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GERMAN JOURNALISM IN THE PAST DECADE

By KLAUS MANN

THE year 1933 marks an interruption in the cultural life of Germany. Observers of a later day will probably be justified in maintaining that with the year 1933 German cultural life—chiefly and for the time being—ceased to be a cultural life. Within the boundaries of the Reich, to be sure; for outside of these boundaries its development continues and its achievements are in part of a high order. This is as true of journalism as of every other activity of public intellectual life.

Journalism, this half literary-intellectual and half informative activity, serious and responsible in conception, presupposes a certain measure of freedom without which it simply cannot exist. The very nature and essence of journalism is discussion: it is the expression of public opinion, in progress constantly and often growing very heated, about the dominant concerns of public life. Under the totalitarian dictatorship journalism loses its meaning and its *raison d'être*. When a Minister "of Propaganda and Popular Enlightenment" predetermines almost literally what shall be said and what may not be said, then journalists have become superfluous. Under such conditions they are absolutely forbidden to speak for themselves; they have been degraded to the position of appointed ad-writers of a state which disposes of their pens as it will later, when need arises, dispose of the guns of soldiers.

In the totalitarian state the press—along with the film, the radio, and the theatre—belongs to the state's means of propaganda. It has no sort of private opinion and therefore no longer any public influence. However, I am of the opinion that the real influence, the so-called "power of the press," is often overrated in democratic countries. Of course the func-

tion of the press is not only to reflect the public opinion of a country; it must also, so long as it is free, contribute to the formation of this public opinion or at least to make it conscious of itself. But sometimes, under certain conditions, public opinion is developed with entire independence of the great press or even in direct opposition to the tendencies represented by the leading newspapers. When the "great liberal press" seemed to have undisputed sway in Germany, especially in Berlin, quite different forces and moods were at work in the country and these had asserted themselves to a much stronger and more dangerous degree than we suspected at that time. The cultured bourgeoisie quite wrongly refused to take seriously an ultra-nationalistic press which was repulsive because of its crudeness and the dogmatic falseness of its arguments. Readers of the "great liberal press" laughed loud and long at the aggressive noisy nationalists, until suddenly, and as it were overnight, the economic and political interests which backed these noise-makers and were their wire-pullers from the beginning, had all the power in their hands. The cultivated German bourgeoisie, like the good citizens in the grandiose novel of Sinclair Lewis, had proudly thought too long, "It can't happen here." And then when the unbelievable did become possible the general astonishment was unbounded.

In Provincial Germany "the great liberal press" was most impressively represented by the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the intellectual level of which was extraordinarily high. Its editor-in-chief, Heinz Simon, had, along with a few gifted collaborators, made of it one of the first-rate European newspapers. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* had the distinction of being

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more intensely hated by Adolf Hitler than any other product of the press, much more, for example, than the official organs of the Left, the Social-Democratic *Vorwärts* and the Communist *Rote Fahne* (There is much in *Mein Kampf* of this implacable and very characteristic rage of Hitler against the left-bourgeois, liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung*.) Even today the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which is said to have pleasant connections with the Foreign Ministry and certain industrial circles, occupies an exceptional position among the newspapers of the Reich. Abroad it is read by people who no longer think of picking up any other German paper. Yet as things are today, one is no longer really informed about German feelings and affairs if one reads about them in a paper which after all is only half "co-ordinated" and which even today still makes an effort to retain a relatively civilized jargon. Whoever wants to learn something about the real tone of the Third Reich must, willy-nilly, make up his mind to read Hitler's official *Völkischer Beobachter*, Goebbels' semi-official *Angriff* or Streicher's *Stürmer*—the favorite paper of the Führer.

The *Frankfurter Zeitung* was unquestionably for many years the best German newspaper published outside of Berlin. Perhaps it was even superior in many respects to the two best-known democratic dailies of the Capital. The distinguished writer of lead-articles of the *Berliner Tageblatt* was Theodor Wolff; the political Editor-in-Chief of the *Vossische Zeitung* was—until a few years before the Nazi revolt—Georg Bernhard. Theodor Wolff now lives in retirement in Southern France and no longer writes anything except observations concerning the past (*March Through Three Decades*, and the like). Bernhard, who now reveals himself as the more active of the two, edits in Paris the only daily paper of the German émigrés: *Pariser Tageszeitung*. Politically these two German publicists were pretty closely related. Both were nationalistic during the War; then they moved towards the left but without ever becoming radical. Their attitude was democratic, pacifistic, and very francophile; (Georg Bernhard was especially known for his French sympathies). The *Berliner Tageblatt* was the representative organ of the Mosse concern; the *Vossische Zeitung* belonged to the Ullstein family. These two great houses, Ullstein and Mosse, produced, besides their serious papers, also lighter ware which sold better and brought in the major

portion of their profits. Thus Mosse had great success with its *8-Uhr-Abendblatt*, (a boulevard sheet of the *Paris Soir* type); much in demand was also the *B. Z. am Mittag*, published by Ullstein, and the *Berliner Illustrierte*, which belonged to the same concern. Naturally the big reactionary publishers, Scherl and Hugenberg, made an effort to be amusing and cosmopolitan; but in this regard the Ullstein firm was always more successful than any of its competitors of either the Right or the Left. No afternoon paper was so much in favor as the *B. Z.*, and no *Illustrierte* could boast nearly so large an edition as the *Berliner Illustrierte*.

The *Berliner Illustrierte*—whose former editor by the way is now employed in New York—was read in all of Germany; but there were also in different parts of the country provincial *Illustrierte* of which some had large editions. The largest was probably that of the *Münchener Illustrierte*, published by the same firm—Knorr und Hirt—as the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*. The latter was politically the most influential newspaper in South Germany. The *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* reacted against its own liberal past and became in time more conservative. It is an undeniable fact that it had an essential part in the rise of the Nazis, who are known to have begun their activity in München. All because of a short-sighted and narrow opposition against Berlin—which was democratic at that time—the powerful South German journal protected Hitler and his "movement"—only to oppose him seriously when it was too late and when its editors, suspected of royalist sympathies, had to enter the concentration camp together with the "Marxist" and the left-Catholic publicists.

On a numerically insignificant but not unimportant plane some opposition publicists play an important part. I have in mind Leopold Schwarzschild, distinguished analyst of political and economic connections, who edited the *Tage-Buch* in Berlin; and Carl von Ossietzky, editor of the *Weltbühne* after the death of the famous Siegfried Jacobson. Schwarzschild has been editing his *Tage-Buch* in Paris since 1933 and has made of it the best-informed and most widely read organ of the German émigrés. Ossietzky has, as is well known, been paying for his heroic pacifism and the moral absoluteness of his character in German concentration camps for almost four years. (He has just been awarded the Nobel Prize.) The *Weltbühne*, in which Ossietzky formed

published his thundering articles against militarism and imperialism, continues to appear in Prague. Much discussed also in the last years of the German Republic were the political and economic articles in the review *Die Tat*, which propagated ideas concerning both nationalism and a socialistically planned economy.

On the whole, book reviewing was neglected in the German press. With the exception of the purely literary magazines it played an important rôle only in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Theatrical criticism however was an important feature in the feuilleton of the great Berlin newspapers. We are reminded of the most distinguished of the theatrical critics of the capital, Alfred Kerr, who, like so many good German authors, lives in exile today. His books, *Die Welt im Drama* and *Die Welt im Licht*, in which his reviews of several decades are brought together, are real classics and cannot be neglected by anyone who wishes to know of the history of the German drama and the German theatre since the day of Gerhart Hauptmann's youth and the first productions of Ibsen. Along with Kerr, Doctor Herbert Ihering had the greatest influence; he was a Marxist for whom nothing could be radical enough and who was able after all to become almost a Nazi and to remain in Berlin as a theatrical critic—until the Nazis, who have no special respect for renegades, finally threw him out. Along with the distinguished dramatic critics the favorite collaborators on newspapers and reviews were a few travel-writers. The Mosse firm sent Hollriegel to all the continents; and Ullrich had in Katz its most successful recorder of travels. Superior to both of these in a literary sense were Arthur Holitscher (who wrote very interesting things especially about the Far East and North America) and Egon Erwin Kisch (whose most famous book is *Der rasende Reporter*). Holitscher, Kisch and a few others cultivated with moral seriousness and technical ability the style of great social reportage—a style which has also been brilliantly mastered here in America by some writers. In the German language territory men like Kisch deserve credit for having made out of reportage something to be taken seriously—a form of art; while writers like Alfred Kerr have the merit of winning back for theatrical criticism the intellectual terrain which it had possessed long ago—when Lessing wrote his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*—and which in the meantime had been lost to it.

My observations about German journalism are too fragmentary to enable the reader to form a true picture of the many-sided and complex activity of the German press up to the year 1933. What I hope to have indicated is this: that the press of the Weimar Republic was not boring. It had many faults, there was much in it to criticize, politically as well as morally. Of all questionable human institutions the press is perhaps the most questionable. One does not improve it in any way by making it dull—as the dictatorships are doing. As long as the German press was not dull there was some merit in reading it. For there was thought, there was work in this much-slandered German Republic, in the sphere of the press as well as everywhere else.—*New York*.

“...many American students seem to enjoy French lyric poetry; on the whole they prefer pre-Symbolist poets to later ones; they like to hear poetry read aloud; they find that analyzing a poem increases their understanding and enjoyment of it; by reading they come to appreciate poets who differ widely in method and appeal.”—George Neely Henning, in *The Modern Language Journal*.

“If Addison had had the wit of Voltaire and the subtlety of Henry James he might have written like Erasmus. The combination of such irreconcilables is impossible? Yes; but Erasmus achieved it.”—Preserved Smith, in *The American Scholar*.

“The great, true German literature, the literature of humanistic inspiration, is represented by those writers who in their devotion to it exiled themselves from their country, in order to remain true to it and to themselves. But they are free from all arrogance; they know that among the writers who have remained in Germany they have many secret allies. The boundaries of the Reich must not separate German writers who are free in spirit; the battle against the foes of freedom and culture must be carried on in union.”—*Vorwort to Das Wort*, Moscow.

“The poet (Jean Paul) intended to leave Weimar, but he did not know where to go. In any case it was to be a town where they brewed good beer. So he had samples of beer sent from all parts of the countryside, and there must have been a terrible lot of them for he took years to consider until he finally decided on Bayreuth.”—Walter Kaulahn, in *Germany, Berlin*.

THE CONTEMPORARY GERMAN DRAMA

By MARIAN P. WHITNEY

IN NO country has the theatre played so large a part in the life of the people as in Germany. There every considerable town has long had its own subsidized theatre with stock company and a repertory system which has kept alive all good plays and afforded to every class in the community an opportunity of seeing them sooner or later. Luther approved and encouraged the acted drama as a means of spreading his own doctrines, Lessing looked upon it as a powerful factor in the building up of a united Germany. During the Republic, a system was developed by which even remote villages could see the best plays of the day. Naturally, Hitler, with his flair for propaganda, did not overlook this valuable means for spreading the ideas of a Germany now at last united, as he claims, in the “Totalitarian State.” From the first his government has done everything possible to encourage both theatre and drama. The Reichstheaterkammer arranges dramatic festivals and theatre expositions and Reichstheaterfestwochen, which present the best of the year's production. It builds new theatres, especially open-air theatres, offers many prizes for the best plays and sees to it that no dangerous ideas find their way onto the stage.

Under such stimulus large numbers of young writers are trying to express in dramatic form the ideals and achievements of the new Germany. The dramatic output is very large. In 1934, 294 plays, some 200 of them by living German authors, had their premières in 152 German theatres, and the other years of Nazi rule have been no less productive.

What ideas inspire this new drama? A German critic reviewing one of the plays of 1934 says, “In this play the author has given dramatic form to the great articles of faith:

race, homeland and war.” (*Blut, Boden und Krieg*). If we add to these passionate loyalty to the leader (*Führerideal*), contempt for the bourgeois ideals of peace, humanitarianism and internationalism, and for any individual life which does not directly serve the State, confidence in youth and distrust of older generation, we shall have touched on almost every motive of the Nazi drama.

Most of these motives appear in the first really successful play based on Nazi ideology. When I was in Germany in the Spring of 1933, the first year of Nazi domination, *Schlageter* (H. Johst) was being played in every German theatre. The play is based on an actual occurrence of the year 1923. Schlageter, a young officer mustered out at the end of the war, is trying to settle into civilian life under the Republic which he despises and hates. When the French march into the Ruhr, he feels that he cannot see his beloved Germany lying passive under their tyranny. He leads a group of comrades to blow up a railroad bridge in the occupied zone, and is taken, tried and shot by the French. He dies feeling that “the sacrifice of his life will shatter the sleep of the nation.” His last words are “Deutschland, erwache!” In this play Johst has “given form to a new heroism for the New Germany.” He was already an established dramatist, and his play shows the influence of pre-Nazi ideas; to enhance the tragic effect, he provides Schlageter with a quite unhistorical betrothed. The author of *Düsseldorfer Passion* (P. Beyer, 1933) has no such theatrical tricks in his play, based on the same incident. He envelops the story in the vague mysticism which is a part of the Nazi ideology and which is reminiscent both of the Bible and of the old German mythology. Each of his ten scenes opens with