. The Economics Ministry did not find it feasible to provide state subsidies large enough to sustain the press at a time when the country was in dire financial straits. But the removal and reduction

of government intervention drove bankrupt newspaper publishers into the hands of industrialists like Hugenberg and Stinnes. Successive Weimar governments nevertheless sought to improve the predicament of the press through legal, financial, and political measures. To that end, a draft law of 1924 sought to "uphold the internal independence of the German press as the mirror of public opinion."[86]

But much of the damage had already been done by the early 1920s. More newspapers started to receive and print information from right-wing nationalist sources skeptical of democracy. This did not necessarily translate directly into votes for Alfred Hugenberg's political party, the DNVP. But the newspapers' right-wing anti-Communist stance arguably laid the foundations for Nazi electoral success by increasing voters' susceptibility to right-wing ideology.[87] Not paying the price of paper would prove far more politically expensive than anyone could have imagined.

Scarcity of newsprint remained a problem after World War II. In 1949, the Intelligence Unit of *The Economist* in London prepared a report for UNESCO on this very topic. In the foreword, UNESCO declared that "paper for printing books, magazines and newspapers is a material essential to the development of education, science and culture and to the effective enjoyment of freedom of information both within and between countries."[88] The authors of the report, which found severe shortages *and* deep inequalities in the distribution of newsprint, believed that it was "no exaggeration to suggest that the tardy progress in conquering ignorance and illiteracy is not wholly unconnected with the unequal distribution of newsprint supplies." The United States consumed almost two-thirds of the world's paper in 1949; Asia, Africa, and Latin America only received around 10 percent combined.[89] The shortage of newsprint everywhere except North America led to the rationing of newsprint—and

[86] BArch R43I/2462, 161, letter from Interior Minister, Dec. 24, 1924.
[87] Extensive reporting of political scandals further deepened the population's skepticism of "the democratic system." Bernhard Fulda, "'Die Politik der 'Unpolitischen'. Boulevard- und Massenpresse in den zwanziger und dreißiger Jahren," in *Medialisierung und Demokratie im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Norbert Frei and Frank Bösch (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006), 48–72.
[88] *The Economist*, *The Problem of Newsprint and Other Printing Paper*, 6.
[89] Ibid., 53.

thus of newspapers. "This means, in practice," the report lamented, "the rationing of information to the public."[90] The implication was that lack of paper would have deleterious political consequences.

For the United States, newsprint offered a method to fight Cold War propaganda overseas and spread American ideals. Some members of the US Congress suggested in 1950 that the country should supply newsprint abroad to fight Soviet influence. Representative Emanuel Celler even argued that newsprint was an "indispensable commodity for carrying the message of the democratic way of life."[91]

Despite prophesies about the death of newsprint for the past three decades, newspapers still make most of their advertising and other revenue from printed copies. More to the point, the cost of paper remains a central concern. At the close of 2016, paper prices rose in the United Kingdom by more than 8 percent because of a drop in supply and a drop in the value of sterling following the so-called Brexit vote to leave the European Union that June. This hit newspapers particularly hard by increasing costs just when advertising and circulation were rapidly declining.[92] The problem of paper during Weimar is thus a cautionary tale that alerts us to the dangers of forgetting how material concerns fundamentally shape news.

[90] Ibid., 58.
[91] Cited in Stamm, "The Space for News," 67.
[92] David Bond, "Newspaper Groups Hit by Rising Print Costs," *Financial Times* (Dec.11, 2016) (https://www.ft.com/content/228cd9de-bca8-11e6-8b45-b8b81dd5d080).