# The German Past and the British Press:

# Sefton Delmer as an Anglo-German Actor during the 1950s

Karen Bayer

The 1950s was considered a time during which almost no critical examination of the national socialist past took place. This holds particularly true for the reintegration of former National Socialists into West German society. Although this was tacitly accepted, especially journalists broke the silence. Above all the article series criticizing the continuity of key personnel in the foreign ministry, published by the *Frankfurter Rundschau* in 1951, was a vital example.[1] These rare, but all the more distinctive debates had a transnational dimension. The articles and reactions to them were published under the supervision of the occupying Allies. Their potential reactions have always been part of the authors' considerations. Similarly, their political commentaries and direct interventions were picked up by German politicians and society. Sometimes they were directly initiated by foreign journalists.

This article examines these transnational media issues in the post-war German past in the context of a scarcely noticed but important debate which was initiated by the British reporter Sefton Delmer in 1954. Following a short introduction into Delmer's vita, it analyzes the transnational reactions to his article series in the "Daily Express". Conclusions can be drawn from both media and political reactions which address the manner in which transnational discourse made it possible to talk about Germany's national socialist past.[2]

## From sympathizer to opposer: Sefton Delmer and national socialism

Foreign correspondents typically rely on strong social contacts with people in the country in which they are posted. Sefton Delmer's life was connected to Germany since his childhood. Although his parents were Australian, he was born in Berlin in 1904.[3] Delmer went to a German school and grew up in a German intellectual sphere: His father Frederick Sefton Del-

---

1 Frankfurter Rundschau, 1-6.09.1951.

2 This article is based on my research for my biography of Sefton Delmer; cf. Karen Bayer, *How dead is Hitler? Der britische Starreporter Sefton Delmer und die Deutschen* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2008).

3 Concerning Delmer's childhood cf. his autobiography: *Die Deutschen und ich* (Hamburg: Nannen, 1962), 15-51.

mer was a professor of English language and literature.[4] At the outbreak of the First World War his father was interned in Ruhleben prison camp as an enemy alien. Later, in 1917, the family was granted permission to move to England where Sefton Delmer continued school. After school he studied Modern History at Lincoln College, Oxford

His career as a journalist began with an encounter with one of the most powerful British "press barons". A short time after completing his degree he made acquaintance with Lord Beaverbrook, owner of the *Daily Express* and many other papers.[5] Beaverbrook became a central figure in Delmer's life during the next decades. It was Beaverbrooks idea to hire Delmer as a correspondent for the *Daily Express*.

At that time the *Daily Express* fell somewhere between quality and yellow press – a marked contrast to the paper's present tendencies.[6] The newspaper succeeded in appealing to men and women of different age and social classes. Under Beaverbrook the newspaper achieved a phenomenally high circulation, setting new records for newspaper sales several times throughout the 1930s. Its success was due partly to an aggressive marketing campaign and a vigorous circulation war with other newspapers.

The *Daily Express* was a right-conservative paper. Since the mid-1920s, the paper had consistently advocated Britain's complete isolation from European quarrels. Beaverbrook believed that stronger ties with the Empire could restore Britain's lost power and prosperity.[7]

Since 1928 Delmer headed the Berlin Bureau of the paper: he was indeed in the right place at the right time and was the right man for the job. He spoke German fluently, was sociable, quite eccentric and had an infallible nose for scoops. Delmer wrote human interest stories, reports about social events and political developments in Berlin. One of his first and

---

4 Concerning Frederick Sefton Delmer cf.: John Fletcher, *Frederick Sefton Delmer: From Herman Grimm and Arthur Streeton to Ezra Pound* (Sydney: Book Collector's Soc. of Australia, 1991).

5 There are a number of biographies about Beaverbrook, in many cases written by former colleagues and friends: Anne Chisholm, Michael Davie, *Beaverbrook: A Life* (London: Hutchinson, 1992); Tom Driberg, *Beaverbrook: A Study in Power and Frustration* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1956); David Farrer, *G – For God Almighty: A Personal Memoir of Lord Beaverbrook* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969); Alan J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook* (London: Hamilton, 1972); Alan Wood: *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook* (London: Heinemann 1965); concerning Beaverbrook's time as Minister of Aircraft Production cf.: David Farrer, *Beaverbrook – „A Difficult Fellow": The Story of Beaverbrook at M.A.P* ( London: Lane, 1945).

6 Robert Allen, Voice of Britain: The Inside Story of the Daily Express (Cambridge: P. Stephens, 1983), 17.

7 Robert Gordon Ambrose, Perspectives on National Socialism: The Daily Express and the Daily Herald on Aspects of the Nazi Regime and European Unrest. January 1933 – March 1936 (Waterloo: Univ. of Waterloo, Diss. 1986), 16f.

most spectacular reports was his article series about Peter Kürten, the legendary mass murderer of Düsseldorf, in 1929. The "vampire of Düsseldorf", as Delmer called him, is a very typical example of his journalistic style.

It is striking indeed that Delmer reported quite early-on about Hitler and had close contacts with the leader of the NSDAP. In 1929 Delmer met Hitler for the first time and received permission to accompany him during his election campaign by plane, "Hitler über Deutschland". As a result Delmer gushed forth in enthusiastic articles about the National Socialists. He made acquaintance with the leading National Socialists; especially with Ernst Röhm. Delmer was fascinated by the political atmosphere and ambitions and also by Hitler's charisma. He predicted in 1931 that "Germany is marching with giant strides to join the Fascist nations of Europe."[8]

Delmer shared the enthusiasm for Hitler with other British political conservatives. In the beginning of the 1930s National Socialism was an object of fascination: it was young, vigorous and powerful – in opposition to the British system, which was regarded as decadent and ossified.[9]

In 1934 Delmer's sympathy for the National Socialists waned. A critical tone underlay his writing. This was caused by the killing of his friend Ernst Röhm, who was removed in the so-called "Röhm-Putsch". In addition, the *Daily Express* began demanding a more critical coverage of German politics, as more and more doubt was cast on the legitimacy of the Nazi mandate.

Finally, Lord Beaverbrook ordered Delmer back and sent him to Paris to serve there as a foreign correspondent. From 1936 until 1938 the reporter wrote about the Spanish Civil War, and later traveled as a foreign correspondent through Europe.

After the beginning of the Second World War Delmer became prominent in a different way in Anglo-German Relations than he had achieved during his time in Berlin: Now he worked for the German Service of the BBC. From 1941 to 1945 he led the so-called Black Propaganda against Germany. By using subversive radio and leaflet propaganda the British wanted to demoralise the Germans.[10]

---

8 DAILY EXPRESS, 04.05.1931, Herr Hitler talks to the Daily Express, 1f.

9 Bernd-Jürgen Wendt, "Economic and Political Appeasement", in: Wolf D. Gruner, Bernd-Jürgen Wendt (eds.), *Großbritannien in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Hamburg: Krämer, 1994), 185-205, here 199. For more detailed information cf.: Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933-39* (London: Constable, 1980). An example for National Socialism's appeal to the British aristocracy is Lord Londonderry: Ian Kershaw, *Hitlers Freunde in England: Lord Londonderry und der Weg in den Krieg* (München: Dt-Verl. Anst., 2005).

10 Conrad Pütter, Rundfunk gegen das „Dritte Reich": Deutschsprachige Rundfunkaktivitäten im Exil 1933 – 1945: Ein Handbuch (München et al.: Saur, 1986), 81-83; 111-132.

After the war Delmer returned to Germany: The British wanted him to build up a new German news agency and a model newspaper for Germany. However, his successes were limited as he conflicted with the British authorities several times over his designs for the model newspaper. Frustrated, he went back to the *Daily Express*, where he became the Chief Foreign Affairs Reporter and a legendary figure in the Fleet Street. The *Daily Express* built him up as its star reporter. During the next twenty-three years he reported on many important political developments, wars and civil wars worldwide, not least the Korean War and the suppression of the Hungarian national uprising in 1956. But his main topic remained Germany. He wrote about the "German Question" and about West German remilitarisation.

## "How dead is Hitler?": An Anglo-German Controversy

Delmer's most important article series concerning Germany, "How dead is Hitler?", was one of the reasons why he became such a notorious personality in post-war Germany. The *Daily Express* published the first article of the series on March 22,1954, under the lead "The new powers surging up in Germany prompt an investigation by a man who knows the Germans well ... and raise a disturbing question: 'How dead is Hitler?'"[11]

This was a frontal attack against the political leaders in Germany. The topic of this and the following articles was Delmer's warning of the former national socialist elites, who, as he wrote, enjoyed the prospect of returning to power. Delmer described that the organisations of former German soldiers and of the SS reappeared. The reason for the accceptance of these organisations was, in Demer's view, that they could assist in attracting recruits for the new German armed forces.

The headline of the second article of the series on the next day was "Jobs for the Gestapo boys. They're back at the old game".[12] Delmer wrote about Reinhard Gehlen, the former Abteilungsleiter "Fremde Heere Ost", who in 1946 began his intelligence work by setting up an organization of former German intelligence officers. The "Gehlen Organization" was pivotal in supplying the West with intelligence on Warsaw pact nations. Delmer wrote that he had spoken with Adenauer's State Secretary Hans Globke, who had assured him that there was nothing "Nazi" about the organisation. Delmer smelled a rat.

The headline of the third article was "This is the German for Blackmail".[13] The blackmail was, as Delmer wrote, in "a Memorandum on Germany's post-Berlin foreign policy prepared by a former S.S. captain and ex-Ribbentrop diplomat, Dr. G. A. Sonnenhol." Delmer explained that the

---

11 DAILY EXPRESS, 22.03.1954, How dead is Hitler?, 4.

12 DAILY EXPRESS, 23.03.1954, Jobs for the Gestapo boys, 4.

13 DAILY EXPRESS, 25.03.1954, This is the German for blackmail, 4.

memorandum had been the basis of a serious discussion of German foreign policy of the Liberal Democrat Party (FDP). It recommended that the German government continue the cold war, playing off the East against the West, so that Germany could be reunited and more powerful in the future.

## Responses by the press

In Germany nearly all important newspapers reported on Delmer's articles. In the papers one can find three different lines of reasoning. First, there were a few papers like the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*[14] and *Die Welt*[15], which were mildly critical of Delmer. Thus, the FAZ reported on his articles in moderate tones predicting that British official circles would not take a Beaverbrook-paper seriously. Nevertheless the newspaper declared: "We absolutely can not be indifferent to the way (in which) several million British readers and voters visualize the Federal Republic, after buying the journalistically splendid Beaverbrook-papers".[16]

These newspapers warned about the deleterious effect his articles could have in England. It is clear that Delmer was seen not only as a journalist, but also as a member of the British occupying power. This factor bore great significance. As the German people were aware of the chance that the Allies could intervene in their affairs, they behaved quite cautiously towards the British occupying power. As a result of potential foreign doubts about the reliability of German democracy, German politicians and the public tended to peer beyond the German borders to ascertain foreign understanding.[17]

A second line of reasoning was represented by newspapers such as the *Neue Rhein-Zeitung*.[18] The paper admitted that there still existed indeed about fifty national socialist organisations in Germany at that time. But these organisations were seen as insignificant, although in them there were still parts of the national socialist ideology and mentality with a demonstrable vitality. *Der Mittag* conceded a certain, although rather limited, justification to Delmers accusations: "What Delmer is writing is not precisely wrong, but still, at least we hope so, acutely lopsided."[19] The paper

---

14 Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 23.03.1954, „Wie tot ist Hitler?". Cf. furthermore Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 25.03.1954, „Jobs für die Gestapo-Boys"; Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 26.03.1954, Sefton Delmer: Deutsche Schaukelpolitik.

15 Die Welt, 24.03.1954, Im Kreuzfeuer.

16 "Es kann uns aber durchaus nicht gleichgültig sein, welches Bild der Bundesrepublik Millionen und aber Millionen englischer Leser und Wähler gewinnen müssen, die die journalistisch glänzend gemachten Beaverbrook-Blätter kaufen."

17 Cf. Norbert Frei, Vergangenheitspolitik: Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit (München: Beck, 1996).

18 Neue Rhein-Zeitung, 27.03.1954, Klaus Besser, Sefton Delmer sagt: „Hitler ist nicht tot".

19 "Was Delmer schreibt, ist nicht gerade falsch, aber doch, so hoffen wir wenigstens, überaus schief"; .Der Mittag, 25.03.1954, Ist Hitler tot?

advised the German politicians to restrain as Adenauer's way might be right, but he is following it *"with the boisterousness of an 18 year old"*.[20] The German people should not press ahead, as if they could not wait to put the uniform back on, which as a matter of fact was not the case, as the newspaper stated correctly. So, to some extent these papers agreed with Delmer.

A third group of newspapers, like the *Essener Allgemeine Zeitung*[21] or the *Berliner Morgenpost*[22] criticised Delmer severely. They argued that the *Daily Express* wanted to protect Britain from the growing German economic power. The *Berliner Morgenpost* noted critically, how staggering were the "efforts the chief correspondent of the London Daily Express makes, to support the communists".[23] The CSU-affiliated *Passauer Neue Presse* took the same antisocialist line: " Delmer and his friends (sharing the same attitude) will not encourage a German dictatorship this time, but instead achieve a Soviet dictatorship over (all of) Europe." [24] The reporter would support the EDC opponents and the enemies of a united Europe in favour of the Soviets. This kind of newspaper did not even consider thinking about whether there was some truth in Delmer's uncovering.

Lord Pakenham, the former Minister for German affairs, also joined the discussion. He attacked Delmer for his articles in the House of Lords. Parts of his speech were published by the *Daily Express*: "I cannot believe that any fair-minded person could go to Germany now and meet people of all sorts and then come away and say the generals were back, or the Nazis were getting into the saddle."[25]

A few days later Delmer replied. In the next article "I name three men who prove the danger"[26], he introduced these revelations ironically with the remark that he could understand Lord Pakenham's anxiety, because Pakenham himself was responsible for the de-nazification and re-education of post-Hitler Germany. It must be bitter for him, Delmer wrote, to admit that his work had failed. Delmer continued: "I wonder what would have happened if Lord Pakenham had visited Germany under similar auspices in the pre-Hitler era [...]. I rather fancy that Lord Pakenham like to many other wishful thinkers of those days, would have pooh-poohed the warning I gave after my first interview with Hitler in March 1931 that

---

20 "mit dem Ungestüm eines 18jährigen".

21 Essener Allgemeine Zeitung, 25.03.1954, Fritz Lucke, Ein General zittert – und ein Reporter hetzt gegen Deutschland.

22 Berliner Morgenpost, 25.03.1954, Kein Wunder!

23 "was der Chefkorrespondent des Londoner ‚Daily Express' tue, um die Kommunisten zu unterstützen"; Berliner Morgenpost, 25.03.1954, Kein Wunder!

24 "Delmer und seine Gesinnungsfreunde werden diesmal keine „deutsche Diktatur fördern, sondern die Diktatur der Sowjets schließlich über Europa bringen.", Passauer Neue Presse, 25.03.1954, August Remminger, Sind wir schon wieder soweit?

25 DAILY EXPRESS, 25.03.1954, Oh! The naughty Daily Express!, 2. Cf. Pakenham's speech chronicled in: Parliamentary Debates, Fifth Series, Vol. 186, 24.03.1954, 676f.

26 DAILY EXPRESS, 29.03.1954, I name three men who prove the danger, 4.

'Germany is marching with giant strides to join the Fascist nations of Europe.'" That was a quite amazing distortion of Delmer's enthusiastic reports about Hitlers success in the early 1930s. Now a revisionist Delmer presented himself as someone who had always warned about the dangers of national socialism.

His article brought further allegations against the old national socialists and their return to power. He wrote about three German federal ministers: Theodor Oberländer, Waldemar Kraft and Victor Preusker. Delmer reported, that the Minister for Refugees, Oberländer, occupied the rank of a Stormtroop Chief in the Gauleiter's office for East Prussia, while the Minister for Special Assignments, Kraft, was a colonel in the S. S. and from 1943 onwards an official of Himmler's notorious Secret Police Service. Delmer continued, that the Minister for Housing, Preusker, joined the SS in 1933. For his part "in liberating the German economy from the Jewish yoke" he was presented with a special certificate of honour by Adolf Hitler.

The more Delmer revealed the more aggressive the reactions of the German newspapers became. Some odd mistakes in his articles came to light. For example it was obvious that the "special certificate of honour by Adolf Hitler" for Kraft had never existed. While in the beginning of the discussion there were different views of the newspapers and many tended to be careful to criticise Delmer, the situation began to change because doubts arose over the credibility of Delmer and the *Daily Express*. Since even British politicians like Pakenham criticised Delmer, there was less reason to offer reserved judgment.

Thus the FDP-affiliated *Westdeutsche Rundschau* prophesied with a grim solemnity: "He [Delmer] remains true to a tradition of political defamation [roorback], which twice let the world go up in flames. Maybe he will see one day, when the red flood hits England, how greatly he helped to decay the German firewall. But then it is too late."[27] It is noteworthy how rarely German writers of that time centered their articles on Delmer's early solidarity with important national socialists at the end of the 1920s and the early 1930s. Although a few journalists address this connection, none explores the topic in any depth.[28] The focus remained on the present and many individuals appeared, in this respect, to have forgotten some history.

---

[27] "Er [Delmer] bleibt einer Tradition der politischen Diffamierung treu, an der schon zweimal die Welt in Flammen aufging. Vielleicht werden ihm eines Tages, wenn die rote Flut auch England erfassen sollte, die Augen darüber aufgehen, wie sehr er mitgeholfen hat, die deutsche Brandmauer morsch zu halten. Doch dann ist es zu spät.", Westdeutsche Rundschau, 03.04.1954, Curt Weithas, Delmer schießt quer.

[28] For example in the Aachener Nachrichten, Am Abflußrohr der Weltgeschichte, 31.03.1954; Der Fortschritt, 08.04.1954, Mausetoter Hitler – kein Geschäft.

## Responses by the West German politicians

Delmer's articles not only initiated an Anglo-German debate within the media. They also led to reactions from a few West German politicians about some parts of Delmer's coverage. For example vice-chancellor Franz Blücher explained that the "Sonnenhol-Memorandum" was just a private note. Furthermore, the chancellery office initiated an investigation to uncover which sources Delmer used. The results were made public as early as 31 March 1954. [29] According to these, Delmer had been instructed thoroughly by Lord Beaverbrook, an opponent of the EDC, as to what he should investigate in Germany. A Bonn politician would have allowed the reporter a short inspection of the Sonnenhol-Memorandum in good faith. Delmer however betrayed this trust and gave the document an entirely different interpretation.

Delmer had also met two gentlemen from the trading-policy department of the ministry of foreign affairs, while doing research for his articles.[30] He apparently pretended to be interested in matters of trade and commerce between East and West. He also had an "informal interview" with Globke. [31]

Delmer's cunning lay in his ability to hide his true motives from the interviewee. His articles would have made shocking reading for his confidantes. One can appreciate the importance and impact his series of articles had and how they elevated the journalistic content of the *Daily Express*. Exploiting his informants in this way could only work once: Delmer was in constant need of new sources. Some newspapers stated generally that some informants have been as trusting with Delmer, "as they have never been with German press representatives."[32]

This frankness also owed to the circumstance that the *Daily Express* was, after all, a paper from one of the occupying powers. And one tended to deal with them rather cautiously – unless the British public and politicians turned against the British newspapers' articles themselves. On the other hand the informants' communicativeness can be attributed to Delmer's outstanding journalistic skills. He combined an exceptional journalistic nose for new "stories" with a distinct sociability, enabling him to make contact with a vast number of important persons engaged in politics. But even from politicians he barely knew, Delmer was able to extract in-

---

29 Politik und Wirtschaft, 31.03.1954, Sefton Delmer.

30 Milner to Auswärtige Amt, 23.03.1954, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (PA/AA), B 11/1215,.

31 This conversation is documented by a letter from the minister of the interior and social affairs of Rheinland Pfalz, Zimmer, cf. Zimmer an Globke, 04.06.1954, Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik (ACDP), NL I-070,.

32 "*die sie deutschen Pressevertretern gegenüber noch nie aufgebracht haben*", cf. Der Fortschritt, 08.04.1954, Mausetoter Hitler – kein Geschäft. Whether Delmer was unduly informed by "certain Bonn circles", was later also asked by the Allgemeine Zeitung. Neuer Mainzer Anzeiger, 21.05.1954, Wie tot ist Hitler?

formation, in many ways more successfully than other journalists could have. And if the source bore less information than he had anticipated, he drew on background knowledge to write a typically stirring story.

All this must have been more than unpleasant for the West German government. Nevertheless there was no official condemnation. not one member of the German Federal Government denied the allegations of Delmer, not even those concerning their Ministers Oberländer, Preusker and Kraft.

The main reason for the collective silence was that the German Department for Foreign Affairs had recommended a policy of ignoring Sefton Delmer's articles. Sir Frank Roberts, chief of the German department in the Foreign Office, explained that "due to the nature of the *Daily Express* [...] going into unfriendly articles on Germany [would] not [be] particularly advisable, as this would only lead to counterstatements and would focus the attention on distressing journalistic workings, that should be forgotten as soon as possible."[33] The German Department for Foreign Affairs subscribed to Robert's view and suggested, "not to address any of Sefton Delmer's unfriendly articles about Germany."[34] That is exactly what happened.

## Responses from abroad

It was an open-ended question as to how the governments of the Western Allies would react on this debate. Although the anti-communist unity and the rearmament of West Germany had suggested a prevalent tolerance against the elite-continuity, the British intervention against Nazis within the FDP in North-Rhine-Westphalia in 1953 demonstrated that the Allies were not opposed to action. In general, however, political reactions were much more reserved. [35]

The French High commissioner André Francois-Poncet agreed with Delmer, that virulent nationalism could arise again in Germany. But he thought that there is also an opposite movement in Germany, which must be supported. The American High Commission reacted quite calmly. It maintained that political life in Germany was largely democratic, moderate and anti-communist, even if the High Commission admitted that a few

---

[33] "bei der Eigenart des DAILY EXPRESS [...] ein Eingehen auf unfreundliche Deutschlandartikel nicht besonders empfehlenswert [sei], da dies nur zu Gegenäußerungen führe und die Aufmerksamkeit auf bedauerliche journalistische Arbeiten richte, die man zweckmäßig möglichst schnell der Vergessenheit anheim fallen lassen sollte.", Schlange-Schöningen ans Auswärtige Amt, 12.04.1954 PA/AA, B 11/1215.

[34] *"auf unfreundliche Deutschlandartikel von Sefton Delmer nicht mehr einzugehen."*, Velhagen an das Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, 22.04.1954, PA/AA, B 11/1215.

[35] In the following concerning the Western Allies' reactions cf.: Ulrich Brochhagen, *Nach Nürnberg: Vergangenheitsbewältigung und Westintegration in der Ära Adenauer* (Hamburg: Junius, 1994), 213-216.

old Nazis had entered democratic institutions. Anthony Nutting of the British Foreign Office was angered by the *Daily Express*. He thought that the German democracy should have a chance to defend itself against attacks of Delmer and his unscrupulous boss. Nutting got to the point: "The more Delmers, the more Hitlers and the less Adenauers."

Delmers articles were also read in the GDR. For example the newspaper of the Soviet military administration, *Tägliche Rundschau*, translated the articles into German.[36] The *Rundschau* agreed to the English reporter: "The EDC is nothing but an opportunity for them [the German militarists] to mount the horse again, for to get rid of all ties in due course and to implement the European idea as they see fit: the blood-splattered fascist soldier-boots in all European countries."[37]

That corresponded to the official attitude of the GDR of confronting the West German government with the fact that many national socialist elites had come back to power. The GDR did not see itself as the heir of the national socialist state.[38] The German communists stressed the suffering and the triumph of the Soviet Union and the communist martyrdom. The GDR nurtured a self-conception of a good and noble Germany which opposed the evil West.

## Background to the article series

Who and what was behind these articles from the side of the *Daily Express*? Delmer, of course: the highly professional journalist, the eccentric star reporter with the ability to churn out biting copy. He wrote a sustained commentary on the return to power of old national socialist elites. Perhaps he was motivated by a moral conviction that it was necessary to warn the British about this development. However, the series also had a serious political background. Delmer had an clever instinct for sensation, but he

---

36 Tägliche Rundschau, 25.03.1954, Engländer entlarvt den westdeutschen Militarismus; Tägliche Rundschau, 28.03.1954, Sefton Delmer: „Noch ist es nicht zu spät"; Tägliche Rundschau, 06.04.1954, „Wie tot ist Sefton Delmer?".

37 "Die EVG ist für sie [die westdeutschen Militaristen] nichts anderes als eine Gelegenheit, sich erneut in den Sattel zu setzen, um sich dann zur gegebenen Zeit von allen Bindungen frei zu machen und die sogenannte Europaidee so zu verwirklichen, wie sie sie verstehen: die blutbesudelten faschistischen Soldatenstiefel in allen europäischen Ländern.", Tägliche Rundschau, Sefton Delmer: „Noch ist es nicht zu spät".

38 In the following cf.: Jeffrey Herf, *Zweierlei Erinnerung: Die NS-Vergangenheit im geteilten Deutschland* (Berlin: Propyläen, 1998), here 450. Regarding a comparison on the handling of the National Socialist past in the Federal Republic cf. also Jürgen Danyel (ed.), *Die geteilte Vergangenheit: Zum Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand in beiden deutschen Staaten* (Berlin: Akad. Verl., 1995); Ulrich Herbert, Olaf Groehler, *Zweierlei Bewältigung: Vier Beiträge über den Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit in den beiden deutschen Staaten* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse Verl., 1992). The SED's German policy is focused from a history of politics point of view by Michael Lemke, *Einheit oder Sozialismus? Die Deutschlandpolitik der SED 1949-61* (Köln: Böhlau, 2001). Furthermore cf. Martin Sabrow (ed.), *Geschichte als Herrschaftsdiskurs: Der Umgang mit der Vergangenheit in der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau, 2000).

also fully understood the expectations of Lord Beaverbrook, the editorial office of the newspaper and its readership. Delmer wrote exactly what the *Daily Express* wanted him to write.

The *Daily Express* was the only important conservative newspaper which opposed the plans of the British government to re-arm Germany.[39] Beaverbrook wanted Germany to be a neutral state without a military alliance, like the European Defence Community. He did not accept the German "Westbindung", from which rearmament would follow. By stressing the danger which West-Germany represented, which in turn jeopardised the peace in Europe, Delmer's series of articles can be seen as part of a broader argumentation against German rearmament.

Beaverbrook never hesitated to use his newspaper for his political aims. On one occasion in 1948 he explained to the *Royal Commission on the Press*: "My purpose originally was to set up a propaganda paper, and I have never departed from that purpose all through the years."[40] Beaverbrook demonstrated his proclivity for propaganda when a few months after Delmer's first series of articles the *Express* started a campaign against the German rearmament. Beaverbrook had posters hung up and advertisements published in different newspapers with the slogan "Don't arm Germany – *Daily Express*".[41]

Delmer wrote more articles in the following months about nearly all former national socialists who are known today for their efforts to return to power in the 1950s: for example about the leader of the "Deutsche Reichspartei" Hans Ulrich Rudel, about one of the leaders of the "Sozialistische Reichspartei" Otto Ernst Remer and about Werner Naumann, who tried to infiltrate the Liberal Democratic Party. West German newspapers continued to criticise Delmer or simply discounted his articles as tabloid frivolity. That was quite easy for them, because Delmer became increasingly estranged from his social contacts in Germany.

Also, the German papers discounted him because there was a broad cultural unwillingness in these years to think about the Nazi past at all.[42]

---

39 Concerning Beaverbrook's views on foreign policy cf. Chrisholm, Davie, Beaverbrook. A Life, 455; Herald Tribune. New York. European Edition. Paris, 23.05.1952, Beaverbrook opposes Bonn peace contract.

40 As cited by Graham Murdock/ Peter Golding, "The structure, ownership and control of the press, 1914-1976", in: George Boyce, James Curran, Pauline Wingate (ed.), *Newspaper History from the seventeenth century to the present day* (London: Constable, 1978), 130-148, here 142.

41 Cf. for example: Der Kurier, 10.08.1954, Das ist der Mann...; Der Tagesspiegel, 10.08.1954, Delirium.

42 Regarding the by now extensive literature on the Federal Republic's handling of the National Socialist past cf. representatively Brochhagen, *Nach Nürnberg*; Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*; Wilfried Loth, Bernd A. Rusinek (eds.), *Verwandlungspolitik: NS-Eliten in der westdeutschen Nachkriegszeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus Verlag, 1998). Debatable as a representative for the thesis, that coping with the National Socialist past was the political leitmotif in the early Federal Republic, cf.: Manfred Kittel, *Die Legende von der „Zweiten*

To allow for the widespread desire to "rule off" the unpleasant past the *Straffreiheitsgesetz (punishment exemption law)*[43] was passed in 1949. It contained an extensive amnesty including felonies committed in the "Third Reich". In the following years the denazification process wound down bit by bit. From 1953 onwards the prosecution of national socialist crimes all but ceased in West German courts. By the mid-1950s even heavily implicated elites had for the most part been reintegrated socially as well as professionally. A peculiar kind of stability had been reached.

The way the early Federal Republic dealt with its national socialist past is mirrored in its behaviour towards Delmer who, coming from the outside, broke into "the atmosphere of willingly keeping silent on the individual national socialist past"[44] with his article series published in spring 1954. Neither politicians nor the majority of newspapers sympathized with him. Most Germans did not want to be reminded of the recent past. The clearer it became that the British Allies distanced themselves from Delmer's articles, the stronger the West German press denounced him.

Delmer's warnings concerning the reintegration of national socialist elites were furthermore used as a means to substantiate fears concerning West German rearmament. The German press did indeed notice the argument against rearmament sustained by the *Daily Express*. But they were even more incensed by the suspicions he cast on quite a number of West German political protagonists, especially as Delmer's criticizm on Adenauers' ministers became more and more severe.

This criticism had been somewhat misinterpreted by the German press. Delmer was not a Soviet agent, as was presumed by several newspapers, simply because he argued against rearmament and the old and new national socialist elites in West Germany. In the bifurcated political world of the cold war, it seemed unimaginable to argue against a conservative tendency in the West without therefore being a supporter of the East, at least from a West German point of view. Delmer represented a special form of English conservatism which was incomprehensible in West Germany and therefore rejected.

---

*Schuld": Vergangenheitsbewältigung in der Ära Adenauer* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1993). Summing it up and ranging as far as the present are Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland: Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (München: Beck 2001); Helmut König, *Die Zukunft der Vergangenheit: Der Nationalsozialismus im politischen Bewusstsein der Bundesrepublik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003). König turns against Hermann Lübbe's provocative thesis, that keeping silent on the past had been necessary: „So alternativlos die Lösung in der frühen Bundesrepublik wahrscheinlich auch gewesen ist – auf die Dauer war sie zum Scheitern verurteilt", 30. Cf. also Hermann Lübbe, "Der Nationalsozialismus im deutschen Nachkriegsbewusstsein", in: HZ 236 (1983), 579-599.

43 Cf. Frei, Vergangenheitspolitik, 29-53.

44 "die Atmosphäre des bereitwilligen Beschweigens individueller NS-Vergangenheit", ibid, 405.

Delmer was a highly professional journalist but it is difficult to ascertain how the extent to which he wrote critically. Solely on the basis of Delmer's articles in the *Daily Express*, it is not possible to determine if the views he advanced in the paper were the views he held himself. Beaverbrook was the man to please; it is plausible that Delmer's personal convictions were shaped by his professionnal commitments. A few things suggest this. *Der Spiegel* reported that Delmer was asked by a German friend whether his revelations about Germany were justified. He answered, shrugging, "I am the Lord's servant".[45]

Delmer is said to have once mentioned something to Joachim Ritter, his former schoolmate and member of the German embassy : "I would sometimes like to write nicer words about Germany, if I would not need to consider Lord Beaverbrook."[46] In a German television interview in the early 1960s Delmer denied explicitly having named himself a "Knecht des Lords" and pointed out that: [...] I have never received an order or directive from him [Beaverbrook] to write something. Of course every journalist writes what he thinks will be best received in the newspaper."[47] Between an explicit declaration and an unexpressed expectation what a journalist should write, a striking ambiguity remains. And here Beaverbrook's power is evident.

Delmer advanced his published opinion concerning the threat of an ascendent national socialist elite personally towards his journalist colleagues. A reporter from the news agency Reuter wrote about Delmer: "*In my view Delmer over-emphasises the power of ex-Nazis in West Germany, but his knowledge of the country is equaled by few. [...] He attacked the Western Allies for allowing what he called ‚the counter-revolution of the Nazis' by allying themselves with West German right-wingers against the Soviet Union in the Korean War period.*"[48]

A few years later Delmer wrote in his autobiography: "For it would be dire for Germany and all of Europe, if those men, who brought forward Hitler and his war, would come to power again, dressed up as anti-Nazis. And it would be as bad, if they would, by their mere presence, undermine

---

45 "*Ich bin ein Knecht des Lords*", der Spiegel, Nr. 37, 08.09.1954, Schwarze Propaganda, 16-22, here 16.

46 "*Ich würde manchmal gern netter über Deutschland schreiben, wenn ich nicht auf Lord Beaverbrook Rücksicht zu nehmen hätte.*", Bericht der Botschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland an das Auswärtige Amt, Betr.: Beaverbrook-Presse und Deutschland, 24.07.1957, PA/AA, B 31/16.

47 "[...] ich habe niemals von ihm [Beaverbrook] einen Befehl oder eine Direktive bekommen, irgendwas zu schreiben. Natürlich schreibt jeder Journalist, was er glaubt, was in der Zeitung am besten ankommen wird.", ZDF, 04.09.1963, Günter Gaus, Zur Person – Sefton Delmer.

48 Peter B. Johnson, *Reuter Reporter in Divided Germany 1955-58* (Olsztyn: Studio Poligrafii Komputerowej "SQL", 1998), 115f.

the moral unity of the West in their struggle with the new aggressors from the East."[49]

Thus it seems that on a personal level Delmer held the views he published in Beaverbrook's newspaper. Delmer's articles were not just a successful adaption of the newspaper's political orientation. Although the *Daily Express*, for which he worked for so many years, influenced and reinforced his political views as a matter of course, a conformity in Beaverbrook's and Delmer's political assessment of Germany can be detected.

## Conclusion

The conflict over Delmer's articles reveals that the national socialist past was after all made a subject in the German press in the early 1950s. Making it a public topic meant first and foremost conducting a heavy defensive reaction by attacking even the slightest error in Delmer's investigation. The media's cross-border circulation added to this conflict decisively. Delmer not only challenged the German media but the West German government as well, although the Federal government wisely restrained from public comment.

At the same time the limits of journalistic investigation became apparent. The campaign of the *Daily Express* had met some true blocades: neither could they endanger the status of politicians they attacked nor could they trigger an actual political response by the Western Allies. At the same time, the article also revealed that Delmer was unable to deal with their his former relationship with Hitler. On the contrary, Delmer could turn his own former affection for the NSDAP into a pathos of resistance without a hiccup.

---

[49] "Denn es wäre schlimm für Deutschland und für ganz Europa, wenn die Männer, die Hitler und seinen Krieg gefördert haben, als Anti-Nazis verkleidet, noch einmal zur Macht gelangen würden. Und es wäre genauso schlimm, wenn sie durch ihre Anwesenheit die moralische Einheit des Westens in einer Auseinandersetzung mit den neuen Aggressoren aus dem Osten untergraben würden. Leider sieht es so aus, als ob genau das geschehen ist ", Delmer, Die Deutschen und ich, 636.