

# British Press Correspondents in Post World War II Germany

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In April 1945, British newsreel viewers saw for the first time a number of horrifying pictures taken at the German concentration camp Bergen-Belsen. A British war correspondent who had visited the camp immediately after its liberation by British troops wrote in his memoirs that the sight of the sufferings of Nazi Germany's victims made him hate 'everybody and everything German far more fiercely than ever before during the war'.<sup>1</sup> This feeling was shared by the majority of the British population. The pictures from Bergen-Belsen and the regime they conjured up became an integral part of the British image of Germany and overshadowed Anglo-German relations for decades to come.

At the same time, in the post war world, the integration of the western half of Germany into the western camp seemed imperative. Only ten years after the war, the former enemies Great Britain and West Germany became NATO allies. Politicians on both sides stressed that on a political level the relations between the two countries were amicable. However, anti-German feeling in the British population was still considered to be strong and the press was held responsible for fuelling these feelings. This paper will discuss the role and work of British press correspondents as actors in Cold War Germany and in Anglo-German relations in the period from 1945 to the early 1960s.

In recent years, the role of non-state actors in international relations has been highlighted by historians of International History.<sup>2</sup> These actors include foreign correspondents, who by profession play a key role in the transmission and non-transmission of information, ideas and images from one country to another.<sup>3</sup> In a media society, the political and professional choices of these journalists have an important impact on the perception and the development of the relations between their home and their host country.

The impact the press had on Anglo-German relations was certainly heightened by the fact that this impact was perceived to be considerable.

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin Tetlow, *As It Happened: A Journalist Looks back* (London: Peter Owen 1990), 78.

<sup>2</sup> See for example: Wilfried Loth, 'Einleitung', in: Wilfried Loth, Jürgen Osterhammel (eds.), *Internationale Geschichte: Themen – Ergebnisse – Aussichten* (Munich: Oldenbourg 2000), VII-XIV (XI).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Hartmut Kaelble, *Der historische Vergleich: Eine Einführung zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag 1999), 68 and Johannes Paulmann, 'Interkultureller Transfer zwischen Deutschland und Großbritannien: Einführung in ein Forschungskonzept', in: Rudolf Muhs, Johannes Paulmann, Willibald Steinmetz (eds.), *Aneignung und Abwehr. Interkultureller Transfer zwischen Deutschland und Großbritannien im 19. Jahrhundert* (Bodenheim: Philo 1998), 21-43 (35-36).

The influence attributed to a specific newspaper could contribute to turning it into an important political force and its representatives into influential actors in Anglo-German relations.<sup>4</sup>

To illustrate the life and work of British press correspondents in post war Germany, this paper will address five points: first, the correspondents' biographical background; secondly, the difficult return to peace time journalistic practices and standards in occupied Germany; thirdly, the positioning of the British newspapers and their correspondents in the ideological battle of the Cold War; fourthly, the tight rope walk of the German government between informing and manipulating foreign press correspondents; and lastly the special status of *The Times* and its Bonn correspondents.

## 1. Biographical Background

Foreign correspondents of quality newspapers are an elite group within the journalistic profession. Many of those representing *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* or *The Manchester Guardian* in Germany had been to Oxford or Cambridge before they took up a career in journalism. Others followed a different path and had gone into journalism straight after school and worked their way up from news room apprentice – or even messenger boy – to a foreign post. Two short biographical sketches may illustrate these different career patterns:

Terence Prittie (1913-1985), who was the *Manchester Guardian's* German correspondent from 1946 to 1963, was the younger son of an Anglo-Irish lord.<sup>5</sup> He had been educated at public schools and studied History at Oxford. His aim had been to join the diplomatic service, but because of an illness he missed the entrance exam and opted instead for a career in the City. After the signing of the Munich Agreement he joined the regiment of the Rifle Brigade in which his father and grandfather had already served.<sup>6</sup> When the war broke out, he was immediately called up. In May 1940 he was taken prisoner at Calais and spent nearly five years in German prisoners' camps. Six times he attempted to escape and finally succeeded in March 1945.<sup>7</sup> Back in Britain, he applied for a job with the occupation army in Italy or Austria. He was offered a position in Germany, but decided not to take it up. In his memoirs he wrote:

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<sup>4</sup> In my PhD dissertation, I study the role of British Berlin, later Bonn, and German London correspondents as actors in Anglo-German relations in the period from 1945 to 1962.

<sup>5</sup> For Prittie's family background see Terence Prittie, *Through Irish Eyes* (London: Bachman & Turner 1977), 14-15.

<sup>6</sup> Prittie, *Through Irish Eyes*, 85-102.

<sup>7</sup> See the chapters 'Going To The Wars', 'Prisoner-of-war' and 'Secret Agent' in: Prittie, *Through Irish Eyes*, 103-159 and 167-169.

'I could not see myself administering the people of a country in which I had just spent five years as a helpless prisoner.'<sup>8</sup>

In February 1946, he joined *The Manchester Guardian* to be trained as a sports reporter. However, when the post of German correspondent became vacant shortly afterwards, Prittie applied for the job.<sup>9</sup> He spent nearly seventeen years in Germany, at first very suspicious of the German people, but slowly recognising the dramatic change the country and its inhabitants were undergoing.<sup>10</sup>

In 1963, he returned to London to become diplomatic correspondent of *The Guardian*. He left the paper in 1970 to work as a lobbyist for Israel in Great Britain.<sup>11</sup> In his *Times* obituary Prittie is described as 'one of the leading foreign correspondents of his generation'.<sup>12</sup>

Louis Heren (1919-1995), who represented *The Times* in Bonn from 1955 to 1960, climbed an even steeper career ladder. In the official history of *The Times* he is introduced as a man 'whose intelligence, courage and drive were to win him a career which few Times men have equalled'.<sup>13</sup>

Heren was born in Shadwell, a slum parish in the East End of London. His father, who died when Heren was only four years old, had been a *Times* printer. His mother ran a canteen to provide an income for the family. Heren attended the local grammar school, but left school at the age of 15 to work as a messenger boy for *The Times*. He later recalled:

'[...] as an office boy I slipped through the departmental divisions unnoticed. I was permitted to write advertising copy because the department was understaffed. I was allowed to write my first story for the paper for much the same reason. [...] Today it would be almost impossible to make such a surreptitious upward journey from the bottom.'<sup>14</sup>

During the war, Heren fought with the British Army in Europe and the Far East. In 1946, he rejoined *The Times* as a reporter, in 1947, he was transferred to the foreign department and in the same year he got his first foreign placement: He reported about the partition of India and was then sent to Palestine to write about the foundation of Israel. He returned to London in 1950, but was soon sent out again to report from the Korean War. In the following decades Heren reported for *The Times* from Singapore (1951-

<sup>8</sup> Prittie, *Through Irish Eyes*, 172.

<sup>9</sup> In retrospect Prittie wrote: 'A few months earlier, I would have regarded Germany as the last place in the world where I could wish to be. After nearly five years there as a prisoner-of-war I had talked of never wanting to see the country again. Time is certainly a healer of minds.' Terence Prittie, *My Germans: 1933-1983* (London: Oswald Wolff 1983), 99.

<sup>10</sup> See Prittie, *Through Irish Eyes*, 222 and Prittie, *My Germans*, 185 and Terence Prittie: 'Sixteen Years in Germany', *The Guardian*, 10.7.1963.

<sup>11</sup> See the chapter 'Homage to Israel', in: Prittie, *Through Irish Eyes*, 290-309.

<sup>12</sup> 'Terence Prittie', *The Times*, 29.5.1985.

<sup>13</sup> Iverach McDonald, *The History of The Times: Vol. 5: Struggles in war and peace, 1939-1966* (London: Times Books 1984), 149.

<sup>14</sup> Louis Heren, *Growing Up Poor in London* (London: Phoenix 2001), 187.

1953), Delhi (1953-1955), Bonn (1955-1960) and Washington (1960-1969). He advanced in 1969 to become 'American Editor' of *The Times* and in 1970 was called back to London to serve the newspaper as foreign editor and later as deputy editor. He left *The Times* shortly after Murdoch acquired the paper in 1981. One of Heren's former colleagues said about his remarkable career:

'Without the shock of Hitler, that stuffed-up inter-war British society would never have dropped the kind of ladders which enabled a bright kid from Shadwell to rise up to become a man of Louis' eminence and influence.'<sup>15</sup>

Louis Heren and Terence Prittie came from opposite ends of the social spectrum. While Prittie's family background was not the rule, Heren's career was certainly an exception. The correspondents who had started their career as an apprentice at a local newspaper mostly belonged to the older generation.<sup>16</sup> The trend went towards the recruitment of university – mainly Oxbridge – graduates.<sup>17</sup> For some of these young men, journalism was a second choice: the first would have been a career in the Foreign Office.<sup>18</sup> By becoming a foreign correspondent, they chose a profession in many respects related to that of a diplomat. However, there is one essential difference: journalists are responsible to their readers and editors and not to their government.

## 2. From War Correspondence to Peace Time Journalism

The British correspondents in occupied Germany sometimes had to fight to safeguard their professional independence. In 1945, they came to Germany as war correspondents accredited to the allied armies. Robert Co-

<sup>15</sup> Peter Hennessy, 'Introduction', in: Heren, *Growing Up Poor in London*, 5-7 (6).

<sup>16</sup> John Henry Freeman (1889-1964) and Robert Wright Cooper (1904-1992), for example, both worked their way up from apprentices at provincial newspapers to the foreign department of *The Times*.

<sup>17</sup> Reginald Peck (*The Daily Telegraph*), Terence Prittie (*The Manchester Guardian*) and Anthony Mann (*The Daily Telegraph*) had been to Oxford. John Midgley (*The Times/The Manchester Guardian*), Charles Hargrove (*The Times*), Alistair Horne (*The Daily Telegraph*) and Blake Baker (*The Daily Telegraph*) had graduated from Cambridge, and Edwin Tetlow (*The Daily Telegraph*), John Stewart Buist (*The Times*) and Douglas Brown (*The Daily Telegraph*) had been to university in Manchester, Glasgow and London respectively. *The Times* was increasingly recruiting directly from Oxbridge. See British Library, ADD 78924, John Stewart Buist Diaries, 9.9.1960. See also Heren, *Growing up Poor in London*, 188. Peter Nichols, Richard Davy, Richard Wigg and John White, who worked as junior correspondents at *The Times* office in Bonn, had all four been to Oxford.

<sup>18</sup> Terence Prittie got shingles before sitting the exam and then never took it (Prittie, *Through Irish Eyes*, 83), Charles Hargrove failed the exam (Charles Hargrove, *Un Gentleman du Times, 1944-2000: Paris-Berlin-Tokyo-Bonn* (Paris: Tallandier 2001), 40) and Alistair Horne's marks were not good enough to take the exam (interview with Alistair Horne, 15 June 2004 – all transcripts of this and subsequently cited interviews are in the possession of the author).

per, the first *Times* correspondent to arrive in Berlin, informed his foreign news editor in August 1945:

'Berlin, with its direct impact on Russian and American policy, is clearly going to be an important news centre, though a pretty grim one to live in. There is no need to tell you that the old office in the Unter den Linden is so completely obliterated that I can't remember just where it was, and the general destruction is on a scale that I would never have believed possible had I not seen Cologne.'<sup>19</sup>

Cooper's letter hints at the exceptional situation in which the British correspondents found themselves. Not only were they reporting from a town and a country which lay in ruins: it was still visibly militarised. Even after the status of war correspondent had been abolished in August 1946, the correspondents were still obliged to wear uniform.<sup>20</sup> They visibly belonged to one of the victor nations and enjoyed the same privileges as British officers in defeated Germany. However, this 'colonial existence'<sup>21</sup>, as John Midgley of *The Manchester Guardian* put it, could be quite detrimental to their professional work.

Terence Prittie, who came to Berlin in autumn 1946, wrote in his memoirs:

'I lived virtually isolated from the people of Berlin, in a British-requisitioned flat, eating British rations, using British transport facilities and British 'occupation currency', even – initially – wearing British uniform as a so-called 'War Correspondent'.<sup>22</sup>

As Prittie's remarks indicate: The journalists, whose job it was to 'control' and possibly criticize the work of the British military government in Germany, were totally dependent on it for lodgings, furniture, food, transport, communications – and information. There was no independent German press and the opportunities to meet with Germans were rare.

On the one hand, the correspondents protested against having to wear uniform at all times, because it made meetings with Germans so difficult.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, when the special status of war correspondent was abolished and the journalists were accorded a civilian status, they complained about being 'bereft of all military privileges in a quasi-military community'.<sup>24</sup> Despite their dependence on the British authorities in Germany, the journalists aimed to safeguard their professional independence. At the

<sup>19</sup> Times Newspapers Limited Archive [hereafter TNL Archive], Deakin Papers, Cooper to Deakin, 2.8.1945.

<sup>20</sup> See The National Archives [hereafter TNA], FO 946/23, Regulations for War Correspondents, August 1945, and Guidance for correspondents accredited to the CCG (British Element) and the ACA (British Element), issued by the Director of Information Services, Control Office for Germany & Austria (draft version), 29.6.1946.

<sup>21</sup> The Guardian Archive [hereafter GA], Editorial correspondence file, B/M 305/46, Midgley to Wadsworth, 21.1.1947.

<sup>22</sup> Prittie, *My Germans*, 101.

<sup>23</sup> TNA, FO 1013/1911, MacDonald to Treadwell, 14.4.1946.

<sup>24</sup> TNA, FO 946/31, Letter of Protest from the British and Allied Press Correspondents stationed permanently in Berlin and the British Zone, 10.10.1946.

same time, they expected all possible help from the British authorities, especially the Public Relations Branch of the Control Commission because of the difficult working and living conditions in occupied Germany.<sup>25</sup> It was a complicated and not always successful balancing act.

In July 1945, a member of the British Military Government wrote to a colleague that he was convinced that the Public Relations Branch of the Control Commission could have a great influence with the press. According to him, the main aims of the Control Commission's news service should be to 'help the Press to put over the right stuff' and to 'prevent the Correspondents having to search in inappropriate quarters and thus produce inaccuracies and get on to undesirable subjects.'<sup>26</sup>

This British public relations specialist saw the correspondents in the role of disseminators who gathered their information solely from official sources and presented the world with a 'suitable' picture of the situation in Germany. Such a position leaves very little room for the British tradition of a critical and independent press. In August 1945, the *Times* correspondent Robert Cooper complained to his foreign news editor:

'An increasing tendency is discernible on the part of the military here to funnel everything through P. R. channels. Heaven forbid that mass journalism has come to stay!'<sup>27</sup>

At several occasions in the following years, the British correspondents protested – more or less successfully – against the information policy of the British Military Government.<sup>28</sup> In June 1946, John Anderson of *The Manchester Guardian* complained to his editor that more and more information given at British press conferences was classified as 'off the record'. Anderson wrote:

'One does not want to be catty about one's colleagues, but what shocks me is that there appears to be a school of thought which has as sneaking *liking* to have as much as possible 'off the record'. It makes life easy, there is no risk of being 'scooped,' and all P.R. and F.O. officials just purr with pleasure at how 'co-operative' you are. I'm afraid that I am *not*. I take the view that it is our job to report and *not* to be repositories of secret information.'<sup>29</sup>

Professionally, the British correspondents in occupied Germany both profited and suffered from being nationals of one of the victor nations. After six years of war and censorship, the return to peace time working and living conditions and standards was a slow one.

The situation changed in some respects with the foundation of the Federal Republic in 1949. The defeated and destroyed country slowly reawak-

<sup>25</sup> See for example TNA, FO 1030/193, Memorandum by the British Press Correspondents' Association, 12.5.1947.

<sup>26</sup> TNA, FO 1056/508, Houghton to Treadwell, 28.7.1945.

<sup>27</sup> TNL Archive, Deakin Papers, Cooper to Deakin, 2.8.1945.

<sup>28</sup> See for example TNA, FO 1030/193, Memorandum by the British Press Correspondents' Association, 12.5.1947.

<sup>29</sup> GA, Editorial correspondence file, B/A 65/26, Anderson to Wadsworth, 22.6.1946.

ened politically, economically and intellectually and new – German – sources of information opened up. When reporting about the development of Germany, British correspondents were now mainly writing about German, not British policies and were increasingly using German sources.

However, the situation of British correspondents in Germany remained an exceptional one. In his memoirs, the *Times* correspondent Louis Heren wrote:

‘In the mid-fifties, even after sovereignty had been granted by the occupying powers, West Germany still had the atmosphere and attitudes of an occupied country. The temperature of the Cold War was still below freezing.’<sup>30</sup>

### 3. Positioning in the Cold War

In this battle between two ideologies, whose front line was running directly through divided Germany, the British journalists had to opt for one side or the other. John Peet, Reuter correspondent in Berlin since 1946, did this in a very spectacular fashion. Peet, a Communist since youth, was disillusioned with the capitalist, insufficiently denazified West German state, he was worried about the plans to rearm West Germany and he was convinced that the West was heading towards a war against the communist East.<sup>31</sup> At a press conference in East Berlin in June 1950 he declared:

‘I am standing here today, because I am no longer willing to serve those who propagate war. As a western journalist [...] I have become, without wanting to, a tool for the war machinery directed by America. Today this is the sad and degrading fate of most western journalists, who work for a press which has become the mouthpiece of warmongers. As an English patriot, democrat and friend of peace I cannot any longer contribute to this.’<sup>32</sup>

John Peet’s move to the East attracted worldwide attention – but none of his former colleagues followed his example.

The vast majority of British correspondents in Germany was firmly anchored in the western camp, and their anti-communist attitude influenced their reporting about Western Germany. Alistair Horne, assistant Bonn correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph* in the early 1950s, said in an interview:

‘[...] we were then very much in the throes of the Cold War – and that’s why I am quite sure the *Telegraph* backed Adenauer, backed West Germany. It was very frightening. One felt the tremendous power of the Soviets [...].’

A new war seemed a real possibility and the western defences terribly inadequate.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Louis Heren, *Growing up on The Times* (London: Hamish Hamilton 1978), 210.

<sup>31</sup> See Stefan Berger, Norman LaPorte, ‘John Peet (1915-1988): An Englishman in the GDR’, *History* 89, 1 (2004), 49-69 (53). As editor of the *Democratic German Report* from 1952 to 1975, Peet became ‘the most successful propagandist of the GDR in Britain’ (ibid., 68).

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in: ibid., 50.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Alistair Horne, 15 June 2004.

In this situation, many British correspondents possibly shared the attitude which the *Times* correspondent John Freeman expressed in a letter to his foreign editor. Freeman wrote:

'Much as I dislike Germany, I am sure the realistic policy for us is to ensure that the western half of it at any rate is well within the democratic orbit.'<sup>34</sup>

When Neal Ascherson came to West Germany in 1963 to report for *The Observer*, he noted that most of his British colleagues in Bonn took a 'strongly anti-Communist line'.<sup>35</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* regarded such a political line as an entry requirement. In 1960, the London office refused to hire a particular journalist as Bonn correspondent, because the paper

'could not take the risk of employing someone who is known to look favourably Eastward, no matter how academically.'<sup>36</sup>

It was very difficult for British correspondents to get access to genuine information about the situation in East Germany and to write about it from their own experience. In May 1959, Reuters was the first non-communist western news agency to open an office in East Berlin. The possible political implications of this step became apparent in letters that Reuters received from the East German authorities. According to Peter Johnson, the first Reuter correspondent in East Berlin, these letters showed:

'[...] that they regard setting up our office in East Berlin as part of the relations between our two countries, whereas the view of Reuters is that we are out to get news and not to make politics.'<sup>37</sup>

The Federal Government was very displeased about the opening of the Reuters office.<sup>38</sup> The government of the GDR, on the other hand, began to promote accreditation in East Berlin. In 1963, *The Times* refused such an offer. The editor and the foreign editor both thought

'at present it would be better not to get formal accreditation as the east Germans might make propaganda use of it, saying that British newspapers were already 'recognising' the east German regime'.<sup>39</sup>

*The Daily Telegraph*, too, refused the offer from East Berlin. In a letter to London, its Bonn correspondent Blake Baker stated:

'We should certainly not take the lead in accepting Communist advances. The Bonn Govt will certainly react in a very sour way, if not energetically, to such a move.'<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> TNL Archive, McDonald Papers, Freeman to McDonald, 25.4.1954.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Neal Ascherson, 29 June 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Pawley to Baker, 21.1.1960. See also Baker's response: Baker to Pawley, 26.1.1960. (Both letters are in possession of *The Daily Telegraph*).

<sup>37</sup> Peter Johnson, *Reuter Reporter among the Communists 1958-59* (London: Tagman), p. 104.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, FO 953/2023, Protocol of Anglo-German Information Talks, London, 17.1.1961.

<sup>39</sup> TNL Archive, McDonald Papers, McDonald to Hargrove, 11.9.1963.

<sup>40</sup> Baker to Marsh, 15.7.1964. (Letter in possession of *The Daily Telegraph*).

These examples show that the German governments in Bonn and East Berlin did not regard the correspondents of British newspapers solely as journalists. They also saw them as representatives of important British institutions whose attitude towards the 'recognition' of the GDR – whether expressed in their reporting or by their accreditation in East Berlin – was of political significance.

In the 1950s, most British newspapers closed their West Berlin offices which made it even more difficult for British correspondents to gather information about East Germany.<sup>41</sup> The *Times* correspondent Charles Hargrove thus advised his superiors to keep a correspondent and an office in West Berlin. In a letter to Printing House Square he said:

'It is hard enough in Berlin itself to resist the temptation to turn oneself into an instrument of the cold war, subjected as one is to a constant stream of anti-communist propaganda. But it must be, in my estimation, ten times harder to keep any sort of proper perspective when dealing with eastern Germany from Bonn, where the full blast of the Kaiser Ministry [the Ministry of All German Affairs, A. R.] and all the official propaganda services is turned upon foreign Correspondents.'<sup>42</sup>

As this letter indicates, the Federal Government in Bonn hardly ever missed an opportunity to make its policies and convictions known to the foreign press in Bonn.

#### 4. West German Press Policy

Active as well as repressive governmental press policy had a long tradition in Germany.<sup>43</sup> However, it was not a tradition the Federal Press Office could liberally draw on. The press policy of the Kaiserreich had been marked by repressive laws and the sponsoring of semi-official media organs, that of the Weimar Republic by restrictive measures and ardent campaigning for the revision of the treaty of Versailles and that of the Nazi regime by massive propaganda for the regime and a total control of the media.<sup>44</sup>

The government of the new West German state had to try and tread carefully when it came to exerting influence on the German and the foreign press. At the same time, the press was its most important means of promoting its policies and ideas at home and abroad. At first without a foreign ministry and a diplomatic service, the West German government

<sup>41</sup> For the closure of *The Times* Berlin office see TNL Archive, McDonald Papers, Haley to McDonald, 30.7.1954; TNL Archive, Norman Papers, McDonald to Norman, 5.10.1954, Nichols to Norman, 16.4.1955, and Norman to Nichols, 4.5.1955.

<sup>42</sup> TNL Archive, McDonald Papers, Memorandum by Charles Hargrove, 28.7.1954.

<sup>43</sup> See Ute Daniel, Wolfram Siemann, 'Historische Dimensionen der Propaganda', in: Ute Daniel, Wolfram Siemann (eds.), *Propaganda: Meinungskampf, Verführung und politische Sinnstiftung (1789-1989)* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag 1994), 7-20.

<sup>44</sup> See Ute Daniel, 'Die Politik der Propaganda: Zur Praxis gouvernementaler Selbstrepräsentation vom Kaiserreich bis zur Bundesrepublik', in: Daniel, Siemann, *Propaganda*, 44-82.

depended on the foreign press as a channel to inform a foreign public about the young German democracy.<sup>45</sup> Konrad Adenauer very famously used interviews with foreign correspondents to make his policies known to the world.<sup>46</sup> When the *Times* correspondent John Henry Freeman once suggested to the Chancellor that his interviews with foreign journalists might not always be helping the cause of the Federal Republic, Adenauer wrote in reply:

'No other way remains open to me, because otherwise the voice of the Federal Government would not be heard abroad, much less esteemed.'<sup>47</sup>

One of the major aims of the young West German state was to win back the trust of the Western world. The Federal Government was very anxious about the image of Western Germany projected by the foreign press, and the Federal Press Office worked hard to ensure that the foreign correspondents reporting from Germany were being well informed and well treated. The British press correspondents had easy access to West German politicians, diplomats and officials who would talk to them quite frankly and openly. According to the *News Chronicle* correspondent George Vine this open approach to the press was a reaction against Nazi secrecy.<sup>48</sup> However, the dividing line between informing and trying to manipulate the foreign press was thin. In its dealings with the press, the federal government had to be very careful to avoid any reminiscences of Goebbel's propaganda machinery.

Plans to establish a powerful Ministry of Information, which according to Terence Prittie 'in some respects, bore an unfortunate resemblance to the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda'<sup>49</sup> caused a storm in the foreign press. The plans were brought forward by Otto Lenz of the Federal Chancellery in August/September 1953.<sup>50</sup> The Federal Press Office was opposed to Lenz's project. To dissuade Konrad Adenauer from supporting it, some of its officials entreated the press officers at the British and the American High Commission in Bonn to approach influential press correspondents and ask them to report critically about the planned ministry. The German

<sup>45</sup> See for example Johannes J. Hoffmann, *Adenauer: „Vorsicht und keine Indiskretionen!“ Zur Informationspolitik und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit der Bundesregierung 1949-1955* (Aachen: Shaker 1995), 387.

<sup>46</sup> See Frank Andreas Buchwald, *Adenauers Informationspolitik und das Bundespresseamt 1952-1959: Strategien amtlicher Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit in der Kanzlerdemokratie* (Mainz: PhD dissertation 1991), 19-22.

<sup>47</sup> TNL Archive, Memoranda Germany, Memorandum by Freeman, 29.5.1950. See also: Adenauer to Freeman, 27.4. 1950, No. 224, in: Hans Peter Mensing (ed.), *Adenauer. Briefe 1949-1951* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag 1985), 198-199.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with George Vine, 16 July 2004.

<sup>49</sup> Terence Prittie, *Velvet Chancellors: A History of Post-War Germany* (London: Muller 1979), 78.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Arnulf Baring, *Außenpolitik in Adenauers Kanzlerdemokratie: Vol. 1* (Munich: dtv 1971) 30-33.

officials were convinced that critical articles appearing in influential foreign newspapers would help to change Adenauer's mind about the ministry.<sup>51</sup> The British High Commission approached Terence Prittie of *The Manchester Guardian* and asked him whether he was prepared to write about Lenz's plans. Prittie agreed under the condition that the Commission gave him additional information and an absolute guarantee that this information was correct.<sup>52</sup> The Commission complied with these conditions and Terence Prittie broke the story in the British press.<sup>53</sup> It was immediately taken up by other British newspapers – and the plans for the information ministry were dropped. Prittie was convinced that there was a direct link between the publication of his article and – on the same day – Adenauer's public denial that he had ever supported Lenz's plan. In a letter to his editor, Prittie wrote:

I am sure Dr Adenauer is not going to love the Manchester Guardian for some little time to come, but I don't think that can be helped. It may be that the evil of the Information Ministry has been averted. That will be something gained.<sup>54</sup>

In this episode, a British foreign correspondent appears as a political actor who is asked for support by representatives of his government and decides to use his influence to avert a foreign head of government from supporting a plan considered harmful for the development of a democratic German state and its press.

The first initiative for Prittie's intervention came from officials of the Federal Press Office who were well aware of the importance which Konrad Adenauer attributed to the foreign press. The Chancellor was often enraged about what he considered to be unfair reporting about Germany in the British press. During his chancellorship, Anglo-German press relations went through few ups and many downs, and Adenauer repeatedly complained that the British press instead of furthering Anglo-German relations severely hampered them.<sup>55</sup> In a radio interview in April 1959, Adenauer said:

I have sometimes asked myself if there are wire-pullers somewhere who deliberately try, for reasons of foreign policy, to impair relations between the British people and the German people.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See TNA, FO 1056/366, Pope to Robb, 23.9.1953.

<sup>52</sup> See GA, Editorial correspondence file, B/P 267/435, Prittie to Wadsworth, 25.9.1953.

<sup>53</sup> 'Curbing Freedom of Press. Dr Adenauer Considers Plans for Information Ministry. Test for Democracy', *Manchester Guardian*, 25.9.1953, and 'The Wrong Foot', *Manchester Guardian*, 25.9.1953

<sup>54</sup> GA, Editorial correspondence file, B/P 267/435, Prittie to Wadsworth, 25.9.1953.

<sup>55</sup> See for example 'Dr Adenauer's persecution complex. Charity should begin at home', *Manchester Guardian*, 10.4.1959.

<sup>56</sup> "Troubled Relations' with Mr. Macmillan Denied: Dr Adenauer Speaks of 'Pure Fantasy'", *The Times*, 9.4.1959. *The Times* printed a full-length translation of Adenauer's radio broadcast.

The British correspondents in Bonn, who had recently been sending reports about the deterioration of Anglo-German relations to London<sup>57</sup>, reacted promptly to Adenauer's speech. In an article for *The Times* Louis Heren wrote that

[...] it is difficult to see how independent journalists can be described as 'wire-pullers'. The implication seems to be that the journalists are the instrument of some concealed plotters, perhaps in the Foreign Office.<sup>58</sup>

According to Heren, this kind of misunderstanding of the functioning of the British press was rather frequent in Germany.

In the months following this incident, the Federal Press Office worked very hard to soften the effects of Adenauer's unfortunate speech. Felix von Eckardt, the chief of the Federal Press Office, met up with Louis Heren to try to explain Adenauer's repeated sniping at the British press and British policy. Eckardt's remarks amounted to an appeal 'to be patient with Adenauer'. According to Heren:

It was an odd situation, a head of department appealing to a foreigner to be patient with his head of government.<sup>59</sup>

## 5. The Special Status of *The Times*

However, Louis Heren was not just any foreigner. As *Times* correspondent, he was the representative of the most prestigious British newspaper which was considered to have close links with the British government. In a conversation with two members of the British Embassy's press department in January 1958, Felix von Eckardt admitted that he found it

'particularly difficult to explain to the Chancellor that neither 'The Times' nor the B.B.C. should be regarded as official organs of H.[er]M.[ajesty's]G[overnment].'<sup>60</sup>

The Federal Press Office, the Foreign Ministry, the London Embassy – and the Chancellor – were displeased about the constant stream of anti-German articles pouring out of the pens of the *Daily Express* correspondents and other boulevard journalists.<sup>61</sup> However, these articles never caused them as much concern as did critical reports appearing in quality

<sup>57</sup> See for example 'Unpopularity in Bonn of Mr. Macmillan: Anglo-German Relations at Low Ebb', *The Times*, 3.4.1959, and 'Germany's Mental Strait-Jacket: Dr Adenauer refuses to look at Macmillan plan. Ideas at a Premium', *Manchester Guardian*, 6.4.1959.

<sup>58</sup> 'Identity of the Wire-Pullers', *The Times*, 10.4.1959.

<sup>59</sup> TNL Archive, Memoranda Germany, Memorandum by Louis Heren, 26.6.1959.

<sup>60</sup> TNA, FO 371/137599, Fisher to Anderson, 30.1.1958.

<sup>61</sup> See for example the reaction to a *Daily Express* article published in July 1959, in which the paper had claimed under the heading 'Down Comes Macmillan' that Adenauer had taken a portrait of Macmillan off the wall. Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes [hereafter PA-AA], AV Neues Amt, vol. 136, Note by Hans Scherer, 30.7.1959, Scherer to Hiller, 31.7.1959, and Hiller to Scherer, Bonn, 4.8.1959.

newspapers, and most particularly in *The Times*. The British always had to reckon with the, as a member of the Foreign Office put it,

'almost morbid sensitivity of the Germans in relation to anything 'The Times' does or does not print'.<sup>62</sup>

For example, when a *Times* leading article suggested a policy for Germany which was not in line with the official position of the western Allies, the German ambassador in London might approach the Foreign Office and request that, should the question come up at the next press conference, the Foreign Office official would make it quite clear that this was not the policy of the British government.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, the reports of *The Times* correspondents stationed in Germany were read with great scrutiny in Bonn. The tone of these reports could change dramatically, when a new *Times* correspondent was sent to report from the German capital.<sup>64</sup>

The first Bonn correspondent of *The Times*, John Henry Freeman, was a fervent admirer of Konrad Adenauer and fully supported the Chancellor's policies in his articles. The official history of *The Times* writes about Freeman:

'In western Germany [...] he developed a sincere admiration for Dr. Konrad Adenauer, and his messages – much warmer in tone towards the Chancellor than many of The Times leading articles – helped readers to understand that the west Germans had fully committed themselves to the western side.'<sup>65</sup>

When the British High Commission had asked Terence Prittie to help dissuade Adenauer from pursuing Lenz's plans for a Ministry of Information, Prittie had wondered why they had not approached the *Times* correspon-

<sup>62</sup> TNA, FO 953/2022, Briefing for the Anglo-German Information Talks in London, 17.1.1961. Item 6: Review of Anglo-German Press and Public Relations, January 1961.

<sup>63</sup> See for example PA-AA, B 31, vol. 20/2, v. Welck to Brentano, 15.10.1955, and German Embassy London to Auswärtiges Amt, 17.10.1955. In this case, the complaint was about a *Times* leader which had put the question: 'But is it not possible to have a pact on a provisional basis that in no way rules out German unity for the future? The Russians on their side would have to drop their insistence that the military alliances, east and west, would have eventually to disappear.' 'Three Months', *The Times*, 15.10.1955. At the Foreign Office press conference on the day of the publication of the article, the Foreign Office official was asked to comment on this phrase. His response was: 'This is not the policy of Her Majesty's government.' PA-AA, B 31, vol. 20/2, German Embassy London to Auswärtiges Amt, 17.10.1955. *The Times* responded to this intervention by publishing a second leader on the same topic. 'Germany and Security', *The Times*, 18.10.1955. Cf. also McDonald, *Struggles in War and Peace*, 254.

<sup>64</sup> *The Times* was very anxious about its independence and granted a great measure of it to its own correspondents. Louis Heren writes: 'The independence traditionally granted to correspondents of *The Times* was a wonderful gift. It gave me freedom to report the world as I saw it, regardless of the views of the editor or proprietor.' Heren, *Growing up on The Times*, 61. Cf. also Louis Heren, *Memories of Times Past* (London: Hamish Hamilton 1988) 67, 173 and 185.

<sup>65</sup> McDonald, *Struggles in War and Peace*, 150.

dent. The reply had been: "Oh, John Freeman won't hear a word against the Federal Chancellor"!!<sup>66</sup>

The contrast between Freeman's very loyal and Louis Heren's more critical reporting from Germany was a very pronounced one. Heren, who took over the Bonn office of *The Times* in 1956, remarked in his memoirs:

'One of my predecessors had been so cooperative that my more objective approach was seen as hostile.'<sup>67</sup>

Shortly after his arrival in Bonn, Heren upset both German and British officials by his critical reports about the Anglo-German negotiations on the payment of the stationing costs for the British Army in Germany. A member of the British Embassy considered his reports to be 'neither fair nor reliable' and wrote to the Foreign Office that he found it 'very tiresome when a 'Times' correspondent is so irresponsible.'<sup>68</sup>

According to his superiors Heren's aim as a journalist was

'to make his despatches set the record straight about the deeds and misdeeds of men in authority, no matter how much he upset them.'<sup>69</sup>

During his five-year term in Bonn, Heren repeatedly upset the German government officials in charge of press matters. All sorts of measures were undertaken to bring Heren around to a more positive view of Germany or to try to exert some pressure on him: Meetings with Heren, talks with his superiors, complaints about Heren to the British Embassy and the Foreign Office, the cancelling of an interview with Konrad Adenauer, and the supply of incriminating evidence to a German correspondent in London who wrote critical articles about Heren's reporting from Bonn.<sup>70</sup>

Heren left Bonn in December 1960 to take over the Washington office of *The Times*. His successor Charles Hargrove had a very different conception of the role of a *Times* correspondent.<sup>71</sup> Hargrove, whom the official history of *The Times* attributes with a 'fine diplomatic sense'<sup>72</sup>, was very well connected in the political and diplomatic circles of the German capital. He saw himself as a kind of second British ambassador, and wrote and acted accordingly. His reports from Bonn hardly ever caused a stir.

A British briefing for the Anglo-German Information Talks in May 1962 – nearly 18 months after Hargrove had taken over from Heren – states:

<sup>66</sup> GA, Editorial correspondence file, B/P 267/435, Prittie to Wadsworth, 25.9.1953.

<sup>67</sup> Heren, *Memories of Times Past*, 192.

<sup>68</sup> TNA, FO 371/121915, British Embassy Bonn to Foreign Office, 30.6.1956.

<sup>69</sup> McDonald, *Struggles in War and Peace*, 149.

<sup>70</sup> See W. G. Krug: '„Times“ und BBC: Wahre Sprachrohre Englands? Unfaire Deutschland-berichterstattung am laufenden Band', *ZV + ZV*, vol. 57, no. 16, 15.8.1960, 901. See also PA-AA, AV Neues Amt, vol. 117, Memorandum by Dr. W. G. Krug about *The Times* reporting from Bonn, without date [autumn 1960, A. R.].

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Hargrove, *Un gentleman du Times*, 44 and 261-2, and the interview with Charles Hargrove, 8/9 October 2004.

<sup>72</sup> McDonald, *Struggles in War and Peace*, 349.

'As far as British correspondents in Germany are concerned, the change in the representation of 'The Times' has brought a great improvement. The former correspondent, Mr. Heren, (...), though a good journalist, proved a constant irritant to the Germans, and his disappearance from Bonn has been a blessing.'<sup>73</sup>

The example of *The Times* illustrates the potential role of foreign correspondents as actors in Anglo-German relations. The reaction of the Federal Government to critical reporting in *The Times* underlines the importance attributed to this particular newspaper. The London office of *The Times* did hardly ever interfere with its correspondents' reporting from Bonn. The tone and manner of a *Times* Bonn correspondent largely depended on his biographical and professional background, his political attitudes and his conception of the role of the representative of an influential foreign newspaper. As representatives of *The Times* in Bonn, the correspondents were perceived as important actors in Anglo-German relations. Depending on their own conception of their role, they did – or did not – feel it to be their duty to contribute to lessening the tension between the two countries.

## Conclusion

With respect to their biographical background, the British correspondents reporting from post World War II Germany were not a homogenous group. They belonged to a (journalistic) elite by profession and not necessarily by birth or academic education. However, the newspapers increasingly chose Oxbridge graduates over veteran reporters.

Those coming to Germany immediately after the war were faced with an exceptional situation. They came from a country with a long tradition of an independent, critical press. However, during the occupation period it was at times difficult to uphold this tradition. The British military government which provided the correspondents with food, lodgings, transport, communication channels and information pursued at first a rather restrictive information policy. It took some time – and some effort on the part of the correspondents – to return from wartime to peacetime professional standards and working conditions.

With the founding of the Federal Republic, the situation of the journalists changed. In the immediate post war years, the British correspondents had in many respects been dependent on the British military government. But now the newly elected West German government very much depended on the foreign press to regain the trust of its former enemies and project its policies abroad. For this purpose, the Federal Press Office used a number of instruments such as organising journeys for foreign journalists, helping individual correspondents to explore Germany, arranging background talks and interviews with politicians and issuing information bro-

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<sup>73</sup> TNA, FO 953/279, Brief No. 9: Anglo-German Information Talks, Bonn, May 15, 1962: Review of Anglo-German Press and Public Relations.

chures. In its dealings with the press, the German government had to try to avoid all reminiscences of the Nazi press and propaganda policy. However, the concept of a critical and truly independent press was rather new and foreign to Germany with its long tradition of a partisan press, and it was not fully understood by some of the men in power.

The influence of the press on Anglo-German relations was thought to be considerable – and generally damaging. Rather unsuccessful efforts were undertaken to put an end to the recurring snow ball fights between the German and the British press. Particular attention was paid to the reporting in quality newspapers. These newspapers' attitude to topics such as the future of Berlin, disengagement plans, the GDR or the Oder-Neisse line was taken very seriously. Their refusal to have a correspondent accredited in East Berlin – and the reasons given for this refusal – underlines the perception and the role of these newspapers and their representatives as political actors. Their correspondents were mostly anti-communist and thus pro-Adenauer. However, these journalists were neither the mouth-piece of their editors nor of the British government and were free to express their own opinion on the new Germanys. Their judgement – and the way they expressed it – differed according to their political convictions and their conception of the profession of foreign correspondent. Whether they perceived their role to be that of a watchdog or an unofficial ambassador – they certainly were a force to be reckoned with in Anglo-German relations.