



# The ‘Ullstein Spirit’: The Ullstein Publishing House, the End of the Weimar Republic and the Making of Cold War German Identity, 1925–77

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## Abstract

This article examines the role of the Ullstein company, a liberal publishing house with Jewish roots and one of Germany’s most important cultural producers, in the disintegration and the subsequent historical interpretation of the Weimar Republic. It reconstructs the company’s history before and after the Second World War and retraces the public debate about Ullstein’s political role to arrive at a more balanced picture of the company’s place in twentieth-century Germany. Ullstein portrayed itself as a pillar of democracy during the Weimar era, but distanced itself from this tradition during the economic and political crisis of the late 1920s and early 1930s. After 1945, Ullstein’s history was distorted by its use as a political token in the Cold War struggle between the two German states over the ‘right’ view of Weimar’s demise. Western media – most prominently the Axel Springer publishing house – interpreted Ullstein as a symbol of a Jewish-German tradition of Western liberal democracy, while the East German press and some commentators in West Germany accused the company of paving the way for the Nazis. Ultimately, Axel Springer succeeded in integrating an overly positive version of Ullstein’s history into West German national identity.

## Keywords

Aryanization, Cold War, media history, Nazi Germany, seizure of power, Weimar Republic

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In 1925, seven years after the First World War had ended, the Soviet journalist Larissa Reissner travelled across Germany to report about the state that had risen from the collapse of the *Kaiserreich*. In her articles for *Izvestia*, she depicted it as ‘Hindenburg’s country’, built on the betrayal of a working-class revolution.<sup>1</sup> According to Reissner, one of the ‘national sanctuaries’ from which this new nation was ‘invisibly ruled’ was Ullstein – the country’s biggest publishing house.<sup>2</sup> She likened the company to a ‘clever madame’, with its many different publications as her prostitutes, walking the streets in search of customers and catering to every taste. By ‘inflaming appetites with whispers’ the Ullstein papers kept their audience chained to cheap entertainment and away from political engagement: ‘Millions of European workers live with a dream about Russia. . . . But Ullstein’s reader, the petty-bourgeois, goes to the pictures to see his promised land.’<sup>3</sup>

Reissner was not the only foreign observer to note Ullstein’s role in German postwar society. In 1927, French journalist Jacques Mortane also went on a trip to see ‘the new Germany’, but he had a very different experience to Reissner.<sup>4</sup> Travelling from Cologne to Berlin, he found an open, industrious nation, boasting the most modern architecture, democratically minded statesmen, and, at the end of his journey, a bustling capital that had been transformed from an imperial city ruled by the ‘Potsdam military’ into a republican metropolis, where ‘the civilian is the master of the sidewalk’.<sup>5</sup> According to Mortane, the best representation of this new German republic, besides the Bauhaus and Gustav Stresemann, was Ullstein. Devoting a whole chapter of his travelogue to the company, he described its Berlin headquarters as a cosmopolitan hub of activity, whose size and diversity surpassed all similar ventures in his own country.<sup>6</sup> Other Western publications echoed Mortane’s report: in 1929, the British trade journal *Newspaper World* called Ullstein’s printing house ‘one of the most interesting sights in Berlin’ and praised the company’s tightly integrated production: ‘In every phase of publishing, printing, and advertising service, the Ullstein organisation is thoroughly up-to-date’.<sup>7</sup> A year later, the *New York Times* depicted the company as a formidable force in the new German state and reported with awe on its economic and cultural clout:

This enormous chain publishing industry is unmatched by any similar organization in the United States. Naturally it wields tremendous power in Germany. The combined

1 See L. Reissner, *V Strane Gindenburga: Ocherki Sovremennoĭ Germanii (In Hindenburg’s Country: Sketches of Contemporary Germany)* (Moscow 1926). Parts of this collection have been published as *Hamburg at the Barricades and other writings on Weimar Germany*, trans. by Richard Chappell (London 1977).

2 *Ibid.*, 113.

3 *Ibid.*, 163.

4 See J. Mortane, *Sous les Tilleuls. La Nouvelle Allemagne* (Paris 1928).

5 *Ibid.*, 23.

6 See *ibid.*, 277–82.

7 ‘The German Press. The “Big Three” of German Publishers’, *Newspaper World*, Advertising Convention Supplement (17 August 1929), 20.

circulations of its newspapers and periodicals number millions and its influence extends into nearly every field, for there is scarcely a home throughout the length and breadth of the land that is not reached by at least one Ullstein publication.<sup>8</sup>

Despite Ullstein's undeniable success and influence, all of these accounts were rather hyperbolic: Germany's fragmented and decentralized press market limited Ullstein's reach and thus none of its daily papers could match the circulation of similar publications in other countries, such as the *Daily Mail*, *Le Petit Parisien* or even the Soviet peasant paper *Krestianskaia gazeta*.<sup>9</sup> In Germany itself, the media empire of far-right politician Alfred Hugenberg also rivalled Ullstein in terms of size and market share.<sup>10</sup> Arguably, while Reissner's overly negative portrayal of Ullstein was driven by disappointment over a 'failed' revolution, the positive image in France, Britain and the USA was equally one-sided: as an outspoken supporter of the new state and a publisher with a long liberal tradition, Ullstein – and the popularity of its publications – seemed to be proof that the new, peaceful, Western democratic order was here to stay in Germany. This central role of the Ullstein company as an easily exploitable symbol for Germany's shifting political character is the topic of this article.

The article's central argument is two-fold: first, it will disentangle Ullstein's Weimar-era history from these contemporary narratives, arguing that the company was neither German democracy's upright defender nor its capitalist gravedigger, but a very ambivalent political actor struggling to negotiate the shifting political landscape of the time. The actions of its various executives, representatives and employees were sometimes aimed at supporting the Republic's political system, sometimes they – unwittingly or not – undermined it. Most importantly, they were always motivated by a multitude of considerations, ranging from a sincere support for the new democratic order to profit maximization and political opportunism. Second, the article will analyse the role of these narratives after 1933, showing how they were used to obscure the company's ambivalent history in order to contribute to the construction of West Germany's Cold War identity. After the failure of Weimar democracy, Ullstein came to be seen in the West as an embodiment of Weimar's lost promise, a symbol of an 'other' Germany and its destruction by the Nazis. The supposed legacy of Ullstein as part of a long German tradition of Western liberal democracy – a tradition that could be resurrected – was a very welcome political instrument in the developing Cold War: when the remainders of the company were returned to the former owners in 1952, Western media celebrated it as the resurrection of a democratic tradition, which seemed particularly significant against the backdrop of the Iron Curtain that had descended upon

8 'Ullstein Verlag, Power in the Reich', *New York Times* (5 October 1930), 4.

9 See M. Eksteins, *The Limits of Reason. The German Democratic Press and the Collapse of Weimar Democracy* (Oxford 1975), 74; P. Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State. Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization* (Cambridge 1985), 228–9.

10 For Hugenberg, see D. Guratzsch, *Macht durch Organisation. Die Grundlegung des Hugenbergischen Presseimperiums* (Düsseldorf 1974).

Berlin and the rest of the country. At the same time, as will be shown below, the East German press carried on Reissner's image of Ullstein and described the company as a peddler of Americanized entertainment that had paved the way for Hitler's regime and was now supporting another 'imperialist' regime. Thus, Ullstein became a key witness in the postwar struggle over the historical interpretation of the Weimar era, in which both German states tried to set themselves up as the only real heir to the country's first democratic experiment. The Jewish heritage of the company, which had made Ullstein a prime target of the Nazis during the 1930s, became a central aspect of contention in this contest over German national identity.

The Cold War interpretations of Ullstein's past, which have since dominated its historiography, distort the complex and conflicting role the publishing house played during the transformations of Weimar democracy. An injection of historical complexity seems necessary, when the company is, in 2002, still described as 'the harbinger of a future that is only coming true today'.<sup>11</sup> Most importantly, in such a more complex perspective the company's history is much more representative of Weimar society than in its guise as Hitler's bourgeois bedfellow or as the precursor of contemporary German democracy. The Weimar Republic was 'not a parliamentary democracy fighting heroically against radical forces of the Left and the Right', but a transitional political system between modern liberal democracy and authoritarian monarchy – an amalgamation of tradition and modernity, of progressivism and reaction.<sup>12</sup> As one of the culturally and politically most influential German companies of the time, this contradictory quality also characterized Ullstein. This shows most clearly in the company's own understanding of democracy. The political culture of Weimar Germany was not simply divided between democrats and anti-democrats, but was characterized by a multitude of competing notions of democratic rule, from representative to direct, social to national, soviet (*Rätedemokratie*) and people's democracy (*Volksdemokratie*).<sup>13</sup> This discussion about the right form of democracy was not confined to Germany, but was an international trend after the First World War.<sup>14</sup> As will be shown below, the conception of democracy put forward by the different journalists, editors, owners and representatives that made up the public's perception of Ullstein as a political force were relatively vague, changing, sometimes contradictory and by no means an unadulterated support for the liberal, pluralist and representative system that

11 C. Stölzl, 'Der Ullstein-Geist: Katalysator gesellschaftlicher Modernisierung' in E. Lindner (ed.), *125 Jahre Ullstein: Presse- und Verlagsgeschichte im Zeichen der Eule* (Hamburg 2002), 9.

12 P. Longerich, *Deutschland 1918–1933. Die Weimarer Republik* (Hannover 1995), 16.

13 See M. Llanque, *Politische Ideengeschichte. Ein Gewebe politischer Diskurse* (Munich 2008), 406–41; C. Gusy, 'Demokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik – Entstehungsbedingungen und Vorfragen', in C. Gusy (ed.), *Demokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik*, (Baden Baden 2000) 11–36 (12–13).

14 See A. McElligott, 'Rethinking the Weimar Paradigm. Carl Schmitt and Politics without Authority', in J. Hung, G. Weiss-Sussex and G. Wilkes (eds) *Beyond Glitter and Doom. The Contingency of the Weimar Republic* (Munich 2012), 87–101 (100); Llanque, *Ideengeschichte*, 424–34.

characterized West Germany, for which the company was later recruited as an intellectual forebear.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the company's central role in German culture and society, there has been no systematic investigation into its whole history yet. The almost complete destruction of the company archive during the Second World War has certainly played a role in this, but it also gave room to the subsequent mythologization of the company. Researchers now often have to rely on public relations material to fill in the gaps.<sup>16</sup> This article makes extensive use of the few surviving original sources and files in Germany, the USA and the UK to construct a more balanced image of Ullstein's role between the rise of the Nazis and the establishment of two German states after 1945.

Since its foundation in Berlin in 1877 by Leopold Ullstein, a Jewish paper merchant from Fürth, the company played an important political, economic, social and cultural role in the newly unified German state.<sup>17</sup> The Ullstein newspapers took a liberal stance, regularly opposing the Bismarck government and advocating a free press and civil rights.<sup>18</sup> This earned the company not only multiple law suits for libel and *lèse-majesté*, but also – after the social democratic press was banned – a growing readership among the working class.<sup>19</sup> Leopold's five sons Hans, Louis, Franz, Rudolf and Hermann took over the company after his death in 1899 and over the next decades established Ullstein as 'the giant of German publishing'.<sup>20</sup> As such, the company naturally had great influence on the cultural and political life of Weimar Germany: by the end of the 1920s, Ullstein not only owned the *Berliner Morgenpost*, the country's biggest daily, the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, Europe's biggest weekly, and the *Vossische Zeitung*, one of Germany's most respected broadsheet newspapers, but also held a considerable share of the book market and investments in several movie studios, owned a chain of travel agencies, and maintained its own fleet of aeroplanes that delivered its newspapers to all corners of the nation.<sup>21</sup>

Ullstein fashioned itself as a particularly cosmopolitan, modern and progressive company, and as the home of Weimar's new republican culture.<sup>22</sup> This included

15 For the difference between contemporary and Weimar-era ideas of democracy, see C. Schönberger, 'Demokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik: Anfang und Abschied', in Gusy (ed.), *Demokratisches Denken*, 664–9.

16 The various anniversary volumes published by Ullstein have to be counted among this material, see M. Osborn (ed.), *50 Jahre Ullstein (1877–1927)* (Berlin 1927); W.J. Freyburg and H. Wallenberg (eds), *Hundert Jahre Ullstein (1877–1977)*, 4 vols (Berlin 1977); Lindner, *125 Jahre Ullstein*.

17 For Leopold Ullstein's Jewish background, see V. Titel, 'Bürgersinn und jüdische Lebenswelt: Ullsteins Fürther Wurzeln', in D. Oels and U. Schneider (eds), *'Der ganze Verlag ist einfach eine Bonbonniere.'* *Ullstein in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin 2015), 365–87.

18 K. Koszyk, *Geschichte der deutschen Presse. Teil II: Deutsche Presse im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin 1966), 283–90.

19 See G. Bernhard, 'Die Geschichte des Hauses', in Osborn, *50 Jahre Ullstein*, 22–8.

20 B. Fulda, *Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic* (Oxford 2009), 2.

21 For economic data on Ullstein, see Ullstein AG, *Geschäftsbericht 1930–33*, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (StB), An 9568/36; Ullstein AG, *Ullstein-Berichte* (Berlin 1916–33); Eksteins, *Limits*, 112–15, 314.

22 See D. Oels and U. Schneider, 'Masse, Mobilität, Moderne – Zur Einleitung', in Oels and Schneider, *Bonbonniere*, 1–15.

a very conciliatory idea of the relationship between Labour and Capital, aimed against Communist ideas of proletarian revolution. In the company's corporate philosophy, Germany's democratic transformation featured less as a revolutionary act than a decidedly apolitical, common-sense reaction to a historical cataclysm by the German people. Georg Bernhard, editor-in-chief of the *Vossische Zeitung* and Ullstein's political figurehead, endorsed the idea of a democratic 'people's state' (*Volksstaat*) based on mutual respect between workers and employers, working hand-in-hand to rebuild Germany after the war.<sup>23</sup> In the lavishly produced, 400-page strong celebratory volume commemorating the company's 50th anniversary in 1927, Bernhard depicted the company as an exemplary realization of this vision – the core of and model for the new Republic.<sup>24</sup> In the same book, Ullstein's personnel director Georg Sydow described the traditional in-house labour agreements as arrangements between equal partners that benefitted both sides and thus the company as a whole:

During the fifty years of its existence, the company has always upheld the democratic principle of acknowledging the workers as equal partners in all labour agreements. ... It has always been the fundamental tendency of all labour policy at the Ullstein house to work *with* the workers, not against them. There has never been a one-sided standpoint of 'being master in one's own house'.<sup>25</sup>

This harmonious relationship in the Ullstein company, Sydow argued, contrasted with the pre-war 'lord-of-the-manor attitude' (*Herr-im-Hause-Standpunkt*) of German industrialists that had been swept away in 1918.<sup>26</sup> Thus, he suggested, Ullstein had already practiced what would later form the socio-political foundation of the Weimar Republic: the social pact between unions and employers.

Ullstein's image of the Republic as an expression of the political will of the whole people beyond boundaries of class and party affiliations, which contrasted sharply with the reality of Weimar's highly partisan political culture, was also reflected in the company's publication for the 1929 World Advertising Congress in Berlin. The trilingual, glossy and opulent book introduced international visitors to the company's view of the new state and 'the position held by the Ullstein Publishing Company in German economic and cultural life'.<sup>27</sup> In a chapter on the 'Germany of Today', Albrecht Graf Montgelas, one of the *Vossische Zeitung's* political editors, painted the picture of a sound economy and of strong

23 For Bernhard's ideological background, see M. Klein, *Georg Bernhard. Die politische Haltung des Chefredakteurs der Vossischen Zeitung, 1918–1930* (Frankfurt am Main 1999), 23–9; Eksteins, *Limits*, 54–6.

24 See Bernhard, 'Geschichte', 2.

25 G. Sydow, 'Die Sozialpolitik des Hauses Ullstein', in Osborn, *50 Jahre Ullstein*, 364.

26 For the 'lord of the manor' debate and Weimar social policy, see A. Wirsching, *Die Weimarer Republik. Politik und Gesellschaft* (Munich 2000), 24–7.

27 See 'Preface' in Ullstein AG, *Der Verlag Ullstein zum Weltreklamekongress* (Berlin 1929), 3. All texts in this volume were published in German, French and English, and it was well received by the foreign press, see 'Big Three', 20.

democratic institutions enthusiastically supported by the public.<sup>28</sup> The Republic had weathered political and economic storms, he argued, but had outlived its internal enemies 'due to the discipline, the sense of order, the education and most of all the national ideals of the biggest part of the German workers'.<sup>29</sup>

Both Ullstein books concluded with the same essay by Paul Schlesinger, the company's popular legal correspondent, about the 'spirit of the house'.<sup>30</sup> Similarly to Bernhard and Sydow, Schlesinger described Ullstein as a company embodying the new democratic Germany, where everybody, from the lowly worker to the directors, worked together under meritocratic principles, with no place for the old authoritarian culture:

We are all workers for the same purpose. Our work progresses continuously, but not because some Napoleon thinks he has to command and shout orders. There are no servants in uniform, opening the doors. Nobody bows before anyone. Our politeness does not need any formalities. In our house, there is more respect from above for the ones below than the other way around. Our democracy is perfect.<sup>31</sup>

While there is no doubt that Ullstein was a strong supporter of the Republic, it is remarkable that the most important institutions of a representative democracy – parliament, political parties – played virtually no role in the company's vision of a democratic Germany. Instead, the company promoted the idea of democracy as an egalitarian national community – and of itself as its exemplary institution, aloof from the murkiness of the party system. This optimistic image deliberately glossed over the deep social and political divides in German society as well as Ullstein's own commercial interests. A vivid sign of the precariousness of the Republic and of Ullstein's position had been the occupation of the company headquarters in Berlin's Kochstrasse by revolutionary troops during the January uprising of 1919 that had caused a major disruption of the production.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Ullstein's ideal of a peaceful and prosperous Republic based on the equal and free relationship between employers and workers was not only a political vision, but also in the best commercial interest of the company.

From the beginning, the company's self-fashioning as one of the pillars of Weimar democracy came under criticism from pro-republican journalists and intellectuals. Already in 1918, *Die Weltbühne* author Alfons Goldschmidt mocked Ullstein's self-image as a facade for its commercial interests.<sup>33</sup> Eight years earlier, Goldschmidt had lost his job as an editor at Ullstein after he attacked the Deutsche Bank, which had then put pressure on the company. This incident of sacrificing

28 See A. Graf Montgelas, 'Deutschland von Heute', in Ullstein, *Weltreklamekongress*, 1–8.

29 *Ibid.*, 4.

30 See Sling (i.e. Paul Schlesinger), 'Und der Geist des Hauses', in Ullstein, *Weltreklamekongress*, 249–63; Osborn, *Fünfzig Jahre Ullstein*, 385–93.

31 *Ibid.*, 386.

32 For the Ullstein occupation, see P. de Mendelssohn, *Zeitungsstadt Berlin. Menschen und Mächte in der Geschichte der deutschen Presse* (Berlin 1982), 284–7.

33 Lorarius (i.e. Alfons Goldschmidt), 'Ala', *Die Weltbühne* (4 April 1918), 331.

editorial independence, he argued, proved his point that ‘in this publishing house, business interests . . . play a decisive role in questions of political orientation’.<sup>34</sup> Ullstein’s own business practices also did not inspire confidence in liberal German journalists, who still had vivid memories of the shackled press before 1918. In 1922, the left-liberal magazine *Das Tage-Buch* reported how the company used its newspapers to attack a competitor of its book publishing business.<sup>35</sup> In 1928, the pacifist and playwright Herbert Eulenberg complained about Ullstein threatening the diversity of German culture:

There is no other publishing company that finds advertising as easy as Ullstein, as it is able to promote its books as cheaply as possible in its own countless newspapers and magazines. In the future, this will be ever more profitable for the company, and consequently there might come a day when all publishers in Germany have become one single Ullstein house.<sup>36</sup>

In contrast to Western observers like Jacques Mortane and the *New York Times*, these German writers did not see Ullstein as a benign force in the new Republic, but as a rather opportunistic institution that defended the ideals of democracy and social justice only as long as it benefitted from it financially. These suspicions seemed to be confirmed in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when economic and political pressure made it increasingly difficult for Ullstein to reconcile its commercial interests with its political agenda.

Successive German governments had steadily curtailed the fragile freedom the press had gained after 1918.<sup>37</sup> After 1930, under the so-called ‘presidential cabinets’, this situation only got worse: starting with Chancellor Brüning, the law was repeatedly changed to expand government authority to ban newspapers and prosecute journalists.<sup>38</sup> One of the reasons for these changes was Brüning’s anger over the supposed economic and political impact of negative reporting by the Ullstein press.<sup>39</sup> The threat of costly newspaper bans was compounded by the deteriorating economic climate after 1928 that seriously threatened Ullstein’s business and made the company’s management increasingly risk-averse.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, an internal dispute among the five Ullstein brothers only added to the companies woes. The so-called ‘Ullstein affair’, based on false accusations against Franz’s wife of acting as a spy for France and perceived by the public as one of ‘the biggest

34 See Alfons Goldschmidt, ‘Ullsteins’, *Die Weltbühne* (11 April 1918), 353.

35 See ‘Stilke und Ullstein’, *Das Tage-Buch* (17 June 1922), 902–4.

36 H. Eulenberg, ‘Wie die großen deutschen Verlage gegründet wurden. Das Haus Ullstein’, *Die literarische Welt* (17 August 1928), 3.

37 See K. Koszyk, *Geschichte der deutschen Presse. Teil III: Deutsche Presse 1914–1945* (Berlin 1972), 337–45.

38 For Brüning’s press laws, see Fulda, *Press*, 169–202.

39 See *ibid.*, 170–1.

40 See M. Bosch, *Liberale Presse in der Krise. Die Innenpolitik der Jahre 1930 bis 1933 im Spiegel des Berliner Tageblatts, der Frankfurter Zeitung und der Vossischen Zeitung* (Frankfurt am Main 1976), 247–58; Eksteins, *Limits*, 222–3.



scandals of the Weimar era', seriously hindered the company's ability to react to the rapidly changing times.<sup>41</sup> Under pressure from government attacks as well as the economic crisis, and demoralised by internal division, the Ullstein management repeatedly admonished the newspaper editors to keep their publications out of the political fray.<sup>42</sup> In November 1930, Louis Ullstein's son Heinz, who had joined the company five years earlier, relieved the well-respected film critic Hanns G. Lustig from his duties after advertisers had complained about his articles.<sup>43</sup> In September 1931, the *Vossische Zeitung's* left-leaning film critic Heinz Pol left the company because he had been asked to tone down his reviews after Germany's biggest film production company, Universum Film AG (UFA), had cancelled its advertisements as a reaction to his polemical tone.<sup>44</sup> This case of kowtowing to an advertising client was particularly ominous, as UFA belonged to the media empire of Alfred Hugenberg, chairman of the far-right, anti-democratic German National People's Party (*Deutschnationale Volkspartei*, DNVP).<sup>45</sup> The struggle between managers and newspaper editors came to a head on 14 December 1931, when the Ullstein papers *B.Z. am Mittag* and *Tempo* published reports about Hitler's alleged plans to form a Nazi aviation corps.<sup>46</sup> It was inconceivable, the *B.Z.* argued, that Hitler's unhindered construction of a private army was happening without the blessing of the defence ministry. According to Franz Höllering, the *B.Z.'s* editor-in-chief, defence minister Groener was furious and 'a high official of the publishing house' warned the editor that he had to 'learn how to make compromises'.<sup>47</sup> After Höllering refused, he was removed from his position. His successor, Fritz Stein, was appointed only after consultation with the government and in a letter to Brüning, Stein promised to redirect the Ullstein papers 'on to the path of responsible political thought and action'.<sup>48</sup> Ullstein's self-censorship was noted throughout Weimar's political landscape and the SPD journalist Eugen Prager accused the company of 'getting rid of every opinion that could hurt the sales of its publications'.<sup>49</sup>

Naturally, as a publishing house with a long liberal tradition and Jewish roots, the rise of the Nazis was an existential threat to Ullstein. The company's Jewish heritage played no direct role in its self-fashioning as the model for a new Germany: the five owners were baptized Protestants and while the company employed a great number of Jewish editors, writers and journalists, its publications

41 Arthur Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue. An Autobiography* (London 1954), p. 166. For a detailed account of the family feud, see Eksteins, *Limits*, 180–93; Koszyk, *Geschichte*, 253–55.

42 See Fulda, *Press*, 188–90; Eksteins, *Limits*, 236–8.

43 See H. Pol, 'Ullstein und Ufa', *Die Weltbühne* (29 September 1931), 477.

44 See *ibid.*, 482; 'Skandal bei Ullstein', *Welt am Abend* (12 September 1931), unpaginated.

45 See note 10.

46 See 'Hitler organisiert ein Fliegerkorps', *B.Z. am Mittag* (14 December 1931), 1; 'Wozu braucht Hitler Flugzeuge?', *Tempo* (14 December 1931), 1.

47 See F. Höllering, 'I Was an Editor in Germany', *The Nation* (5 February 1936), 152.

48 Fritz Stein to Brüning, 19 December 1931, Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde (BArchL), R 43-I/2480, f. 106.

49 E. Prager, 'Zusammenfassung der Arbeit!', *Mitteilungen des Vereins Arbeiterpresse* (1 December 1930), 2. See also 'Krach bei Ullstein', *Welt am Abend* (16 December 1931), 1.

never defined themselves as ‘Jewish’ newspapers.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, the company had long been ‘a target for concentrated Nazi hate’ as the epitome of the image of the ‘Jewish press’ poisoning the minds of the German people.<sup>51</sup> The Ullstein press actively and outspokenly attacked the Nazis, but as a mass-market publisher at a time of rapidly diminishing revenues, the company found it increasingly difficult to commit to an all-out attack against what seemed like a genuine mass movement. In fact, the Ullsteins believed that many of their own readers sympathized with National Socialism despite the traditional liberal ethos of their papers.<sup>52</sup> After 1930, the company tried to solve this conundrum by differentiating between Nazi voters and functionaries. While the latter were still regularly attacked in Ullstein papers, editors and journalists were advised to spare the former. When the *Vossische Zeitung*’s legal reporter Moritz Goldstein complained in May 1932 that one of his articles, in which he had claimed that Nazi voters approved of crimes committed by NSDAP representatives, had been toned down, the paper’s political editor Carl Misch replied that it was necessary to distinguish between the two.<sup>53</sup> Abusing voters, Misch explained, was not helpful for Ullstein’s purpose. In the same month, Heinz Ullstein reprimanded the editorial office over the mocking tone of an article in the *Vossische Zeitung* about the ideological confusion of the NSDAP.<sup>54</sup> Taking the Nazis seriously was also the core demand of a strategy paper by Carl Jödicke, an assistant to long-time director Richard A. Müller.<sup>55</sup> National Socialism, Jödicke argued, had to be accepted as ‘a movement of political freedom and economic justice’.<sup>56</sup> To be able to compete with Nazi propaganda, the Ullstein papers had to change their tune, he argued, from lofty ideals of individual freedom and democracy to a ‘new patriotism’, which ‘strongly emphasised the welfare of the collective’.<sup>57</sup> The temporary curtailing of civil rights and democracy was inevitable in this time of crisis, Jödicke claimed. Shouldered with their daily struggle, he argued, the people did not care much for the ‘luxury’ of freedom at the moment anyway.<sup>58</sup> It is not clear how much influence this paper really had on the company’s politics, but embracing Nazi sympathizers now clearly belonged to its strategy.

50 See H. Wallenberg, ‘Zum jüdischen Beitrag. Biographische Miniaturen’ in Freyburg and Wallenberg, *Hundert Jahre Ullstein*, vol. I, 418–53; Eksteins, *Limits*, 133–4.

51 O.J. Hale, *The Captive Press in the Third Reich* (Princeton, NJ 1964), 131.

52 See H. Ullstein, *The Rise and Fall of the House of Ullstein* (London 1944), 183. This was a problem for the whole of the liberal press, see Eksteins, *Limits*, 249–50; P. Fechter, *An der Wende der Zeit. Menschen und Begegnungen* (Berlin 1950), 53.

53 See Moritz Goldstein to Carl Misch, 16 May 1932 and Misch to Goldstein, 17 May 1932, Carl Misch papers, BArchL, N2193, 13, f. 62–4. Goldstein had reported about the court case against NSDAP deputy Robert Ley, who had attacked and severely beaten SPD chairman Otto Wels. The article in question is ‘Sühne für den Überfall auf Wels’, *Vossische Zeitung* (15 May 1932), 1.

54 See Heinz Ullstein to Dr. Wolf, 4 May 1932, Misch papers, BArchL, N2193, 13, f. 57. The article in question is ‘Maifeier und Hohenzollern’, *Vossische Zeitung* (3 May 1932), 3.

55 See ‘Taktische Skizze’, 9 May 1932, Carl Jödicke papers, Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich (IZM), F110, f. 2–5.

56 *Ibid.*, 3.

57 *Ibid.*, 5.

58 *Ibid.*

Many commentators criticized Ullstein for apparently trying to appease or pander to the Nazis: in *Die Weltbühne*, Carl von Ossietzky called Höllering's dismissal 'a further sad chapter in the decline of a great liberal-democratic publishing house'.<sup>59</sup> Ullstein's purge of any overtly political content, he argued, was the 'the most scandalous capitulation to National Socialism'. In February 1932, Kurt Tucholsky wrote a scathing poem about a Jewish newspaper publisher called 'Mülvoß' – a pun on Richard A. Müller's name and the *Vossische Zeitung* – who declares himself an antisemite to 'go with the times'.<sup>60</sup> Ullstein's apparent concessions to the far right greatly alarmed its authors and readers. On 25 January 1932, the playwright Carl Zuckmayer complained to Emil Herz, the director of Ullstein's book publishing arm, about a 'fundamental change in the political conviction of the publishing house'.<sup>61</sup> A few months later, the Jewish academic Gershom Scholem privately called the company's papers 'most hypocritical and misleading', because he felt they turned a blind eye to Nazi atrocities.<sup>62</sup>

There are differing accounts about the events at the Ullstein house after Hitler was appointed as Chancellor in January 1933. Several historians have investigated the early 'Aryanization' of the company, but they have focused more on retracing the course of this process rather than on how this was discussed and justified among the management.<sup>63</sup> This is important in order to avoid creating the one-dimensional image of Ullstein as an upright defender of democracy being crushed by anti-democratic outsiders. From the documents analysed for this article, it is clear that the 'Aryanization' was ordered and coordinated by the highest echelons of the new regime and implemented by willing collaborators at Ullstein, among them some of the most senior and longest-serving staff. Not surprisingly, the company was a prime target of the Hitler government in the run-up to the election on 5 March 1933. While the party press of SPD and KPD bore the brunt of Nazi aggression, Ullstein was not spared: sustained propaganda, concerted boycotts among the party faithful, and direct attacks against subscribers and advertisers threatened Ullstein's already declining turnover.<sup>64</sup> In the night of the general election, Heinz Ullstein was arrested by Nazi Stormtroopers and brought to the NSDAP Berlin headquarters for questioning. According to Ullstein's director general Hans Schäffer, Heinz voted against reporting the incident in the company's

59 See C. von Ossietzky, 'Der Fall Franz Höllering', *Die Weltbühne* (5 January 1932), 1.

60 See T. Tiger, 'Dreh dich hin, dreh dich her – kleine Wetterfahne!', *Die Weltbühne* (16 February 1932), 239.

61 Carl Zuckmayer to Emil Herz, 25 January 1932, Ullstein Buchverlage contract archive, Berlin, 2–3.

62 Gershom Scholem to Betty Scholem, 1 May 1932, in Gershom Scholem, edited by Itta Shedletzky, *Mutter und Sohn im Briefwechsel 1917–1946* (Munich 1989), 266.

63 See W. Wippermann, 'Eule und Hakenkreuz. Ullstein und Deutscher Verlag im "Dritten Reich" 1933 bis 1945', in A. Enderlein (ed.), *Ullstein-Chronik, 1903–2011* (Berlin 2011), 198–219; M. Münzel, *Die jüdischen Mitglieder der deutschen Wirtschaftselite, 1927–1955* (Paderborn 2004), 394–407; E. Lindner, "'Arisierung", Gleichschaltung, Zwangsarbeit. Ullstein 1934–1945', in E. Lindner, *125 Jahre Ullstein*, 74–81; R.M.W. Kempner, 'Hitler und die Zerstörung des Hauses Ullstein. Dokumente und Vernehmungen' in Freyburg and Wallenberg, *Hundert Jahre Ullstein*, vol. III, 267–92; Eksteins, *Limits*, 294–301; Hale, *Captive Press*, 131–8.

64 See Hale, *Captive Press*, 134–5; Koszyk, *Presse*, vol. III, 354–5.

papers when he was released the next day because he did not ‘feel obliged to play the martyr for opinions the company used to entertain against his will’.<sup>65</sup>

A few days after the election, Ferdinand Bausback, a member of the Ullstein supervisory board, informed the management that the government was drawing up plans on how to deal with the company, which would involve the dismissal of Jewish employees.<sup>66</sup> According to Bausback, Goebbels was intent on systematically ruining the company with bans of its publications and attacks on advertising clients until the Nazis could cheaply buy up Ullstein’s printing plant, while Göring wanted to preserve the company’s press as an oppositional fig leaf. When the government sent a list of demands to the Ullstein management, Göring’s plan seemed to have won out.<sup>67</sup> The company was allowed to keep up a modest, yet ‘loyal opposition’, under condition of fundamental changes in Ullstein’s management, including the dismissal of Jewish director general Schäffer and the admission of several people with close ties to the government. After a short deliberation, the Ullsteins accepted. On 13 March 1933, Schäffer was replaced by Richard A. Müller, while Bausback became chairman of the supervisory board.<sup>68</sup> Müller was granted wide-reaching powers to facilitate an ‘adjustment’ of the Ullstein house and to bring it into line with the government.<sup>69</sup> According to Max Reiner, the *Vossische Zeitung*’s influential political correspondent, Müller eagerly and voluntarily ‘put Jewish and politically “intolerable” Christian editors out on the street, preferably penniless’.<sup>70</sup> Moritz Goldstein later claimed that the management showed no sympathy for its Jewish employees, but rather saw them as a liability.<sup>71</sup> The Ullsteins themselves, who at this time still controlled the majority of the company’s shares, remained passive and only intervened in special cases, like Reiner’s dismissal after over 25 years of service.<sup>72</sup>

On 12 May 1933, the Nazi-dominated Ullstein staff council organized a demonstration demanding a faster dismissal of all Jewish employees, which ended in a disruption of the printing of the evening papers.<sup>73</sup> In a reply to the council’s demands, the management confirmed the termination of its contracts with 14 Jewish colleagues, among them Max Reiner and Moritz Goldstein.<sup>74</sup> Another 12 were in the process of leaving the company, including Carl Misch and Julius Elbau, Georg Bernhard’s successor as editor-in-chief of the *Vossische Zeitung*. The circular, signed by Georg Sydow, who just five years earlier had conjured up the

65 See Hans Schäffer diary, 6 March 1933, Hans Schäffer papers, Leo Baeck Institute, New York (LBI), AR 7177/MF 512, 10, fol. 4, f. 6.

66 See Schäffer diary, 8–10 March 1933, LBI, AR 7177/MF 512, 10, fol. 4, f. 12–16.

67 See Schäffer diary, 11 March 1933, LBI, AR 7177/MF 512, 10, fol. 4, f. 17–20.

68 See *ibid.*, f. 20. See also ‘Die Neuordnung des Verlages Ullstein 1933/34’, Ullstein Collection, Axel Springer Unternehmensarchiv, Berlin (ASUA), Folder 1, unpag.

69 See M. Reiner, ‘Mein Leben in Deutschland vor und nach dem Jahre 1933, 1906–1939’, Max Reiner papers, LBI, ME 517/MM 63, f. 186.

70 See Reiner, ‘Mein Leben’, LBI, ME 517/MM 63, f. 190.

71 See M. Goldstein, *Berliner Jahre: Erinnerungen 1880–1933* (Berlin 1977), 128–9.

72 See Reiner, ‘Mein Leben’, LBI, ME 517/MM 63, f. 188.

73 See Eksteins, *Limits*, 288.

74 See undated circular, in Misch papers, BArchL, N2193, fol. 13, f. 83.

solidarity between owners and workers at the Ullstein house, ended with a promise to continue to purge the staff of Jewish employees.

The Ullsteins now seriously began to consider 'Aryanizing' their own company: according to Carl Jödicke, the family had been advised by the president of the Reichsbank, Hjalmar Schacht, to put the firm into reliable hands and claim it back once the 'Nazi bustle' (*Nazirummel*) had blown over.<sup>75</sup> From May, the company's legal representative Fritz E. Koch, himself a member of the wider Ullstein family, drew up several plans to put Schacht's advice into action.<sup>76</sup> On 16 June 1933, a memorandum about the 'transfer of all Ullstein shares into Aryan hands' and the 'Northification' (*Aufnordung*) of the supervisory board' laid out necessary steps and possible trustees.<sup>77</sup> The model for these plans was the Wertheim company, a Jewish department store chain, which had restructured its executive and supervisory boards in close coordination with NSDAP party offices.<sup>78</sup> On 1 July, Ullstein also hired Eduard Stadler, a member of the NSDAP parliamentary group, for the new position of 'political director' to negotiate with the regime.<sup>79</sup> Before they offered him the job, Hermann Ullstein and other members of the management had met Stadler in a private room of a restaurant, where he assured them of his good relationship with the new Chancellor.<sup>80</sup> On 12 July, Stadler was indeed granted an audience with Hitler to discuss Ullstein's *Gleichschaltung*, in which the Nazi leader agreed to keep the name of the company for 'reasons of foreign policy'.<sup>81</sup> Hitler's personal involvement shows that the new regime took the company's political and cultural clout very seriously, but it did not bode well for the Ullsteins themselves. After its newspapers had been brought into line and the company had purged itself of its Jewish employees, it quickly became clear that the regime was not satisfied and aimed to take full control of Ullstein. In fact, instead of fighting the owners' corner in his meeting with Hitler, Stadler had agreed with the Nazi leader to 'eliminate the influence of Messrs Ullstein in terms of staff and capital'.<sup>82</sup> Hjalmar Schacht was instructed by the government to organize Ullstein's 'Aryanization' and his plan in many ways followed the steps laid out in the documents drawn up by the Ullstein management: Schacht suggested issuing new shares, which would be offered to 'Germany's premier firms in industry and

75 See C. Jödicke, "'Wir haben doch die Macht!'" Goebbels und das Verbot der Grünen Post', *Publizistik*, vol. 23 (1978), 387–8.

76 See Fritz E. Koch to Theodor Martens, 22 May 1933, ASUA, 1, unpaginated.

77 See 'Übergang sämtlicher Ullstein-Aktien in arischen Besitz. Aufnordung des Aufsichtsrats', 16 June 1933, ASUA, 1, unpaginated.

78 See 'Betriff: A. Wertheim', 15 June 1933, ASUA, 1, unpaginated. For the 'Aryanization' of Wertheim, see S. Ladwig-Winters, *Wertheim – ein Warenhausunternehmen und seine Eigentümer. Ein Beispiel der Entwicklung der Berliner Warenhäuser bis zur 'Arisierung'* (Münster 1997), 162–7, 189–95, 203–35.

79 For Stadler, see Eksteins, *Limits*, 288–90.

80 See H. Ullstein, 'We Blundered Hitler into Power', *Saturday Evening Post* (13 July 1940), 36.

81 See 'Neuordnung des Verlages Ullstein', f. 2. The government files concerning the *Gleichschaltung* of the Ullstein company can be found in BArch, R 43 II, 469c.

82 See Kempner, 'Hitler', 272.

trade', securing 'the influence and predominance of Aryan shareholders'.<sup>83</sup> The family's interest would in turn be transformed into non-voting participatory certificates, which would be managed by an Aryan trustee. On 2 November 1933, the reorganization was officially adopted during the shareholders' general assembly.<sup>84</sup> In the same month, the German Aviation Ministry granted Ullstein the highly profitable contract to produce *Sirene*, a membership magazine for the paramilitary State Air Protection Corps (*Reichsluftschutzbund*), which brought in much-needed funds.<sup>85</sup> The *Gleichschaltung* of the Ullstein house made news all over the world: a *New York Times* editorial condemned it as an attack on 'the free development of intelligence in Germany', the *Chicago Daily Tribune* described it as the demise of a 'national landmark', and the Canadian daily *The Globe* called it 'the Nazis' most important success in the muzzling of the press'.<sup>86</sup>

After they had 'Aryanized' the company, the Ullstein management obviously expected to be able to continue their highly successful tradition of light entertainment in books and magazines, as long as they kept their newspapers in line. This hope is reflected in an internal memo by Georg Sydow from March 1934, in which he argued that Ullstein publications still enjoyed great popularity in the 'Third Reich' and that thus there was no sense in transforming the company into 'National Socialist publisher No. X'.<sup>87</sup> He further claimed that the attacks of the Ullstein press against the Nazis before 1933 had been conducted only by 'a few crazed editors in most disgraceful fashion', while most members of the management – including himself and members of the Ullstein family – had always regretted these assaults.

However, the company was far too valuable for the regime to leave it in the hands of compliant agents like Sydow, Müller and Bausback. In April 1934, using a mildly critical article of its editor-in-chief as a pretext, Goebbels banned the *Grüne Post* for three months.<sup>88</sup> Ullstein had become increasingly dependent on this popular magazine to keep other parts of its publishing empire afloat and this lengthy ban was effectively a death sentence for the publication. On 9 May, three 'Aryan' Ullstein directors – Bausback, Siegfried Manger and Carl Jödicke, who had been promoted to the board of management only six days earlier and now oversaw the newspapers – were summoned to Goebbels' office to discuss the *Grüne Post*.<sup>89</sup> The Nazi minister told them in unmistakable terms that the Ullsteins' formal retreat was not enough and that they had to 'eliminate the Jews' from the company

83 Ibid.

84 See 'Neuordnung des Verlages Ullstein', f. 2.

85 Ullstein AG, *Ullstein Geschäftsbericht 1933* (Berlin 1934), 3–4.

86 'Topics of the Times', *New York Times* (3 November 1933), 18; 'Ullsteins toss up sponge', *Chicago Daily Tribune* (2 November 1933), 8; 'Perils of a shackled press', *The Globe* (3 November 1933), 4. See also 'Nazis absorb Germany's biggest publishing house', *New York Herald Tribune* (3 November 1933), 5.

87 See 'Weshalb wäre eine Änderung des Verlagsnamens ein schwerer, nie mehr gutzumachender Fehler?', 9 March 1934, Ullstein Collection, ASUA, 1, unpaginated.

88 See Koszyk, *Presse*, vol. III, 404; Eksteins, *Limits*, 298–9.

89 See Jödicke, 'Goebbels', 388–90; Ullstein, *Rise and Fall*, 225.

entirely before the ban would be lifted.<sup>90</sup> Two weeks later, on 26 May, Goebbels noted in his diary that Max Amann, director of the Nazi publishing house Franz Eher and Hitler's close friend, was to be put in charge of the company.<sup>91</sup> By then, the Ullsteins had resigned themselves to selling their remaining holdings in the company. They were eventually bought by Amann for a fraction of their actual value, and thus Ullstein became a part of his rapidly expanding Nazi media empire.<sup>92</sup> On 8 June, a day after the transaction was completed, the ban on the *Grüne Post* was lifted. According to Ullstein's financial director Gustav Willner, the money to buy out the beleaguered owners was borrowed mainly from the Bank der Deutschen Arbeit, which managed the seized funds of the recently broken-up unions, and was then paid back from the company's profits, which soon rose again after the regime stopped its attacks.<sup>93</sup> The government and all participating parties, which included Deutsche Bank, took great care to hush up the deal in order to maintain the respectable reputation of the company.<sup>94</sup> It was only in 1937 that the Nazis dared to drop the famous name and changed it to 'Deutscher Verlag'.<sup>95</sup>

Many exiled journalists and writers later condemned Ullstein for not using its newspapers to defend more vigorously Weimar's democratic institutions and accused the owners of giving up their liberal convictions – and even their Jewish heritage – to maintain their profits.<sup>96</sup> Shortly after the Ullsteins had sold their company, an anonymous commentator of the émigré journal *Das neue Tage-Buch* blamed them for helping prepare the 'Hitler catastrophe' by purging their publications of any political content.<sup>97</sup> This accusation was echoed by exiled former Ullstein employee Heinz Pol, who argued that the Ullsteins had supported anyone who seemed able to defend their profits against the economic crisis: 'Anybody who could have worked this miracle would have been welcomed. And thus, full of hope, they welcomed Brüning, Papen and Schleicher, one after the other. The Kochstrasse offices were open to all of them, naturally also to Hitler'.<sup>98</sup> Franz Höllering directly accused the former owners of cowardice and opportunism.<sup>99</sup> In a private letter, Hanns G. Lustig described Ullstein's 'Aryanization'

90 See Joseph Goebbels diary, 11 May 1934 in E. Fröhlich (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, (Munich 2005), part I, vol. 3/I, 51.

91 See Goebbels diary, 26 May 1934 in *ibid.*, 53.

92 See Wippermann, 'Eule', 198–219; Kempner, 'Hitler', 277–84; Koszyk, *Presse*, vol. III, 392. Max Winkler, who led the negotiations on behalf of the government, later claimed that the price was considered appropriate by the Ullstein family, see Max Winkler, 'Ullstein A.G.', 12 September 1947, in Misch papers, LBI, AR 7214, 1, fol. 7, f. 6.

93 G. Willner, 'Wie der Aktienbesitz der Familie Ullstein an den Parteiverlag Eher ging', 2 August 1945, ASUA, unpaginated.

94 See H. James, *The Nazi Dictatorship and the Deutsche Bank* (Cambridge 2004), 63–5; Kempner, 'Hitler', 285–90.

95 For the history of the Deutscher Verlag, see Wippermann, 'Eule', 210–9; Erik Lindner, "'Arisierung'", 74–81.

96 This accusation was levelled against many German-Jewish businesses, see H.-H. Knütter, *Die Juden und die deutsche Linke in der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf 1971), 147–52.

97 'Ullstein-Ende', *Das neue Tage-Buch* (16 June 1934), 562.

98 H. Pol, 'Ullstein-Nekrolog', *Die neue Weltbühne* (21 June 1934), 771–2.

99 Höllering, 'I Was an Editor', 151–2.

as a fitting punishment: 'I interpret Ullstein's ignominious demise as an act of personal kindness by our dear Lord. I was extremely happy to hear about it.'<sup>100</sup> Later even Hermann Ullstein himself accused his brothers and the company's management of not making a stand against the growing National Socialist sympathies among their readership and thus contributing to Hitler's rise to power.<sup>101</sup> However, Franz Ullstein still defended the populist orientation of the company's newspapers until the end. In 1944, he rejected his brother's accusations in a private letter: 'To constantly swim against the tide is suicide. . . . The audience may not be sovereign, but you have to respect a majority decision.'<sup>102</sup>

Towards the end of the Second World War, the harsh criticism of Ullstein in the wake of the Nazi 'takeover' gave way to a more conciliatory view of the company's role in the Weimar Republic. The publisher of *Das Tage-Buch*, Leopold Schwarzschild, conceded in 1943 that although the Ullsteins' aversion to conflict proved to be disastrous, 'there is no reason to doubt that the political miscalculations were made in good faith'.<sup>103</sup> A year later, this view was echoed by Harold Nicolson: 'It was not cowardice of which they were guilty so much as optimism.'<sup>104</sup>

The restitution of the Ullsteins' former property after the collapse of the 'Third Reich' was a long and arduous process, complicated by the chaotic situation in occupied Berlin, the reluctance of German postwar authorities, the unclear legal status of the Deutscher Verlag, which had been merged with several other publishing concerns by the Nazis, and disagreements among the surviving Ullstein family members, scattered all over the world by persecution and war. Already in 1943, Fritz E. Koch, who had advised the owners during the 'Aryanization' of their company and later fled to London, began to lobby British authorities for a return of the firm after the end of the war.<sup>105</sup> Koch approached John A. Hawgood, the head of the German Section of the Foreign Research and Press Service (FRPS), presenting him with a memorandum in which he claimed that the company's liberal tradition and its role as a bulwark for Weimar democracy made it an important instrument in the coming re-education of the German people.<sup>106</sup> He painted the picture of Ullstein as an unwavering and uncompromising defender of 'the principles contained in the Atlantic Charter', who 'had to fight

100 Jan Lustig (i.e. Hanns G. Lustig) to Manfred Georg, 20 June 1934, in Manfred George papers, Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach (DLA), 75.3246/3. Lustig had been made redundant by Ullstein on 18 April 1933 because of 'the necessary reorganization relating to the political circumstances', see the letter of termination reprinted in Jan Lustig (i.e. Hanns G. Lustig), *Ein Rosenkranz von Glücksfällen. Protokoll einer Flucht* (Bonn 2001), 114.

101 Ullstein, 'Blundered', 35. See also H. Ullstein, *The Rise and Fall of the House of Ullstein* (New York, NY 1943).

102 Franz Ullstein to Margarete Mühsam-Edelheim, 1944, Ullstein Family Collection, LBI, AR 1133, fol. 1, f. 1.

103 L. Schwarzschild, 'The Ullstein Papers', *The Nation* (10 April 1943), 530.

104 H. Nicolson, 'Marginal Comment', *The Spectator* (10 March 1944), 218.

105 See K. Koszyk, 'Restitution und Ende des Hauses Ullstein', in A. Renger et al. (eds.), *Festschrift für Claus Arndt zum 60. Geburtstag* (Heidelberg 1987), 116; Münzel, *Wirtschaftselite*, 401–3.

106 See Fritz E. Koch, 'Memorandum on the Reconstruction of the Ullstein Verlag, Berlin', 20 December 1943, The National Archives (TNA), FO 371/39146, f. 7–16.



against superior forces and unscrupulous methods'. The memorandum also included a 'reconstruction programme', according to which the Deutscher Verlag's range of publications, most of which were old Ullstein titles like *Berliner Morgenpost* and *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, would be kept, while editorial staff and management would be exchanged with politically unobjectionable people. Hawgood, a historian of German-American descent, took an interest in the Ullsteins' case and forwarded the memorandum to the Joint Re-Occupation Committee, a body formed by representatives of the Political Warfare Executive, the Ministry of Information and the BBC, and which planned the reconstruction of the media system for soon-to-be liberated Europe.<sup>107</sup> In his accompanying letter, Hawgood highlighted the impact a return of the Ullsteins to Germany could have on these efforts. Not only would they occupy a position of great influence in the postwar German press and book trade, should they succeed in reclaiming their property, he argued; a resurrection of the firm would also be a contentious issue among the population in the occupied territory, because 'the Ullstein imprint had become connected in the minds of very many Germans with "Kultur-Bolschewismus" [sic] and Americanised mass-production of literature' in the time before the war.<sup>108</sup>

Surprisingly, Koch made no reference in his memorandum to the Ullsteins' Jewish roots as one of the reasons why the Nazis had attacked the company. This was the cause of some puzzlement among the members of the German Sub-Committee of the Joint Re-Occupation Committee, who discussed the memorandum forwarded by Hawgood.<sup>109</sup> All agreed that the case could set a precedent for following claims by other expropriated Jewish owners and that it was to be avoided at all costs that these claims would be directed against the occupying forces once they took over Nazi property. Thus, when the chairman of the German Sub-Committee, Con O'Neil, replied to Hawgood, he refused to offer any help to the family, arguing that 'his Majesty's government cannot... undertake any commitment towards them, either in the way of supporting their legal claims or by undertaking to make use of their services as publishers in Germany'.<sup>110</sup>

Shortly after the end of the war, in July 1945, Koch wrote to the United States Office of War Information (OWI) to apply for a newspaper licence in Germany. Enclosing his memorandum, he again stressed the company's democratic credentials and offered 'the cooperation of the members of the Ullstein family in the reconstruction of the German press'.<sup>111</sup> However, his attempts did not seem to be successful: in September, he contacted Ludwig Ruge, a Berlin notary who had also been involved in the negotiations during the 'Aryanization' of the Ullstein

107 For the role of the Joint Re-Occupation Committee and its structure, see G. Clemens, *Britische Kulturpolitik in Deutschland 1945–1949: Literatur, Film, Musik und Theater* (Stuttgart 1997), 57–66.

108 John A. Hawgood to German Sub-Committee, 22 February 1944, TNA, FO 371/39146, f. 6.

109 See 'Future of the Ullstein Publishing Company, Berlin', 21 March 1944, TNA, FO 371/39146, f. 1–4.

110 O'Neill to Hawgood, 7 April 1944, TNA, FO 371/39146, f. 17.

111 Koch to George Backer, 27 July 1945, ASUA, 14, f. 3–4.

company in 1934, authorizing him to prepare the necessary steps for a restitution of the family's former property.<sup>112</sup> The first step would be to apply for a newspaper licence in Germany rather than from outside. However, Ruge painted a bleak picture in his reply: the company's old headquarters in Kochstrasse were completely destroyed and the printing plant in Tempelhof was also badly damaged.<sup>113</sup> The facility had been occupied by the Red Army during the Battle of Berlin and the best printing machines had been dismantled; Gustav Willner, Ullstein's long-serving financial director, who had remained at Deutscher Verlag after 1934, had been imprisoned for two weeks.<sup>114</sup> After the sectoral division of Berlin in July, the rest of the Tempelhof plant – still the biggest printing facility in Germany, according to Ruge – had ended up under control of the US Army, which used it to print the overt newspaper *Allgemeine Zeitung*.<sup>115</sup> Willner was appointed as legal administrator of the printing plant, but his efforts to secure a publishing licence for the Nazi-owned Deutscher Verlag had been turned down. In a letter to Peter de Mendelssohn, a German émigré and British army officer who had been tasked by the Americans to oversee the rebuilding of the press in their sector, Willner pleaded that former Ullstein employees like himself had worked in 'inner emigration' since 1934 and merely acted as placeholders for the exiled family.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, he claimed, most of the company's publications had kept an 'antifascist' character during the Nazi reign, which had made buying the *Berliner Morgenpost* an act of quiet opposition. Willner's claim that the biggest publishing company of the 'Third Reich', owned and controlled by a Nazi organization, had somehow acted as a force of resistance was certainly motivated by the postwar situation, but it also reflected the naivety of the Ullstein managers who had willingly 'Aryanized' the company in 1934.

War damage and suspicious authorities were not the only obstacles to a speedy resurrection of the Ullstein firm. Immediately after the occupation of Berlin during the last days of April, Heinz Ullstein, the only male family member who had remained in Germany, made a first attempt to revive the company in his own name, which put him in competition with the part of the family represented by Koch.<sup>117</sup> However, although the US authorities were eager to rebuild the press in their sector to stem the rising tide of publications under Soviet control in the former German capital, Heinz's application to publish a newspaper was unsuccessful.<sup>118</sup> Instead, Mendelssohn handed the licence for the *Tagesspiegel*, the first privately-owned newspaper in Berlin, to a group of German cultural figures; to add insult to injury, the publication still had to be printed in Ullstein's former

112 Koch to Ruge, 10 August 1945, ASUA, 14, f. 2.

113 Ruge to Koch, 12 September 1945, ASUA, 14, f. 14.

114 Ruge to Koch, 25 September 1945, ASUA, 14, f. 29–30.

115 Ruge to Koch, 12 September 1945, ASUA, 14, f. 14.

116 Willner to De Mendelssohn, 19 September 1945, 1, unpag.

117 Ruge to Koch, 25 September 1945, ASUA, 14, f. 30. See also 'Ullstein seeks to regain his Berlin plant', *Chicago Herald Tribune* (11 July 1945), 6.

118 See 'Recommended Licences for German Newspaper in US Sector Berlin', September 1945, Monacensia Archive Munich (MAM), PdM M 148, 1–6.

Tempelhof plant.<sup>119</sup> In a memorandum for Robert A. McClure, the director of Information Control Division (ICD), John L. Whitelaw, deputy chief of staff of the US Headquarters in Berlin, explained the decision with the fact that Ullstein represented a journalistic tradition that was 'dated, outmoded, and even discredited'.<sup>120</sup> He emphasized Heinz's moral claim to an opportunity to restart the family tradition, but the latter's reluctance 'to admit that a break with this tradition was required' did not qualify him for such an important position. In the end, Heinz was granted a licence to publish a women's magazine.<sup>121</sup>

Despite these setbacks, Ruge submitted an application for the return of the Ullsteins' property to the US authorities in Berlin on 25 September 1945.<sup>122</sup> However, this seemed to do more harm than good: Hans Wallenberg, a former Ullstein journalist who had become a US citizen in exile and now occupied a central position in the rebuilding of the German press, warned Franz Ullstein that such attempts were highly undesirable at the present time.<sup>123</sup> As a result, Franz, who had emigrated to New York, strongly opposed the plans by the London-based part of the family.<sup>124</sup> Thus, Koch changed his strategy and postponed any efforts aiming at a restitution in order to avoid 'antagonizing the authorities'.<sup>125</sup>

On 16 October 1945, the Allied Control Council dissolved all Nazi organizations, including the Franz Eher firm and, with it, the Deutscher Verlag, which was put under the stewardship of the Berlin Magistrate, the city's new local government. Although this was a first step towards the restitution of property seized by the Nazis, it was taken on a long, winding and often murky path, obstructed by legal uncertainties and beginning Cold War animosities. As existing German and international law could not adequately cope with the European dimension and often quasi-legal nature of the Nazis' plundering, new laws had first to be written.<sup>126</sup> This process quickly exposed the often very disparate interests of the Allies and resulted in the introduction of different restitution laws for each of the sectors of occupied Germany between 1947 and 1949.<sup>127</sup> A separate version was introduced in West Berlin on 26 July 1949, two months after the foundation of the West German state. The restitution of the Ullsteins' former property, spread over different sectors in Berlin, Germany and even Europe, has to be seen in the wider context of these developments. Koch, Ruge and other representatives of the various parts of the family spent the next several years gathering documents and

119 See W. Schivelbusch, *Vor dem Vorhang. Das geistige Berlin, 1945-1948* (Frankfurt am Main 1997), 243-53.

120 'Recommended Licences', (see note 118) 8.

121 See H. Ullstein, *Spielplatz meines Lebens. Erinnerungen* (Munich 1961), 348.

122 Koch to Heinz Guradze, 27 October 1945, 14, f. 50-51.

123 Franz Ullstein to Wallenberg, 3 October 1945, 14, f. 47.

124 Franz Ullstein to Ruge, 14 October 1945, ASUA, 14, f. 45-46.

125 Koch to Guradze, 27 October 1945, 14, f. 50-51.

126 See C. Goschler, *Schuld und Schulden: Die Politik der Wiedergutmachung für NS-Verfolgte seit 1945* (Göttingen 2005), 100-3.

127 *Ibid.*, 106-10.

building a case. On 11 April 1950, they finally submitted to the Berlin Restitution Offices, which had been founded shortly after the introduction of the law, an application for the transfer of the total asset of the Deutscher Verlag.<sup>128</sup> However, the West-Berlin authorities, as the legal successor of the company, feared that a return of the property would ‘greatly impact the city’s finances’ and filed an objection against the application.<sup>129</sup> The treasury of the Magistrate – and after October 1950, the Senate – argued that at the end of the war ‘the greater part of the assets of the Deutscher Verlag consisted of values that had not been seized from the Ullstein company or any other natural or legal persons’.<sup>130</sup> After several out-of-court settlements had failed, a partial settlement was finally reached before the Berlin district court on 3 January 1952.<sup>131</sup> The court saw it as evident that the sale of the company in 1934 happened under duress, stemming from racial and political persecution, and thus returned the shares to the family. However, the Ullsteins also inherited the liabilities of the Deutscher Verlag – unpaid taxes, salaries and bills – in the amount of over 7.6 million DM, and had to sell the bombed-out old headquarters in Kochstrasse to the city council. They also returned the copyright of the publications added during the Deutscher Verlag era – mostly Nazi publications like *Signal* and *Das Reich* – to the Senate.

By the time the court reached its decision, the Cold War was already in full swing and made the company’s resurrection a highly politicized event, entangling Ullstein’s Weimar-era history with the postwar politics of memory. The British news magazine *The Spectator* wrote that Ullstein’s return to publishing ‘awakens memories of some of the great days of German journalism’.<sup>132</sup> The *New York Times*, which had always taken a close interest in the family’s fate, celebrated Ullstein’s ‘resurrection from the ashes of tyranny to join in the defence of democracy’ and described the re-founding of the publishing house in West Berlin as ‘restoring a beacon of freedom in the citadel of liberty behind the Iron Curtain’.<sup>133</sup> Even a regional newspaper like the *Atlanta Constitution* took part in the struggle over Ullstein’s past, describing the *Berliner Morgenpost* as the German paper that came closest to US-style press freedom during the Weimar Republic: ‘That’s why Hitler killed it. It wouldn’t knuckle under.’<sup>134</sup> The claim that the Nazis discontinued the paper was false: it was published until 23 April 1945, when paper shortages and war damage put an end to the *Morgenpost*.<sup>135</sup> At the restitution ceremony on 23 January, Cecil B. Lyon, director of the United States High

128 See ‘Rückerstattungsantrag über Gesamtvermögen des Deutschen Verlags’, Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB), B Rep 025-02, 1242/50-1, f. 1.

129 Oberbürgermeister von Gross-Berlin, Finanzabteilung to Wiedergutmachungsamt Berlin, 26 October 1950, LAB, B Rep 025-02, 1242/50-1, f. 25.

130 Senator für Finanzen, 22 January 1952, LAB, B Rep. 079, Nr. 1014, f. 1.

131 See LAB, B Rep 025-02, 1242/50-1, f. 154. See ‘Ein Gott hat uns beschützt’, *Der Spiegel* (23 January 1952), 10–17 and R. Peck, ‘An Ullstein Returns’, *The Spectator* (8 February 1952), 11 for details about the court case.

132 Janus, ‘A Spectator’s Notebook’, *The Spectator* (11 January 1952), 4.

133 ‘The House of Ullstein’, *New York Times* (13 January 1952), 10.

134 ‘A good newspaper outlasts dictators’, *The Atlanta Constitution* (4 July 1952), 15.

135 See Mendelssohn, *Zeitungsstadt*, 417.

Commissioner's Berlin office, put the company's 'Aryanization' in the context of 'a new totalitarian challenge' the city was facing now.<sup>136</sup> Rudolf Ullstein, by then the only surviving of the five brothers who had led the company to its success in the 1920s, replied that the resurrected publishing house would 'do its utmost for the further defence of democracy in Berlin'.<sup>137</sup> The new Ullstein company itself made only cautious references to its past: when its old flagship daily *Berliner Morgenpost* reappeared on 26 September 1952, the first editorial only alluded in passing to 'our past, our reputation and our achievements of the years before the great silence'.<sup>138</sup> When the tabloid *B.Z.* was reintroduced a year later, it painted a nostalgic image of the paper's heyday in 1920s Berlin and vowed to resurrect its position 'above the discord of parties and interest groups'.<sup>139</sup> Ironically, it described its own role by approvingly invoking Reissner – described as 'a Russian writer' – and her definition from 1925 of the *B.Z.* as a 'puddle in which the whole world is reflected'.

Not surprisingly, the East German authorities attacked Ullstein as a force that had contributed to the fall of Weimar democracy and the rise of the Nazis. For example, aspiring journalists learned that the company's publications had 'kept the class of proletarianized employees and impoverished small shopkeepers from becoming aware of their real situation' during the Great Depression and thus drove them into Hitler's arms.<sup>140</sup> The East German press described the new Ullstein house as 'remote-controlled by Americans' and a puppet of 'the American secret service', spewing lies 'in the style of Fascist propaganda troops'.<sup>141</sup> Despite the conflictive relationship between the two German states, they found common ground in their condemnation of Ullstein. As mentioned above, the West Berlin authorities had fought against losing control over the Tempelhof printing works and were not sympathetic towards the resurrected company. They were joined by the city's new media elites, who had established themselves on the small West Berlin press market since the end of the war, but were struggling to turn a profit. According to them, Ullstein's tradition of depoliticized mass-market journalism was out of place or even counterproductive in these Cold War times: on the day the *B.Z.* was reintroduced, the editor-in-chief of the liberal paper *Der Abend*, Maximilian Müller-Jabusch, claimed that this 'sensationalist rag' was depoliticizing West Berliners and was putting 'their will to freedom to sleep'.<sup>142</sup> Berlin's Governing Mayor Walther Schreiber accused Ullstein of betraying the responsibility of the West Berlin press to 'inform the readers about political

136 See 'Big Ullstein Plant Restored', *Information Bulletin. Monthly Magazine of the HICOG*, February 1952, 38.

137 See 'Der Ullstein-Besitz', *Der Abend* (24 January 1952), 5.

138 'Na endlich ...!', *Berliner Morgenpost* (26 September 1952), 2.

139 'Guten Morgen, Berlin! Die *B.Z.* ist wieder da', *Berliner Zeitung* (19 November 1953), 2.

140 See Verband der Deutschen Presse, *Geschichte der deutschen Presse, Lehrbrief 12* (Berlin 1956), 23–5.

141 See 'Von Amerikanern ferngelenkte Zeitungsverlage in Westberlin', *Neues Deutschland* (5 November 1953), 6; 'Kriegsverbrecher von morgen', *Neues Deutschland* (22 September 1954), 2; 'Der amerikanische Wind des Agenten Mr. Wind', *Berliner Zeitung* (2 November 1954), 8.

142 M.-J., 'Mr. Conat weiß es besser', *Der Abend* (19 November 1953), 5.

dangers and Communist propaganda' and of trying to make a profit 'without consideration for public interests'.<sup>143</sup> It is obvious that these politicians, publishers and journalists were not only concerned about the influence of Soviet propaganda, but about a new competitor with an illustrious name who also controlled one of the few printing houses around.<sup>144</sup> However, to interpret these doubts as purely commercially motivated would mean to dismiss the deeply felt consternation many people felt about the role the mass media had played in the rise of the Nazis, which was also reflected in the doubts about Ullstein's tradition of populist entertainment the British and US authorities had shown during the 1940s. In 1951, a year before Ullstein's return to publishing, Theodor W. Adorno had already put these fears into words, when he spoke out against a nostalgic view of the company's past. The liberal publishing houses of the 1920s, he argued, were nothing but cultural precursors for the Nazis:

The whole span of German culture was languishing, precisely where it was most liberal, for its Hitler, and it is an injustice to the editors of Mosse and Ullstein or to the reorganizers of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* to reproach them with time-serving under Nazism. They were always like that, and their line of least resistance to the intellectual wares they produced was continued undeflected in the line of least resistance to a political regime among whose ideological methods, as the Führer himself declared, comprehensibility to the most stupid ranked highest.<sup>145</sup>

After the experience of the failure of Germany's first democracy and the terror of the 'Third Reich', Ullstein's brand of mass-market publishing seemed not only out of place, but downright dangerous.

Furthermore, in a post-Holocaust Germany, the Ullsteins' Jewish heritage was the metaphorical elephant in the room in this debate. As mentioned above, the company itself only made vague allusions to its liberal tradition – rather than the owners' Jewish roots – as the reason it had been attacked by the Nazis. In contrast, when the *Spectator* reported on the return of the company, it mentioned the Ullsteins' 'Jewish blood' as the only reason 'for the forced sale to Goebbels'.<sup>146</sup> Ullstein's West German critics, on the other hand, never mentioned the owners' moral right to return to their family business as victims of the Nazis' racial persecution, even after it was officially recognized in court. The East German media, meanwhile, did not shy away from rehashing antisemitic stereotypes in their drive to discredit the company: on 20 December 1952, the semi-official *Berliner Zeitung*

143 'Conants einseitige Entscheidung', *Telegraf* (20 November 1953), 1. See also 'Die Pfütze', *Der Spiegel* (2 December 1953), 8–10.

144 For reports on the contemporary debate about Ullstein's return, see 'Ein Gott', 16–17; 'Pfütze', 9–10.

145 T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflections from a Damaged Life*, trans. by E.F.N. Jephcott (London 1974), 57. Mosse published the esteemed *Berliner Tageblatt*, while the *Frankfurter Zeitung* was published by Sonnemann. Both companies belonged to the liberal Jewish-German establishment and were 'Aryanized' at the beginning of the 'Third Reich', see Koszyk, *Presse*, vol. III, 403–8.

146 Peck, 'Ullstein', 11.

attacked Karl Ullstein as a stooge for 'American monopoly capitalism'.<sup>147</sup> Karl, one of the founder's grandsons, who had returned from exile in the USA to help rebuild the family firm, was portrayed as greedy, stunted and 'tubby (*kugelrund*)'.<sup>148</sup> While there were no direct allusions to Ullstein's Jewish heritage, the text and the accompanying illustration bore a shocking resemblance to Nazi attacks against the company. The *New York Times* denounced such articles as 'an attempt to play on the work of the late Dr. Joseph Goebbels, who did his best to smear the old Berlin publishing family'.<sup>149</sup>

The image of Ullstein as a defiant defender of Weimar democracy and a representative of Jewish victims, which prevailed in the Western press outside Germany, eventually also got the upper hand in the West German discourse. At the end of the 1950s, a host of West German publications by former Ullstein employees painted the company's role in the Weimar Republic in a nostalgic light, describing it as 'a stronghold of liberalism' and the heart and soul of Weimar democracy.<sup>150</sup> In 1961, Heinz Ullstein, who had distanced himself from the company's liberal-democratic tradition in 1933, now also wrote about 'the Ullstein spirit' of humanism and civility that had ruled the company in the Weimar years.<sup>151</sup> This trend reached a highpoint in 1962, when Ullstein published the memoirs of Vicki Baum, one of its most successful writers during the 1920s, in which she described the company as the 'stronghold of German liberalism' in the Weimar Republic.<sup>152</sup> However, the most important part in the process of Ullstein's historicization as the embodiment of a Western, liberal and democratic Germany was played by the Axel Springer publishing company. Springer was a direct competitor of the resurrected Ullstein house.<sup>153</sup> But while the Hamburg-based company quickly grew into West Germany's biggest media company, Ullstein struggled in the harsh conditions of the isolated West Berlin press market. In 1956, Springer bought 26 per cent of the company's shares from Ullstein family members and secured a majority of the voting rights from the rest of the owners.<sup>154</sup> In 1959, the family sold the remaining shares to Springer.<sup>155</sup> In the same year, Springer opened a new Berlin office on Kochstrasse, not far from Ullstein's former headquarters, which was presented as a symbolic as well as physical continuation of the tradition of the older publishing

147 R.-h., 'Herr Ullstein aus Amerika', *Berliner Zeitung* (20 December 1952), 6.

148 Ibid.

149 H. Gilroy, 'A paper in Berlin stirs imitations', *New York Times* (24 November 1957), 38.

150 A.H. Kober, *Einst in Berlin. Rhapsodie 14* (Hamburg 1956), 16. See also M. Krell, *Das alles gab es einmal* (Frankfurt am Main 1961), 121–266.

151 See Ullstein, *Spielplatz*, 302–13.

152 V. Baum, *Es war alles ganz anders. Erinnerungen* (Berlin 1962), 354, 457.

153 In 1952, when the British authorities sold the daily *Die Welt*, both companies competed for the licence, with Springer outbidding the other competitors, see 'Sale of *Die Welt*', 1952, TNA, FO 936/1367. Springer's *Bild* tabloid also competed with Ullstein's *B.Z.* on the Berlin market, see 'Newspaper "War" in West Berlin', *The Times* (19 November 1953), 7.

154 See 'Schluckt Springer Ullstein?', *Telegraf* (4 September 1956), 1; 'Tante Marthas Aktien', *Der Spiegel* (12 September 1956), 18–20.

155 See Koszyk, 'Restitution', 113–23; C. Riess, 'Restitution und Neubeginn', in Freyburg and Wallenberg (eds.), *Hundert Jahre Ullstein*, 385–429, 427.

house: the name of both companies were installed over the main entrance and a giant stone owl – Ullstein’s company logo, salvaged from the rubble of its Berlin offices – was erected on the front lawn.<sup>156</sup> Springer played a central role in the construction of a West German national identity as a liberal, democratic and staunchly anti-communist country firmly anchored in the Western Bloc.<sup>157</sup> The company’s publications, particularly its flagship tabloid *Bild*, viciously attacked groups or individuals that did not seem to conform to this identity.<sup>158</sup> This made the company a prime target for criticism among the leftist student movement during the 1960s and for far-left terrorism during the 1970s.<sup>159</sup> In 1968, the company headquarters in West Berlin were attacked by rioters after student leader Rudi Dutschke had been shot by an anti-communist would-be assassin, who was believed to be motivated by *Bild*’s campaigns; in 1972, the terrorist group Red Army Faction (RAF) carried out a bomb attack on the company’s Hamburg office.

The company’s move to isolated West Berlin was motivated by founder Axel Cäsar Springer’s vision of Germany’s postwar future: a return to Weimar’s ‘golden’ years of 1924–32, as a unified country with Berlin as its political and cultural capital.<sup>160</sup> Another central aspect of Springer’s identity politics was the Holocaust: already in the 1950s, he defined Germany as a nation ‘guilty of crimes against humanity, against other nations, above all, against the Jews’, and he was an outspoken supporter of the state of Israel.<sup>161</sup> Springer saw his publishing house as the heir of Ullstein’s self-defined role as the centre of Weimar’s democratic culture and expressly defined his company as playing a similar role in West German society.<sup>162</sup> He used Ullstein to construct the image of a Jewish-German tradition of Western liberal democracy destroyed by the Nazis, which his company could invoke to legitimize itself and the West German identity it helped create.

Springer’s arguably most wide-ranging attempt to write Ullstein into West German memory was the company’s centenary in 1977 – the highpoint of far-left terrorism in West Germany. To mark the occasion, Springer commissioned an exhibition in Berlin and Hamburg and an ‘educational film’ about Ullstein’s history

156 See P. Tamm, ‘Der berufene Partner aus Hamburg’ in Lindner, *125 Jahre Ullstein*, 100.

157 See C. von Hodenberg, *Konsens und Krise: eine Geschichte der westdeutschen Medienöffentlichkeit, 1945–173* (Göttingen 2006), 183–228, 362–98; G. Kruip, *Das “Welt”-“Bild” des Axel Springer Verlags. Journalismus zwischen westlichen Werten und deutschen Denktraditionen* (Munich 1999).

158 See K.C. Führer, ‘Erfolg und Macht von Axel Springers *Bild*-Zeitung in den 1950er-Jahren’, *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, 4, 3 (2007), 311–36.

159 See D. Claussen, ‘Im Zerrspiegel von Zeitzeugen und Wissenschaft – Springer und “68” in F. Backhaus et al. (eds), *Bild dir dein Volk! Axel Springer und die Juden* (Göttingen 2012), 164–71; W. Kraushaar, ‘Kleinkrieg gegen einen Großverleger. Von der Anti-Springer-Kampagne der APO zu den Brand- und Bombenanschlägen der RAF’ in W. Kraushaar (ed.), *Die RAF. Entmythologisierung einer terroristischen Organisation* (Bonn 2008), 292–355.

160 See Kruip, *Axel Springer*, 178–9.

161 Speech by Axel Springer at an international conference in Berne, 1958. Cited in Kruip, *Axel Springer*, 183.

162 See A.C. Springer, ‘Tradition, die uns verpflichtet’ in Freyburg and Wallenberg, *Hundert Jahre Ullstein*, vol. I, 11–20. See also Kruip, *Axel Springer*, 73.



to be used in schools.<sup>163</sup> The cornerstone of these efforts was a four-volume company history published by Ullstein in the same year.<sup>164</sup> The main ceremony on 9 September 1977 at Springer's Berlin headquarters, broadcast live by the US-controlled RIAS radio station, was overshadowed by the RAF kidnapping of industrialist Hanns Martin Schleyer a few days earlier. In their coverage of the celebration, the Springer papers drew explicit parallels to the Weimar era, describing Ullstein's 'courage to fight and defend freedom and human dignity' as a precursor to their own battle against the far-left militant group, while Springer's image of West Germany was described as a continuation of Ullstein's vision.<sup>165</sup> This appropriation of the company's history for West German identity politics culminated in the *Berliner Morgenpost* republishing Schlesinger's 1927 essay about the democratic 'spirit of the house'.<sup>166</sup> The most important dignitaries of West German politics and culture sent their congratulations, from Chancellor Helmut Schmidt to Wolfgang Stresemann, director of the Berlin Philharmonic and son of Weimar's famous politician, who described Ullstein as 'the most important pillar of the democratic-republican spirit in the 1920s'.<sup>167</sup> President Walter Scheel's appearance at the ceremony had been cancelled because of the kidnapping, but the *Morgenpost* published his planned speech, in which he lamented that even 'Ullstein, its democratic press and its great authors could not save Berlin from the brown tide'.<sup>168</sup> In his own speech, Axel Springer portrayed his company as a pillar of democracy being attacked by a small band of extremists, just like Ullstein, a company 'born of Jewish entrepreneurial spirit', had been in the Weimar Republic:

When our offices in Kochstrasse, with the names 'Ullstein – Axel Springer' over their entrance, were attacked by extremist arsonists in the Spring of 1968, the shattered glass and the flames showed that the attackers ran out of arguments on their way from radicalism via extremism to terrorism – as it happened so often in history. ... The Ullstein house was subjected to similar experiences during its long history.<sup>169</sup>

By drawing a direct line from the Nazis to the student movement, Springer equated Ullstein with Weimar democracy and his own company with the West German state. However, for this historical simplification it was necessary to flatten the complexities of Weimar politics and to treat Ullstein's self-promotion from the

163 See 'Lehrfilm über Ullstein', *Hamburger Abendblatt* (28 January 1976), 1; 'Hundert Jahre Ullstein', *Hamburger Abendblatt* (15 June 1977), 1.

164 See note 16.

165 See R. Stiege, 'Hundert Jahre Ullstein', *Berliner Morgenpost* (9 September 1977), 1; 'Stobbe dankt Axel Springer', *Berliner Morgenpost* (10 September 1977), 1; 'Axel Springer: Sie wollen das Fundament der Freiheit zerstören', *Bild* (10 September 1977), 2.

166 See centenary supplement, *Berliner Morgenpost* (9 September 1977), iv.

167 See 'Glückwünsche zum hundertjährigen Bestehen des Hauses Ullstein', *Berliner Morgenpost* (9 September 1977), 1–2.

168 See 'Scheel: Berlin hat seine Rolle als deutsche Hauptstadt gemeistert', *Berliner Morgenpost* (10 September 1977), 3.

169 'Verleger Axel Springer zum Jubiläum: "Tradition, die uns verpflichtet"', *Berliner Morgenpost*, centenary supplement (9 September 1977), i.

1920s as historical fact rather than a narrative. Criticism of the company's role during the Weimar Republic did not have a place in this version of history. In fact, it was actively silenced: the centenary volume included a reprinted text about 'Life and Death of the *Vossische Zeitung*' by its former reporter Moritz Goldstein, who had warned against trying to appease the Nazis in 1932 and had been fired by the company a year later.<sup>170</sup> Taken from Goldstein's memoirs, the text was cut to exclude a passage that stated that the 'old spirit' of the Ullstein house had not survived 1933 and its rebuilding after 1945.<sup>171</sup> In a review of the anniversary publication, the press historian Wilmont Haacke criticized the omission as a deliberate falsification of the author's intentions, covering up 'how deeply he was hurt by the publishing company's dismissal'.<sup>172</sup>

The different interpretations of Ullstein's past in divided Germany were closely linked to the difficult position the Weimar Republic occupied in German history. Both states went to great lengths to distance themselves from Weimar's failure, while at the same time using it to legitimize their own existence.<sup>173</sup> As a company with Jewish roots and the self-declared home of Weimar's liberal, democratic, Western-oriented culture, Ullstein was an important focal point for these Cold War interpretations of the Weimar era and the 'Third Reich'. Depending on the ideological context of the respective observer, the postwar image of the company was thus flattened to either a victim of barbaric, anti-democratic forces or their capitalist bedfellow – effectively continuing the Weimar-era debate about Ullstein's symbolic role in German politics.

The West German interpretation of the company's fate included an important fact that is worth repeating here: the Ullstein family were direct victims of a regime intent on destroying their livelihood and their existence, and it is doubtful if they really could have prevented Hitler's rise had they acted differently. However, the personal suffering of the Ullsteins should not be used to glorify the role the company as a whole played during the last years of the Republic. The Ullstein press certainly belonged to the most outspoken proponents of the new state. However, as we have seen above, many liberal and left-wing commentators had long been doubtful about the sincerity of the company's support of Weimar democracy. As it turned out, while some editors, like Franz Höllering, were prepared to take up the fight against anti-democratic forces, the Ullstein management – including

170 See M. Goldstein, 'Vom Leben und Sterben der Vossischen Zeitung' in Freyburg and Wallenberg, *Hundert Jahre Ullstein*, vol. 2, 165.

171 For the original text, see Goldstein, *Berliner Jahre*, 269.

172 W. Haacke, 'Hundert Jahre Ullstein als Spiegelung der Geistesgeschichte', *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, 31 (1979), 185.

173 See E.D. Weitz, 'Weimar Germany and its Histories', *Central European History*, 43, 4 (2010), 581–91; 'Vorwort', in H.A. Winkler (ed.), *Weimar im Widerstreit. Deutungen der ersten deutschen Republik im geteilten Deutschland* (Munich 2002), 9–11. For West German interpretations, see also S. Ulrich, *Der Weimar-Komplex: das Scheitern der ersten deutschen Demokratie und die politische Kultur der frühen Bundesrepublik, 1945–1959* (Göttingen 2009); for GDR historiography, see also M. Sabrow, 'Kampfplatz Weimar. DDR-Geschichtsschreibung im Konflikt von Erfahrung, Politik und Wissenschaft' in Winkler, *Weimar*, 163–84; A. Dorpalen, 'Weimar Republic and Nazi Germany in East German Perspective', *Central European History*, 11, 3 (1978), 211–30.

members of the Ullstein family – forced them to take a more neutral stance or leave the company. Furthermore, the pre-emptive dismissal of Jewish employees – before the introduction of the *Schriftleitergesetz* in January 1934 – is hard to reconcile with the West German image of the company as a bulwark against the Nazi ‘seizure of power’.

As described above, Ullstein was under intense political and economic pressure at the end of the Weimar Republic that made it very hard to react effectively to the threat of the Nazis. However, the company did not collapse under these pressures – it was transformed and actively integrated into the Nazi media machinery by some of its leaders, who had only a few years earlier professed their allegiance to Weimar democracy. Shedding light on the active role of these historical actors and introducing individual agency into Ullstein’s history in this way can contribute to a better understanding of Weimar society and how it could be transformed into the ‘Third Reich’ so quickly. The image of Ullstein as an upright defender of democratic values is as flawed as that of Weimar as a liberal democracy ambushed by extremists or flooded by a ‘brown tide’. The Weimar Republic was not toppled by outsiders – from the beginning, it included and created the forces that undermined it. This is why it is more accurate to talk of Weimar’s transformation or, to borrow from medical terminology, ‘malignant degeneration’, rather than its ‘collapse’ or ‘demise’. The fate of the Ullstein company is a highly significant case study of this process: inadvertently or not, people like Richard A. Müller and Heinz Ullstein paved the way to Hitler’s appointment in January 1933. That their options were severely limited by Weimar’s economic and political crisis does not change the fact that their actions ultimately contributed to the undermining of the Republic.

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