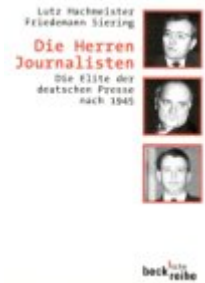


Lutz Hachmeister, Friedemann Siering. *Die Herren Journalisten: Die Elite der deutschen Presse nach 1945.* München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 2002. 327 S. EUR 14.00, broschiert, ISBN 978-3-406-47597-9.



Reviewed by Anni Baker

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When a visitor first travels in Germany, especially a visitor with a little knowledge of history, she feels the country's twentieth-century past infusing the buildings, the streets, the air. It demands recognition during a stroll down narrow cobbled streets--brownshirted SA men could have marched down them; on a stop in the musty smoke-filled cafe in the old part of town--perhaps a group of disgruntled veterans met here in 1919 to argue politics; in the sight of a spindly, bent old man formally dressed in wool coat and hat--so what were you doing back then? But if the first few weeks turn into months or years, the visitor, no longer a stranger, loses focus on the past and sees the country as it is, very much in the present, with its fashions and fads, new movies, crimes in the headlines. Even overt reminders like television shows or magazine articles about the history of the Third Reich and the Shoah seem to isolate those twelve horrible years, as if they have been placed on an iceberg drifting out to sea, able to be seen from shore but still distant and alone.

Die Herren Journalisten, a collection of essays edited by Lutz Hachmeister and Friedemann Sier-

ing, reminds us, in case we have forgotten, that the Nazi era cannot be isolated from what came after. In chapter after chapter, the contributors prove that a disturbing number of the founders and first editors of West Germany's major national newspapers and journals had long-standing sympathies and institutional ties to National Socialism. The naive observer might have expected that the postwar media, licensed and overseen by Allied military government officials, would have provided a platform for the ideas of persecuted liberals and socialists, but in fact this was far from the case. According to Hachmeister and Siering, it was rather easy for former Nazis with experience and talent to obtain positions in the publishing world, from the conservative nationalist founders of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* to the former SS officers on the editorial board of *Der Spiegel* (hired for their access to titillating gossip about former bigwigs), to the whiny Richard Tuengel, chief editor of *Die Zeit*, who wrote in a December 1946 editorial: "We [the Germans] are today in a similar situation to the Jewish people. In many ways it is even worse for us. We have not enough living space, we freeze and

starve, we cannot work freely and are hated in the community of nations." Is it possible that such words could have been published in a major newspaper eighteen months after the fall of the Nazi regime? It is even more surprising from a paper most people associate with the great liberal Graefin Marion von Doenhoff, who became the editor ten years after its founding.

The most sickening example of continuity described in the book is the case of SS-Obersturmbannführer Dr. Hans Roessner, in youth an adherent to German nationalist sentiments and later a member of Reinhard Heydrich's SD. By the late 1950s, he had become an acquisitions editor for Piper Verlag, and as such, he handled the firm's negotiations with Hannah Arendt over her books on Rahel Varnhagen, the Hungarian Revolution, and—imagine—the study published as *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. The story of their polite and formal correspondence over the word "Jew" in the subtitle of the Rahel Varnhagen book—she insisted on it, he felt it was better left out—neatly encapsulates the point of this collection: the influence of personal background and experience on the allegedly objective elite media.

The volume's introductory essay addresses the character of elite national publications; Hachmeister's term "prestige papers" suggests the right combination of intellectual rigor and cultural snobbery. The men (and less often, women) who then and now provide the editorial voice for the prestige papers, Hachmeister asserts, are not, as they would have it, a disinterested group of observers providing an enlightened critique of society. Far from standing above society, they are in and from it, with ties to business interests, political views, cultural norms. This is obvious and unarguable, yet papers and their readers everywhere conspire to pretend it is otherwise. Only when there is a sufficient disconnect between the editorial voice of the prestige papers and a large segment of public opinion is the bias of the media acknowledged and discussed, as, for example, in

the recurrent debate over alleged bias, liberal or conservative, in the American media. The essays collected by Hachmeister and Siering show that in the first postwar decade, most of the major publications in West Germany—the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* are notable exceptions—were led by people from whose backgrounds we would expect bias toward conservative, nationalistic and national socialist ideas and institutions.

The editors assure us that the volume is more than an exposure of the Nazi background of famous figures. "In any case," writes Hachmeister, "the phase of naive astonishment over the degree of German continuity should be over" (p. 11). At times the book does indeed read merely as an extended outing of former Nazis. Nevertheless, its publication is an important step toward a clearer understanding of the national press in West Germany. There are (at least) two more books to be written on the subject. First is an examination of actual bias in the coverage and editorial positions of the papers. The case of Richard Tuengel, mentioned above, is one fruity example of the background-editorial position connection, but more thorough research could reveal the existence of subtler strains. Second, the essays do not address the reception of such bias, assuming it existed, on the readership of the papers. It was not until the student movement of the 1960s that the question of media bias arose as a public issue; are we to assume that most readers in the early postwar period accepted and agreed with the tone and voice of the papers they read?

Perhaps. Much scholarship has concluded that the postwar generation was a politically passive one, tired of ideology and anxious to rebuild and go back to "normal" life. My own reading of local (American zone) papers of the postwar period finds a heavy strain of resentment and self-pity running through editorials and letters, and even in reporting. Frequently covered are the faults of military government, the burdens of reparations

to Israel and other nations, the plight of German POWs and expellees, bomb damage, shortages, and long lines: "In many ways it is even worse for us." On the Nazi backgrounds of those in power and the fate of the victims there is utter silence. The essays in this volume confirm our impression of postwar Germany as a nation wanting to forget, yet it remained at least somewhat open to appeals of national grievance.

The book is a grim reminder of the continuity between the Third Reich and postwar West Germany. It is comforting to hold onto the concept of *Stunde Null*, the moment where the Nazis and all that went with them were sent out to sea on the iceberg, and the new Germany began from scratch. But it is false and dangerous. It is true that the rejection of an entire past, however evil, is not easy, and continuities not caught at once are increasingly difficult to dislodge. In spite of Hachmeister's insistence that we ought to be past the "phase of naive astonishment" over continuity, it is chilling to be reminded of the depth of the postwar media elite's involvement in the politics and policies of barbarism.

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