

# British Journalism in the Great War

Martin Schramm

Myths and half-truths still shroud the role of the British press in the First World War. Prominent among these legends that surround the behaviour of British journalists is the notion that they had led a consistent campaign against Germany before 1914 and overwhelmingly supported Britain's declaration of war in August 1914. As early as 1912, the counsellor of the German Embassy in London, Richard von Kühlmann, considered the British press to be the most dangerous enemy to European peace.<sup>1</sup> While perhaps not going quite as far, historians over the last century have tended to accept the view that British newspapers made a considerable contribution to heightening international tension well before the crisis of July 1914. One historian even suggested that '[t]he press campaign against Germany continued from 1910 till the outbreak of war.'<sup>2</sup>

A second widely-held idea which needs revision concerns the impact of censorship on relations between government and the press during the Great War. This, the story goes, constituted a decisive caesura. A third myth exists with regard to the effectiveness of British government propaganda against Germany, especially with a view to the activities of Lord Northcliffe, the most influential press magnate at the beginning of the war, who was appointed director of propaganda in enemy countries in 1918. After the war, no one less than Emperor William II. exclaimed 'Oh, that propaganda of Northcliffe! It was colossal!' His entourage emphasised this view: 'What a man!' [...] If we had a Northcliffe we could have won the War!<sup>3</sup> After 1918 the Germans supposed that Great Britain had achieved victory only through cleverly manipulating the press.<sup>4</sup> Adolf Hitler, for instance, was convinced that the British press had played a major role in overthrowing the Kaiser.<sup>5</sup> Joseph Goebbels studied British propaganda strategies and emulated some of them in the Second World War.<sup>6</sup>

This article intends to challenge these notions in three ways: first by demonstrating that the British press was far from consistently anti-German in the years before the Great War, and that only a minority of newspapers

---

<sup>1</sup> Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (hereafter PAAA), London R 5640, Kühlmann to Bethmann, 30.8.1912.

<sup>2</sup> Cate Haste, *Keep the Home Fires burning: Propaganda in the First World War* (London: Allen Lane, 1977), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Norah Bentinck, *The Ex-Kaiser in Exile* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1921), 63.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Eberle, *Großmacht Presse: Enthüllungen für Zeitungsgläubige, Forderungen für Männer* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1920), 18; Edgar Stern-Rubarth, *Die Propaganda als politisches Instrument* (Berlin: Trowitzsch, 1921), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Clarke, *Northcliffe in History: An intimate Study of Press Power* (London: Hutchinson, 1950), 175.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Knightley, *The First Casualty: From the Crimea to Vietnam: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 82.

supported intervention in July 1914; secondly, by arguing that it was not censorship which made British press management during the war so effective but personal intimacy between government officials and press representatives – in this perspective, August 1914 was not as decisive a caesura as has often been claimed; and finally, by suggesting that British war-time propaganda was so devastatingly successful not because of brilliant government management but rather due to the journalists themselves who voluntarily and enthusiastically contributed to the creation of hatred against Germany.

### 1. The British press and the outbreak of war in August 1914

The Kaiser, naval fleets and especially Anglo-German relations were constant themes in news coverage of Germany.<sup>7</sup> There had been several press feuds between Great Britain and Germany long before 1914<sup>8</sup>, like the Kruger-telegram, the Morocco crisis and the armaments race. Despite these animosities, however, British press coverage of Germany before August 1914 was not overwhelmingly negative. Reporters routinely portrayed the Kaiser in a positive light. Though he was criticised for his behaviour from time to time, even the ultra-nationalist weekly paper *John Bull* – known for its hatred against Germany – expressed its hope that William would continue his reign for a long time.<sup>9</sup> The *Birmingham Daily Post* wrote: '[...] nothing now is in the least likely to depose [Wilhelm] from [his] position. A successful war could hardly leave him more securely installed as the leader of his people; an Imperial disaster could hardly destroy the halo of quasi-sanctity which surrounds him.'<sup>10</sup>

Anglo-German relations as a whole were described as positive. In hundreds of articles the newspapers wrote about better relations.<sup>11</sup> Liberal papers especially were happy about 'a great improvement'<sup>12</sup> comparable to

<sup>7</sup> Martin Schramm, *Das Deutschlandbild in der britischen Presse 1912-1919* (Berlin: Akademie, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Zara Steiner, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 29, 49, 52f, 131; Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866-1918*, 2 vols. (München: Beck, 1994f), vol. 2, 656, 663, 665.

<sup>9</sup> *John Bull*, 1.11.1913, 639: "A Chauvinistic Emperor, backed up by a huge army and a powerful navy, is not likely to condescend to the peace of the world, and it will be wise for Britain and her friends and allies to keep this fact well in view as the day of his [the Crown Prince's] accession – which we trust will be long deferred – draws near."

<sup>10</sup> *B'ham Post*, 16.6.1913, 6.

<sup>11</sup> *B'ham Post*, 2.12.1912, 8, 19.5.1913, 6; *Chronicle*, 6.2.1912, 4, 29.4.1912, 6; *Daily Express*, 15.2.1912, 4, 27.5.1912, 4; *Daily News*, 8.2.1913, 4, 24.5.1913, 6; *Daily Mail*, 11.10.1913, 5, 20.10.1913, 8; *Evening News*, 3.12.1912, 1; *Glasgow Herald*, 26.2.1913, 8, 24.10.1913, 8; *Graphic*, 3.2.1913, 4, 10.2.1913, 4; *Guardian*, 17.7.1912, 7, 31.12.1912, 8; *Irish Times*, 30.5.1913, 4, 5.2.1914, 4; *Liverpool Daily Post*, 13.2.1912, 6, 17.2.1912, 6; *Scotsman*, 17.2.1913, 6; *South Wales Daily News*, 7.5.1912, 4, 12.8.1913, 4; *Star*, 6.2.1912, 2, 14.4.1913, 4, 6.2.1912, 2; *Telegraph*, 31.12.1913, 10f, 1.1.1914, 10f, 5.2.1914, 13; *Times*, 25.6.1914, 7.

<sup>12</sup> *Westminster Gazette*, 1.1.1913, 1.

Anglo-American affairs.<sup>13</sup> Even conservative papers recognised a change. *The Daily Graphic* spoke of 'quite a pleasant, if not a cordial, relationship between the two Powers'<sup>14</sup> already in 1912, and *The Daily Telegraph* saw 'marked improvement in the relations between Great Britain and Germany, which has been in steady progress throughout the year'<sup>15</sup> in 1913 and even *The Times*, *The Evening News* and *The Daily Mail* expressed a friendlier attitude.<sup>16</sup> The majority of British journalists maintained a positive view of Germany during the July crisis of 1914. Especially close friends of members of the cabinet, like Spender, made clear statements against British intervention. C. P. Scott, of the well-known *Manchester Guardian* and friend of David Lloyd George, wrote that he 'was working desperately all Saturday and Sunday to work up opposition to the War'<sup>17</sup>.

On the opposite side there was only a smaller group of interventionists led by Lord Northcliffe and his newspapers. The following table compares the number of interventionists, opponents and undecided newspapers and demonstrates that until 31 July there was a clear majority against intervention. After recognising the new quality of the crisis on 27 July, only three newspapers were absolutely pro intervention: *The Times*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Evening News*, all of which belonged to Lord Northcliffe. A majority of ten papers were against intervention<sup>18</sup>, whereas another ten papers did not have a clear position.

Left-wing newspapers such as *The Manchester Guardian*, *The Daily News*, *The Star*, and *The Liverpool Daily Post* in particular formed the backbone of the anti-interventionist opinion. On the conservative side *The Yorkshire Post*, *The Daily Graphic* and *Daily Sketch*, with a daily circulation of about 800,000, are the most prominent papers, and became pro-interventionist only at the end of the crisis. After 31 July, for example, *The Daily Telegraph* shifted towards an interventionist opinion. The interventionist position achieved majority only after 1 August and the outbreak of war between Austria and Serbia. Still on 3 August, more than a third of the papers were emphatically against intervention, even at the diplomatic cost of acquiescing to Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality. But with the declaration of war on 4 August, most papers had begun to rally behind British intervention.

### Statistics<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Star*, 5.2.1914, 4; see *Chronicle*, 22.10.1913, 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Graphic*, 31.12.1912, p. 4.

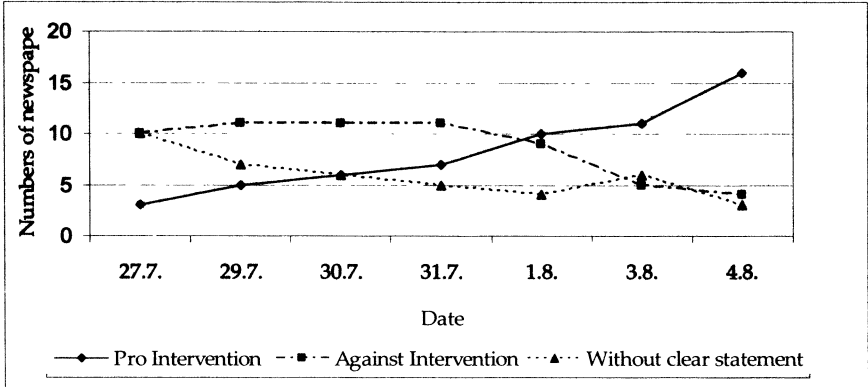
<sup>15</sup> *Telegraph*, 31.12.1913, 10; see *Daily News*, 27.12.1913, 6.

<sup>16</sup> *Daily Mail*, 11.10.1913, 5, 20.10.1913, 8; *Evening News*, 3.12.1912, 1; *Times*, 25.6.1914, 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Manchester Guardian* Archive, MGA/132/17, Scott to Hobhouse, 4.8.1914 [exact date unknown].

<sup>18</sup> William Aitken (Lord Beaverbrook), *Politicians and the War 1914-1916* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1928), 22.

<sup>19</sup> Own statistics, July 28th and Sunday, August 2nd not included.



Within the United Kingdom there had been considerable connections between journalists and politicians. For example no less than 41 journalists and 24 newspaper owners were members of the House of Commons in 1910.<sup>20</sup> Although there were no official contacts, Downing Street and Fleet Street were closely linked. The best example is John Alfred Spender, editor of the semi-official *Westminster Gazette*. He had been a friend of the secretary of state for foreign affairs, Edward Grey, since their studies in Oxford, and he knew Prime Minister Asquith and his wife. Spender stood in close contact with the former Prime Minister Lord Rosebery and the secretary of state for war, Richard Haldane. He talked to Winston Churchill as early as 1900 and at the height of the Morocco crisis in 1911 he met both the German and the French ambassadors. Similar connections are evident for nearly all press magnates and editors at the time.

In many ways, however, the British press retained a large degree of independence. Although politicians and diplomats tried to influence journalistic writing, it was mainly the journalists themselves or the owners of newspapers that dominated the papers' opinion. During the July crisis, evidence suggests that politicians and journalists invested a great deal of energy in attempting to influence each other. The Prime Minister, for example, told his wife on 29 July 'We have arranged to see the representatives of the Press daily, so as to tell them what they may, and what they may not publish.'<sup>21</sup>

Just how close the contacts were is shown by a telephone conversation between John French, the British Chief of the General Staff, and Lord Riddell, editor of the *News of the World* on the eve of war. French asked if there

<sup>20</sup> Alan Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press 1855-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 294-296; Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism 1860-1914* (London: Ashfield Press, 1996), 89f.

<sup>21</sup> Margot Asquith, *The Autobiography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962), 280f.

was going to be war, whether Great Britain was to be involved, and who was to be commander in chief. After polling several politicians in his dining room, Riddell answered 'that I thought we should be in the war, that we should send an army to the continent, and that he [French] would be in command.'<sup>22</sup> On the French side, the ambassador Paul Cambon was in close contact with Henry Wickham Steed from *The Times*.<sup>23</sup> Steed had received the order of French mobilisation one day in advance on 31 July – on condition that he would not pass on the information to French newspapers.<sup>24</sup> On 1 August, the Russian ambassador complained about the undecided attitude of the British government<sup>25</sup> and hoped for support from *The Times*. The Russian foreign minister called a leading article of the pro-Russian (!) *Times* 'an encouragement to Austria to take strong measures against Serbia.'<sup>26</sup>

On the opposite side, there were plenty of attempts to keep Great Britain out of the war. As early as 9 July, the Austrian foreign minister ordered his ambassador to act accordingly.<sup>27</sup> Emerging costs – he did not speak of bribery – had to be approved by the Foreign Ministry. Apart from the *Westminster Gazette*, *The Times* was the main target of Austrian diplomacy. After meeting Steed, the Austrian ambassador read the journalist's article of 16 July with satisfaction<sup>28</sup>, remarking that it was 'much more favourable than everything which for a long time had come from his pen' ['viel günstiger als alles, was seit langem aus seiner Feder kam'].<sup>29</sup> Shortly afterwards Steed's opinion changed. The result was an article of 22 July entitled 'A Danger to Europe'<sup>30</sup> in which he warned the British people of the imminent danger.

The German campaign to influence the foreign press had begun in earnest in July 1914, but had begun somewhat later than the comparable Austrian effort.<sup>31</sup> The Kaiser's personal friend, Alfred Ballin, and the German

<sup>22</sup> George Riddell, *War Diary 1914-1918* (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1933), 6.

<sup>23</sup> Times Newspaper Limited Archive, TNL Archive/HWS/2, Steed to Marlowe, 2.5.1931.

<sup>24</sup> Public Record Office (National Archives), TNA/FO800/94/516, Memorandum Montgomery, 31.7.1914.

<sup>25</sup> Henry Wickham Steed, *Through Thirty Years 1892-1922: A Personal Narrative*, 2 vols. (London: W. Heinemann 1925), vol. 2, 12.

<sup>26</sup> *History of the Times: The 150th Anniversary and Beyond 1912-1948*, 2 vols., Chapters I-XII, 1912-1920 (New York: Millwood, 1985), vol. 1, 188.

<sup>27</sup> *Österreich-Ungarns Außenpolitik von der bosnischen Krise 1908 bis zum Kriegsausbruch 1914: Diplomatische Aktenstücke des Österreichisch-Ungarischen Ministeriums des Äußern*. Selected by Ludwig Bittner et. al., 9 vols. (Wien: Österreichischer Bundesverlag für Unterricht, Wissenschaft und Kunst, 1930), ÖUAP 8, No 10158, 9.7.1914, 382, Berchtold to London.

<sup>28</sup> *Times*, 16.7.1914, 9.

<sup>29</sup> ÖUAP 8, No 10304, 16.7.1914, 461; Mensdorff, see ÖUAP 8, No 10335, 17.7.1914, 20.7.1914, 477f.

<sup>30</sup> *Times*, 22.7.1914, 9, see Steed, *Through Thirty Years*, vol. 1, 410f.

<sup>31</sup> *Die Deutschen Dokumente zum Kriegsausbruch 1914*, hg. im Auftrage des Auswärtigen Amtes von Max Montgelas und Walter Schücking, 5 vols, (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsge-

Ambassador Lichnowsky<sup>32</sup> had tried to influence *The Times*. He advised one of its owners to publish the German view of the ongoing events: 'It must be stated again; Russia alone forces the war upon Europe. Russia alone must carry the full weight of responsibility.'<sup>33</sup> On 1 August, the German Chancellor himself took action. He sent a telegram to Spender in which he argued that it was prudent and necessary to publish a despatch documenting Germany's peaceful intentions.<sup>34</sup>

It is evident that during the July Crisis consensus over British intervention had not been reached between the major newspapers. There was no planned crusade by British journalists to force their country into war. In fact, the majority of journalists were sceptical about intervention at all. But as the documents show, journalists had little influence on decisions. The attempts by German, Austrian, French, Russian and British politicians and diplomats had some effect on the articles in newspapers. Due to the speed of international politics these articles were always at least one day behind. They had no significant influence on final decisions, which were made by a few politicians within the cabinet<sup>35</sup>, but they played a major role in convincing the British public that the issue of intervention bore an immediate relation to the survival of the British Empire. According to German documents, this development had massive effects on German policy. The foreign ministry did not expect British intervention because it was assumed that the anti-interventionist newspapers expressed the official British policy.

Immediately after the outbreak of the war in 1914, the British government asked for the support of the press.<sup>36</sup> Despite the previous quarrels, journalists contributed to the Allied efforts to win in every way. With a few exceptions, even those who were against intervention now backed the efforts for total war.

The change of opinion by anti-interventionists such as J.A. Spender and C.P. Scott deserves closer analysis. Though the latter was strictly against British participation as late as 4 August, he immediately supported the government efforts after the declaration of war.<sup>37</sup> He underlined that he was against fighting, 'but once in it the whole future of our nation is at

sellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1922), DDK 1, No 36, 12.7.1914, 57, Jagow to Lichnowsky; see DDK 1, No 44, 14.7.1914, 69, Jagow to Rome and Bukarest.

<sup>32</sup> DDK 3, No 676, 2.8.1914, 146f, Lichnowsky.

<sup>33</sup> Steed, *Through Thirty Years*, vol. 2, 18.

<sup>34</sup> Alfred Spender, *Life, Journalism and Politics*, 2 vols. (London: Cassell and Company, 1927), vol. 2, 15; see DDK 2, No 396, 30.7.1914, 125f, Bethmann to Tschirschky, DDK 3, No 732, 3.8.1914, 183, Lichnowsky.

<sup>35</sup> Keith Wilson, "Britain", in: idem (ed.), *Decisions for War 1914* (London: UCL Press, 1995), 175-208, 201f.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Baylen, "The British press", 1861-1918, in: Dennis Griffiths (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of the British Press 1422-1992*, 33-46, 42.

<sup>37</sup> John Lawrence Hammond, "C. P. Scott, 1846-1932", in: Frederick Muller (ed.), *C. P. Scott, 1846-1932: The Making of the „Manchester Guardian“* (London: F. Muller, 1946), 31-74, 52.

stake and we have no choice but to do the utmost we can to secure success.’<sup>38</sup>

Though his anti-German propaganda was not as strong as in other newspapers, his opinion did not change during the war. He rebuffed criticism very strictly: ‘[...] You can’t fight this war as one fought the Boer war [...] because it stands on a wholly different footing as regards its origin and objects’<sup>39</sup>.

This unity among nearly all newspapers, journalists and politicians not only helped to solidify public opinion in England, but exercised a similar effect in Ireland and abroad in distant British colonies.<sup>40</sup> The Labour Party, as well, and Irish nationalists stood behind the British government<sup>41</sup>; most Conservatives had been there all along.

## 2. The Transmission of Information and Censorship

With the beginning of the war, one of the main questions for the press was how to deal with the transmission of information. The conflict between reporting and (not) revealing military secrets is obvious. Every journalist recognised the necessity to win the war, and tried to act accordingly.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, there was disagreement about how this goal would be best achieved. Founded after the Morocco crisis, the *Joined Standing Committee*, consisting of military leaders and press representatives, agreed not to disclose any information relevant to the war. The press upheld the agreement through the July crisis, but the military was distrustful.<sup>43</sup>

The so-called Press Bureau as the instrument of communication between government and press fulfilled two major tasks. The first was ‘The issue to the Press for publication of official war news and of other official communications directly or indirectly relating to the war.’ The other function was ‘The censorship of the Press, that is to say, the determination of what unofficial news may or may not be published and the passing or stopping of Press cablegrams’.<sup>44</sup>

So far, the Press Bureau was a means of communication between the government and the press, which aimed to obstruct the passing of relevant

<sup>38</sup> MGA/333/111, Scott to Mellor, 7.8.1914.

<sup>39</sup> MGA/333/162, Scott to Emily Hobhouse, 19.12.1914.

<sup>40</sup> John Keiger, ‘Britain’s ‘Union Sacrée’ in 1914’, in: Jean-Jaques Becker, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau (eds.), *Les Sociétés européennes et la guerre de 1914-1918 : Actes du colloque organisé à Nanterre et à Amiens du 8 au 11 décembre 1988* (Nanterre: Université de Paris-X Nanterre, 1990), 39-52, 49.

<sup>41</sup> Freeman’s Journal, 5.8.1914, 6; Telegraph, 19.9.1914, 6; *Daily Express*, 8.4.1916, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: Penguin, 1998), 444.

<sup>43</sup> Philip Gibbs, *Adventures in Journalism* (London: William Heinemann, 1923), 230.

<sup>44</sup> TNA/HO139/17/66, Buckmaster, 26.10.1914, Notice to all Officers of the Press Bureau, see: Riddell, *War Diary*, 2.

war-time information to the enemy. Political criticism, however, was not subject to the same degree of censorship.<sup>45</sup>

To obtain information published by the Press Bureau, it was necessary for newspapers to acquire a letter of approbation; almost all British papers received one successfully.<sup>46</sup> The code of conduct for publication was the *Defence of the Realm Act* – DORA – which was changed from time to time.<sup>47</sup> The exact outlines were given to the newspapers in the *Press Bureau Book of Instructions*<sup>48</sup>. For example, publication of information pertaining to troop or ship movements, strategic or tactical considerations or information about weapons or weather reports was forbidden.<sup>49</sup> It was only permitted to report the death of a soldier after 30 days. The place of death could be reported only vaguely, for example ‘in Flanders’ or ‘at the Dardanelles’. The same protocol held for plane crashes.<sup>50</sup>

Compared to Germany, the reports of the British press regarding politics were frank and challenging. At the end of August 1914, *The Irish Times* complained: ‘There is good reason to believe that the German advance has penetrated more deeply into France than the public has been authoritatively informed. If there is bad news, the public ought to have it. Nothing is to be gained by subjecting people to unnecessary anxiety.’<sup>51</sup> In contradiction to today’s view, the press censorship was by no means stringent: ‘A general complaint of the Newspaper representatives was, that there was a want of coordination amongst the censors.’<sup>52</sup>

Throughout the war, the Press Bureau and the objectives of censorship were criticised severely: ‘[...] the censorship must not so far repress the newspapers as to turn journalism into a compulsory process of deceiving the people.’<sup>53</sup> Amazingly, these articles were not censored.<sup>54</sup>

One of the main problems the newspapers faced was the lack of uniformity in censorship. The stamp of approval for a particular article by a particular censor did not mean to assure its publication.<sup>55</sup> *The Times* feared reprisals after it published news of the British defeat at Mons in 1914, even

<sup>45</sup> TNA/HO139/17/66, Memorandum Buckmaster, 15.12.1914.

<sup>46</sup> TNA/HO 139/1/1-Part 1, 24.10.1914, see letter of the Press Bureau to *Freemaso’s Chronicle*, 12.11.1914 etc.

<sup>47</sup> Edward Cook, *The Press in War-Time* (London: Macmillan, 1920), 24-26.

<sup>48</sup> TNA/HO 139/19/78, Press Bureau Book of Instructions, 1.7.1915.

<sup>49</sup> Cook, *The Press in War-Time*, 88.

<sup>50</sup> TNA/T 1. 12137/6751, Press Bureau, 6.6.1918, see 4.9.1918.

<sup>51</sup> *Irish Times*, 28.8.1914, 4, see TNL Archive/NOR/1/2/58, Northcliffe to Murray, 1.12.1914, *Reynolds’s*, 7.11.1915, 1.

<sup>52</sup> TNA/HO139/6/22, Memo of the Admiralty, War Office and Press Committee Meetings, 21. and 24.8.1915.

<sup>53</sup> *Observer*, 21.2.1915, 8; *Evening News*, 16.10.1915, 2, 11.1.1918, 2; Steed, *Through Thirty Years*, 77.

<sup>54</sup> *Times*, 7.8.1917, 7; Tania Rose, *Aspects of Political Censorship 1914-1918* (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1995), 15, for censorship see 10-41.

<sup>55</sup> Cook, *The Press in War-Time*, 35, 125.



though a censor had approved the article.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, newspapers had to impose a kind of self-censorship to avoid punishment such as the restriction of paper allocations.

On the other hand, the censors were inundated with articles from the press, not even a fraction of which could have been read before publication. The threat of punishment after publication guaranteed the 'voluntary' cooperation of newspapers: 'All newspapers and news agencies are invited to exercise on their own part the utmost care in considering whether any particular piece of news or comment can be directly or indirectly of assistance to the enemy. It is hoped that where news is plainly dangerous newspapers will assist the bureau by stopping it themselves.'<sup>57</sup> Only in cases of doubt were certain articles offered to the censorship by the press to be checked voluntarily.<sup>58</sup> The intended self-censorship proved so successful that the spirit of censorship can be interpreted in a rather different light: Not the fear of consequences but indeed patriotic interest – victory – stood behind newspapers' willingness to restrict their freedoms. No-one wanted to be a traitor. Thus, it is not surprising that only a very few newspapers were charged for printing material in contravention of censorship guidelines.<sup>59</sup>

Many of the journalists knew much more about the happenings at the front than they were allowed to write. An example of the breadth of knowledge is the former Colonel Charles Repington, who knew the Commanders in Chief, John French und Douglas Haig.<sup>60</sup> He was a permanent guest at headquarters and government buildings. He had direct contact and access to the allied Generals Pétain, Nivelle, Foch und Pershing.<sup>61</sup> He even learned something about the exact dates of imminent major offensives.<sup>62</sup> He recognised soberly that "We obtained insignificant results at the cost of heavy loss."<sup>63</sup>

Not without bad conscience, the journalists talked to each other about their conflicted situation – knowing the truth, but not reporting about it. Lord Rothermere, owner of *The Daily Mirror*, admitted 'We're telling lies, we know we're telling lies, we daren't tell the public the truth, that we're losing more officers than the Germans, and that it's impossible to get through on the Western Front.'<sup>64</sup> Once the war had ended Spender admit-

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>57</sup> TNA/HO 139/19/78, Press Bureau Book of Instructions, 1.7.1915, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Riddell, *War Diary*, 16.

<sup>59</sup> Alan Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 148.

<sup>60</sup> *History of the Times*, vol. 1, 274; Douglas Haig, *The Private Papers 1914-1919*, ed. by Robert Blake (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1952), 84, 22.1.1915.

<sup>61</sup> Charles Repington, *The First World War 1914-1918: Personal Experiences*, 2 vols. (London: Constable, 1921), vol. 1, 157, 263.

<sup>62</sup> Repington, *The First World War 1914-1918*, vol. 1, 35.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, vol. 1, 36.

<sup>64</sup> Lucy Masterman, C. F. G. *Masterman: A Biography* (Edinburgh: Cass, 1968), 296.

ted to having known everything about the many different military offensives 'but nothing could be said about it in the papers.'<sup>65</sup> Winston Churchill even admitted to C.P Scott in 1915 'That we are not winning the war with our present methods is, I fear, undeniable. That we are in great danger of losing it is increasingly in evidence.'<sup>66</sup>

After the war the future Prime Minister wrote about the knowledge of the press: '[...] the truth could not be told; the case could not be argued. The Press, though its information flowed in through a thousand rills, possessed only a partial knowledge of the facts and operative causes as these were known to the Governments'<sup>67</sup>. But this was only a partial truth. The information newspapers published was not consistent with what journalists knew. But their task was to strengthen the country, the people and the soldiers as much as possible.

### 3. War-time Propaganda

Although propaganda is a phenomenon as old as war itself, it reached new heights during the Great War. One of the main reasons for this was the behaviour of the journalists who, in one interpretation, were responsible for creating a new kind of warfare.<sup>68</sup> The importance of the media for propaganda cannot be overestimated. The journalists fought for new recruits and armies, they fought for new war bonds, they did their best to buoy moral in the trenches, on the high seas and at the home front. They justified why the Allies had to break martial law and they had to convince neutral countries about Britain's just cause.<sup>69</sup>

For these reasons the press was highly appreciated in government circles: '[The] Press is, after all, the principal channel through which the Government is able to influence public opinion.'<sup>70</sup> Especially 1915 was 'a special time of hate'<sup>71</sup>. But in August 1914, the pro-German view in Great Britain had already changed completely. In direct contradiction to pre-war

<sup>65</sup> Alfred Spender, *Life, Journalism and Politics*, 2 vols. (London: Cassell and company, 1927), vol. 2, 73.

<sup>66</sup> MGA/334/91, Churchill to Scott, 2.4.1916.

<sup>67</sup> Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis 1911-1918*, 2 vols. (London: Odhams Press, 1938), vol. 2, 1134.

<sup>68</sup> Haste, *Keep the Home Fires burning*, 2.

<sup>69</sup> Miles Hudson, John Stanier, *War and the Media: A Random Searchlight*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 55; Alice Marquis, "Words as Weapons: Propaganda in Britain and Germany during the First World War", *Journal of Contemporary History* 13 (1978), 467-498, 488; Henry Simonis, *The Street of Ink: An Intimate History of Journalism* (London: Cassell and Company, 1917), 338; James Read, *Atrocity Propaganda 1914-1919* (New York: Arno Press 1972), 5.

<sup>70</sup> TNA/HO139/9/36/ Part 3, Memorandum Minister of Labour, 16.1.1918.

<sup>71</sup> David French, "Spy Fever in Britain, 1900-1915", *Historical Journal* 21,2 (1978), 355-370, 370.

statements<sup>72</sup> German behaviour was now likened to ‘The Reign of Beelzebub’<sup>73</sup>. Wilhelm II. – the Emperor of Peace from 1913 – was believed to be mad.<sup>74</sup> The Germans, without exception, were seen as barbarians and savages.<sup>75</sup>

The case for British intervention was explained as convincingly as possible: ‘[...] we are fighting, not for ourselves alone, but for civilisation’<sup>76</sup>. ‘Everywhere “German Atrocities” stood at the centre of reports’<sup>77</sup>. Many examples of acts of cruelty committed by German soldiers were reported; but fact and fiction blurred in the telling. Even moderate journalists damned Germany as a whole: “The Kaiser has taken Attila and his Huns as his model. But these horrors are not the work of real Huns. Attila did not talk of culture or call himself ‘the Scourge of God.’ He was a rapacious barbarian and did not affect to be anything else. But Belgium has been desolated in cold blood, on calculated principles, by a nation of philosophers and intellectuals.”<sup>78</sup>

This comparison between Germans and the Huns became a recurrent *Leitmotiv* in British journalistic discourse. ‘Hun’ was not the only term used. The British journalists wrote also about ‘Fritz’<sup>79</sup> and ‘Greta’<sup>80</sup>, the ‘Boches’, ‘mad dogs’<sup>81</sup>, ‘Barbarians’<sup>82</sup>, ‘Beast[s]’<sup>83</sup>, ‘Red Indians of Europe’<sup>84</sup>, ‘Jinghiz Khan’<sup>85</sup> or the ‘Afghan hillmen.’<sup>86</sup>

The aim of propaganda has been defined as ‘the direction and control of public opinion towards certain ends.’<sup>87</sup> In the British case, the most important purpose was the mobilisation of the people. In a country with voluntary service – like Britain in 1914 – particularly the men fit for military

<sup>72</sup> See part 3. The perception of Germany in the British press before 1914.

<sup>73</sup> *Daily Express*, 28.8.1914, 4.

<sup>74</sup> *John Bull*, 22.8.1914, 4, see 15.8.1914, 3: „The Kaiser’s Brain. [...] Somewhere at the back of the dictionary there is a lump of Latinity to the effect that whom the Gods wish to destroy they first make mad. Do you remember the articles we published a year or two ago on the state of the kaiser’s brain?” *People*, 9.8.1914, 7: „The Kaiser’s Madness.”

<sup>75</sup> Hermann Hiery, „Angst und Krieg: Die Angst als bestimmender Faktor im Ersten Weltkrieg“, in: Franz Bosbach (ed.), *Angst und Politik in der europäischen Geschichte* (Dettelbach: J.H. Roßll, 2000), 167-224, 186; Michael Sanders, Philip Taylor, *Britische Propaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg 1914-1918* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1990), 116.

<sup>76</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 10.11.1914, 4.

<sup>77</sup> *Graphic*, 13.1.1915, 4.

<sup>78</sup> *Daily News*, 5.9.1914, 5.

<sup>79</sup> *Telegraph*, 5.9.1870, 4; *Cambria Daily Leader*, 4.12.1917, 1, 26.6.1918, p. 1.

<sup>80</sup> *Daily Mail*, 22.8.1912, 4.

<sup>81</sup> *Evening News*, 6.8.1914, 2, see *Daily Express*, 23.4.1917, 2.

<sup>82</sup> *Lloyd’s*, 22.8.1915, 6, see 28.2.1915, 10; *Liverpool Daily Post*, 1.8.1916, 4.

<sup>83</sup> *Daily Express*, 1.2.1917, 4.

<sup>84</sup> *Chronicle*, 19.8.1914, 1.

<sup>85</sup> *Observer*, 30.8.1914, 6.

<sup>86</sup> *Reynolds’s*, 30.8.1914, 6.

<sup>87</sup> *Haste, Keep the Home Fires burning*, 1.

service had to be convinced.<sup>88</sup> Newspapers were essential in recruiting young men. From the first day of the war, papers claimed 'Your King and Country need you'<sup>89</sup>, demanding loudly 'Join the Army to-day!'<sup>90</sup> This campaign continued until the introduction of conscription in 1916. In close connection to the government in Westminster, several politicians were quoted as saying, 'We want every recruit that we can get.'<sup>91</sup> The guarantee for victory 'is to be found in the readiness of its recruitable manhood to take their place promptly in the fighting line.'<sup>92</sup>

The soldiers had been recruited to their part, and now the civil population was asked to fulfil their task: 'The man in the street has to do his part, and it will be no small one.'<sup>93</sup> The deciding factor was not powder and steel, 'but those of a moral nature behind the material weapons.'<sup>94</sup> To emphasise this prominent men in British public life such as Arthur Conan Doyle, George Bernard Shaw and Herbert George Wells<sup>95</sup> supported the theory of a German conspiracy to force Europe into war. Their voices were an important factor in converting public opinion to support intervention.<sup>96</sup>

As figures show<sup>97</sup>, the recruiting campaign was not a constant one. Backed by the press, the only boom in volunteers took place after the lost battle of Mons and the incidents at Louvain in August 1914, where German soldiers allegedly burned down the city and killed many civilians. Recruitment numbers rose somewhat after these atrocities. The government asked Lord Northcliffe and other journalists for assistance as early as October 1914.<sup>98</sup> He did not want to cooperate 'until our men (our correspondents at the front) are treated properly, and facilities given them to help recruiting by telling about our army.' Northcliffe was convinced of his abilities: 'I can get 500,000 men, but I must do it my own way.'<sup>99</sup> But also without formal cooperation, Northcliffe's papers did everything to supply the armies with volunteers.

<sup>88</sup> For recruiting in peace times see John Osborne, *The Voluntary Recruiting Movement in Britain, 1914-1916* (New York: Garland, 1982), 3-9.

<sup>89</sup> *Cambria Daily Leader*, 5.8.1914, 4, see 20.8.1914, 3; *Evening Express*, 5.8.1914, 2, 8.8.1914, 2; *Liverpool Daily Post*, 7.8.1914, 3; *Chronicle*, 1.9.1914, 7.

<sup>90</sup> *Daily Mail*, 5.8.1914, 3, see *Times*, 5.8.1914, 3.

<sup>91</sup> *Evening News*, 28.8.1914, 2.

<sup>92</sup> *B'ham Post*, 5.11.1914, 6.

<sup>93</sup> *Chronicle*, 5.8.1914, 4.

<sup>94</sup> *Times*, 8.8.1914, 9, see *Guardian*, 8.8.1914, 9.

<sup>95</sup> *Chronicle*, 26.8.1914, 4: „The World-War Conspiracy. – Germany's Long Drawn Plot against us.“ *Daily News*, 28.8.1914, 4. For Shaw see *Daily News*, 11.8.1914, 4: „The peril of Potsdam.“ For Wells see *Chronicle*, 7.8.1914, 4: „The Sword of peace.“

<sup>96</sup> Arthur Ponsonby, *Falsehood in Wartime: Propaganda Lies in the First World War* (London 1928, reprint Costa Mesa: Institute for historical review, 1991), 25, see 128 and Sanders, Taylor, *Britische Propaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg*, 93.

<sup>97</sup> Schramm, *Deutschlandbild*, 400-406.

<sup>98</sup> Herbert Asquith, *Memories and Reflections 1852-1927*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1928), vol. 1, 277f.

<sup>99</sup> Tom Clarke, *My Northcliffe Diary* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1931), 71, 4.10.1914.

In November 1914 there was a second peak in recruiting. The entry of the Ottoman Empire into the war and the attack of British coastal cities by the German Imperial Navy caused great excitement. Appeals rang out: 'Your King and Country Need another 100,000 Men.'<sup>100</sup> Despite several other major propaganda events, like the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the publication of the so-called Bryce Report about German atrocities in Belgium and northern France, the rate of volunteers declined. In autumn 1915 the *Daily Express* stated: 'We must have more men or we shall lose the war. Voluntaryism [sic] seems to us to have exhausted its possibilities'<sup>101</sup>.

As a last attempt to avoid conscription Lord Derby tried to get enough volunteers. In a personal letter he asked several journalists for help: 'Please therefore do everything you can to encourage men to come forward.'<sup>102</sup> At first the Derby-Scheme had some success<sup>103</sup>, especially due to the execution of a British nurse in Belgium, which charged the British public with emotions.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, the numbers of recruits fell to their lowest level afterwards. The introduction of conscription could not be avoided. The press had therefore failed in one its most important wartime commissions: to recruit a sufficiently large body of volunteer soldiers. As a consequence the press was then brought to assist in the introduction of conscription.

What the journalists did not pay attention to were the unintended consequences of their propaganda. The picture of the German Huns during four years of war propaganda shaped the Anglo-Saxon consciousness.<sup>105</sup> This led to some absurd consequences. Shops with German names – not necessarily owned by Germans – were destroyed. German surnames were changed, even that of the aristocratic family Mountbatten – from Battenberg – and the royal family from Saxe-Coburg and Gotha into Windsor.<sup>106</sup> This change was seen as 'a symbol of the disruption in the relations between this country and Germany which has been produced by the war; it marks the character of the gulf that separates the two peoples'<sup>107</sup>. In 1924, regarding the change of name, the King remembered how deeply hatred had penetrated British society: 'It is difficult to comprehend the atmosphere which had prevailed then in England: it had become absolutely necessary that the king should put down his name to save himself and his

<sup>100</sup> *Times*, 28.10.1914, 9, see 4.11.1914, 7, 7.11.1914, 9f; *Guardian*, 7.11.1914, 6.

<sup>101</sup> *Daily Express*, 7.10.1915, 4.

<sup>102</sup> HLRO/BM/Der. 4, Derby to Blumenfeld, 28.10.1915, see HLRO/SP/S/5/2/3, Derby to Strachey, 28.10.1915.

<sup>103</sup> Roy Douglas, "Voluntary Enlistment in the First World War", *Journal of Modern History* 42 (1970), 564-585, 579.

<sup>104</sup> Irene Willis, *England's Holy War: A Study of English Liberal Idealism during the Great War* (New York: Knopf, 1928, reprint 1972), 231.

<sup>105</sup> Hiery, „Angst und Krieg“, 167-224, 186, 189; Sanders, Taylor, *Britische Propaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg*, 116.

<sup>106</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 18.7.1917, p. 4, see *Chronicle*, 18.7.1917, p. 2; *Westminster Gazette*, 17.7.1917, 5.

<sup>107</sup> *Scotsman*, 18.7.1917, 4, see *Graphic*, 18.7.1917, 4; *Telegraph*, 18.7.1917, 4.

house from danger.' [[Man] koenne sich keinen Begriff machen von der Atmosphaere, die damals in England geherrscht habe; es sei fuer ihn, den Koenig, eine absolute Notwendigkeit gewesen[, seinen Namen zu andern], wenn er und sein Haus nicht Gefahr laufen wollten, die Krone zu verlieren].<sup>108</sup>

A consequence of this was the refusal to consider any kind of premature peace. Germany had to be defeated completely. Efforts to reach peace, for example by Pope Benedikt XV.<sup>109</sup> or President Wilson were destined to failure from the beginning. The propaganda message had so completely refashioned the British conception of the enemy that after Armistice, peacemaking proved exceptionally difficult: in their hearts, many Britons were still at war. Culpability for war lay entirely on the Germans; the Kaiser was the primal war criminal. The language of the Treaty of Versailles had to represent this opinion for the British government to retain any legitimacy with its people.<sup>110</sup> But the Treaty, in fact, saw the emergence of a new kind of hatred<sup>111</sup>, invented, propagated and published by journalists. A further fatal consequence was the view of propaganda in the following war. Many British people did not believe the atrocity propaganda in World War II<sup>112</sup>, because they realised that propaganda in World War I had misrepresented reality. In 1939, the Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* capitalised on the excesses and compared British newspaper reporting of the late 1930s with the stories of atrocities in the past.<sup>113</sup>

Regarding the possibility of a peace treaty, George Cadbury, owner of *The Daily News*, warned in 1914 that 'To unduly humiliate Germany would simply be to lead to another war in time to come'<sup>114</sup>. But not only Cadbury, Quaker and pacifists saw the dangers. Even the bellicose *Times* had issued a warning at the beginning of 1918: 'The settlement after the war must not bear in itself the seed of future war.'<sup>115</sup> The right to self-determination must be granted to the Germans and Austrians as well. In 1919, this was forgotten. The Paris correspondent of *The Manchester Guardian* had written in 1915: 'I am convinced that a decisive victory of the Allies would be only less dangerous than a German victory.'<sup>116</sup> Other voices were also ignored:

<sup>108</sup> PAAA, R 77114, Dufour, 30.10.1924.

<sup>109</sup> Wolfgang Steglich, *Die Friedenspolitik der Mittelmächte 1917/18*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1964).

<sup>110</sup> Ponsonby, *Falsehood in Wartime*, 58-60.

<sup>111</sup> Modris Eksteins, *Tanz über Gräben: Die Geburt der Moderne und der Erste Weltkrieg* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1990), 378.

<sup>112</sup> Walter Laqueur, *Was niemand wissen wollte: Die Unterdrückung über Hitlers 'Endlösung'* (Frankfurt/Main: Ullstein, 1982), 16-18.

<sup>113</sup> *Völkischer Beobachter*, 4.9.1939, 4.

<sup>114</sup> University of London, British Library for Political and Economic Science, UL, BLPES, ARR, A. G. Gardiner Papers, 1/8, George Cadbury to Gardiner, 21.12.1914.

<sup>115</sup> *Times*, 7.1.1918, 7.

<sup>116</sup> MGA/204/37a, Robert Dell to C.P. Scott, 9.4.1915.

C.P. Scott counselled the later Israeli President Weizman not 'to create a Germania irredenta'<sup>117</sup> were not fulfilled.

## Conclusion

As the documents show, many journalists knew exactly what happened at the front. They knew the numbers of casualties, the location of the front line and conditions in the trenches. In a self-congratulatory tone British journalists overestimated their role in the Great War. Lord Rothermere noted: 'Without the aid of the Press, it is a fair thing to say that the present Coalition Government could not have survived the storms of the last eighteen months.'<sup>118</sup> From the beginning of British intervention, the country had reached unity, like the French *union sacrée* or the German *Burgfrieden*.

In comparison there are significant differences between the role of the press in Britain and other countries. For example, an unexpected intimacy between government and press representatives created a basis for mutual confidence. Dawson from *The Times* called it 'surely the most extraordinary fact in modern history'<sup>119</sup> that the British Expeditionary Force left the British Isles without any reference to this in the press despite the fact that journalists were aware of the move. Although a similar alliance between politics and press is stated for France and Germany, it did not reach that level.<sup>120</sup>

The government expressed its gratitude through John Buchan, leader of the Department of Information and author, who said to the editor of *The Times*. 'I want to thank you for all you and the "Times" have done in the past two years to help our work. [...] You have shown very great judgment and very great courage and the 'Times' has been a wonderful asset to the British cause.'<sup>121</sup>

Furthermore, the censorship of the press was much stricter in other countries than in Britain. Although military matters were dealt with in a similar way, political topics were treated independently. In no other country could the government be criticised so harshly as in Great Britain. The best example is the fall of Prime Minister Asquith in 1916. Beforehand – according to the *Herald* – Northcliffe had already arranged the resignation

---

<sup>117</sup> MGA/A/W35/2a, C.P. Scott to Weizmann, 15.11.1914.

<sup>118</sup> Churchill University, Churchill Archives Centre, CHAR/2/103/73, Rothermere to Lloyd George, 14.11.1918.

<sup>119</sup> TNL Archive/GGD/1, Dawson to Child, 14.8.1914.

<sup>120</sup> Bernhard Rosenberger, *Zeitungen als Kriegstreiber? Die Rolle der Presse im Vorfeld des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Köln: Böhlau 1998), 325; Gundula Bavendamm, *Spionage und Verrat: Konspirative Kriegserzählungen und französische Innenpolitik, 1914-1917* (Essen: Klartext, 2004), 80, 144, 148, 177, 265.

<sup>121</sup> TNL Archive/GGD/2, Buchan to Dawson, 17.12.1918.

of other ministers.<sup>122</sup> Although other factors also played a role, the Northcliffe press was one of Asquith's main opponents. In addition, the press was much more important for British war efforts than for German: 'To Hell with politics,' said Gwynne with savage brusquerie, 'I'm for the country.'<sup>123</sup>

Propaganda of the First World War was novel in the rationalisation and modernisation of techniques of shaping opinion.<sup>124</sup> The significance of the press for propaganda cannot be overestimated. The papers were unanimous in their common battle against a common enemy. Despite its antipathy against liberal papers *The Daily Express* stressed: 'We must get on with the war. It makes no difference who is at the head of the Government – Unionist, Radical, Labour, or Socialist – so long as we get on with the war.'<sup>125</sup> Even the Labour Party stood behind the King.<sup>126</sup>

British press propaganda was highly efficient. Its extraordinary success was based on the impartiality of its 'victims'<sup>127</sup>. For the first time in history, 'Propaganda had been put on a professional basis.'<sup>128</sup> The disparagement of everything German began immediately after the outbreak of the war. Prussian militarism was identified as the enemy, and the entire German population was seen as Prussian. After four years of war and propaganda, Germans were put on a par with the cruel Huns. The German Empire was seen as a nation of barbarians.<sup>129</sup>

Not since the 30-years war had religious aspects been similarly used as a means of propaganda. Though the protestant-catholic-orthodox Allies Britain, France and Russia fought against a Protestant-Catholic enemy coalition, *The Daily Mail* emphasised that 'this war is in every truth a holy war.'<sup>130</sup> There was a difference between the German word 'Gott' and the English word 'God': '[...] these names, in different nations, have varying connotations. [...] Gott, like Prussia, is "justified by success." When Prussia fails, perhaps this Gott will be dethroned for another.'<sup>131</sup>

The more the brutality of German soldiers was talked about the more British fighters were motivated to save their families: 'What would happen should they [the Germans] have at their mercy the women and children of France?'<sup>132</sup> The war was fought 'for the safety and liberty of peoples, for

<sup>122</sup> *Herald*, 9.12.1916, 9, 24.11.1917, 9.

<sup>123</sup> William Hutcheon, *Gentlemen of the Press: Memories and Friendships of Forty Years* (London: John Murray, 1933), 168.

<sup>124</sup> Haste, *Keep the Home Fires burning*, 2.

<sup>125</sup> *Daily Express*, 8.4.1916, 4.

<sup>126</sup> *Telegraph*, 19.9.1914, 6.

<sup>127</sup> Read, *Atrocity Propaganda*, 2.

<sup>128</sup> Haste, *Keep the Home Fires burning*, 2, see Hudson, Stanier, *War and the Media*, 54.

<sup>129</sup> Hiery, „Angst und Krieg“, 167-224, 186; Sanders, Taylor, *Britische Propaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg*, 116; Haste, *Keep the Home Fires burning*, 50-107, 179.

<sup>130</sup> *Daily Mail*, 5.8.1918, 2.

<sup>131</sup> *Mirror*, 2.12.1914, 7.

<sup>132</sup> *Daily Mail*, 24.8.1914, 4.



securing them against arbitrary rule and the ambition and self-interest of rulers – for making, as he [US president Wilson] before expressed it, ‘the world a safe place for democracy.’<sup>133</sup>

All these examples of British propaganda show the kind of change that took place in journalism. Before the war, Anglo-German relations were more favourable than they had been for over a decade. British intervention in the war was planned within the cabinet, as had been customary for centuries, but the war was not fought like a cabinet war. With the help of the press, the war was fought within the emotions of the British public. The enemy was dehumanised, denied as a political opponent and accepted as a barbarian. A peace settlement was impossible given this mindset, for one did not strike bargains with the devil.

It was not British censorship which encouraged the propaganda, as it had fixed rules within the Press Bureau Book of Instructions. Although the British Government had its part in anti-German propaganda, for example the so-called Bryce Report on German atrocities, it was not a major aim to spread atrocity propaganda in newspapers. Particularly journalists and newspapers with close contact to important politicians abstained from the cruellest atrocity stories. No economic reasons forced atrocity stories into newspapers: all major newspapers survived the war and long after. But the journalists themselves created this incomparable feeling of hatred against Germany without obvious necessity.

Though the perception of Germany in the British press improved already in the 1920s, as Thomas Wittek has shown, some remnants of the propaganda can still be found today. For example, the boxer Graciano Rocchigiani was referred to as ‘Germany’s reincarnation of Attila the Hun’ in his fight against Chris Eubank in 1996.<sup>134</sup> When in 1990, ‘*The Sun* [met] the Hun’, that is, the German Ambassador von Richthofen in London, that headline in Britain’s biggest-selling tabloid newspaper demonstrated that some after-effects of British propaganda in the First World War have lasted longer than its creators had ever imagined.<sup>135</sup>

---

<sup>133</sup> *Guardian*, 6.12.1917, 4.

<sup>134</sup> *Sunday Mirror*, 23.1.1994, 64.

<sup>135</sup> Quoted in John Ramsden, *Don't Mention the War: The British and the Germans since 1890* (London: Little, Brown), 401.