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BISMARCK AND THE PRESS: THE EXAMPLE OF THE NATIONAL LIBERALS

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Everyone, it appears, is an expert on public opinion. Everyone is a member of the public, and consequently knows how he feels and what he thinks about an issue. Most like to think of themselves as rational, independent, critical thinkers, arriving at an opinion only after judicious consideration of the facts. A democracy posits this sort of a public possessing the essential freedom of information. Liberal democracy places a burden of thought upon the public. But, as everyone knows, there are informed and uninformed opinions, more or less freedom of information even today. The issues of an uninformed public and managed news are still with us.

It is difficult to re-create a complete picture of Bismarck's influence upon the German press because he removed most of the secret records dealing with such matters — with the Emperor's apparent approval — when he left office in 1890.¹ The press' connections with Bismarck were also kept secret. Both Bismarck and the press took pains to deny such journalistic liaisons if some rash political opponent accused them of influence or injudicious dependence.² But an attempt to portray these factors must be made if the politics of the time, so closely linked to the newspaper world, are to be understood. Again, the press of that time is today used as a basis for historical research, and yet virtually nothing has been done to investigate its independence, objectivity, or relationship with Bismarck. When dealing with the press, surely it is the historian's task not only to ascertain what the press said, but to get behind the printed word in order to determine who really said it, his personal, professional, and political relationships with his surroundings, and finally his reasons for writing. All these factors make the press what it is and produce an extremely complex picture, but they must be investigated if the press is to be studied or used for research purposes.

The large liberal press in Germany had a virtual monopoly position in the country: liberal and nationalistic ideas were in the air. The intellectual climate of much of the German middle-class was basically

¹ Much of the research for this paper was done in the ex-imperial archives in the Deutsches Zentralarchiv in Potsdam (DZA 1), and in the ex-Prussian state archives in the Deutsches Zentralarchiv in Merseburg (DZA 2). The above statement is the opinion of Dr. Brater of the DZA 1, who is responsible for this area of documentation.

² Bismarck's speech in the Reichstag of 9.2.1876. *Gesammelte Werke* (Berlin, 1924-32), vol. 4, pp. 24ff.

centralistic, as much intellectual and economic as political in origin. Most of the moderate liberal political leaders who represented these ideas and who banded together after 1867 in the National Liberal Party had commenced their political careers as journalists or close friends of journalists, created their political support through the newspapers, and remained in political office through their relations with this powerful press.³ With the one exception of Württemberg, no National Liberal party newspaper existed in the country after unification, whereas every other party felt the serious need of such papers to rally their followers.⁴ The general liberal press represented the National Liberal ideas sufficiently well, it was felt by the party leaders.⁵

In a changing society, the press was the expression of the non-traditional middle-class, desirous of change and progress.⁶ Such strongly traditional groups as the Catholics, Conservatives, and federalists or other similar groups were, as is usual in a free press situation, little represented. The Social Democratic press, although moving up quickly, was cut off in its growth by the anti-socialist law of 1878.⁸ The conservative elements quite rightly looked upon the press as an institution with deep distrust, as a disturber of their peace and tradition, whereas the socialists at first were content to follow the liberal lead.

It is the nature of the press to give immediate description of changing events. This imparts the impression of great fluidity to the collective consciousness, and weakens the feeling for historical traditions and gradual development as well as for ideological rigidity. Tradition thinks in continuities in which the present is understood in terms of the past and

³ Many examples could be given of the close connection between the moderate liberal press and the National Liberal Party members. The party leader in Hesse was Fr. Oetker, editor of the *Hessische Morgenpost*; the leaders of the party in lower Bavaria were Julius Knorr and August Vecchioni, publisher and editor of the Munich *Neueste Nachrichten*; one of the founders of the party in Wurtemberg was the publisher of the *Schwäbischer Merkur* Otto Elben, also a member of the Reichstag; another leading member was Wilhelm Wehrenpfennig, editor of the *Preussische Jahrbücher* and of the Berlin daily *Spener'sche Zeitung*; a founder and director of the Prussian party was Dr. Zabel, editor of the Berlin daily *Nationalzeitung*, and his successor Fr. Dernburg took his place in the party; leaders in West Prussia and Saxony were Heinrich Rickert, publisher of the *Danziger Zeitung*, and Dr. H. Brockhaus, part-owner of the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* of Leipzig.

⁴ Julius Hölder Papers and Wilhelm Lang Papers (Württembergische Staatsbibliothek, Stuttgart), especially Chapter 13 of Hölder's hand-written memoirs.

⁵ Contrast left-liberal leader Eugen Richter's energetic attempts to found a party paper with the National Liberal indifference on this point. Ursula Steinbrecher, *Liberale Parteiorganisation unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Linksliberalismus 1871-93*, (Köln, 1960), p. 73, and *Der Nationalliberaler Parteitag in Berlin am 18.5.1884. Stenographischer Bericht* (Berlin, 1884).

⁶ Professor Wuttke, *Die Deutschen Zeitschriften und die Entstehung der öffentlichen Meinung* (Hamburg, 1876), p. 42.

⁷ Kl. Loeffler, *Die Geschichte der katholischen Presse Deutschlands*, (München-Gladbach, 1924), p. 63. Also government reports on conservative and government-supported papers in DZA 2, *Ministerium des Innern. (Bureau P)*.

⁸ Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Wissen ist Macht — Macht ist Wissen* (Leipzig, 1876). Also, Wilhelm Bloss, *Unsere Pressezustände*, (Leipzig, 1876).

projected into the future. The press, on the other hand, adapts itself more to the moment, excites the collective consciousness on the basis of novelty — news — and demands immediate reactions. It is normally more representative of the non-traditional elements such as the German middle-class at that time, which was striving for recognition and status.⁹ The moderate liberal middle class, represented politically after 1867 by the National Liberal Party on the national scene, dominated in the press not only in the cities, but also took a large share of the readership of the more traditional countryside of Germany.¹⁰

Bismarck chose after 1867 to work with this moderate liberal middle-class in creating the new federation and later the empire. But he shared neither this class' ideas on the future of the country's politics, nor its powerful political instrument of the press.¹¹ It was the latter which both attracted and worried him more than did their rather puny political organizations.¹² Public opinion expressed and directed towards the National Liberal Party through the press could influence Bismarck's government, and he did have to reckon with it whether he wanted to or not. He rather studiously ignored the moderate liberal's political organizations, but spent much time offering their press certain journalistic benefits and secretly infiltrating it in order to insinuate his own political ideas into the liberal mind.

It is doubtful whether an analysis of the liberal political organizations offers much light on the problem of the great liberal strength in the late 1860's and early 1870's, which was so suddenly followed in the late 1870's by such a crushing defeat. After all, the smaller group of determined left-wing liberals managed to hold their own against Bismarck's energetic opposition in 1878 and 1881 with no better political organization than that of the moderate liberals who lost.¹³ Neither would that shed much light upon the great change of attitude towards politics itself in the 1880's on the part of the large moderate middle class grouped in the National

⁹ Joachim Klippel, *Geschichte des Berliner Tageblatts, 1872-80* (Dresden, 1935), p. 37.

¹⁰ Horst Heenemann, *Die Auflagehöhen der deutschen Zeitungen. Ihre Entwicklung und Probleme* (Berlin, 1929). Also DZA 1, *Reichskanzlei. Statistisches Büro des Reichspostamtes in Berlin*, vol. 1 ff.

¹¹ Herbert von Bismarck to Christopher von Tiedemann, Friedrichsruhe, 2.12.1880. DZA 1. *Reichskanzlei. Angelegenheiten der Presse im Allgemeinen*, vol. 2, pp. 88-9.

¹² The Prussian archives at both the top level and the local level contain almost nothing on liberal political organizations, whereas everyone from Bismarck through his Minister of the Interior to provincial *Oberpräsidenten*, down to the local *Landrat* spent a great deal of time observing and influencing the press.

¹³ Some of the powerful National Liberal organizations completely disappeared, but the party kept on at a lower rate of success through the newspapers. *Nationalliberaler Verein Mannheim*, DZA 1. About Munich, letter Vecchioni to Stauffenberg, Munich, August 1878, DZA 1, *Stauffenberg Papers*.

Liberal Party; from optimism in 1867 to political disappointment and disinterest by 1881.¹⁴

Liberal political organization, particularly among the moderates in the 1860's and 1870's, was still under-developed and did not undergo any substantial evolution during this period.¹⁵ It was the press, not political organization as such, which was the most powerful liberal weapon.¹⁶ The federal arrangement of the empire, the imperial law forbidding national political organizations, and the ingrained individuality and intellectual approach to politics of the middle-class all conspired to keep its political structure weak and local. Almost the only effective liberal political grouping was the local constituency election committee formed by a few leading citizens to fight an election campaign of only a few weeks' duration.¹⁷ Candidates were hard to find and rarely visited their constituencies even during the most critical election campaigns. Most of the actual campaigning was carried on by the local group through the press.¹⁸ Between elections, the elected liberal members maintained almost no contact with their electorate, feeling that they were elected to look after the whole country's interests, and not those of a certain area.¹⁹ Between elections, the party could, to all extent and purposes, be said only to have existed in its parliamentary representatives.²⁰ The National Liberal Central Election Committee was the only central body which sporadically tried to unite these representatives and the country, but even their work was termed by the party's leading organizer as "useless."²¹

Because party organizations were not well-developed, the press was the only really effective liberal organ for influencing the country and forming public opinion.²² The connection between the press and political

¹⁴ Ludwig Bamberger, "Das Recht und die Wissenschaft" (printed in the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* 22.7.1872) in *Studien und Meditationen* (Berlin, 1898), pp. 256-92. Also, Bamberger, "Verdirbt die Politik den Character?", *Ibid.*, pp. 293 - 316.

¹⁵ Even later in official party books the question of organization was still completely displaced by the idea of liberalism. Paul Harms, *Die nationalliberale Partei. Ein Gedenkblatt zu ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Berlin, 1906), pp. 16-17.

¹⁶ See the budget of the *Nationalliberaler Verein Mannheim*, DZA 1, in the late sixties and early seventies. The greatest part of its funds were spent on newspaper publicity.

¹⁷ A good criticism of this is to be found in Lammer's report to party chief Bennigsen, Hanover July 1878, DZA 1, Bennigsen Papers, 97.

¹⁸ This is clear from the papers of the leading National Liberals, now in DZA 1. See also footnote 16. Both Lasker and Bennigsen refused to visit their constituencies during the critical 1878 and 1881 campaigns. Pastor Umland to Bennigsen, Lamstadt 18.6.1878, DZA 1, Bennigsen Papers, p. 166. Also Lasker to Dietz (draft), Berlin 28.9.1881, DZA 1, Lasker Papers, p. 58.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Thomas Nipperdey, *Die Organisation der deutschen Parteien vor 1918* (Dusseldorf, 1961), p. 36.

²¹ Rickert to Stauffenberg, Danzig, 15.7.1878, in Stauffenberg Papers, p. 61.

²² Richard Jacobi, "Geschichte und Bedeutung der nationalliberaler Presse", in *Nationalliberale Blätter*, 19 (10.5.1914), pp. 455-6.

parties has been dealt with in the case of the Social Democratic and Center parties, but no history of the powerful liberal press, its relationship to the National Liberal Party and to Bismarck, has yet been written. True, histories of individual liberal papers have appeared, but only in so far as the ideas reflected in the paper's columns are concerned. A clear picture of the liberal press is without doubt more difficult to paint because it was not centrally directed, possessed no central party organ as did the Social Democratic and Center press, was founded by private initiative for profit as well as for political motives, and did not develop party disciplines.²³

German liberal politicians did not feel the need for party disciplines for they optimistically felt that history was on their side. They hoped after 1867 that by their objectivity, enlightenment and usefulness they would inexorably force Bismarck to offer them greater political responsibilities. Bismarck did not share this rosy view. In order to mobilize the liberals as political support for himself, while at the same time keeping them politically in check, he found that their political ideas and hopes had to be slowly changed. But to be effective, this change could not emanate directly from Bismarck, who might appear as a suspect source in the liberal public's eyes. People who know they differ with the source of a view tend to resist or distort the source's view on any subject. But if one differs with basically like-minded people, one still tends to feel one agrees. Therefore it was most important for Bismarck to have his ideas on politics and parties put to the public not by himself directly, but rather through the liberal papers, which agreed beforehand with, and were acceptable sources to, the liberal public. When Bismarck took the risk after 1867 of allowing public opinion a greater role in order to galvanize it for himself, he also realized that he would have to influence and regulate it through the liberal press.²⁴

In his long co-operation with the dominating moderate liberal party and press after 1867, Bismarck aimed at discrediting political parties and loyalties on the grounds that they were devious and selfish when compared to his own super-party objectivity and loyalty to the whole nation.²⁵ As he succeeded in pushing through his army legislation in the empire, and as the general pride in the economic and military as well as diplomatic strength of the empire grew, he re-interpreted with the conscious and unconscious help of the liberal press itself the past history of his relationships with the liberals and with political parties. The myth took root that Bismarck had succeeded everywhere despite the obstruction

²³ Otto Groth, *Die Zeitung* (München, 1927), vol. 2, p. 510.

²⁴ Puttkamer to Bismarck, Berlin, 13.6.1884 for a review of the press situation since 1862. DAZ 2, *Preussisches Ministerium des Innern (Bureau P.) Verhandlungen über das Eingehen der Provinzialkorrespondenz*. Also, DZA 2, *Preussisches Staatsministerium. Centralstelle für Presseangelegenheiten*, vol. 1 (1860) ff.

²⁵ This sort of opinion about parties can be clearly seen in Moritz Busch, *Tagebuchblätter* (Leipzig, 1899), vol. 2, pp. 366-7.

of the political parties, which were too selfish and narrow to contemplate the good of the whole nation. In the face of earlier liberal attacks, he had managed to unify the country almost alone. He had then permitted the parties, in this case the moderate liberals, to co-operate with him for the benefit of the country as a whole — and not for the benefit of any one political group. Thus the budding development towards responsible cabinet government based upon political parties was nipped, and the liberals were disarmed.²⁶

Instead, Bismarck built up personal loyalty to himself, trust, some love, and fear, and he did this largely by infiltrating the strong liberal press with his ideas. He depended upon both the willing co-operation of the liberals, and upon an intricate and secret press machine to achieve this end.²⁷ In this he was so successful that as soon as the National Liberals found themselves in conflict with Bismarck again at the end of the seventies, they discovered that public opinion — and often their own as well — was no longer what it used to be, but had been distorted, managed, and manipulated until no opposition to Bismarck could be gathered together through a call to party loyalty.²⁸ The moderate liberals had lost their own faith and their hold on the German public. The great National Liberal Party, in the late sixties and early seventies supreme in Reichstag, state, and provincial chambers and in the press, became a tragic figure: it had managed neither to build up its own strength to grasp power for itself, but had by its co-operation only created this for Bismarck.²⁹

In this way the legend, which still exists today, took root in Germany that to take a "party standpoint" upon a question was to show a lack of independent thought and objectivity. This was spread by Bismarck's band of admiring liberal and other writers in both the press and the learned milieus with striking results. Even before the final break with the chancellor after 1878, the National Liberal Party found itself in an increasingly weak moral and political position for striking bargains with the government. At crucial moments, when Reichstag members needed journalistic and public support, the press and public let them down. Weakened by their tactics of compromise in the Reichstag and by a heavily-infiltrated press which explained these compromises in a positive fashion in order to cover the politicians' actions and not to lose its valuable

²⁶ Lothar Bucher to Moritz Busch, Berlin, 27.7.1873, quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 403 ff.

²⁷ For a criticism of this connection by a National Liberal, see H. B. Oppenheim, "Leiden und Sünden der Tagespresse" and "Aus einer französischen Charakteristik der Berliner Zeitungspresse" in *Gegenwart*, 19.7.1873.

²⁸ A pamphlet written anonymously by an editor of the National Liberal daily *Nationalzeitung*, Reuter, complaining of this process, cost him his position when his identity was discovered. Anon., *Nationalliberale Partei, Nationalliberale Presse und höheres Gentlemanthum. Von einem Reichsfeind* (Berlin, 1876).

²⁹ Theodor Heuss, *Einführung* to Otto von Bismarck, *Gedanken und Erinnerungen* (Berlin, 1951), p. 21.

connections with Bismarck, the National Liberals as a party found themselves in an ever more vulnerable position. Thus Bismarck gradually educated the liberals in national rather than in party loyalties. His system of press infiltration and management of public opinion contributed enormously to this end, and can best be seen by studying briefly the German press, which was overwhelmingly liberal, and Bismarck's own press organization.³⁰

The wide dispersion throughout Germany of the large number of relatively small papers, the lack of one national news center, and the weak financial position of many of the papers permitted Bismarck to attack the problem from a central and advantageous position. Although a few capital or provincial dailies developed a certain local strength, none ever became a truly national paper as in other countries.³¹ While Berlin did become a national journalistic center, it functioned as a news-gathering and relay center rather than as a newspaper metropolis. This dispersion of the German press was to remain one of its characteristics: in 1878 there were over 4,000 papers and journals in Germany, and by 1933 the figure had not sunk but risen to almost 5,000.³²

Average circulation was very low, about 2,500; barely a hundred papers in the 1880's exceeded the figure of 10,000, and only five that of 40,000.³³ In comparison, the *London Daily News* had already exceeded the daily figure of 150,000. The largest paper in the mid-eighties was the advertising king of Germany Mosse's *Berliner Tageblatt*, a fairly non-political paper with a slight liberal bias to attract the middle-class readers, which almost reached the figure of 70,000, double that of its nearest Berlin competitor. But its circulation was limited to Berlin, and it became a prototype for the largely apolitical newspaper conceived of as advertising media.³⁴ Competition between newspapers was moderate for both technical and sales reasons. Rotary presses enabling large printings were not installed until the eighties generally. Circulation campaigns were further limited by the fact that subscriptions were not taken out through the newspapers in the main, but rather through the Post Office or independent subscription agencies which did not give the papers lists of the subscribers, but only ordered a certain number for delivery by the agency. Public sale of newspapers was almost non-existent.

³⁰ Reuter in his anonymous pamphlet (see footnote 28) wrote on pp. 25-6, "The 'independent' National Liberal press is not the press of the National Liberal Party... It is simply the government's, and especially the chancellor's press."

³¹ Gerhard Muser, *Statistische Untersuchung über die Zeitungen Deutschlands, 1885-1914* (Leipzig, 1918), pp. 22-3, 38-9.

³² Reliable newspaper statistics were almost completely lacking until after 1918. DZA 1, *Reichskanzlei. Angelegenheiten der Presse im Allgemein*, vol. 1, 1878-80, contains some government estimates. Also, Robert W. Keyserlingk, *Haltung und politische Richtung der deutschen Zeitungen 1933* (unpublished report for the United Press), (Berlin, 1933), p. 36.

³³ Gerhard Muser, *Statistische Untersuchung*, pp. 55-7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Only four newspaper kiosks existed in Berlin in 1878, and similar public sales were forbidden by law in most other centers.³⁵

Government press regulations further limited the newspapers' expansion, at least until the press law of 1874 was passed. The government had powers of censorship and confiscation until that time, and in a limited way even after. Until 1874 it also exercised a great financial influence upon the press through the tax on each individual newspaper copy, and the financial bond of good behavior on behalf of the responsible editor deposited with the government. The tax applied uniformly to the circulation, and the bond could be withheld if an editor was convicted by the courts. Until 1874, from one quarter to one third of a paper's total income went to cover this newspaper tax.³⁶

Only with the passage of this imperial press law did newspapers become financially more stable.³⁷ The liberal Reichstag accepted the law despite its several illiberal remnants of post-printing censorship and confiscation, and editorial responsibility for all written material, because it was better than no law at all on the national level as before, and also because the heavy tax and bond were dropped. The liberals proved to be justified in their hope that these residual police powers would not be used by the imperial and local governments against them, but rather against their common enemies, the Social Democrats and the Center Party.³⁸ Even Bismarck unwillingly came to the conclusion that these powers were insufficient to curb real press opposition. He realized later that the fines administered against convicted editors and newspapers, especially in the case of any liberal papers, were minimal in comparison with the notoriety and added circulation which they gained through prosecution.³⁹

While the financial instability of the mass of small German papers gave Bismarck a convenient key to the editorial offices, the large liberal press was generally not so pliable because its older connections with the business community gave it solid financial backing even in the pre-1874 days before the press law.⁴⁰ In fact, the earliest German newspapers had grown from merchant reports in the sixteenth century, and the connection

³⁵ *Deutscher Journalistentag, Bericht des Vororts Breslau über die Verhandlungen des 6. Journalistentages am 9. und 10. Juli 1871* (Breslau, 1872), pp. 7-8.

³⁶ Joachim Klippel, *Geschichte des Berliner Tageblatts*, pp. 95-6. Also, Alfred Oelke, *100 Jahre Breslauer Zeitung, 1820-1920* (Breslau, 1921), pp. 205 & 207.

³⁷ Until this time there had been a Confederation press law adopted by some, but not all of the German states. First government draft of a new imperial law by Eulenburg, Berlin 19.9.1871. DZA 1, *Reichskanzlei. Das Pressegewerbe*, vol. 1, 1867-73, pp. 61-2.

³⁸ This is clearly seen from the local government files. For a survey of Bavaria to 1880, see *Bavarian Ministerium des Innern*, 65613.

³⁹ Puttkamer to Emperor William, Berlin, 4.11.1881, DZA 2, *Königliches Geheim Civil-Cabinet. Zeitungen und Zeitschriften*, vol. 1, 1861-98, p. 42.

⁴⁰ Robert Brunhuber, *Das deutsche Zeitungswesen* (Leipzig, 1908), p. 100.

remained strong ever since. It was re-inforced by the advent of advertising on a large scale in the nineteenth century, and by the public sale of stocks and bonds. The famous *Kölnische Zeitung*, started the first quick German news service in the 1840's by carrier pigeon between Paris and Cologne to enable news from the Paris money-market to arrive in Cologne within sixteen hours.⁴¹ The first wire service, the origin of the famous Wolff Continental Telegraphic Company, was started in 1849 by the same paper, and was used almost exclusively until the 1860's for stock and market reports. Free trade and political liberalism became identified in the sixties, and this alliance was reflected in the newspaper field.⁴²

But few newspapers even after 1874 felt themselves to be in a sufficiently strong financial position to afford much outside help in the form of full wire news service or reporters in the main centers who could pen their own lengthy, scholarly, and reflective articles typical of the times.⁴³ Only one provincial paper, the *Kölnische Zeitung*, had its own bureau and wire service from Berlin in the early 1870's.⁴⁴ Most provincial papers either depended on a very brief wire service, printed commercial newsletters, and a few badly-paid correspondents — usually other editors or parliamentarians — in other centers, or simply copied the news from other papers.⁴⁵ The large and relatively wealthy liberal Berlin daily *Nationalzeitung* could for a long time not even afford its own reporters in the Prussian Diet or the Reichstag in the same city. By far the most common, and certainly the cheapest, news source was the other newspapers from which large excerpts were simply lifted with the introduction that the following article appeared yesterday in such and such a paper.⁴⁶ This meant in effect that the few larger and wealthy papers paid for their own news, and that the mass of smaller ones existed by employing scissors and paste, thereby paying virtually nothing for theirs.⁴⁷ This also meant that the few technically-advanced and well-informed newspapers had a real influence throughout the country far in excess of their actual circulation figures because their articles were so extensively quoted

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁴² L. Krieger, *Liberal Ideas and Institutions in the German Era of Unification* (unpublished thesis, Yale, 1949), pp. 56-8, 136-7.

⁴³ The continental press generally still today differs from the press in the English-speaking world in this respect.

⁴⁴ Dumont-Schauberg, *Geschichte der Kölnischen Zeitung* (Köln, n.d.), pp. 9, 13, 65.

⁴⁵ The papers of Petzet, editor of the National Liberal *Breslauer Zeitung*, and later of the moderate liberal *Ausburger* (later *Münchener*) *Allgemeine Zeitung*, contains an extensive collection of articles he wrote for other leading German liberal papers. Petzetiana (Bavarian Staatsbibliothek), VII, 13.

⁴⁶ Wilhelm Bloss, socialist author of *Unsere Pressezustände*, relates that his first newspaper job was on the *Schwawälder Bote*, which was made up entirely of such scissors and paste work.

⁴⁷ No laws existed against this sort of copying, although the wealthy papers discussed the possibility of one at their annual journalists' meetings. W. Marrs, "Etwas für den nächsten Journalistentag", in *Grenzboten*, 1873 (1), pp. 473ff & 507ff.

by other papers. As all articles were printed anonymously, once a piece had appeared in a large paper, it became impossible to trace its author elsewhere, and the views expressed were taken simply as those of the paper itself. Therefore, if Bismarck or someone else could insinuate an article into one of the leading papers, his chances of having it quoted verbatim by the many small papers, or even by other large ones, were very good.

With the wealthier liberal and nationalistic press prepared to cooperate in instituting centralistic reforms and in attacking the "enemies of the empire," Bismarck could gain a decided influence without resorting to crasser methods of bribes or financial support, as was so often the case with the smaller, weaker, or conservative press. He possessed a complicated and hidden press system based upon two main centers, neither of which had to be overly large in view of the ease with which one insinuated article could achieve almost national circulation. These two centers were the Literary Bureau of the Prussian government, and the Central Office of the Foreign Office. Funnelling out from these two offices were numerous other supposedly independent news services which regularly sent out special articles, newsletters, and wire-services with which Bismarck could supply both the large and the weaker press of the country with government-slanted news and reports.⁴⁸ He had the secret funds to run these agencies and to supply the press with these services.⁴⁹ And perhaps most important for the large papers, he controlled the most fertile news source of the day, namely the government and its policies.

Bismarck himself was an extremely competent journalist. He was still busy educating the nation through his writing when he wrote his memoirs, memoirs which he knew not only recorded history, but also made it in the sense of interpreting it.⁵⁰ He was proud of his journalistic ability, and as an old man fondly reminisced about his first article he wrote while still a youth in a local county paper in defense of hunting as a sport.⁵¹ He had recommended the foundation of a conservative paper in Berlin to combat the overwhelming liberal press as early as 1847, a year before such a project finally materialized. Once the *Kreuzzeitung* had been called to life to combat the revolutions of 1848, he became its chief political and satirical writer.⁵² That he was behind much of the political polemic

⁴⁸ These became known as *Waschzettel* or laundry lists, a term coined by the leader of the Progressives, Eugen Richter. Leopold Ullstein, *Eugen Richter als Publizist und Herausgeber* (Leipzig, 1930), pp. 102-3.

⁴⁹ The famous *Reptilienfonds* appear to have played less of a role than was commonly believed. The Prussian Minister of the Interior had two secret but annually-voted funds which amply covered the press work he had to do. The most he received from the *Reptilienfonds* during the 1870's was a mere 26,000 marks in 1873-74. Rössler report to the Minister of Finance von Bitter, Berlin 20.5.1882. DZA 2. *Pr. Min. des Innern (Bureau P)*. 1882- on, p. 29.

⁵⁰ Theodor Heuss, in introduction to Bismarck's *Gedanken und Erinnerungen*, pp. 26-7.

⁵¹ Moritz Busch, *Tagebuchblätter*, vol. 1, p. 23.

⁵² Bernhard Stude, *Bismarck als Mitarbeiter der Kreuzzeitung in den Jahren 1848-9* (Diss, Bonn, 1903). 125 of Bismarck's articles are collected here.

in the press during his career as Prussian Prime Minister and Imperial Chancellor was clear to many people who read his leading articles in the governmental papers, and suspected him behind many others. Even his political opponents recognized his great journalistic talent, as can be seen by this excerpt from his obituary by August Stein in the democratic *Frankfurter Zeitung*, a paper usually violently opposed to Bismarck:

The master of style was really an old journalist: he began and ended as one. He saw the power of the press and used it, no matter how unfriendly and impatient he was personally with his colleagues (sic!) of the newspaper profession.⁵³

From the time of his entry into public life he was often enough the subject of acrimonious comment in the oppositional press. The acerbity of his reaction always surprised his calmer assistants, who somehow felt that he should be above this sort of anger. Christoph von Tiedemann, head of the imperial Chancellery in the late seventies, has left us his comments on this subject:

Even the most insignificant newspaper attack excited him to defense. He was forever prepared to repay a pin-prick with a sword-thrust. It cannot be denied that his joy of combat often led him to fire upon sparrows with a cannon. If some small local sheet (*Käseblatt*) from the backwoods of Pomerania fell into his hands at Varzin or Friedrichsruhe, it could occasion a violent series of polemical articles.⁵⁴

His opinion of journalists was never expressed publicly in very favourable terms, and he refused to invite them to his famous parliamentary soirees in Berlin unless they were at the same time members of parliament — which meant in effect that many journalists did attend.⁵⁵ Yet he did not hesitate to use them, or to spend much of his time writing for the press himself. He came to learn of the corruptibility of the press while still a young diplomat when he was stationed in Frankfurt in the 1850's as Prussian ambassador to the German Confederation.⁵⁶ There he became acquainted with the Austrian system of ubiquitous press intervention, influence, and bribery as it functioned against Prussia. He studied the sums involved, the methods used, and came to realize the very positive political gain to be had from apparently independent support in the press. It was at this time that Bismarck started his first secretive press organization by turning the Austrian methods against them.⁵⁷

⁵³ *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 2.8.1898. Reprinted in, August Stein, *Irenaeus. Aufsätze von August Stein* (Frankfurt, a.m., 1921), p. 35.

⁵⁴ Christoph von Tiedemann, *Sechs Jahre Chef der Reichskanzlei unter dem Fürsten Bismarck. Erinnerungen* (Leipzig, 1909), vol. 2, p. 496.

⁵⁵ Heinrich von Poschinger, *Fürst Bismarck and die Parlamentarier* (Breslau, 1895), vol. 1, p. 8.

⁵⁶ Heinz Schulze, *Die Presse im Urteil Bismarcks* (Leipzig, 1931), pp. 105 & 115.

⁵⁷ Bismarck was appointed to Frankfurt in 1851, and one of his main jobs was to run the Prussian press office there dealing in secret press influence. See Kohl, *Bismarck Jahrbuch*, IV (1898), pp. 1-156 for 33 letters from Bismarck to the press center in the Foreign Office in Berlin, and 116 letters to Bismarck from that office.

When later Prussian ambassador in France, he also had the chance to study Napoleon III's extensive use of the press for his own ends.⁵⁸

Upon his return to Prussia in 1862 as Prime Minister, it became clear to him that the government was extremely weak in the area of the domestic press, which was under strong liberal control.⁵⁹ The conflict with the Prussian chamber taught him a lesson about the connection between the press, public opinion, and electoral trends which was not lost upon him as election after election returned majorities hostile to his policies. The Prussian, and later the imperial, constitution gave him a supreme position in the institutions of government, but it was obvious that he could not control public opinion without the liberal press. If Bismarck were to become as secure as he wished in the political arena and to employ public opinion for himself, it would be necessary to gain influence in the press.

It is doubtful if there was another statesman of his century who followed the press as closely and was such an avid newspaper reader as was Bismarck. From his early days in power when he had to censor the king's newspaper reading for fear that he would lose faith in his new Prime Minister, to his days of forced retirement and even to the very day of his death, he constantly searched newspapers for information and opinion.⁶⁰ At Varzin, his estate where he spent so many summers away from Berlin, his secretaries were forced to suffer through most of the night as Bismarck first ate his usual midnight supper, and then read, pencilled, and discarded huge heaps of newspapers. Having completed his journalistic survey by early morn, Bismarck then summoned his sleepy secretary before going to bed himself, and dictated articles, démentis, and instructions for the ministers.⁶¹

Bismarck had three different types of press which he used according to his purposes; the official press, the semi-official press, and finally the supposedly independent press. The official imperial, Prussian, state or provincial, and local papers (*Amtblätter*) were fairly numerous, but were of little mass political effectiveness until Bismarck politicized them after 1862, because of their dull and official nature.⁶² Even after 1864 these papers were not very highly considered even by the government in so far as their political influence was concerned, but often they were the only type

⁵⁸ The documents dealing with this press system were published by Jules Favre and Thiers after 1871.

⁵⁹ Eulenburg to von Massenbach (Government President in Dusseldorf) Berlin, 11.10.1863. *Regierung Düsseldorf. Präsidialakten*, 704 (Presse).

⁶⁰ Bismarck, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 7, p. 175.

⁶¹ Busch, *Tagebuchblätter*, vol. 1, p. xix.

⁶² The process began in the spring of 1863. In a memorandum to all government presidents from Eulenburg dated Berlin 9.2.1863, it is clear that the government feels it has no support in the press, and must start its own papers and politicize its present local papers. *Reg. Dü. Präs.* 702.

of paper available to officials.⁶³ These included on the top level the official *Reichs-und Preussischer Staatsanzeiger* of Berlin, which was used mainly for the publication of legislation and regulations, but which also contained some political articles as well. Ministries, the armed forces and other government offices had similar small official papers with a similar lack of influence upon public opinion.⁶⁴

More difficult to define and to discover were the semi-official (*offiziös*) papers, journalistic organs in which the government exercised a secretive but deciding influence by means of financial support or control. This sort of influence varied from refund of the newspaper tax or bond before 1874, to reduced postal rates, government advertising, free news through the government-controlled newsletters, correspondences or wire service, to outright secret ownership or financial assistance.⁶⁵ On the local level, several hundred small country papers (*Kreisblätter*), although nominally independent, come under this heading. In return for government advertising, for which they sometimes even paid as it increased the circulation, the government felt called upon to dictate their political line.⁶⁶ On the national level Bismarck controlled two large Berlin papers through financial support, the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* and the *Post*. The public always suspected a close connection between these papers and Bismarck, but Bismarck always denied that there was anything more between them than a gentleman's agreement to give him some free space from time to time.⁶⁷ In fact the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* was bought outright with government money in 1862, and was contractually tied to representing government policy.⁶⁸ The *Post* was taken over by a consortium of Free Conservatives in 1873, and also put at Bismarck's complete disposal.⁶⁹ Among other articles for which these two Bismarck papers became famous, was the "War in Sight" series of 1875, which started the crisis of that year.

⁶³ Their circulations and policy was usually totally government supported and directed — and therefore quite dependably dull. *Oberpräsidialakten (Koblenz — Staatsarchiv)*, 403 - 9637 (Contracts for *Amtsblätter*).

⁶⁴ The government attempted to keep the government ads in its own official papers, but here it had a difficult time as there were simply too few or were felt to be of too restricted a circulation. Printed memorandum from vice-president of Prussian Cabinet to *Oberregierungpräsidenten* Berlin 16.12.1874. *Ibid.*, 403 - 7148.

⁶⁵ This was not totally unknown to discerning people of the times, but its exact structure and those influenced by it were at the most suspected.

⁶⁶ They were somewhat harder for the government to control in some cases, Eulenburg to Reg. Pres. Von Massenbach, Berlin, 22.7.63. *Reg. Dü. Präs.* 703.

⁶⁷ Bismarck speech in the Prussian Diet 22.1.1864. *Reden*, vol. 2, p. 282.

⁶⁸ The preliminary contract between Brass and the brothers Ohlendorff of 1872 shows clearly that its political line was directed by the government. One of the three original owners was Liebknecht, who left with the second partner when they discovered that Brass had sold out to Bismarck. Joachim Boener, "Die Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung", *Zeitungswissenschaft*, 1 (1926), pp. 92 & 73.

⁶⁹ Brass, ex-editor of the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine*, became *Post* editor in 1873. Ludwig Salomon, *Geschichte des deutschen Zeitungswesens* (Oldenbourg & Leipzig, 1906), vol. 3, p. 668.

Beyond this semi-official level, the government's press contacts became more hidden and extremely difficult to follow. The files of the imperial and Prussian governments contain many examples of requests from papers for financial or free news support in return for public defense of the government and its policies.⁷⁰ In order to service these demands and to co-ordinate his other press organs with which he infiltrated the independent press, Bismarck used his two press offices, the Literary Bureau and the Central Office.

Directly connected with Bismarck until 1875-76 was the Central Office of the Foreign Office. On the ground floor of the old Foreign Office at 76 Wilhelmstrasse there were a few small offices where worked Bismarck's most direct press assistants, Lothar Bucher, Moritz Busch, and later Professor Aegidi of Bonn University.⁷¹ Above them worked the "chief," who summoned his faithful scribes by butler to attend him upstairs with pencil and paper in hand whenever he felt the need of taking to print in leading German papers. These articles were usually then distributed on a more select and individual manner to the leading German liberal papers, who could then be counted upon to be quoted by the mass of smaller papers.⁷² Bismarck himself usually corrected the drafts before they were sent out. Each noon a member of this office met with a member of the second press center, the Literary Bureau of the Prussian cabinet, in order to pass on the "chief's" latest instructions for the provincial press.

The Literary Bureau had been started in the early 1840's under another name to gather news summaries for the government and to influence the press.⁷³ But it did not really flourish until Bismarck came to power, and until he appointed such men as Wilhelm Wehrenpfennig and Professor Rössler as its bureau heads.⁷⁴ The Literary Bureau attracted a small group of ill-paid writers who were looking for financial security while remaining writers. These men wrote articles under the bureau head's direction for a minimal salary, and could then sell these articles to any provincial papers with which they could take up contact. These articles appeared to provincial editors as an independent writer's own handiwork, and appeared to emanate at the same time from one with good news connections in the capital. This way the writers pocketed two fees, one from the Literary Bureau which paid them according to the number of provincial papers with which they were connected, and another

⁷⁰ In the files of the *Pr. Min. d. Innern. Die Haltung der Presse.*

⁷¹ For Bucher's life see, Heinrich von Poschinger, *Ein Achtundvierziger. Lothar Buchers Lebenswerk*, 3 vols (1890-94).

⁷² Moritz Busch gives lists of papers, *Tagebuchblätter*, vol. 1, p. 15.

⁷³ Memorandum containing earlier history of the bureau, Berlin, 25.8.1857. *Pr. Min. d. Innern. (Bureau P). Die Organization des Literarischen Cabinets*, pp. 58-103.

⁷⁴ *Pr. Min. des Innern. Central Bureau. Dr. Rössler, 1860-1894.*

from the provincial papers themselves.⁷⁵ One of the best known of these writers was Theodor Fontane, who was employed by this bureau in England and Germany, with a short break in the reactionary 1850's, from 1849 to 1883.⁷⁶ Outside experts were also encouraged to write for bureau distribution, and included many eminent liberals and scholars such as the famous legal professor from Munich and Old Catholic leader Friedrich von Schulte.⁷⁷

Following the 1875 "War in Sight" crisis, Bismarck re-organized these two offices in order to gain a better and more direct control over them.⁷⁸ The Central Office was directed to influence only the foreign press, and to keep out of domestic news areas. The Literary Bureau was given the job, under its new head Professor Rössler, of covering the whole area of domestic newspapers. Bismarck's personal press help now moved into his newly-formed chancellery office, where the head of the chancellery office and Bismarck's son Herbert functioned as his press assistants.⁷⁹

Bismarck ran several newsletters and correspondences through these various press centers, which had a great influence in the German press and were considered by editors as being independent reports or surveys. The *Englische Correspondenz*, for instance, was published privately and sold in Germany as a survey of English press comments. In actual fact it had been bought out in the early seventies by Bismarck, and was under direct Foreign Office control and direction. All the large papers subscribed to it.⁸⁰ Various other leading domestic newsletters were under Bismarck's control as well, the most important being the *Provinzial Correspondenz* put out through the Literary Bureau for the provincial press, and the *Oldenburg Correspondenz*, the country's leading summary of parliamentary happenings in Berlin.

The *Provinzial Correspondenz* was founded by Bismarck in 1863 in order to put the government's case to the public through the local provincial and official press with some sort of central direction during the

⁷⁵ *Rechnungen über den Fonds für Presse Angelegenheiten... Pr. Min. des Innern. Verwaltung...*

⁷⁶ His personnel file in *Pr. Staatsministerium. Central-stelle für Presse-Angelegenheiten.*

⁷⁷ Aegidi to Schulte, Berlin, 6.7.1871. *Schulte Papers* (Munich), 17.

⁷⁸ Hans Herfeld, *Die deutsch-französische Kriegsgefahr von 1875* (Berlin, 1922), p. 21.

⁷⁹ *Reichskanzlei. Reichstagswahlen (1878-on). Also Reichskanzlei. Angelegenheiten der Presse im Allgemein.* According to these documents, Herbert Bismarck was active in the 1879 Prussian and 1881 Reichstag elections. Walter Bussmann in *Staatssekretär Herbert von Bismarck* (Göttingen, 1964), p. 21, gives the impression that he was active only in the latter election.

⁸⁰ *Pr. Staatsmin. Berichte über die Verwaltung der Continental Telegraph Compagnie... insbesondere die Anweisungen über die finanzielle Beteiligung des Preussischen Staates*, vol. 1, 1869-80.

constitutional conflict in Prussia.⁸¹ It was quite openly connected with the government in the eyes of those who knew about it, mainly the local officials through whom it was distributed to trustworthy editors. But its influence rose amazingly in the post-1867 period of liberal press co-operation with the chancellor until its circulation shot up from the original few hundred to 30,000 in 1869 and over 100,000 by 1880 as more and more papers included it as an insert. As its circulation rose, so too did its deficit, as it was distributed in the main free of charge. This deficit and the salary of those connected with the newsletter, all of whom were Literary Bureau employees, were covered by the Prussian government's funds.⁸²

By far the most important other newsletter was that run by the famous and talented parliamentary reporter in Berlin, Karl Oldenburg.⁸³ He was considered the doyen of the Prussian press gallery in the sixties, and supplied all leading papers with his concise and objective reports of parliamentary proceedings.⁸⁴ But during the seventies he came under Bismarck's direct financial influence, and by 1877 was on a regular government salary through the Literary Bureau.⁸⁵ By giving this newsletter first crack at all governmental speeches in the Reichstag and in the Prussian Diet before all other similar organs, Bismarck made this newsletter essential to all papers and also made sure that his statements would get full coverage. It was made a condition that papers taking this service were not permitted to edit the complete version of government statements included in the Oldenburg newsletter.⁸⁶ This further guaranteed the government full coverage, leaving often the smallest amount of space possible for the opposition's case.⁸⁷

Certainly one of the most important links in this chain which so limited freedom of the press was the Wolff Continental Telegraphic Company. Started as a private venture by the liberal editor of the *Kölnische Zeitung* in 1849, it was bought out by Prussian government in two stages between 1866 and 1869 when it looked like a take-over of that company was about to take place by either Reuters of England or Havas of France. In return for capital from the Prussian government

⁸¹ Decker to Eulenburg, Berlin, 24.9.1863. *Pr. Staatsmin. Central Stelle für Presse Angelegenheiten*, vol. 1. Also Puttkamer to Bismarck, Berlin, 13.6.1884. *Pr. Min. d. Innern (Bureau P). Verhandlungen über das Eingehen der Provinzialkorrespondenz*.

⁸² *Pr. Staatsmin. (Literarisches Bureau). Verwaltung des Fonds für Presse Angelegenheiten*.

⁸³ Robert Brunhuber, *Das deutsche Zeitungswesen* (Leipzig, 1908), p. 56.

⁸⁴ Paul Lindau, *Nur Erinnerungen (Berlin & Stuttgart)*, 1916-17, pp. 242-3.

⁸⁵ *Pr. Staatsmin (Literarisches Bureau). Verwaltung des Fonds*, vol. 3, 1877-78.

⁸⁶ *Pr. Cabinet Minutes*. Berlin, 2.1.1882. *Reichskanzlei. Angelegenheiten der Presse im Allgemeinen*, vol. 4, 1882-4, pp. 205-6.

⁸⁷ Following one of his or one of his minister's speeches, Bismarck was often to be seen in the parliamentary restaurant correcting the stenographic reports for the Oldenburg Correspondenz. August Stein, *Irenaeus*, pp. 35-6.

and priority over all other wire news services on the royal (and later imperial) telegraph lines, the Prussian government was given complete control over the agency's staff and political news reporting.⁸⁸ All government offices inside Germany, and many outside the country as well, received this wire service free, and the government had the further right of suggesting private papers in which it was interested for a similar free service.⁸⁹ As the Continental Telegraph Company thus had a virtual monopoly of wire services in Germany, there was little alternative for any leading paper but to take it if it wished to offer full coverage to its readers. This news monopoly and the government's influence upon the coverage was deprecated by the liberal journalists, who tried once to organize their own co-operative service upon the model of the American Press, but failed.⁹⁰

The influence of Bismarck's secret press apparatus cannot be underestimated. With news initiative largely in his hands, and the majority of the liberal press willing to co-operate with him in most matters, it is hardly to be wondered that he was successful in insinuating his ideas on politics and parties into the public mind. Through his press set-up he could have an article printed in a domestic or foreign newspaper one day, and then quote it in the next day's reports as independent opinion or reporting. The press re-printed much itself, and with the Bismarckian apparatus planting and re-planting its wares in this fashion, it was not difficult to initiate press campaigns or spread ideas around the country with the help of the large liberal press.

Such articles and reports were fashioned under Bismarck's central control — although this does not mean that he encountered no problems with those in his press machine who mis-interpreted or slanted his instructions. Constant repetition of his strong feelings about history, parties, loyalty to the monarchy, middle-class ideas on parliamentarianism, a strong Germany, and his role in government was not without some effect upon the great mass of the liberal reading public. When the National Liberal Party was forced into opposition to Bismarck in the late seventies, its press soon abandoned it and pleaded for a return to Bismarck.⁹¹ The ability of the press, and later of the party, to withstand pressures put on them by the chancellor had been emasculated by Bismarck's effective infiltration of their press.

⁸⁸ *Pr. Staatsmin. Berichte über die Verwaltung der Continental Telegraph Compagnie.*

⁸⁹ Further contracts and directives in, *Pr. Min. d. Innern. (Bureau P). Der telegraphischer Nachrichtenverkehr, 1869-1877.*

⁹⁰ *Das projectierte Telegraphische Bureaux der deutschen Presse. Bericht für den VIII. Journalistentag zu Hamburg* (Posen, 1873).

⁹¹ The 1878 Reichstag election was the first in which Bismarck actively participated. Until then the National Liberals and Free Conservatives had done most of his work for him. *Reichskanzlei. Wahlangelegenheiten im Allgemeinen*, vol. 1, 1867-1877.

Just as Bismarck lost much of his political effectiveness and manoeuvrability when he broke and discarded the large and willing National Liberal Party, so did his press system evidence new basic weaknesses without a strong and willing liberal press onto which to attach itself in the eighties.⁹² When the moderate liberals in disappointment quit the field of politics in large numbers and their press no longer could be relied upon to support the government, Bismarck was forced to re-organize his press machine on a much more modest basis. The moderate middle-class had permitted itself and its press to be used by Bismarck against itself, and had not been willing to recognize the real power and ability which Bismarck possessed, but which it was not to grasp for itself.

⁹² Bismarck to Puttkamer, Berlin, 9.6.1881. *Reichskanzlei. Angelegenheiten der Presse im Allgemein*, vol. 2, 1880-81, p. 162.