

ETHICS AND THE MEDIA:  
A STUDY OF JOURNALISTS IN  
EASTERN GERMANY  
BEFORE AND AFTER  
REUNIFICATION

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## **Summary**

### **Ethics and the Media: A Study of Journalists in Eastern Germany Before and After Reunification**

**Jonathan Paul McHaffie**

This thesis examines the working conditions and practices of Eastern German journalists before and after the reunification of the two post-war German states. It explores the development of the press in both the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany and the strengths and weaknesses of both systems.

Building on this work, the thesis then examines the experiences of the journalists after 1989. It looks at the problems which have arisen in particular for the journalists, and the way in which these problems have been dealt with. The approach of the journalists to these problems demonstrates the way in which they view their profession and the responsibility associated with their work.

The reasons the journalists had for complying with the political instructions they received in the GDR are very complex and diverse. Some are the result of their upbringing and experiences, while others are very practical and relate to the conditions in which citizens of the GDR found themselves. The reasons each journalist had are never exactly the same. The fact that the journalists did generally comply does not, however, mean that they were unaffected by the compromises they had to make with their own principles. They were often troubled by their consciences, but in time, they learned to live with this as the price which had to be paid for their decision to stay in a career which did afford them some pleasures, and their consciences became desensitised towards the expectations which were placed upon them.

When, in 1989, they suddenly found themselves in a situation in which they had tremendous professional freedom, their consciences were reawakened, and they realised that they had the opportunity to remain true to some of their personal values in a way which had not been the case in the GDR. However, they soon learned that this freedom was being compromised by

the economic demands of the free market. Initially, they reacted strongly against the new pressures which they experienced, but in time, they grew accustomed to the new situation, and, as in the GDR, their consciences became a less significant factor in the decisions they had to make in their professional lives.

The way in which the journalists view the new challenges they face in their work is examined using interview material. This provides insights into the way in which the journalists regard the new experiences they have had since 1989, and the way in which they would like to deal with the new way of working. At the same time, the practical limitations which they face in their new working conditions are seen, and the similarities and differences between their work in the GDR and in the new Federal Republic become clear. Despite all the less positive developments since 1989, none of them wishes to return to the old system.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

There are few subjects about which everybody has an opinion. When it comes to the media, everybody has a view. Some would say that the media go too far in intruding into people's lives, would have an opinion as to whether the media should declare political allegiances, or whether they should be controlled more forcibly by the state. Certainly, almost everybody is affected by the media, whether by receiving information from newspapers, television, radio, or newer technologies, or from being the target of media interest.

The role of the media has always been unclear. For some, the media should be a mirror on society, giving interested individuals information about what is happening in the world and informing them about the effects these events have on their personal lives, and why they matter. For others, the media should be a very pro-active force in the world, setting rather than following agendas. They see the media as being another powerful force in a country, shaping in part the future of each country they touch. The truth undoubtedly lies somewhere between these two ideas, as is reflected in the functions the media in Germany are expected to fulfill.<sup>1</sup> The media are acknowledged as having a degree of power through their ability to achieve widespread coverage of an issue, but much of their work involves merely passing on information about events without any substantial comment being added. In some ways, the media both reflect and contribute to the very nature of the state itself.

Some of the world's most famous leaders have involved themselves in questions relating to the media and the ways in which they can and should be controlled. Joseph Stalin created a media system for the Soviet Union which integrated the media and their power into a political framework, and this model was followed in the German Democratic Republic (GDR).<sup>2</sup> In the GDR, the media were controlled centrally. They had limited freedom to make their own decisions and to print the stories they considered to be important. The media

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<sup>1</sup> Meyn (1992), pp 8-12

<sup>2</sup> Weber (1988), p30



were seen as a powerful weapon in the class war against the capitalist system, and this weapon was used widely.<sup>3</sup> There were attempts to control the flow of information into the GDR. Foreign newspapers were not available to the ordinary citizen, but radio waves could not easily be stopped. Jamming was introduced to stop the GDR citizens from receiving Western stations, but despite this, the advances of the media could not be halted by the political will of the ruling *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED). The GDR's borders were violated by Western television, and in time, the SED gave up on its attempts to stop its citizens from watching such programmes. Where to begin with, the SED sought solutions in hindering its citizens from receiving Western television, it later took the approach of accepting the reality of Western media intrusion into its supposedly sovereign borders and attempted to counteract the messages which were being received by its citizens. But their policies served merely to discredit their own media in the long run.<sup>4</sup> The messages of Western television and radio were believed above those of the GDR, and in time, the position became untenable. This lack of credibility of the GDR media played a role in the events of the summer of 1989, when the citizens of the GDR took to the streets demanding greater freedoms for themselves to travel outside of the socialist block, and for the media to present information in a truthful and realistic manner.

Throughout the GDR era, there were people behind the faceless newspapers. There were journalists working hard to produce a quality newspaper. But were they happy with what they were doing and with the end product of their efforts? Did they agree with the role the SED had cast them in? And were they following the SED's orders from a commitment to these orders, or to the GDR, or what? These are some of the questions this study seeks to answer.

There have already been studies of the mechanics of the GDR media system, and the implementation of the SED's media policies is well documented from many independent sources.<sup>5</sup> But what is lacking is a discussion of what the journalists themselves felt about their profession, about the demands placed upon them, and about their compliance with the SED's instructions. This can only be discovered by asking those who were involved at the time. Of course, such a study cannot take place in a vacuum. There are many background

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<sup>3</sup> Hopkins (1970), p74

<sup>4</sup> Feige (1990), p389

<sup>5</sup> For example, see Herrmann (1960), (1961a), (1961b), (1961c), Holzweißig (1989)

issues which need to be explored first of all in order to establish a framework for understanding what the journalists have to say. This includes considerations of the GDR's history, the development of its press system after 1945 and the differences which were seen from the way in which the Western zones of occupation allowed a press system to re-emerge. In addition, questions of media ethics need to be addressed. What should journalists do? What is their role? What responsibilities do they and their employers have, and to whom?

The past is not the only area of interest. The experiences of the journalists in the GDR will inevitably have an impact on the way in which they work and think today. So far, research has tended to concentrate on more quantifiable issues, such as the background of Eastern German journalists<sup>6</sup> and the problem of unemployment among them.<sup>7</sup> Some research claims to have investigated the ethical values of journalists, but the work lacks any real mention of the important issues involved.<sup>8</sup> Rather than looking at the values the journalists hold, Weischenberg et al's study directed too much attention at the political views of the journalists and their general opinion regarding the role of the media. No attempt was made to distinguish between journalists originating from the FRG and those from the GDR or even between those now working in East and West<sup>9</sup>, which would have provided a useful background to this study. Where work has been carried out successfully<sup>10</sup>, it has taken a wide-angle snapshot of the profession, for example, by conducting telephone interviews with several hundred journalists.<sup>11</sup> This has been invaluable in terms of gaining a broad understanding of the issues which are faced by journalists today, but there is room for additional research, working much closer with the individual journalists involved. Such a project was undertaken by Schubert<sup>12</sup>, but the published version contained only transcripts of her interviews, and provided no background information or analysis. Her study touched on issues relating to ethics in journalism, but concentrated on the experiences of the journalists interviewed.

The salient questions which appear not to have been explored to date relate in part to the

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<sup>6</sup> Böckelmann/Mahle (1994), pp41-51; Schneider et al (1994), pp 156-203

<sup>7</sup> Böckelmann/Mahle (1994), pp 52-74

<sup>8</sup> Weischenberg et al (1994)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p166

<sup>10</sup> Of particular note is Schneider et al (1994)

<sup>11</sup> Schneider et al (1994)

<sup>12</sup> Schubert (1992)

experiences of the journalists on being confronted by issues which are common in the West. What pressure are they put under by their employers and superiors to favour certain other parties, such as advertisers? What power do their employers have over them to impose their will on the journalists actually writing the articles which appear in the newspapers? These and other issues have been long-debated in the West, but their impact on the East is unknown, as are the actual experiences of the journalists there. It could be that they themselves do not consider these issues to be relevant. Other questions might focus on the influence which political parties have on the journalists' work. In the GDR, journalism was determined by politics - has this changed, and if so, in what way, and to what extent? Which methods of gathering information are acceptable? How far does their desire to tell the whole truth take them? Where are their boundaries when it comes to dealing with private lives, and why should people's private lives be kept separate from their public duties?

The aim of the present study was to explore the journalists' own experiences and perceptions in order to ascertain what lessons have been learned from the experiences of the GDR era - lessons for the West as much as for the East.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Press in the two Germanies: 1945-1989

Die Presse galt und gilt als eine wichtige, aber stille und konstante Größe. Von der Presse erwarten wir Stetigkeit und Zuverlässigkeit und, ebenso selbstverständlich, Vielstimmigkeit und Meinungsvielfalt. Wir beginnen erst dann, uns über Zeitungen Gedanken zu machen, wenn das, was wir für selbstverständlich halten, in Frage gestellt erscheint.<sup>1</sup>

When the two post-1945 German states were reunified in 1990, it seemed to be the state and institutions of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) which were called into question, as the Western traditions embodied in the Federal Republic (FRG) were adopted in both parts of the new German state. The backlash against the GDR and its legacy led to much from the East being disregarded and discarded in favour of the new ideas, freedoms and goods from the West. In this process, however, many lessons of West German history were not learned, a fact which is all too clear when looking at the press market in the five new states, where previous experiences with press concentration and powerful owners were not reflected in some of the policy decisions made which affected the East. However, not only was the West German model accepted more or less unquestioningly, but also the ideas and principles behind this model went unchallenged. The ideological nature of the press, particularly under SED rule, meant that by and large, the two press systems were not properly compared, the assumption being that a press which had served the interests of a now discredited regime could not have any real advantages over that of a state which had proven its apparent moral superiority. This attitude of Western supremacy unfortunately meant that the opportunity for a constructive reappraisal of Western assumptions and attitudes towards the press was lost.

#### History of the press after 1945

Initially, the post-war press in the two areas of Germany began in a similar manner. The occupying authorities of the respective areas took control of the press, determined that

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<sup>1</sup> Bergsdorf (1992), p31

Germany should learn the lessons of the immediate Nazi past. However, even at this stage, there were clear differences in the way in which the four occupying powers went about reconstructing a press system. Initially, only the occupying forces issued any sort of news publications, the *Heeresgruppen-Zeitungen*, which were largely unwelcomed by the German population.<sup>2</sup> With the move away from military control, seen in the establishing of a licensed press, the process of the press in East and West moving apart was begun. The press systems which resulted were still guided by the occupying powers, which had their own clear ideas of what the new press should look like.

### *Western zones of occupation*

On 31 July 1945, the Americans initiated the granting of licences for the publication of newspapers in their zone of occupation. This was in fact the second time licences had been issued, as the first licence had in fact been granted in Aachen before the Third Reich had surrendered. However, the official policy of granting licences as a way of guiding the development of the press began in July 1945 when the *Frankfurter Rundschau* was founded.<sup>3</sup> In the three Western zones, licences were granted to individuals, and not parties as in the Soviet zone, and these individuals had to be politically untainted by the immediate past of the Nazi state.<sup>4</sup> Because anybody who had written for a newspaper under the Nazi regime was automatically excluded from holding a licence, irrespective of whether they had been a member of the NSDAP or not, a quarter of the 113 licences granted in the American sector were awarded to people with no experience in newspaper publishing.<sup>5</sup>

The decision to grant licences to individuals was a significant one. In the West, the press was fully expected to provide a wide range of viewpoints on issues where differing opinions existed. With the American policy of giving licences to individuals with no party affiliation, or to groups of individuals who represented the various political leanings<sup>6</sup> - other than Nazi - which existed in Germany at the time, there was a clear move away from a party press. Likewise, the British rejected party control of the press, but in contrast to the American

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<sup>2</sup> Sandford (1976), p21

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p22

<sup>4</sup> Humphreys (1990), pp 26-7

<sup>5</sup> Meyn (1992), p39

<sup>6</sup> Humphreys (1990), p29

system, they issued licences to individuals who were members or supporters of the parties.<sup>7</sup> The papers were then to represent the various party viewpoints, but without being dependent on the parties. The press was no longer to be dependent on whichever parties wished to publish their own newspapers, and the recent experience of the Nazi-controlled press served as an ever-present reminder of the dangers of such a system.

Initially, the Allies imposed pre-censorship on the newspapers being published.<sup>8</sup> When the system was seen to be operating effectively and it had been established that pre-censorship was no longer required, this restriction was lifted by the Americans in September 1945, to be followed by the other two Western Allies shortly afterwards.<sup>9</sup>

It took several years for the Western Allies to end completely the licensing system and allow the free establishment of newspapers in their zones. Disagreement within Germany and with the occupying forces meant that attempts to draw up a press law as early as December 1945, as well as to set up an independent body to control the press, ultimately foundered. While the negotiations and discussions were taking place, those who had been granted a licence were able to secure and strengthen their position in the press market, which was later to have an impact on the setting up of new newspapers. These later start-ups found it very difficult to gain a foothold in the market among the licensed press, which had by that time been in existence for several years and had established a significant readership. This same problem has been seen in Eastern Germany after reunification, where the only newspapers to have retained a strong position are the old SED regional papers. New entrants to the market have found it very hard to establish a large and sufficiently stable circulation to remain economically viable.

The licensing system was phased out gradually, with intermediate trials being used to ascertain how the press was likely to develop. One such trial involved allowing more than one paper to appear in some of the cities in the American zone. There was also a debate as to the best method of allowing the press to expand: the British favoured allowing the large established newspapers to publish local editions for smaller towns, whereas the Americans experimented with the establishment of independent papers in similar towns, eventually

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<sup>7</sup> Meyn (1992), p40

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p41

<sup>9</sup> Sandford (1976), p23

giving up this idea and adopting the British system.<sup>10</sup> When the federal *Grundgesetz* had been drafted, with its guarantee of press freedom, and the *Länder* laws in existence had been equipped with press laws acceptable to the Allies, the stage was set for the licensing system to be abolished. This was finally completed on September 21, 1949.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Soviet zone of occupation*

In contrast to the Western zones, where there was no requirement that newspapers should actually be official organs of any political party, *only* such party newspapers were permitted in the Soviet zone.<sup>12</sup> As well as the military administration's own newspaper, the *Tägliche Rundschau*, the press of the Communist Party (KPD) received distinct preference, and even the left wing social-democratic papers were discriminated against, along with the press of other parties.<sup>13</sup> Although censorship of other parties' press organs was stricter than for the KPD's newspapers, a more effective form of discrimination was the rationing of newsprint, which was in short supply in the years following the war. The history of the KPD-paper *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, and the SPD's *Das Volk* parallels that of the two parties. In April 1946, the two parties were merged to form the SED, and their respective papers were also fused together, resulting in *Neues Deutschland*.

As well as controlling the setting up of newspapers, the Soviet administration also stamped its authority on the developing press in another significant way, through the control of information to the media. In July 1945, a news agency, the *Sowjetisches Nachrichten-Büro* (SNB), was founded in Berlin. In contrast to the normal functions of a press agency, the SNB was also required to act as the mouthpiece of the Soviet military administration in Germany.<sup>14</sup> In October 1946, the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Nachrichtendienst* (ADN) was founded, which effectively replaced the SNB, and which remained the state news agency throughout the existence of the GDR.

### **The influence of the occupying powers**

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p24

<sup>11</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p105

<sup>12</sup> Meyn (1992), p40

<sup>13</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p99

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p95

## *The Soviet Union*

In examining the question of the extent to which the Soviet Union shaped the press in the Soviet zone of occupation (SBZ), part of the theory of the press as developed in the Soviet Union itself needs to be understood. Although the main contributor to press theory in the Soviet Union by 1945 was Lenin, by the time the SBZ came into existence, he had been dead for over twenty years and the Soviet Union was controlled by Stalin, whose style of leadership was markedly different from that which Lenin had advocated.

Although the focus is here on Lenin, the assumption is being made that his views can be grouped together with those of Marx, the final authority in a communist system. The basis of this assumption is Weber's statement that

Lenins Prinzipien sind nicht mit dem ursprünglichen Marxismus identisch, er hat die Marxschen Theorien tiefgreifend verwandelt. Andererseits hat Lenin aber auch kein eigenes Denkgebäude geschaffen; seine Vorstellungswelt ruht auf der Grundlage des Marxismus. Es ist daher durchaus gerechtfertigt, die Ideenwelt Lenins als Marxismus-Leninismus zu bezeichnen.<sup>15</sup>

A further relevant factor is the way in which Lenin viewed himself in terms of his philosophical model, a point which Meyer picked up:

Even while it should be recognized that the precise relationship between Marxism and Leninism is a controversial matter, the facts still remain not only that Lenin considered himself, first and last, a Marxist, if not the foremost interpreter and follower of Marx, but also that he was an erudite student of the vast literature produced by this school.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, for the present discussion, the most significant issue is that stemming from the differences between Lenin and Stalin, and it is this area which will be looked at in some detail. The first problem which arises when dealing with Lenin and Stalin is that neither was consistent in his political views throughout his life. Instead, both showed an evolution in their thinking on many subjects, and their comments certainly need to be seen in their historical context; a very relevant factor when looking at their views on the press. Lenin, for example, did not write major works specifically on the press, but incorporated his press

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<sup>15</sup> Weber (1988), p53

<sup>16</sup> Meyer (1986), p8



theories into a more general political framework:

Lenin's press theory is actually a conglomeration of essays or a few paragraphs of editorials written in the heat of battle. [...] Lenin's thoughts on the press were never far removed from practical politics. He seldom spoke about the ideal press of the future, but rather of what sort of newspaper should be published at the moment, how it should be directed, and what function it should serve.<sup>17</sup>

The conditions of the press which Lenin was addressing were fundamentally different from those of the Stalinist era. Under Stalin, the Soviet Union was already a political entity, if still somewhat unsettled, whereas Lenin was writing for a time of turmoil and uncertainty, and this goes some way to explaining the differences between the ideas of Lenin and the reality created by Stalin. The theory which was based upon Stalin's press model after Stalin's form of the media had already been created often contradicts what Lenin wrote about the press, such as the total state control of the media which Stalin implemented, but which was not advocated by either Marx or Lenin. This paradox can be shown by contrasting an analogy used by Lenin with a later definition of the role of the press which is clearly influenced by Stalinist ideas. Lenin used the analogy of scaffolding around a building, which, just like the press, serves a purpose for a short time. In the case of the scaffolding, it

marks the contours of the structure, facilitates communication between individual builders, helps them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organized labour.<sup>18</sup>

Not only is there no indication of a form of party organisation being in control, but instead, it is the workers themselves who have command of the whole operation and whose interests the press serves. Lenin was addressing the recognised need for the separate areas of the country at that time, and argued that,

We must necessarily, and first of all [...] create a *real* connexion between towns on the basis of *regular common* work. [...] One can *begin* to create this *real* connexion only on the basis of a common newspaper as the only regular all-Russian enterprise, running up the most diverse types of activities and thus *impelling* people to go untiringly forward along *all* the many ways that lead to revolution in the same way as all roads lead to Rome. [...] A real connexion would begin to be created by the mere

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<sup>17</sup> Hopkins (1970), p44

<sup>18</sup> Lenin (1963), p178

function of distributing the newspaper.<sup>19</sup>

This brief quotation demonstrates two points. First, Lenin's considerations were conditional upon the actual circumstances in which he found himself. This is supported by a reading of the whole work, where Lenin is clearly addressing specific issues of the time, and not attempting to establish guidelines for a press of the future, when the socialist state had become a reality (at the point at which Lenin was writing, the revolution was still some 15 years in the future). Second, because the socialist state was still something to be aimed for, there was no question of a party wielding supreme power and acting on behalf of the people as was the case during Stalin's years of power. However, it is also important to be aware of the fact that Lenin's own views on the question of the role of a political party within the state changed around the time of the revolution in 1917, which could be seen as casting a new light on his earlier comments. Commenting on this change, Lowenthal stated that,

In the course of 1917, the Bolsheviks ceased in Lenin's mind to be merely the most enlightened and energetic representatives of the interests of the Russian working class and became, to him, the *only* party of the Russian proletariat; and this implied that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" must in fact take the form of a Bolshevik party dictatorship.<sup>20</sup>

It was then this new view of Lenin's, with a more central role of the party, which Stalin latched onto and developed in later years. In this sense, Stalin's actions could be seen to be consistent with those of Lenin's later ideas. But such a view is rather simplistic. Although statements by Lenin appearing to be consistent with Stalin's interpretation of them can be found, an examination of the broader context of Lenin's political ideas and the way in which he developed his theories shows more accurately his philosophy of the role of the party in the Soviet Union.

As far as the press was concerned, Lenin never revised his stated opinions to include a central role for the party, and Stalin's widening of party control to include the press should therefore not be traced back to Lenin. However, it could be argued that the increasing importance of the party in his later work represents Lenin's more considered approach. Stalin could merely have been applying the principles which Lenin had devised in his more politically mature years to further sections of the society. Indeed, to defend this view, a statement of Lenin

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp 180-1

<sup>20</sup> Lowenthal (1967), pp 279-80

could be cited which *appears* to have supported the more direct control of the press in the early 1920s:

We have begun to make newspapers tools for educating the masses and for teaching them how to live and how to build their own economy without landowners and capitalists.<sup>21</sup>

There is a clear suggestion here of the fact that newspapers were seen as something to be controlled like a tool and used for specific political aims, rather than those producing the newspapers being free to pursue journalism as they saw fit. In addition, Lenin also supported the press restrictions which had been imposed, and which granted press freedom only to revolutionary newspapers, arguing that,

The bourgeoisie (the world over) is still many times stronger than we. To give it still the weapon of freedom of political organization (freedom of the press, since the press is the center and foundation of political organization) means to ease the enemy's cause, to help the class enemy. We do not desire to end in suicide and so we will not do this.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the suggestions of support for the trend towards party control in the Soviet Union under Stalin, however, the question of whether Lenin really was in favour of party control of the press can only really be answered by looking at the development of his own views and how he regarded the earlier stages of his political thinking. As has already been intimated, Lenin's political and philosophical views were not always consistent, as also noted by Meyer:

One source of difficulty is the possibility that the creed may not, indeed, be a coherent one, that it may be composed of contradictory elements, and that any attempt to present it as a system will do violence to it. In the case of Leninism, this problem is acute indeed, especially since Lenin was no ivory-tower philosopher but a man of political action, and his activities as the leader of a political party form a part, perhaps even the most essential part of his theory.<sup>23</sup>

In addressing this problem, Weber identified four stages of "Leninism". Adopting his classification, the first stage would be between 1902 and the First World War, the period in which *What is to be done?* was written; a matter of some significance to the press. These years Weber described as,

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Hopkins (1970), p72

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Meyer (1986), p5

typisch für einen "Leninismus", der durch seine enge Parteilichkeit, seine Einseitigkeit und seine Elitetheorie charakterisiert ist. In dieser Form aber schien er Stalin zur Rechtfertigung seiner bürokratischen Politik gerade gut geeignet.<sup>24</sup>

However, Stalin could not use this period to justify his development of the press. Even in Lenin's most authoritarian phase, he advocated the control of the press by the people, with no suggestion that a party organisation should control the press. In addition, Stalin's use of this period of Lenin's thought to justify his intentions of strengthening his control of the Soviet Union would in any case be unjustified, given Lenin's later comments concerning these very views which he held prior to World War I. In the years 1916 to 1918, Lenin

bekämpfte nicht nur den Staat und das stehende Heer, sondern alle Privilegien, jedes Beamtentum usw. [...] Lenin ersetzte die alte Revolutionstheorie im wesentlichen durch die Theorie der permanenten Revolution, er baute auf die Spontaneität der Massen und schränkte damit seine starre Elitetheorie ein.<sup>25</sup>

A colleague of Lenin also remarked that Lenin said of his earlier work, including presumably the then important idea of the "Elitetheorie", "Es ist sehr interessant, jetzt zu lesen, wie dumm wir damals waren".<sup>26</sup> This certainly supports the hypothesis that Lenin would have been opposed to Stalin's use of these earlier ideas to support his own thoughts on the press.

Although the third "stage" of Leninism, from 1919 to 1921, includes the idea of the replacement of the dictatorship of the proletariat by the dictatorship of the party executive body, again, Lenin's most advanced stage of thinking (1922, 1923) signifies a return to the principles of the revolution, and a recognition that the third stage of practical necessity had in fact led *away* from the goals of the revolution:

Lenin erkannte das Wuchern des Bürokratismus, die wachsende Herrschaft der Apparate und das Ersticken der Revolution. Das Dilemma schien unauflösbar. Während des Bürgerkriegs wurden die Freiheiten und Rechte der Massen immer stärker eingeschränkt, die Prinzipien und die Zielvorstellung wurden den politischen und militärischen "Notwendigkeiten" geopfert. Nach dem Sieg und der Festigung der Macht zeigte sich jedoch, daß die Rechtsbeschränkungen ihre eigene Gesetzlichkeit hervorgebracht hatten. Bedrohlich zeichnete sich die

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<sup>24</sup> Weber (1988), p44

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Weber (1988), p 44

beginnende Herrschaft der Apparate ab.<sup>27</sup>

A brief look at Marx's thoughts on the subject of power within a state demonstrates that Lenin's views in this final stage of his thinking were in line with the intentions which Marx and Engels had:

Bei Berücksichtigung aller Aussagen wird erkenntlich, was Marx und Engels unter Sozialismus oder (wie sie die höherentwickelte Form nannten) Kommunismus verstanden: die Aufhebung jeder Form einer Herrschaft von Menschen durch die Schaffung einer klassenlosen Gesellschaft, in der es keine Ausbeutung und keine Unterdrückung gibt.<sup>28</sup>

The conclusion which must then be made is that it was Stalin who was out of line with the theories and intentions of Marx and Lenin, and that the state which he developed was not the one envisaged by these earlier socialist thinkers. Stalin's use of Lenin's work mainly from his first, relatively immature stage of thought, did not do justice to Lenin's real political aims, and served only Stalin's own purposes. Total party control of the press was not consistent with Lenin's views, but was entirely consistent with Stalin's desire to secure and maintain his own position of power in the Soviet Union.

Although some reservations about the universal value of Lenin's comments remain, it is also important to consider how Lenin's views were regarded after his death. Hopkins is not overstating the case when he writes that "deliberate deification of Lenin after his death in 1924 made his views on the press, and most other subjects, sacred writ".<sup>29</sup> In a self-declared atheist state, the works of both Marx and Lenin acquired a status comparable with that of religious texts in other countries. In all the socialist states of Europe, Marxism-Leninism was a major subject both at schools and universities. Because of the high regard in which Lenin's work was held, it is somewhat surprising to see the way in which many of his statements, or at least their implications, were clearly disregarded by Stalin. Stalin's own view of the press was seen in a statement in 1923, where he explained that,

The press is the most powerful instrument with which the party daily, hourly speaks with the laboring class in its own vital language. There

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<sup>27</sup> Weber (1988), p45

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp 29, 30

<sup>29</sup> Hopkins (1970), p53

exists [...] no other such flexible apparatus.<sup>30</sup>

Instead of the workers communicating with the workers, as Lenin envisaged, Stalin viewed the press as being the *party* communicating with the workers. Hopkins' comment that "it was Stalin's lot to use Lenin's theories in practical matters of establishing a new state"<sup>31</sup> can hardly be supported by the evidence of Stalin having selectively used those parts of Lenin's work which fitted in with what he intended, regardless of what Lenin may have said on the subject. Rather, Weber's remark that,

Der Stalinismus ist zwar aus dem Leninismus hervorgegangen, aber er bedeutet die Negierung vieler Prinzipien Lenins.<sup>32</sup>

seems appropriate to describe the relationship between the two.

Because of the authority which Lenin's work had after his death, taking selected quotations from Lenin from the early stages of his intellectual development was an easy way of ascribing credibility to new policies being introduced. As Weber has noted,

Die Ideen Lenins spielen in der inneren Auseinandersetzung im Ostblock heute eine bedeutende Rolle. Die Vielfalt in seinen Äußerungen macht es den divergierenden Gruppen möglich, bei ihm stets etwas zu finden, was für sie spricht, und die Kanonisierung der leninschen Gesamtlehre verleiht jedem Zitat eine unanfechtbare Autorität.<sup>33</sup>

The significance of this is that it relates directly to the experience of the GDR. Just as there were differences between Lenin's views at different times in his life, and between Lenin and Stalin, so there were differences between the Soviet Union and the GDR. An important area where Soviet influence was clear was in the role of newspapers as official organs of political parties, essentially a Stalinist concept. It is paradoxical that a state which proclaimed its allegiance to the tradition of Marxism and Leninism began its history by blatantly disregarding Lenin's clear views on the press. Given the ideological significance of the press, this conscious decision away from Lenin's ideas and towards Stalin's practices suggests that the nature of the SED-type of socialist state may not be what a reading of Marx and Lenin would suggest. Before looking specifically at the implications for the press, it is

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Hopkins (1970), p74

<sup>31</sup> Hopkins (1970), p53

<sup>32</sup> Weber (1988), p66

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p46

useful to take a broader view of the early history of the SBZ/GDR in order to identify more general trends.

### **The nature of the GDR state**

As has already been suggested, the SBZ/GDR was not truly based upon Marxism-Leninism, but more upon the brand of socialism which Stalin developed. That this is the case can be demonstrated by drawing upon Weber's work, which in part involved a comparison of Marx and Lenin's ideas with reality in the GDR and the Soviet Union. This will then contribute to an understanding of what sort of a society the GDR was, and allow the press system to be compared with that of the FRG with a better awareness of the foundations of the press system.

Die sehr allgemein gehaltenen Überlegungen von Marx zur sozialistischen Gesellschaft einerseits und die auf die Eigentumsfrage zugespitzten Erklärungen zur Übergangsgesellschaft andererseits ermöglichen es den heutigen kommunistisch regierten Staaten, ihre Systeme mit einem Anschein von Berechtigung in die Traditionslinie von Marx zu stellen. Typisch für diese Versuche sind etwa Ausführungen der SED, Marx und Engels hätten eben "kein Rezeptbuch für den Aufbau des Sozialismus geliefert", vielmehr hätten sie "die objektiven Entwicklungsgesetze von Natur und Gesellschaft entdeckt und damit die erste wissenschaftlich begründete Weltanschauung geschaffen", an der sich die SED orientiere.<sup>34</sup>

But Weber believed that the SED's claims were not legitimate; instead, he felt that Marx's picture of the society of the future was exact enough to see that in claiming to be following Marx and Lenin, the SED was involved in a "Verschleierungs- und Rechtfertigungspolitik".<sup>35</sup> Furthermore,

Der bürokratische Kommunismus Moskauer Richtung ist weit entfernt von den humanistischen, den demokratischen und auch den revolutionären Ideen von Marx. Er ist nur insofern eine "legitime" Form des Marxismus in der Leninschen Auslegung, als seine Anhänger versuchen, bestimmte, einseitig ausgewählte Vorstellungen von Marx zu realisieren.<sup>36</sup>

Weber drew an important conclusion, noting that the brand of communism in the GDR was influenced more by the Russian revolution and the backwardness of Russia at the time of the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p28

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p30

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p30

revolution than by any ideas of Marx or Lenin.<sup>37</sup> Whereas the socialist revolution was supposed to take place in an advanced capitalist society when the working classes realised where their true interests lay, the opposite was true in Russia's case. Russia was a very poor country, and instead of the working classes instituting change, Stalin had to take the country on a forced course of industrialisation in order for the country to progress economically. On the other hand, despite defeat in the 1939-45 war, the GDR was an economically advanced country. Basing its development on that of the Soviet Union, which negated Marx's preconditions for revolution, was not the way to ensure that the GDR society conformed to that envisaged by Marx. The GDR state was in reality not a Marxist state at all, in the sense of adhering to the true principles of Marxism. By the principles of Marxism in this context is meant

Emanzipation des Menschen, Selbstbestimmung der Arbeiter in einer solidarischen Gesellschaft. Dies beinhaltet auch politische Demokratie, Rechtssicherheit und Freiheitsrechte des einzelnen.<sup>38</sup>

But these were not features of the GDR. In this, the GDR was not alone. The Soviet Union was also far removed from these ideals of Marxism, and the GDR, basing so much of its society on the Stalinist model of the Soviet Union, was automatically steered towards a comparable system, and away from Marxism. Marxist doctrines were mixed up with, and confused with, phrases such as the "leading role of the party" and "proletarian internationalism", which clearly have their roots in the Soviet communism of Stalin, and which in reality meant the "leading role of the Soviet Union".<sup>39</sup> In this, Weber noted that,

schon in den theoretischen Konzeptionen (ganz zu schweigen von der Praxis) die Berufung der kommunistisch regierten Staaten auf Marx' Ideologie nicht möglich ist. Erst recht ist gerade die praktische Entwicklung des "realen Sozialismus" als durchaus im Gegensatz zu Marxschen Ideen befindlich zu erkennen. Die Gleichsetzung der mit barbarischen Mitteln in der Sowjetunion praktizierten Industrialisierung mit einem angeblichen "Aufbau des Sozialismus" führte dazu, daß dort Rechtlosigkeit der Arbeiter, Privilegien einer bürokratischen Oberschicht und selbst Säuberungen unter Stalin als "Sozialismus" deklamiert wurden.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p30

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p31

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p28

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, pp 28-9



The brand of socialism in the GDR was, then, that of the Stalinist Soviet Union. Both states attempted to legitimise their “socialist” nature by citing selected parts of Marx and Lenin’s works which appeared to support and lend credence to what had already been decided. The basis of the GDR’s socialism was the model of the Soviet Union, and was therefore influenced by Soviet development, the very existence of which denied much of what formed the foundation of Marxism.

### **Soviet influence on the press**

The Soviet Union was actively involved in the development of the press in the SBZ/GDR. As well as the formation of party newspapers and the control of information reaching the newspapers, strict censorship of what was published was a feature of the press under direct Soviet control. All of these features were modelled on the Soviet Union’s own press system, although it is significant that the censorship role was abandoned when the GDR became an autonomous state. The early years of censorship concentrated on two principles:

Auf die strikte Einhaltung und Ausführung der Alliierten und sowjetzonalen Befehle und Anordnungen [...] und auf die Verhinderung jedweder kritischer Äußerung an der Besatzungspolitik.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the intervention to prevent their actions being criticised, the Soviet censors did not involve themselves in areas which were considered to be *innerdeutsch*, such as the reconstruction of the economy<sup>42</sup>, but after the SED was founded, even this changed, and virtually all areas of media coverage became subject to party control. Mosgraber has described the new policy which was felt by those involved in broadcasting in the months after July 1948:

Die bisher ziemlich offene, demokratische Atmosphäre bei der Beratung der Sendepläne wurde im Laufe der nächsten Monate allmählich abgelöst durch betonte Hinweise und Empfehlungen der Chefredaktion in Hinsicht auf bestimmte Themen und Probleme, durch Ratschläge, diese oder jene Mißstände in Wirtschaft und Verwaltung aus taktischen Gründen nicht aufzugreifen, bei nicht mehr zu umgehender Kritik an Partei- und Staatsfunktionären vorher die “zuständigen Stellen” zu kontaktieren - bis hin zu direkten Aufträgen, z.B. “die führende Rolle der Partei der

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<sup>41</sup> Mosgraber (1993), p64

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p64

Arbeiterklasse" in den Sendebeträgen stärker zu betonen.<sup>43</sup>

Although what the press had to do was prescribed in much greater detail, it has to be borne in mind that there was no official censorship in the SED era. In this respect, the GDR showed a degree of autonomy from the Soviet Union by moving away from that model. It demonstrated initiative as well as its independence from Soviet control in doing so, although the end media product was similar. The same result as in the Soviet Union was achieved by the application of self-censorship among the journalists. This self-censorship was based on the instructions originating with party functionaries and passed on by those with editorial responsibility for the media. Instead of an explicit form of censorship, there developed a system of *Meinungslenkung*, which was designed to have the ultimate aim of the SED views represented in the press to the exclusion of any alternative and dissenting opinions.

### *The Western Allies*

Just as the Soviet Union developed a different policy towards the press in its zone, so the three Western Allies also differed in their approaches to the media, albeit to a lesser extent than between West and East.

As has already been mentioned, the Allies in the West also had very definite ideas about how the press in their occupation zones should function, and what role the press should play in a democratic society. Initially, just as in the Soviet occupation zone, there was censorship in the Western zones. When licensing was finally abolished, the difficulties new newspapers faced became contributory factors to the problem of press concentration, which has been a central and much debated issue in the history of the press in the Federal Republic. One concern which has been raised<sup>44</sup> is the impact of the Allies' policies on the subsequent problem of concentration. As has been seen, difficulties with the licensing system led to potential new newspapers facing an uphill struggle to establish a readership and thereby become viable enterprises. However, there were also other factors in some of the Allies' policies which indicated a certain degree of responsibility on their part for the development of a concentrated press market in the Federal Republic.

The aim of establishing the press as a group of privately run, profit-orientated firms, and the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p64

<sup>44</sup> Sandford (1976), pp 24-5, 27-8

simultaneous exclusion of other, non-capitalist forms of organisation<sup>45</sup> meant that there was an economic bias towards concentration, as economies of scale and other financial advantages could be achieved by the move towards larger press organisations. Sandford believed, however, that,

The Allies had envisaged a non-capitalist economic structure for the German press in which independence, objectivity, and a democratic conscience would be the guiding motives rather than profit - a structure which would obviate the great press empires of the past.<sup>46</sup>

There seems to be a contradiction here. On the one hand, it is claimed that Allies had intended to create a press system which would, by its very nature, exclude the possibility of a concentrated market. But on the other hand, history has shown that the reality of the development of the press in the Federal Republic has in fact been a process of increased concentration, despite, or perhaps even *because* of the effects of the Allied press policy. This apparent contradiction may be resolved by the fact that what the Allies had originally intended was not created by the actual policies they pursued. They wanted to have a press operated independent of the state, but this independence meant that the firms had to be privately run. Market forces favoured a significant degree of concentration and there seemed to be no practical way of simultaneously achieving all these aims, with their mutually exclusive results. With the insistence on private ownership of the press, concentration was the logical outcome. This was no different from the Allies' own press systems. There, the respective governments had also been unable to control the activities of the press as well as give it the ideologically desirable freedom. As Sandford observed,

conditions made [the realisation of their aims] no more possible in the state the Allies were setting up in West Germany than in their own countries on which it was modelled; newspaper publishing was seen to be potentially a profitable and powerful business.<sup>47</sup>

It appears that the Allies did not give enough thought to the practical implications of their policy - instead, they were more concerned about establishing a press system with an acceptable ideological basis. What was lacking were foresight and a recognition of the peculiar nature of the press market.

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<sup>45</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p119

<sup>46</sup> Sandford (1976), p25

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p25

## Comparison of the two press systems

### *Press freedom*

Pressefreiheit und Erziehung zur Demokratie wurden Schlüsselbegriffe der deutschen Nachkriegspolitik, um so mehr, als die Westalliierten auf der einen Seite und die Sowjetunion auf der anderen diese Begriffe sehr unterschiedlich interpretierten bzw. in politische Handlungen umsetzten. Der deutsche Journalismus geriet sozusagen automatisch, weil professionell bedingt, gleich zu Beginn mitten hinein in diese Auseinandersetzung, denn journalistische Freiheit ist Bestandteil der Pressefreiheit und damit auch Ausdruck realer Demokratie.<sup>48</sup>

### **The concept of press freedom**

In any study of the press, or any other branch of the media, press freedom is a central concept. In the post-war years in the two German states, this was very much the case, and the two concepts of press freedom are central to an understanding of the operation of the press systems in the two states.

Press freedom is a term which is often used to describe a desirable state of the press in a country which is, according to Western standards, both free and democratic. Unfortunately, however, there is often little idea of exactly what is meant by the term, and the concept is therefore rather vague. A reasonable starting point for a discussion is perhaps the assumption that the press should be able to print what it considers to be "worth" printing. However, the press does not operate in a vacuum, but interacts with other parts of the society of which it is a part. As Blaum has pointed out,

Journalistische Freiheit bedeutete aber nie, daß die konkrete journalistische Tätigkeit frei sein konnte von Abhängigkeiten. Selbst wenn jemand das Privileg besaß oder besitzt, in seiner eigenen Zeitung zu schreiben, gibt es unvermeidbare Rücksichtnahmen gegenüber Rezipienten, Inserenten, gegenüber offizieller politischer Zensur.<sup>49</sup>

Addressing this point, Blaum has offered a possible model of press freedom. Although her comments apply specifically to journalistic freedom, they are also relevant to a discussion of press freedom:

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<sup>48</sup> Blaum (1985), p16

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p15

In einem privat-wirtschaftlich und öffentlich-rechtlich organisierten Mediensystem wie dem der Bundesrepublik besteht journalistische Freiheit heute vor allem im jeweiligen Gesinnungsfreiraum, der seitens der Verleger oder vorgesetzten Institutionen bei der täglichen Arbeit gewährt wird.<sup>50</sup>

It is important to note the context of Blaum's definition. It applies solely to the Western press system and ideology, and would have been rejected as a concept of press freedom in the GDR. In the West, press freedom essentially means guarantees for dissenting opinions and an absence of government restrictions.<sup>51</sup> A more comprehensive list of the features of a free press is given by McQuail, who picks out the following points:

- Publication should be free from any prior censorship by any third party
- The act of publication and distribution should be open to a person or group without permit or licence
- Attack on any government, official or political party (as distinct from attacks on private individuals or treason and breaches of security) should not be punishable, even after the event
- There should be no compulsion to publish anything
- Publication of "error" is protected equally with that of truth, in matters of opinion and belief
- No restriction should be placed on the collection, by legal means, of information for publication
- There should be no restriction on export or import or sending or receiving "messages" across national frontiers.<sup>52</sup>

These ideas will later be used in presenting a critique of the operation of the press in both East and West, but they also demonstrate the contrast with the concept of press freedom in the GDR. An understanding of what this idea involved in the GDR is necessary in order to be able to understand the rest of the operation of the press in that country:

According to Lenin, it is impossible to live in a society and to be free from it. The communist press, therefore, cannot be free from communist society; it must be dependent on its leading force: the working class. The communist party is the outward, political expression of the will of that class, and therefore the press must depend on the party. But in the application of the dialectical method, recognition of the necessity of such

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p15

<sup>51</sup> Hopkins (1970), p62

<sup>52</sup> McQuail (1983), pp 89, 90

dependence turns it into real freedom, freedom from capitalist profiteering, careerism, individualism - gives it freedom to serve the working class, and its *avant-garde*, the communist party.

According to this concept, there *is* freedom of the press in communist society, derived from the recognition and application of objective laws of action, that is necessity, in the interest of society. Press and journalists are not, however, free to interpret those interests on their own, and therefore there is freedom only within the functions and methods strictly defined by the party and ideology.<sup>53</sup>

Whereas in the West, freedom of the press involved a separation of press and state, in the East, the press was seen very much as a part of the state. This even went so far as to allow Rudolf Herrnstadt, editor-in-chief of *Neues Deutschland* to remark in 1950 that,

Our newspapers are not being published to entertain people or to make a financial profit, but to make political propaganda. They are a political institution which for purposes of efficiency (only) bear the character of newspapers.<sup>54</sup>

The differences in the way in which press freedom was understood in the two countries are fundamental to the entire operation of the respective press systems. An appropriate starting point for a consideration of the impact of the two versions of press theory is the relevant article of the constitutions of the two countries. In the Federal Republic, Article 5 of the *Grundgesetz* deals with the press:

(1) Jeder hat das Recht, seine Meinung in Wort, Schrift und Bild frei zu äußern und zu verbreiten und sich aus allgemein zugänglichen Quellen ungehindert zu unterrichten. Die Pressefreiheit und die Freiheit der Berichterstattung durch Rundfunk und Film werden gewährleistet. Eine Zensur findet nicht statt.

(2) Diese Rechte finden ihre Schranken in den Vorschriften der allgemeinen Gesetze, den gesetzlichen Bestimmungen zum Schutze der Jugend und in dem Recht der persönlichen Ehre.

In the constitution of the GDR, the relevant article was Article 27, which, on first reading appears to be very similar to the Federal Republic's Article 5:

(1) Jeder Bürger der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik hat das Recht, den Grundsätzen dieser Verfassung gemäß seine Meinung frei und

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<sup>53</sup> Buzek (1964), p62

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Buzek (1964), p276

öffentlich zu äußern. Dieses Recht wird durch kein Dienst- oder Arbeitsverhältnis beschränkt. Niemand darf benachteiligt werden, wenn er von diesem Recht Gebrauch macht.

(2) Die Freiheit der Presse, des Rundfunks und des Fernsehens ist gewährleistet.

In both articles, the freedom of the press was declared, and it was proclaimed that citizens have the right to air their opinions freely. But the differences were fundamental. In the GDR, the condition of being subject to the “Grundsätze dieser Verfassung” was added. This included, most importantly, the acceptance of the leading role of the SED. What this meant in practice was that the citizens had the right to express their opinion, as long as it agreed with the official state viewpoint, as defined by the SED alone. They could express these views in any way they wished, as long as their content was the same as that of the SED’s position. This point was illustrated by Holzweißig, who quoted the definition of “sozialistische Pressefreiheit” given in *Theorie und Praxis der Sozialistischen Journalistik*, which ran as follows:

Sozialistische Pressefreiheit [ist] die Freiheit der Arbeiterklasse, ihre Presse ungehindert herausgeben zu können und sie als kollektiven Agitator, Propagandisten und Organisator der sozialistischen Ideologie voll entwickeln zu können.<sup>55</sup>

The explicit reference to the working class was important, as it was represented in the GDR by the SED, which claimed to be the party which served the interests of the workers. This “Freiheit der Arbeiterklasse” is the only one mentioned, and indeed, the working class was the only class which had the freedom to publish its press freely. The result of this was that only SED-sanctioned press organs were free to publish, although it should be noted that not all newspapers published in the GDR were SED-controlled, as other political parties and a number of other groups also published their own newspapers, albeit with the aim of showing their readers how they too fitted into the historical development towards communism. The second important point which can be drawn from this definition of press freedom is that it was a specific freedom, namely to develop fully the press as a collective agitator, propagandist, and organiser of SED ideology. This point has also been made by Pürer and Raabe, who noted that press freedom was not

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<sup>55</sup> *Theorie und Praxis der Sozialistischen Journalismus*, No. 3/1974, quoted in Holzweißig (1989), p11

als Freiheit vom Staat gedacht, sondern als Freiheit der Presse, am Aufbau bzw. der Verwirklichung einer Gesellschaft nach marxistisch-leninistischer Vorstellung mitzuwirken.<sup>56</sup>

It comes as no surprise, then, that the content of newspapers was laden with ideology. This ideology did not merely encompass political events, but all aspects of daily life, including entertainment and education. Control of the press was a vital pre-requisite for the establishment of a communist state, as the press was to contribute to a greater awareness of the position of the GDR, and of its individual citizens, in the unfolding of history. This development of history was illustrated in the press by dealing with very many different areas of ordinary life, and served to demonstrate to the population at large just how significant even apparently unimportant events could really be.

Because of the control required to accomplish all this, there could be no freedom granted to the working classes to publish anything else other than what was in accordance with the official line, so this freedom was very much a freedom merely to uphold socialist dogma. This concept is, of course, the opposite of what "press freedom" is thought to entail in the West, where it is the right of the press to take its own stance on current issues, and where its realization is seen in the diversity of views presented. To the GDR, such a view was totally alien.

From this foundation, two crucial concepts relating to the press can be considered, namely the question of objectivity and the use of propaganda and agitation. The application of these ideas in the East and the contrast between theory and practice in the West are very instructive.

### **Objectivity in the GDR**

In looking at the GDR view of objectivity, it is first necessary to consider the type of state which the GDR considered itself to be. According to the SED, the socialist GDR was a state which had advanced beyond the level of the capitalist West, and which was still progressing towards the ultimate goal of a communist system. The SED, as the self-proclaimed representative of the working classes, claimed to have the sole right to ascertain what the best interests of the people of the GDR were. It is this assumption which is critical in the

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<sup>56</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p354



consideration of GDR views on objectivity in the press. Although cases of factional fighting within the SED did come to light in the press, in the main, the official party line was the only one represented in the press. Any other views represented could not be accorded value, as they would of necessity contradict the best interests of the population.

### ***Parteilichkeit and truthfulness***

The concept of objectivity in the GDR press rested on the principles of *Parteilichkeit* and truthfulness. The notion of *Parteilichkeit* was used by Lenin in a 1905 article entitled *Party organisation and party literature*, which argued that if articles were to appear in party-run newspapers, they should be at one with the official party views.<sup>57</sup> Lenin's original comments were later used by Stalin, and Lendvai's excellent definition of what *Parteilichkeit* involved reflects the usage of the term which had developed under Stalin's influence:

Party-mindedness, the most frequently mentioned personal characteristic demanded of a Soviet and East European newspaperman, means that a Communist must judge every issue from the point of view of his proletariat party, thus implying an absolute devotion to the party and obedience to its instructions.<sup>58</sup>

Underlying this principle was the same assumption that the party represents the people. In effect, as has already been stated in another context, the dictatorship of the proletariat was replaced by the dictatorship of the party. Accordingly, the duty of the journalist towards the proletariat was at best represented, and at worst replaced, by a duty towards the party. There was no secrecy involved in the application of *Parteilichkeit*. On the contrary, *Parteilichkeit* was a very positive attribute of the press and was one which was constantly stressed. Again, this was attributable to the fact that the development of the GDR was seen by the SED as being in accord with the scientific views of Marxism. Because the party saw itself as being the authoritative embodiment of Marxist-Leninist theory (although this claim has already been discredited above), the only correct and constructive viewpoints were those of the party. Allied to this was the concept of truthfulness, but the nature of truthfulness seen in the East was not the same as that in the West, as it implied in the East a truthfulness to Marxist-Leninist theory.<sup>59</sup> As Blaum has also explained,

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<sup>57</sup> Lendvai (1981), p21

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p21

<sup>59</sup> Hollander (1972), p39

Da der einzelne nur begrenzt die Fähigkeit dazu besitzt, sich alle für ihn in diesem Zusammenhang wichtigen Informationen zu beschaffen, ist er auf deren Vermittlung und Auswahl durch den Journalismus angewiesen. Axiomatisch gilt die Annahme, mit dem Marxismus-Leninismus als wissenschaftlicher Weltanschauung und Theorie sei die Voraussetzung gegeben, Wahrheit auch tatsächlich erkennen zu können, die Welt so zu verstehen, "wie sie wirklich ist".<sup>60</sup>

Thus the twin ideas of *Parteilichkeit* and truthfulness were inextricably linked. Each one both required and resulted in the other. Truthfulness could only be demonstrated by being *parteilich*, and *Parteilichkeit* was justified because of the inherent truth of Marxism-Leninism which the journalists were employing in their work.

### ***Propaganda and agitation***

The two principal means by which the SED conveyed its ideas to the masses and explained to them what was happening in their country and how that compared to the West were propaganda and agitation. In 1902, Lenin wrote that "a newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and collective agitator but also a collective organizer"<sup>61</sup>, and it was this view which became the cornerstone of socialist press theory. The functions of propagandist and agitator were closely linked. The main difference was the part of society targeted by each, with the methods employed varying appropriately. Pürer and Raabe gave useful explanations of the two terms:

*Propaganda* beabsichtigt die langfristige, politisch-ideologische Erziehung durch die systematische Darlegung und Erläuterung sozialistischer Ideale und Theorien.<sup>62</sup>

In order to achieve these aims, "die vernunftmäßige Verwendung von Argumenten aus Philosophie, Geschichte [und] Wissenschaft"<sup>63</sup> was employed, essentially a theoretical approach to the explanation of Marxist theory. Propaganda was directed specifically towards a small elite, most of whom were party members, and its use of abstract ideas contrasted with the concrete examples of agitation:

*Agitation* war eine spezifische Form der sozialistischen Berichterstattung,

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<sup>60</sup> Blaum (1985), p104

<sup>61</sup> Lenin (1963), p178

<sup>62</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p355

<sup>63</sup> Silbermann (1982), p7

durch die - zu einem beträchtlichen Teil von der SED bzw. vom Staat inszenierte und vorgegebene - Ereignisse bewußt parteilich ausgewählt und in der politischen Linie der marxistisch-leninistischen Lehre gedeutet wurden.<sup>64</sup>

Agitation was a much more practical method of influencing the population. Its involved using concrete case studies and examples from both socialist and capitalist societies to demonstrate some principle resulted from the fact that it was directed at the masses. Where propaganda would, for example, deal with the tendency of Western countries to produce extreme nationalist sentiment, agitation might involve an example of a town where extreme right-wing tendencies had been manifested in violent attacks on immigrants, thereby illustrating the point that Western societies were liable to degenerate and show dangerous tendencies.

The “organisation” aspect brought the propaganda and agitator roles together, and involved the press still further in the development of the country. As an organiser

soll [die Presse] anleitend und kontrollierend in die geplante politische, wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Entwicklung eingreifen und zu konkreten Ergebnissen führen.<sup>65</sup>

There was no sense in which the press was to be merely a mirror of society in the GDR. Instead, it was an integral part of the development of the GDR, and was seen very much as a political tool by the SED. In making this third function of organisation possible, both propaganda and agitation were necessary, as a comment on the organizational role of journalism in the *Wörterbuch der sozialistischen Journalistik* makes clear:

[Der Journalismus] übermittelt den Massen regelmäßig und umfassend Informationen, die erforderlich sind, um für die Verwirklichung der Politik der Partei zielbewußt, koordiniert und zweckmäßig handeln zu können.<sup>66</sup>

The only way the press could operate in a “zielbewußt, koordiniert und zweckmäßig” way was for it to organise its activities, specifically its propaganda and agitation, in such a way as to complement the other activities of the state.

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<sup>64</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p355

<sup>65</sup> Noelle-Neumann et al (eds.) (1989), p156

<sup>66</sup> *Wörterbuch der sozialistischen Journalistik* (1981), p 72, quoted in Pürer/Raabe (1994), p356

In order to ensure that the system of propaganda and agitation was working, and thereby to secure conformity to party doctrine in the GDR, several steps were taken. First of all, the information being given to the press had to be filtered and the official party views stamped upon it. This was achieved by means of the ADN, the official press agency. Just as the press was to be *parteilich*, so also was the ADN itself. This was made explicit in a statute of 14 July 1966:

Mit Hilfe der Nachrichtengebung in Wort und Bild trägt ADN zur Entwicklung und Festigung des sozialistischen Bewußtseins aller Schichten der Bevölkerung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, zur Befriedigung des ständig wachsenden Informationsbedürfnisses und zur Förderung der schöpferischen Initiative aller Bürger der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik bei der Verwirklichung des umfassenden sozialistischen Aufbaus bei.

(2) ADN informiert Presse, Rundfunk und Fernsehfunk in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik aktuell und parteilich in Wort und Bild über alle wichtigen und interessanten Ereignisse auf politischem, wirtschaftlichem, kulturellem, sportlichem und sonstigen Gebieten.<sup>67</sup>

Part of the ADN's duty was, then, to promote the development of the socialist state. The selection criteria used to determine what information should be passed on and in what form were given by the party:

In ihrem Programm, Statut und ihren je aktuellen Beschlüssen gibt die Partei die Richtlinien an, woraus das Prinzip der Parteilichkeit seine Maßstäbe bezieht. Für die Methodik der konkreten journalistischen Tätigkeit [...] hat das vor allem die Konsequenz vorgegebener Selektionskriterien. Welche Informationen zu veröffentlichen sind und welche nicht, wird daran bemessen, ob eine Übereinstimmung mit der jeweils aktuellen politischen Linie der Partei besteht.<sup>68</sup>

Lest there be any doubt remaining about what the press actually printed, there were several other safeguards built into the system to ensure that the press conformed to the wishes of the party. These included daily instructions to the media and weekly meetings of those in charge of the various media with a member of the *Zentralkomitee* of the SED, who was in charge of the departments of agitation and propaganda. These areas will be returned to in more detail when looking at the position of journalists and the question of *Medienlenkung* in the

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<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Holzweißig (1989), p18

<sup>68</sup> Blaum (1985), p103

GDR.

With such a system of control, it was not surprising that the SED needed to have little doubt that its instructions would be carried out to the letter. It was this system which also led to the monotony of the press in the GDR. The detailed instructions to the editors left no room for individual interpretation of events or even for strategic placing of articles - "Sogar die Plazierung von wichtigen politischen Artikeln und Nachrichten wird den Redaktionen vorgeschrieben".<sup>69</sup> Not even the firms and collectives used as examples of the socialist ideal in operation or the readers' letters printed were left to chance. Indeed, readers' letters were often written by the editors themselves, sent to the newspaper by party officials with instructions that they were to be published, or commissioned by the newspaper.<sup>70</sup>

To the West, these practices seemed to be a clear example of bias. But it is important first of all to see the GDR press in its ideological context, and furthermore, to evaluate the criticism the GDR made of the Western notion of objectivity. In doing so, two aspects will be looked at. First of all, the more theoretical concept of what objectivity comprises will be examined, using the GDR terms *Objektivität* and *Objektivismus*. Second, starting from an assumption of the Western theory of the way in which objectivity can be realised, the question of whether, and to what extent, objectivity is a reality in the West will be examined.

### **Objectivity and objectivism**

The GDR's view on objectivity and objectivism was essentially a simple one. Objectivity was what was practised in the GDR. It involved applying the principle of *Parteilichkeit* in all aspects of reporting, and meant that the articles published in the press corresponded with the aims of the GDR state, and more importantly with the interests of the citizens of the GDR. Because the interests of the working classes were seen as being those of mankind in general, the press was regarded as furthering the interests of the entire world by representing and supporting the viewpoint of the working classes. There was no question of other, conflicting, views contributing anything worthwhile. As the SED claimed to be applying scientific principles of Marxism-Leninism, and in any case claimed the position of foremost interpreter of these theories, it was in a position to determine what was right and what was

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<sup>69</sup> Holzweißig (1989), p14

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Rainer Stiehler, Neues Deutschland (the names of journalists interviewed have been changed to protect their anonymity)

wrong, and there was then no need for further debate. Once the decision had been made, it was final. There were few exceptions, but some instances of party infighting did surface in the press, although even in these cases, such as after Stalin's death in 1953, it was still the views of different groups within the party leadership which were aired, and not those of truly dissenting individuals.

Objectivism, on the other hand, was regarded as being an excellent example of what was wrong in Western society. What the GDR called objectivism was what the West calls objectivity, and the GDR's explanation of the principles behind it was precise and well thought out. The West considered its objectivity to be the correct way of achieving unbiased reporting, whereas the GDR concluded that this type of supposed objectivity merely served the interests of the ruling class in the West, to the exclusion of the working class, who received no representation in the press. The Western press attempted to achieve objectivity by establishing a free press, free from outside interference and influence, but because of the operation of the capitalist market, access to the media in the West was limited to those with the financial resources and backing to establish a newspaper. Those working for the newspapers were also selected by the newspaper; a degree of conformity was demanded in order to allow the newspaper to establish a certain profile. The GDR pointed out quite correctly that the Western concept of objectivity really meant that the press was controlled by a minority and catered for minority readerships, unlike the GDR press, which was aimed at the broad masses and attempted to deal with their needs and problems. Although the GDR press often failed in its ambitions, its criticism of the Western press system is no less valid.

The differences between East and West in terms of "objectivity" resulted essentially from the very different concepts upon which both systems were based. To the East, freedom of the press and objectivity included a social and class element, and the clear identification with the working class was an essential part of this. In the West, however, the ideal was a dispassionate reporting of the facts, with no ideological bias or other personal agenda. Newspapers exist to serve their readers, and are necessary because the readers are unable to gather personally all the information they wish to possess. A few centuries ago, the only relevant information needed was what was happening in the local area, but as more and more became known about the rest of the world, as it became possible to reach other areas, countries and continents without great difficulty, and as events in the rest of the world began to affect the lives of those many thousands of miles away, there was a demand for

information about what was happening elsewhere. Few individuals were in a position to gather this information themselves; instead they paid others to provide them with it.<sup>71</sup> Newspapers took over this function, their owners having discovered that the revenue from a large number of people paying for the same basic information, coupled with the money which others paid to advertise their goods and services alongside this new information, was more than enough to cover their costs in obtaining and distributing the information in a uniform format. In this way, the media as they are today developed. What was wanted was knowledge of the facts of events elsewhere, and individuals could then form their own opinions. To this end, reporters were required to lay aside their own views and distance themselves from what they were writing about, unless it was very clear that what they were writing was their own opinion. Before the Second World War, fact and opinion had become intertwined in German reporting, and after the war, it was a priority of the Allies to establish a system which ensured such material was separated.<sup>72</sup> The principle underlying it was to be objectivity.

Lenin, however, disagreed with this notion of objectivity, and considered that,

the substance of the so-called non-partisanship in the question of the world outlook is the covering up of class contradictions.<sup>73</sup>

It is this absence of an honest attestation of allegiances which was criticised by the GDR. To them, “*objectivism* is the presentation of facts or events without their social or class evaluation”<sup>74</sup>, which assumes that it is not possible to act as a journalist in a vacuum, with no other considerations being taken into account. The question which then must be asked is whether the GDR’s assessment of the West’s objectivity has any real basis.

### **Objectivity in the West**

It is important to realise that there are several factors which seriously call into question the validity of Western claims of objectivity, but which do not by any means imply deliberate agendas on the part of journalists or of newspaper owners. Instead, these factors are a consequence of the nature of the press and the function of ideology. People are not normally

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<sup>71</sup> Schröder (1995), p4

<sup>72</sup> Sandford (1976), p25

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Buzek (1964), p56

<sup>74</sup> Buzek (1964), p57

aware of the fact that the ideas they believe to be their own are rather a part of a wider ideology of the state in which they have grown up.

A fundamental part of journalism is the selection of news, as not all the events in the world can be covered in each newspaper or television broadcast, and some are clearly more important than others. At some point, journalists must decide what to cover in their articles and what to leave out, and their decision leaves them open to criticism on the grounds that they have not selected the stories which are truly important. On this problem, Mattelart has written,

As a practical concept “objectivity” presupposes on the part of the journalist perceptive powers capable of selectively penetrating reality and determining what is important and what is not.<sup>75</sup>

But such an ability is clearly unrealistic. Journalists must have criteria by which to assess the importance of what they receive and with which they can rank the vast quantity of information coming into their offices. While, as will be seen later, news can be seen to have some sort of value to the reader, which will undoubtedly influence the selection made, the important point to note here is that any selection made by the journalist is necessarily subjective - even an appraisal of what will interest the readers most is dependent on how the journalist views the news items and his audience. Mattelart’s conclusion on the subject seems to support this view, and also leads on to another important point which provides an interesting comparison with the GDR:

In fact, then, objectivity proposes to us nothing more than the interested selection of these givens. Interested here means, prescribed by the practice of the social group to which one belongs, to which one is tied, and to which one is subjected.<sup>76</sup>

The suggestion that social groups play a role in the selection of news in the West is a fascinating one. It provides a clear link with what the GDR maintained all along, namely that it is not possible to present information without any ideological components being introduced even unwittingly at any point in the process from its reception by the journalist to its presentation to the readers, and then on to their interpretation of it. Mattelart went further,

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<sup>75</sup> Mattelart (1980), p37

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p38



arguing that,

This concept of objectivity postulates that the description of facts (which are *what they are in themselves* and not what the journalist *sees* them to be) goes no further than the facts themselves. The description of events is seen as originating in the external world itself which is being described; the *effect* is produced simply by the inter-action between news item and reader.

But we all know that any description of reality "as it is" is in fact imbued with ideological meaning [...]. The receiver in fact receives from the "objective" journalist a reality which has already been given an interpretation - that of the ruling class and its mode of false consciousness.<sup>77</sup>

The assumption that the journalist in the West can act independently of the rest of society - and the related notion that the press merely reflects society - is unrealistic. On the other hand, it would be going too far in most cases to claim that the press in the West is *deliberately* ideological, although some press products have clear leanings toward certain political viewpoints. The truth of the matter lies somewhere between these two extremes. Journalists, like all other members of society, are affected by their upbringing, their background and the political culture which surrounds them all their lives. When their personal experiences are included, as well as the process by which they gain their own personal convictions, it is surely clear that no journalist will be in a position to distance himself so far from his work that no part of himself enters into his reporting. Consequently, elements of his background and the culture which have in part moulded him will also be present in his work. Here it becomes clear where the GDR's claim that the Western press serves the interests of the ruling class comes into the picture. However, it seems unfair to go so far as to support this rather extreme conclusion, as the influence of the ruling class is at most only one of a number of influences at play, and would act only in a very indirect way. This is very different from the type of *Parteilichkeit* practised in the GDR. There, the link between the working classes and the journalist was very strong, even one by which his success as a journalist was measured.

A further point which is based on this concept of influences on the journalist is the question of writing style. On the one hand, absolute objectivity would lead to an alienation of the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p38

journalist from his work, and he would be denied a recognition of himself in what he writes.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, this personal aspect of reporting in the West gives it some of its interest, making it readable and not merely a task to be accomplished. It would, then, appear that there has to be a form of trade-off between objectivity and style in the work of a journalist if there is to be an attempt at satisfying the desire for both objectivity and well-written and engaging articles. Absolute objectivity is not something which will then be achieved.

Another consideration with respect to objectivity is the difficulty of not presenting a report which is linguistically biased. The headlines in some of the tabloid newspapers are a good example of the way in which strong emotions can be conveyed through the choice of words. The *Bild-Zeitung*'s headline, referring to the suspected arsonist in Mölln, of '**Da ist er!**', in large capitals as ever, hardly suggested the fact that the youth concerned was only a suspect, and although the newspaper never actually stated that he was guilty (this would have been a clear intervention in an ongoing investigation, and as such a violation of the freedom of the press), this was certainly the implicit message given. Other, less extreme examples, have shown a similar problem: that the same facts can be portrayed in a very different light by taking different reference points. Meyn gave an example of this from 1983. Concerning the rate of unemployment in the Federal Republic, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* ran the headline 'Mehr als 2,5 Million Arbeitslose', whereas the *Welt* saw in the figures a different story - 'Im Februar weniger Arbeitslose als erwartet'. These headlines appeared three days before the general election.<sup>79</sup> While these provide examples of the deliberate use of language, they also warn of the dangers inherent in the use of particular words or phrases which may have connotations other than those intended.

Having moved from the purely theoretical criticisms of the Western concept of objectivity through slightly more practical issues, it is now possible to examine to what extent objectivity has in practice been realised in the Western press and where its limitations are. What is involved here is a consideration of whether the reporting of newspapers has been free from pressures from those outside the immediate production of newspapers, such as the readers of the newspapers, newspaper owners, advertisers and political parties, all of which have some desire to see their own views presented as the more logical and reasonable

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p38

<sup>79</sup> Meyn (1988), p302

approach to a given subject. A potential exists for the true facts of the case not to be presented from a dispassionate point of view, but to serve some other agenda. This question will be returned to in a later chapter in the context of the work of Eastern German journalists today and the experiences they have had with these limitations on press freedom.

### *Influence of the readership*

In a free press market, the only way to ensure viability is to sell a large number of newspapers. Not only does this itself generate income, but the level of advertising is also dependent on the circulation of the paper. Because the paper is so reliant on selling itself, its content must appeal to its readers. The heterogeneous nature of the population means that it is likely that a large number of alternative, competing papers will develop, but often there is no consensus on what constitutes important news. The GDR found a solution to this problem by using the concept of *gesellschaftliche Informationen*, which was information which was important for the readers to know and understand, as it contributed to a better understanding of the world in general and the role of the GDR in the world. By applying these criteria and having the SED make the decision as to what was relevant for society, the need for individual journalists to decide what was newsworthy and what should be left out was eradicated. In the Federal Republic, however, what was published in the *Bild-Zeitung* was often unlikely to feature prominently, and certainly not in the same form, in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, and vice versa. In other words, different people wished to read about different issues, in a different light and in varying styles. Most newspapers were very aware of the composition of their readership, and to a significant extent catered for their interests and views in the articles. At the same time, the newspaper could also create or influence the views of its readers, moving towards being a pro-active instrument of the formation of public opinion rather than merely a mirror of events and readers' interests.

Economic necessity may stop a newspaper from reporting equally accurately and objectively on all issues in order to ensure that its readers are not offended or annoyed by something which conflicts strongly with their own views. A paper with a predominantly SPD-voting readership is more likely to wish to read about the positive side of its party, and while a certain amount of criticism of the SPD is expected and desired, too much will eventually lead to the readers looking elsewhere for a newspaper which represents their views more closely. In this way, readers can, albeit unawares and through no deliberate action of their own,

inhibit the realisation of press freedom. Pluralism and the freedom of the press can therefore be undermined by the need to survive economically. In the GDR this problem was solved by subsidising the operations of the press, which charged only a nominal sum for their product and had no financial need for advertising, as their finances came from the SED. They could then operate independently of their readers' wishes, but still be dependent on those of the SED. While their independence from reader pressure was a positive thing, it also had the disadvantage of allowing the newspapers to drift away from their readers' needs and interests, and to damage the affinity between readers and newspapers. Both systems had flaws in the operation of reader pressure.

### *Advertising*

The daily newspapers in the Federal Republic had a share of 34.5% of total advertising expenditure in 1988<sup>80</sup>, and this advertising provided an important source of income. The press has in general now become more reliant on advertising income than on income from sales of the final journalistic product. In order to maintain their high share of advertising expenditure, the press has to offer advertisers a service which they want. Not only are there strong incentives to increase circulation, a development which often goes hand in hand with reduced competition and greater concentration, but the press is also to a certain extent constrained in what it can publish, for the same reasons as it has to bear in mind what its readers are likely to wish to read. It is unlikely to receive much business from large steel firms if it conducts a campaign of reporting on safety deficiencies in steel works and on claims of price fixing among companies, however true the allegations may be. In effect, the media have to weigh up comprehensive reporting of events with the likely impact they will have on their existence. Once again, press freedom in the Federal Republic is compromised by economic considerations. This was another area where the GDR found a solution of sorts. The newspapers only had one source of influence to deal with, the direct influence from the SED. Nobody else had the authority, or perhaps merely the power, to determine what the newspapers were to print, and the SED was able to pass over the more subtle forms of persuasion by implementing structures which gave it the right to issue specific instructions to the media, confident that these would then be followed.

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<sup>80</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p222

### *Government intervention*

A final factor which may interfere with the objectivity of the press is fear of government action against the press. The government may for example wish to prevent publication of certain facts or of overly critical commentaries. The most famous case of this in the Federal Republic was the so-called "*Spiegel* Affair". The government claimed that national security had been placed at risk, and raided the *Spiegel* offices, as well as arresting the journalist concerned, Conrad Ahlers, and the magazine's publisher, Rudolf Augstein, who was legally responsible for the contents of the magazine. While the government's position might appear to be understandable, it is significant that the magazine had previously published a series of articles about the defence minister Strauß, and there were suggestions that this was the main reason Strauß instigated the investigation. Charges of high treason were levelled against both individuals, but there were many voices which accused the government, and Strauß in particular, of trying merely to silence a critical magazine under the pretext of national security.<sup>81</sup> In the end, the Constitutional Court ruled that there was no case to be answered against Ahlers and Augstein, although the *Spiegel's* claim that its constitutional rights had been violated was also rejected.<sup>82</sup> The significance of the case was that it highlighted the need for better legislation in this area, and the Criminal Code was amended in August 1968. The *Spiegel* incident contributed to the decision to provide the press with more safeguards against such an eventuality. After the law was changed, it became much harder for the government to interfere with the press by claiming that state security was at risk.<sup>83</sup> As Humphreys has stated,

Henceforth, the press could only be punished for revealing state secrets which clearly and unambiguously threatened the state's external security. The outcome of the '*Spiegel* Affair', therefore, was yet another major victory for the principle of "press freedom".<sup>84</sup>

Objectivity in the West is by no means something already achieved, as there are simply too many factors influencing journalists individually, newspapers as a whole, and the entire press industry for objectivity to be as clearly an achieved aim as some Western commentators

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<sup>81</sup> Humphreys (1994), p73

<sup>82</sup> Sandford (1976), p57

<sup>83</sup> Humphreys (1994), p73

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p73

would like to assume. This point will become even clearer when looking at the experiences of Eastern German journalists since the *Wende*.

### *Freedom of information*

An area in which there were very great differences between the FRG and the GDR was the freedom of information. Put simply, this was not a right in the GDR, whereas in the FRG, it was a fundamental constituent of the press system. In fact, this right to the provision of information goes even further, and public bodies in the Federal Republic are *required* to make information available to the media upon request, although they do not have to release information on their own initiative.<sup>85</sup> Such a requirement would in any case be totally impractical, and the sheer quantity of information thereby made available could potentially have the opposite effect from that intended, by smothering the press in a blanket of information which could hide what it was they were trying to discover. As Pürer and Raabe have pointed out, this requirement concerns not only those state institutions at the highest levels:

Der Anspruch der Massenmedien auf Auskunft ist dabei gegen den Staat (und nicht etwa gegen Personen) gerichtet, so daß die Auskunftsverpflichtung für alle staatlichen Stellen gilt, von den Bundesbehörden bis zu Ämtern auf kommunaler Ebene.<sup>86</sup>

In essence, the state thereby has committed itself to serving the interests of the press as they fulfil their *öffentliche Aufgabe*, their main role in society. This requirement encompasses anything run by the state, at whatever level. Thus, the *Bundespost* is as much affected by it as are local swimming pools and libraries, should there be an interest in any of these state bodies.

The real importance of the freedom of information in the FRG is that through it, the government and its various agencies are accountable to the press, whereas in the GDR, it was the press which was accountable to the government and the party. This attitude is typical of the more general relationship between the government and citizens of the two states, and demonstrates well one of the fundamental differences between the two countries.

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<sup>85</sup> Meyn (1992), p23

<sup>86</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p275

## *Concentration*

An issue which was only of real relevance in the FRG was press concentration. Nevertheless, because of the concerns which have been raised in the post-unified Germany, it is useful to consider the problems and issues involved in West German press concentration, as they give insights into the way in which the press in the former GDR developed towards a concentrated market. The legacy of the SED regime has been a press system which was already highly concentrated, and the policies of the *Treuhandanstalt* were such as to maintain this structure in the new market and to allow an ever greater degree of concentration to develop, even exceeding levels seen in the old Federal Republic.

### **A definition of concentration**

The phenomenon of concentration is not as simple as might be supposed. The concept has been defined very differently in communications research, but for present purposes, Pürer and Raabe's relatively simple, common-sense definition will be the one used here, as the problem of concentration rather than the precise definition of its nature is of primary interest:

Konzentration wird von Medienforschern und Kommunikationswissenschaftlern relativ übereinstimmend im Bereich der Presse in Anlehnung an die wirtschaftswissenschaftliche Begriffsbildung zunächst verstanden (a) als eine Verringerung der Zahl der Anbieter bestimmter Presseprodukte und (b) als ein überproportionales Größenwachstum einzelner Anbieter.<sup>87</sup>

### **The facts**

West German press statistics tend to obscure the true situation as regards the degree of press concentration. Often, the number of newspapers appearing is cited as being indicative of the wide diversity in the press, but the use of these figures is misleading. In order to show the more accurate development of the press, the terms independent editorial units (*publizistische Einheiten*) and editorial editions (*redaktionelle Ausgaben*) are used. Pürer and Raabe have given a good definition of these two terms, and their use of the concepts will be adopted for this work:

Als *publizistische Einheiten* versteht man dabei redaktionell selbständige

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p114

Tageszeitungen mit Vollredaktionen. Dazu gehören alle Blätter, die den gesamten redaktionellen Teil (und damit sämtliche Ressorts) wie auch den Anzeigenteil selbständig erarbeiten und verantworten. [...] Alle Zeitungsausgaben einer publizistischen Einheit haben, unabhängig von ihrer verlegerischen Struktur, den gleichen Zeitungsmantel. Somit ist es durchaus möglich, daß *eine* publizistische Einheit von mehreren Verlagen zusammen herausgegeben wird.

Als (*redaktionelle*) *Ausgabe* bezeichnet man Zeitungen, die in ihrer Berichterstattung eindeutig Bezug nehmen auf ihr vorwiegendes Verbreitungsgebiet. In erster Linie geschieht dies natürlich im Lokal- und Regionalteil dieser Zeitung, die dann durch die Übernahme redaktioneller Beiträge, insbesondere des politischen Teils, aus einer Vollredaktion, in der Regel aus dem sogenannten "Stamtblatt", vervollständigt werden.<sup>88</sup>

The following table shows the development of the actual number of editions of newspapers appearing alongside the more significant number of independent editorial units:

Year	Independent editorial units	Editorial editions	Circulation (millions)
1954	225	1500	13.4
1964	183	1495	17.3
1976	121	1229	19.5
1985	126	1273	20.9
1989	119	1334	20.3

Source: Schütz (1992), p82

What emerges from these figures is that while the circulation of the newspapers has grown since 1954, both the number of editorial editions, and more significantly, the number of independent editorial units have fallen. What this means in practice is that an ever larger number of newspapers has been controlled by an ever smaller group. As the independent editorial units give an indication of the *true* level of editorial diversity, it becomes clear that the majority of the publishers have been merely producing the local and advertising sections of the paper, with the main political events being covered and commented on by a small number of publishing units.<sup>89</sup> As Sandford has pointed out in this connection,

The system of *Haupt- und Nebenausgaben* has always obscured the true state of affairs, as many *Nebenausgaben* appear ostensibly as separate papers with their own title - often retained from the days when they *were* independent - with little indication that they are in fact identical in

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, pp 111-2

<sup>89</sup> Humphreys (1994), pp 74-6



editorial and most other content not only with the mother paper, but also with many other small papers in the same area.<sup>90</sup>

At this point, it is necessary to deviate somewhat from the actual issue of concentration and examine why it is that the concentration in the press market is seen most clearly in the local and regional press, and why this is so significant in Germany. The reason for this is in fact very simple. In Germany, it is the norm to buy a local or regional newspaper as opposed to a national one, a fact which is true both of the Eastern and Western parts of the country. While there are several important national newspapers, they do not achieve the same circulation figures as those in other countries, and the largest five subscription newspapers achieved a market share of just over a quarter of total sales of subscription papers.<sup>91</sup> In reality, these national newspapers are more supra-regional. They are available and bought throughout Germany, but still have a regional concentration in their area of production. The one exception is the *Bild-Zeitung*, which has in its time topped the 5 million circulation mark. Because of this dependence on local and regional newspapers, the majority of Germans obtain their national and international news from these local papers. Until the mid-1950s, it was unusual to find areas with only one local newspaper, but the incidence of this phenomenon has risen steadily since then.<sup>92</sup> In 1954, only 8% of the West German population lived in an area with only one newspaper 'mit örtlichem und regionalem Inhalt'; by 1977, this figure was 32%.<sup>93</sup> In addition, in 1977, out of 70 German cities, 26 had only one local newspaper, and a further 12 had competition only between newspapers from the same publisher, so in over half of these cities, there was no effective competition. These facts, when seen in the light of the German reading tendencies, indicate why it is that the concentration in the local and regional press markets is of such concern.

While it is important to have some idea of the actual nature of the concentration being discussed, the primary concern is to understand first of all why concentration occurs and secondly why it actually matters, in other words, what difference it makes whether there are thousands of completely independent newspapers or whether there are a few large organisations controlling the same number of newspapers.

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<sup>90</sup> Sandford (1976), p29

<sup>91</sup> Humphreys (1994), p78

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p77

<sup>93</sup> Schiwy/Schütz (1977), p84

### **The reasons for concentration**

The primary reason for the concentration of the press market is the same as for concentration in most other areas of the economy - economic advantage. Because of the nature of the press market in Germany, with the emphasis on the local level, the publishers have a natural tendency to be smaller. Their potential market is very limited and well defined. But the introduction of new technology at most stages of the newspaper production process means that it is economically disadvantageous to be operating in such a manner; a simple case of economies of scale benefiting larger production units. One way of benefiting from these economies was the merging of smaller publishers to reap the benefits of the lower costs of production arising from the use of the new technology. At the same time, the large media firms also had an interest in acquiring these smaller publishers and bringing them all under one roof. It was then a simple matter to work with a system in which variety was reduced to a minimum. International and national news could easily be kept the same for all the areas supplied, and often a further subdivision was possible, with *Land*-level news being covered by one editorial unit, and then passed on to the local units. Only the very local news would then be produced by the editorial units in that specific area. The result would be that the readers had the same information as before, but at a lower cost to the publisher. The real problem with this will be seen when the reasons for concentration's unpopularity are examined.

A further aspect of the economic reasons for concentration being likely to take place is the fact that the market in which the press operates is a free, capitalist market. Gaining control of several newspapers and attempting to achieve a dominant position in an area is an effective defence against competition. It is simpler to take over existing newspapers, which have built up a readership base, keep the existing title, and supply the majority of the news to them. Starting up new newspapers was unlikely to succeed, and would certainly have taken a lot longer and involved much higher costs.

Gaining a large circulation also has economic advantages in terms of advertising. As advertising became a more important source of revenue than sales of the newspapers, the publishers soon became aware of the fact that they had a significant advantage if they had a large circulation, which naturally appealed to advertisers. As Humphreys has said,

Newspapers that started off with a large circulation were already the most

attractive to advertisers and *de facto* the best-placed in the fierce competition that [...] broke out in the early 1950s. Very quickly such newspapers consolidated their position and progressively increased their lead. Publishers rapidly discovered that they could establish the most favourable terms of business with their advertising customers by gaining the largest possible circulation and by gaining a monopoly, or dominant, position in the market.<sup>94</sup>

The best, and certainly fastest, way of increasing circulation was taking over existing small publishers. By 1967-9, the press market in the Federal Republic had achieved saturation point<sup>95</sup>, and takeovers became essentially the only way of increasing circulation. In the short term, the new parent publisher increased both circulation and dominance in that market, and hence received more advertising revenue. In the longer term, there were economies of scale to be reaped. Given the economic framework of the press market, concentration was a logical and inevitable development. The smaller publishers were often financially weak and in no position to argue or fight when a takeover bid was made.<sup>96</sup>

Looking at the issue in terms of economic considerations, concentration appears to be a positive thing. But developments in the Federal Republic since the press market became more concentrated have given cause for concern.<sup>97</sup> This concern is not related to the *reasons* for concentration, but to the *impact* - both theoretical and practical - which these developments have had.

### **Concerns about concentration**

Three concerns which are associated with concentration will be looked at here. The first of these is the suggestion that concentration leads to a reduction in the range of views presented in the media. The second concern deals with the possible motives publishers may have for acquiring rival newspapers and increasing the circulation of their existing newspapers. Aside from legitimate economic reasons, political motives may be at play, with publishers seeing a possibility to gain more political influence on public perception and opinion.<sup>98</sup> Finally, the possibility that readers may suffer from a decline in choice as a result of concentration could

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<sup>94</sup> Humphreys (1994), pp 79, 80

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p80

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p82

<sup>97</sup> Meyn (1992), p96

<sup>98</sup> Humphreys (1994), p83

be seen as an unwelcome development.

The first of these concerns arises from the assumption that only with press diversity will varying opinions come to the public's attention and the press fulfil its public duty in this respect. While this approach appeals to common sense, its validity is less clear. What matters is not the number of press products on the market per se. As Pürer and Raabe have pointed out,

Die These, nach der eine Vielzahl an publizistischen Organen und Titeln auch eine publizistische Vielfalt der Meinungen im demokratischen System bedeutet, ist immer wieder auch kritisch hinterfragt worden.<sup>99</sup>

It is the diversity of opinion present which is the more important factor. Although a large number of independent newspapers does not necessarily lead to a wide range of views being presented, the lack of a significant number of newspapers owned by different publishers presents the danger that diversity in the press will be restricted, as Meyn has pointed out:

Sobald mehrere Zeitung in einem Verlag erscheinen, besteht die Gefahr, daß sie eines Tages auch *einem politischen Willen*, nämlich dem des Verlegers, folgen.<sup>100</sup>

In some ways, the Springer press has provided the best example of a single publisher achieving uniformity in the views held by the various subsidiary newspapers. Having said that, however, the occasion of the student demonstrations in the late 1960s provided an example of the press being subject to its readers more than to its owner. The Springer quality paper *Die Welt* changed an article which was clearly against the students to a more neutral position because the readership of the *Welt* was more sympathetic towards the students than the readers of other Springer papers. The anti-student sentiments were instead printed in the *Bild-Zeitung*, where they were believed to find more resonance amongst the readership.<sup>101</sup>

The second concern relates to the publisher's ability to impose his will in several important ways. The press can have an influence on political parties, who may be afraid that a campaign against them by one prominent newspaper group could damage their election chances. Meyn gives an example of this happening in 1964, when Hans-Dietrich Genscher

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<sup>99</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p120

<sup>100</sup> Meyn (1992), pp 95-6

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, pp 95-6

apologised for an article in the F.D.P. publication *Das freie Wort* which had criticised plans of the Springer concern.<sup>102</sup> Sandford has also suggested that the very fact that the increased concentration in the press market was not discussed at any great length in parliament can be attributed to the risk the parties would run of having a campaign waged against them in the Springer press.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, the debate about press concentration was only really taken up after the *Außerparlamentarische Opposition* (APO) of the late 1960s had brought public attention to the allegations made against the Springer press, and after the APO had itself taken up the issue on the streets, and following direct action against Springer property, with the accompanying demands for Springer to be expropriated. That the Springer empire was able to exert so much influence on the government is a very clear indication of just how undesirable the consequences of press concentration *can* be. It is always possible that such events will never in fact occur, but the possibility of their happening is the paramount concern. The later analysis of the journalists' experience since 1989 will provide some evidence that in some cases, the strength of a newspaper can in fact work in favour of press freedom and freedom of expression in a newspaper.

Another example, also involving Springer, serves to show that in practice, the press may use its influence in entirely selfish ways, not contributing at all to the good of the rest of the country. In 1961, Springer effectively threatened news vendors with cancelling the supply of the Springer-owned newspapers if they continued to sell rival magazines which contained the programmes of the GDR radio and television service.<sup>104</sup> The measure was partly successful, in that it caused Springer's rivals to lose some of their circulation, but eventually the rest of the industry won through.

The final concern relates to the impact of concentration on the individual citizen. The perceived danger results again from the possible uniformity of position developing within one publishing group. The most blatant form of this problem arising is when a publisher gives instructions as to how to deal with a certain issue. This allegation has been directed at the Springer press in the past, albeit controversially.<sup>105</sup> But as Meyn pointed out, the Springer press did hold certain compulsory viewpoints. It was undoubtedly in favour of

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p88

<sup>103</sup> Sandford (1976), p33

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p34

<sup>105</sup> Meyn (1992), p98

private television services (from which Springer hoped to benefit himself), nuclear power stations, the stationing of nuclear weapons in the Federal Republic, and was against the *Ostpolitik* of the social-liberal coalition.<sup>106</sup> Interestingly, Axel Springer gave his own opinion on the problem of his ability to misuse his power:

Große Unternehmen können [...] die Sicherheit des Arbeitsplatzes garantieren. Diese Tatsache macht Journalisten selbstbewußter, stolzer und freier, als sie es je zuvor gewesen sind. Keiner der Redakteure, die für die Blätter unseres Hauses arbeiten, braucht zu kuschen, und die Vorstellung ist aberwitzig, daß ich die Peitsche über 800 geistig unabhängige Menschen schwingen könnte oder auch nur wollte [...] Natürlich muß der Verleger die Entscheidung fällen [...]. Irgendjemand muß an der Wegkreuzung sagen, welche Richtung einzuschlagen ist. Das ist in der Politik nicht anders als auf hoher See und bei der Produktion von Automobilen nicht anders als in einem Zeitungshaus.<sup>107</sup>

Several objections can be made to Springer's comments. Firstly, he asserted that he could not exert control over his writers and editors, but this was simply not true. In a market where there is a high level of concentration, there are few alternative employers for the workers to turn to if they should lose their job. There may well be many other newspapers, but if a large proportion of them are owned by the same publisher, there is little prospect of obtaining employment there, and only the competing press is then a viable option. Competitors in turn are unlikely to be keen to employ somebody who has already demonstrated a strong will against an employer lest this at some point in the future be directed against them. Thus, the mobility of journalists is greatly hampered, and the owner of the paper *can* exert some pressure for certain views to be expressed.

A second objection to Springer's claims relates to the comparison of the press industry with the car industry or the law aboard a ship at sea. It is one thing for the captain of a boat to decide which port to sail to, and for the owner of a car firm to decide which model to produce, but quite another for a newspaper owner to decide that all his newspapers should express a certain view on a subject. Press freedom gives the individual journalist the right to express his opinion freely, but not for the owner to tell the journalist what opinion is to be published. Indeed, such a state of affairs constitutes an infringement of press freedom, and is certainly a danger, especially given the restricted opportunities for the journalist to seek

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p98

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Meyn (1992), p99

employment elsewhere.

What has emerged from this comparison of some aspects of the press systems in the two post-war German states is that, given the concerns with the state of the press in both Eastern and Western Germany, at the time of reunification a rethink of the entire philosophy and practice of the press in Germany should have taken place. Reunification offered the opportunity to reassess what had been taken for granted, but at the same time criticised by many, and to learn from the mistakes of both countries. However, instead of this, the press system of the East was largely disregarded in favour of the Western model. The consequences of this will be seen in a later chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Journalistic practice in the GDR - “Können, aber nicht dürfen”**

The position of journalists in the GDR was central to the application of the theories which the SED had developed about the operation of the media system. Despite the elaborate framework which was used to ensure that the system as a whole could be controlled centrally, the actual mechanics of the production of newspapers were under the control of the journalists. Accordingly, the SED had to be sure that it could rely on them to follow its instructions. It imposed stringent criteria on the selection of people to become journalists and was actively involved in the training of the successful candidates. This was intended to create a loyal body of workers who would then be compliant with the SED's wishes.

In looking at the reality of journalism in the GDR, two main aspects need to be considered. First, the selection, training and work of the journalists provide vital background information to the actual interview material collected in Germany, and provides a context for the journalists' experiences. Second, the way in which the theories were turned into a working model is shown by looking at how instructions from the SED were passed on to the journalists as well as examining the practical tools for controlling the press. These two areas will complete the overview of the GDR's press system and allow for a comparison both with the situation at the time of the *Wende* and subsequently as well as with the current working conditions of journalists.

#### **Becoming a journalist**

Given the restrictions on the work of the journalists, it seems a reasonable question to ask why any of them would want to enter this profession. The limits to their professional freedom and the pressure to conform, which will be discussed in much greater detail later on, were well known, and were stressed before individuals began to study journalism.<sup>1</sup> It must therefore be assumed that there were compensating factors. Some of the very personal

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<sup>1</sup> Holzweißig (1989), p35



reasons for embarking on this career will be looked at in a later chapter based upon information from interviews with some of these journalists. Aside from these factors, there were real advantages of working as a journalist. There were many opportunities for increasing one's salary, and money was also used to compensate for assignments to less popular newspapers, such as *Neues Deutschland*:

Hans-Dieter Schütt: "Und jeder junge Journalist, der ins ND ging, war im Prinzip todunglücklich, da half nur das große Geld."

pan: "Die bekamen mehr."

Schütt: "Aber selbstverständlich, natürlich. Das hängt damit zusammen, daß wir keine Parteizeitung waren, sondern FDJ. Ich habe als Chefredakteur verdient 2500 Mark. Das bekam im ND ein etwas besser gestellter Redakteur."<sup>2</sup>

There was also the possibility of receiving bonuses for doing a job well, such as providing a good coverage of party conferences. Aside from possible financial advantages, some journalists also had the opportunity to travel abroad, which was even more important in the GDR than mere money.<sup>3</sup>

Jutta Voigt: "Die Kollegen lügen übrigens ein bißchen, das erste war nicht Geld, das erste war Westreisen, Reisekader werden war viel wichtiger als Geld, Geld spielte eine zweitrangige Rolle, also ich würde denen das nicht abnehmen. Das erste Motiv war rauszukommen und was zu gelten. Als Reisekader hatten Sie einen Status, der war mit nichts vergleichbar, das war das Höchste, was man erreichen konnte, das war viel wichtiger als das Gehalt. Rauszukommen eben, die Mauer überwinden, durch den Eingang Friedrichstraße eben, durch die Kabuffs gehen und den Paß vorzeigen können."<sup>4</sup>

The next question logically relates to what the compensation was for. This begins with the status of journalists in the GDR. The political significance of journalists in the GDR is suggested by the status accorded to their profession in that country:

In der DDR Journalist zu werden, bedeutet den Erwerb einer gesetzlich geschützten Berufsbezeichnung und ist an wesentlich andere Voraussetzungen gebunden, als wir [im Westen] sie gewohnt sind.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Pannen (1992), p46

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p47

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p47

<sup>5</sup> Blaum (1974/75), p517

In the West, there is even now still a discussion as to whether journalism can and should be termed a “profession”. One reason for denying journalism this title is the lack of an independent body regulating access to the career and applying sanctions to those who break a code of ethics which applies to all those working in the field. An interesting adjunct of this much stricter control of who could become a journalist in the GDR as opposed to, for example, the FRG, was that the GDR had a faculty of journalism in Leipzig as early as 1954, whereas in the 1960s in the FRG there was still a debate about whether journalism could be regarded as a subject worthy of a chair at universities and whether it was preferable for future journalists to have an academic qualification.<sup>6</sup> There was, however, a price to be paid for the earlier recognition of journalism as an academic subject, namely that the would-be journalists were required to act and even - in so far as this could be controlled in practice - to think as political functionaries.<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Grubitzsch, professor of journalism in Leipzig, provided an answer as to why the political views of would-be journalists were so important:

Die Presse der DDR war über vier Jahrzehnte integrierender Bestandteil autoritärer Machtstrukturen des Herrschaftssystems der SED. [...] Die Kommunikation, die diese Presse vermittelte, lief durch eine Einbahnstraße. Die häufig geforderte und etikettierte Pflege des Erfahrungsaustauschs zielte auf Zustimmung und systemgerechte Motivierung. Kritischer journalistischer Geist sah sich von Verbotsschildern umstellt.<sup>8</sup>

In order to ensure that this situation was preserved, the options for studying journalism were very limited. The vast majority of journalists in the GDR were trained in Leipzig, either at the *Sektion Journalistik*, part of the *Karl-Marx-Universität*, or at the *Fachhochschule für Journalistik*. The *Sektion* awarded the title of *Diplomjournalist*, and the *Fachhochschule* course resulted in the officially recognised title of *Journalist*, both of which were only available from the respective institutions.<sup>9</sup> The *Sektion* had developed from the *Institut für Publizistik* in Leipzig, which was founded when the university in Leipzig was reopened in 1946, and had increased in stature over the years to the point at which it was the centre for academically orientated journalism training in the whole country.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Herrmann (1961c), p267

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Grubitzsch (1990), p144

<sup>9</sup> Baerns (1990), p51

<sup>10</sup> Blaum (1974/75), p517

### *Requirements for entering the official institutions*

As the vast majority of journalists were trained at the *Sektion*, the courses offered by the *Fachhochschule* will not be examined in detail. The main differences were that an *Abitur* was not required for admission to the *Fachhochschule*, but a minimum of two years of practical experience at a newspaper and the recommendation of the individual employer were needed in order to join a course.<sup>11</sup> For admission to the *Sektion*'s standard journalism course, an *Abitur* was a requirement as well as a one year's *Volontariat*<sup>12</sup>, which ensured that the applicants had the necessary abilities to succeed in the GDR media.

#### **The *Volontariat***

In order to comply with the requirement of practical experience prior to study, an interested individual either had to apply to a newspaper, radio or television station of their choice or to the ADN. Alternatively, a position as a *Volontär* could be offered by a media institution on its own initiative.<sup>13</sup> In many ways, it was in the best interests of the newspapers themselves actively to seek out new talent, rather than wait to see who would apply to them for a job. Thus,

Es wird den Zeitungen empfohlen, sich rechtzeitig mit den Schulen in Verbindung zu setzen, um geeignete Volontäre zu finden. Die Vertreter der Praxis versuchen also offenbar, der Herabminderung ihres Einflusses auf die journalistische Hochschulbildung entgegenzuwirken, die im nur einjährigen Volontariat liegt, indem sie diesem Volontariat zeitlich vorgreifen und es so tendenziell verlängern.<sup>14</sup>

Beginning a *Volontariat* was not simply a matter of finding a newspaper prepared to provide a training place, however. There were also strict formal requirements. Candidates had to have good grades in German, history, foreign languages, geography and *Staatsbürgerkunde*, and their final school assessment had to certify that they were capable of hard work, that they were politically and morally mature and took an active part in society as well as having typing and stenography skills.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p518

<sup>12</sup> Holzweißig (1989), p34

<sup>13</sup> Blaum (1974/75), p518

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pp 518-9

<sup>15</sup> Baerns (1990), pp 52-3

The selection process for admission to the university course was equally stringent. Even when the *Volontariat* had been successfully completed, there was no guarantee that the individual would be accepted onto a course. The need to obtain a recommendation from the media institution at which the person had worked was far from a mere formality. The newspapers had here an opportunity to contribute to the future composition of their staff. The seriousness of this commitment was demonstrated by the requirement that the newspaper should itself employ for at least one year all those whom they had recommended and who subsequently graduated from the university. Those recommended by a newspaper then proceeded to another selection process, which, by means of a week of rigorous interviews, reduced the number of applicants to the 120 who could be accepted onto the course at the *Sektion* in any given year. The reason for the rejection of any candidates the newspapers had put forward were sent to them<sup>16</sup>, and those rejected had the option of applying for a correspondence course instead.<sup>17</sup>

### *Courses at the Sektion*

Once the candidate had been accepted firstly for a *Volontariat* by a newspaper and secondly by the university after successful completion of the *Volontariat*, the course at the *Sektion* was divided into several stages, with a *Grundstudium* of one year followed by a *Fachstudium* lasting two years and a one year *Spezialstudium* which led, through the diploma exams, to receipt of the full qualification.<sup>18</sup>

The actual content of the courses was closely related to the practical demands of the occupation. The most important of these demands was political - journalists had to have a positive relationship with the socialist society in which they lived.<sup>19</sup> This was not merely a matter of lip-service, but had to be demonstrated by having an active involvement in the social institutions in the GDR, which went much further than simple party membership. Not only were the journalists required to show their social involvement before beginning their course<sup>20</sup>, but

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p53

<sup>17</sup> Pannen (1992), p33

<sup>18</sup> Blaum (1974/75), p519

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Holzweißig (1989), p35

Insgesamt dürften die Anforderungen an die politische Aktivität des Journalisten zutreffend mit den Richtlinien der Sektion Journalistik beschrieben sein, in denen "die bewiesene Bereitschaft, sich für die sozialistische Gesellschaft einzusetzen" zur Studienvoraussetzung gemacht wird, woraus zu folgern ist, daß diese Bereitschaft im Verlauf des Studiums und der späteren journalistischen Tätigkeit wohl auch erneuter Beweise bedarf.<sup>21</sup>

Herrmann has given an indication of the extent of the political involvement of the *Sektion* itself, which was possibly also related to the students' need to provide continuing evidence of active participation in GDR society:

Als besonders markantes Beispiel sei nur erwähnt, daß die Fakultät den Lehrbetrieb im Sommer 1958 vorzeitig stilllegte und die Studenten mit den Assistenten in die Dörfer und Betriebe schickte, damit sie dort die propagandistische und agitatorische Vorbereitung des V. Parteitagés der SED aktiv unterstützten.<sup>22</sup>

This practical political interest was supported by clear theoretical principles in the journalism courses taught. The titles of the sections of the course on offer show the extent to which Marxism-Leninism was an integral part of the training (*italics indicate those parts which have clear ideological or political content or significance, either theoretical or practical*)

Das Grundstudium umfaßte die folgenden Gebiete: *Grundlagen des Marxismus-Leninismus; ausgewählte Probleme des Marxismus-Leninismus; Grundlagen der Theorie und Praxis des Journalismus und der journalistischen Fachgebiete; Geschichte des Journalismus; Grundlagen der journalistischen Methodik; Theorie und Methodik des Medienjournalismus; Massenmedien und Kultur; Massenmedien und politische Massenarbeit; Internationale Entwicklungstendenzen der Massenmedien; Journalismus imperialistischer Länder; Theorie und Praxis des journalistischen Sprachgebrauchs; Psychologie der Massenkommunikation; Wissenschaftsmethodik; Informatik; Literatur; Recht; Geheimnisschutz; Aktuell-politisches Argumentieren; Entwicklungstendenzen der Natur- und Technikwissenschaften; Fachgebietsspezifische Grundlagen journalistischer Arbeit; Militärpolitik; Russisch, Zweite Fremdsprache; Sport.*<sup>23</sup>

The principles of agitation, propaganda, *Parteilichkeit* and so on which have already been discussed were important areas covered in the course, and were, as Blaum stated, the

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<sup>21</sup> Blaum (1974/75), p519, quoting from *Studienführer 1972/73 der Karl-Marx-Universität, Leipzig*, p170

<sup>22</sup> Herrmann (1961c), p270

<sup>23</sup> Baerns (1990), p54, italics added

“Grundlage aller zu erwerbenden Kenntnisse bildet der Marxismus-Leninismus”<sup>24</sup>, which provided the framework for these more journalism-specific principles. The influence of Marxism-Leninism was seen to a greater extent at this introductory level than in the more specialised parts of the course from the fifth semester onwards, when the students could choose between different branches of journalism, either dealing with a specific medium or with a particular subject area, such as foreign affairs.<sup>25</sup>

## Journalism as a career

The involvement of the state in the training of journalists, whether directly or indirectly, for example through the *Verband Deutscher Journalisten* (VDJ), was only the beginning. Throughout their careers and in all aspects of their working lives, the controlling influence of the party was felt. This activity of the party and its various subsidiary ministries and departments in the media field comes under the heading of *Medienlenkung*.

*Medienlenkung - “Was wahr ist und was der Leser wissen darf, das entscheiden wir!”*<sup>26</sup>

The SED’s *Medienlenkung* had certain clear aims in mind, which in the party’s thinking justified their attempts to control the activities of the media. The goals of the policies introduced were

zum einen, die Bevölkerung politisch-ideologisch gegen alle Formen des Antikommunismus zu immunisieren, zu denen eine bürgerliche Ideologie, Nationalismus, Sozialdemokratie, Revisionismus und der Maoismus gerechnet wurden. Zum anderen sollten durch ökonomische Agitation die (Über-)Erfüllung der wirtschaftlichen Planziele wie Steigerung der Produktionsleistung, der Arbeitsproduktivität oder Senkung des Materialverbrauchs propagiert werden.<sup>27</sup>

This quotation reinforces much of what has already been discussed about the SED’s media policies, but it is useful to bear these aims in mind when looking at the way in which theoretical goals were transformed into practical policy.

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<sup>24</sup> Blaum (1974/75), p520

<sup>25</sup> Baerns (1990), p54

<sup>26</sup> From an article dealing with *Medienlenkung* in *Neue Zeit*, 19.1.1990, reproduced in Holzweißig (1991), p53

<sup>27</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p368

In practice, control of the media in the GDR was not a simple exercise, and there were several bodies responsible for certain aspects of the media. The history of these institutions, including changes in their names and roles over the years, has been provided by Holzweißig.<sup>28</sup> The present discussion will be limited to the system in operation in the late 1980s, since its predecessors were similar enough not to require further consideration. The aim here is simply to illustrate how the press was controlled by political rather than professional bodies. German terms have been used throughout in order to keep the complex organisation as free as possible from potential confusion.

The most important of the institutions charged with control of the press was the *Abteilung für Agitation und Propaganda beim Zentralkomitee der SED*, which was answerable to the *Politbüro*. The *Abteilung* was subdivided into eight sectors, four of which were primarily involved in control of the media, namely the sectors *Presse, Rundfunk/Fernsehen, Arbeit mit den ausländischen Korrespondenten in der DDR*, and one other concerned with general agitation and employing the majority of the *Abteilung's* political staff.<sup>29</sup> The purpose of the *Abteilung* was well defined. When Dieter Langguth joined the *Abteilung* in November 1984, his superior, Joachim Herrmann, told him clearly that “Ideologie kommt immer an erster Stelle”, and “Denken konntest du vielleicht bei der FDJ. Wir dienen hier dem Generalsekretär.”<sup>30</sup> Just what that involved in practice will be seen later.

Responsible for the activities of the *Abteilung*, apart from its own *Abteilungsleiter*, was the *Sekretär des Zentralkomitees für Agitation und Propaganda*, the role filled by Joachim Herrmann until the resignation of Erich Honecker. At this point, Herrmann also resigned and the post was subsequently abolished. The post was bound tightly to the *Generalsekretär* of the SED, and most noticeably in the case of the flagship *Neues Deutschland*, Herrmann did not make any significant decisions without a directive from Honecker.<sup>31</sup> The close ties between the two and Herrmann's unpopularity made it inevitable that he would only remain in his position as long as Honecker was protecting him.

Another significant body was the *Presseamt beim Vorsitzenden des Ministerrats*, which was

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<sup>28</sup> Holzweißig (1994), pp 60-2

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p61

<sup>30</sup> Langguth (1990), p85

<sup>31</sup> Grubitzsch (1990), p141

in charge of coordinating the instructions and guidelines emanating from the SED.

Es ist das zentrale weisungsberechtigte Organ zur Informierung der Öffentlichkeit. Das Presseamt veranstaltet Pressekonferenzen und -besprechungen zur Erläuterung der Politik des Ministerrates. Es gibt mehrmals wöchentlich "Presseinformationen" heraus, die von allen Redaktionen bezogen werden müssen. Die "Presseinformationen" enthalten in knapper Form Kommentare und statistische Angaben, die in der Regel unverändert von den Zeitungen veröffentlicht werden.

Auf den Pressekonferenzen des derzeit von Kurt Blecha geleiteten Presseamtes werden zwar auch Hintergrundinformationen gegeben, die aus der Auswertung der Westmedien oder aus nicht veröffentlichten Beschlüssen der SED stammen; sie sind jedoch keineswegs zur Veröffentlichung gedacht. Damit soll vielmehr sichergestellt werden, daß die jeden Donnerstag im Presseamt erscheinenden Chefredakteure der sogenannten bürgerlichen Zeitungen und der Massenorganisationen wissen, was in der Berichterstattung ausgegrenzt werden muß. Kurz vor Redaktionsschluß ihrer Zeitungen müssen sie täglich mit dem Presseamt ohnehin die Plazierung und den Abdruck wichtiger Artikel abstimmen.<sup>32</sup>

In terms of the practical regulation of the press, one of the most important tools used were daily telephone calls and written instructions to the newspapers, which laid down the contents of certain articles and also how they were to be printed - which page, the position on the page, where specific photographs were to appear and so on. Such methods led to the uniformity of the press in terms both of its presentation and its content, the details of which will be examined next. Instructions related not only to how subjects were to be treated, but which topics were strictly off-limits. It was in this latter case where the most extreme and often the most ludicrous examples of press control were to be found.

### **Taboo subjects**

Certain subjects and topics in the GDR were regarded as taboo by the party leadership, whether for entirely political reasons or for more practical reasons, such as not mentioning certain goods which were not available in the shops. A selection from the taboo subjects released on November 12 1968 gives a feel for the kind of areas not discussed and the reasons for this:

Keinerlei Veröffentlichungen zur Erprobung des ökonomischen Systems in der VVB Schiffbau, im Kombinat Ruhla, im VEB Carl Zeiss Jena und

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<sup>32</sup> Holzweißig (1989), pp 16-7



über Betriebe, die Teile des ökonomischen Systems erproben (Agitationskommission) [...]

Vor den Leipziger Messen wurde von der Agitationskommission und dem MAW erneut bekräftigt, daß Veröffentlichungen über Devisenrentabilität, Exportenerlöse, über Selbstkosten und Kostensenkungen, über Vorhaben in strukturbestimmenden Exportbetrieben zu unterbleiben haben. [...]

Keine Veröffentlichungen über die Bildung von Kombinat (Agitationskommission). Als Begründung wurde angegeben, daß zunächst die Erfahrungen der bestehenden Kombinate gründlich ausgewertet werden sollen. [...]

Keine Veröffentlichungen über die Inbetriebnahme des Düngemittelwerkes Schwedt. (Ministerium für Chemische Industrie - Werk ging verspätet in Betrieb, Anlagen z.T. aus kapitalistischem Ausland sind weiterhin störanfällig.)<sup>33</sup>

It was not merely sensitive political areas which became taboo subjects. Nor were restrictions limited to factual information: the lack of certain foodstuffs at different points throughout the year was also reflected in instructions given about what recipes could be used:

Selbst vor Kochrezepten machen solche Anweisungen nicht halt. Wird das Erwähnen bestimmter Zutaten untersagt, um den Mangel an bestimmten Konsumgütern zu verschleiern, zeigt das die Absurdität des zentral gesteuerten Mediensystems der DDR.<sup>34</sup>

As well as such concrete taboo areas, there was in general a rule that only those problems which could be solved could be mentioned publicly. But as Holzweißig pointed out, this posed a problem, as the papers were at the same time meant to be more lively and attractive for the readers. This could hardly be achieved by ignoring the problems they saw around them every day.<sup>35</sup> In addition,

Da diese Weisungen von allen SED-Zeitungen und in analoger Form auch von der Hörfunk- und Fernsehpublizistik beachtet werden mußten, bleibt es ein Rätsel, warum die SED-Führung permanent eine größere Massenwirksamkeit der Medien verlangte und zur gleichen Zeit Uniformität und Monotonie verordnete.<sup>36</sup>

This problem became worse during the history of the GDR, as the reality the GDR citizens

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<sup>33</sup> Reproduced in Holzweißig (1991), pp 16-7

<sup>34</sup> Böttger (1987), p15

<sup>35</sup> Holzweißig (1994), p64

<sup>36</sup> Holzweißig (1990b), p369

saw around them bore less and less resemblance to the rosy picture which was painted in the GDR. The term *Medien-Wirklichkeit* arose to describe this alternative reality, which was distinguished from the *Wirklichkeit* of real life. The significance of this distinction and its impact on the credibility of the media will be returned to in a later section.

### **Instructions on the presentation of subjects**

In many cases, the subjects dealt with were given very specific treatment in the media. This treatment took two forms. First, the papers were told which subjects to cover on a particular day, how to treat the subject content, what arguments to use, what facts to emphasise and which to leave out. Second, the exact position and layout of the text and any accompanying pictures were given.

An example of how this part of the system operated came from 1984, and was published in the *Ostsee-Zeitung* in 1990 after its declaration of independence:

- Wir bitten, von der Behandlung des 17. Juni 1953 in Veröffentlichungen abzusehen.
- In der Ausgabe für Sonnabend steht der Gruß Erich Honeckers an die 12. Weltfestspiele an der linken Spitze Seite 1.
- Ein Nachdruck der Veröffentlichung im ND "2000 Ehemalige wollen zurück" in anderen Zeitungen ist nicht vorgesehen. Ebenso ist von eigenen Beiträgen bzw. Kommentierungen in dieser Angelegenheit abzusehen.
- Am morgigen Donnerstag findet die Übergabe der zweimillionsten Wohnung in Anwesenheit des Generalsekretärs statt. Wir bitten, darüber auf Seite 1 vom Freitag sehr groß aufgemacht zu berichten. [...]
- In Stellungnahmen von Eltern und Pädagogen sollten Bekenntnisse zu unserer Politik der Stärkung des Sozialismus und der Sicherung des Friedens (Interview Erich Honeckers) wiedergegeben werden. Dabei gilt es, die großen Leistungen unserer Volksbildung in den 35 Jahren DDR, in Geborgenheit und Zukunftsgewißheit für unsere Kinder und Enkel in der sozialistischen Gesellschaft hervorzuheben...!<sup>37</sup>

The language used in this example gives the clear impression of instructions which were to be followed rather than recommendations and highlights the fact that in all cases, these communiques were to be taken very seriously. They were not suggestions which could be

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<sup>37</sup> Reproduced in Holzweißig (1990b), pp 368-9

accepted or rejected according to personal taste.

As well as this type of contact with the papers, there were also weekly *Donnerstag-Argus* which were a central part of the activity of the *Abteilung Agitation*.

### Donnerstag-Argus

At these sessions, the editors-in-chief of the SED press were given the commentary of the *Abteilungsleiter* as to what news was to be printed, which subjects were taboo, and how the events were to be presented. These instructions were in many ways similar to the daily correspondence they received. The style of these sessions was rather less formal, undoubtedly a result of the fact that no protocols or minutes were kept, which meant that nothing which was said could ever be used publicly. However, there was still sufficient information available to allow assessment of the nature of these briefings. Loeser has described the atmosphere at the meetings from his own experience:

Jeden Donnerstag ist Anleitung beim Genossen Heinz Geggel, Leiter der Abteilung Agitation und Propaganda im Großen Haus, dem Sitz des Zentralkomitees der SED am Ost-Berliner Marx-Engels-Platz. Alle Chefredakteure und führenden Funktionäre der Massenmedien (Fernsehen, Rundfunk, Presse) aus der gesamten DDR haben zu dieser Anleitung zu erscheinen. Wie Schuljungen in einer Klippschule, so sitzen sie demütig vor dem Genossen Geggel. Seine Anweisungen sind exakt und präzise. Sie legen die politische Linie der Massenmedien für die kommende Woche fest, über welche Fragen mit was für einer Priorität und wie zu berichten ist. Nicht selten werden sogar detaillierte Formulierungen vorgegeben. Widerspruch oder Protest ist undenkbar. Schon selbst eine Frage an den Genossen Geggel wird als suspekt angesehen.

Offiziell sind die Massenmedien frei, zu schreiben und zu sagen, was sie wollen. Dieses Recht ist fest verankert in der Verfassung der DDR. Die Anleitung beim Genossen Geggel ist deshalb lediglich als eine Information anzusehen, die den Chefredakteuren helfen soll, die Linie der Partei besser zu verstehen. Nicht das Große Haus, sondern die Chefredakteure sind verantwortlich für das, was sie in ihren Medien veröffentlichen. Hinter dieser scheinbaren Freiheit verbirgt sich ein raffiniertes System des geistigen Terrors. Jeder weiß natürlich, daß selbst die geringste Abweichung von Geggels Anleitung das Ende der Chefredakteurskarriere bedeuten kann. Und so verlassen sie Chefredakteure im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes mit schlotternden Knien das Große Haus, von der ständigen Angst gequält, sie könnten trotz aller ihrer Bemühungen etwas veröffentlichen, was den Unwillen der Abteilung

Agitation und Propaganda erregt.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the ban on recording the proceedings of the *Argus*, Bürger<sup>39</sup> (a pseudonym) took notes when he infrequently attended the meetings, and his observations were very telling. They showed first of all that all those present were well aware of the reality of the GDR's situation, but that despite this, instructions were still given out as to how to present events as being success stories for the GDR and how to deal with potential problems.

Geggel's reply to a question posed to him in late September 1989 showed some of the political considerations which went into the instructions to the press:

Anfrage: Was sich in Ungarn etc. entwickelt hat, deutete sich doch schon an, als die erste Stacheldraht-Meldung aus U. kam - kein Wort, keine Einstimmung auf weitere mögliche Entwicklungen. Warum Schweigen, warum keine Reaktion?

Gen. G.: Riesenproblem. Wir stehen vor der Frage: Lassen wir unsere Leute weiter nach Bulg., Ungarn, Rum., Polen - ja! Sonst haben wir noch mehr Probleme. Wir können P. nicht besetzen, und die SU wird das wohl auch nicht tun. Heute geht uns "Baltikum" über die Lippen - alles verändert sich...<sup>40</sup>

The problems the GDR was confronting were clearly recognised, and it was apparently quite permissible and normal to admit to the journalists present the seriousness of the situation. But it was understood that the comments made would not be printed or even hinted at - the party instructions were to be followed. If, as in the above case, there were none, the issue was not dealt with in the media.

It is hard to tell what Heinz Geggel, *Abteilungsleiter* at the time, really thought both of the GDR's true position and of the work of the newspapers. Much of what he is reported to have said comes across very much as being from someone totally committed to the socialist system in operation, and intent on preserving the status quo, but other comments tend to suggest a more realistic appraisal of the GDR. Perhaps there are elements of both. The following parts of the *Argumentation* from 19 October 1989 shows this disparity between *Wirklichkeit* and *Medien-Wirklichkeit* well, coming as they did at a time when the whole

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<sup>38</sup> Loeser (1984), pp 71-2

<sup>39</sup> Bürger (1990)

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p225

country was politically unstable.

Er lese heute kaum noch Westzeitungen, nur unsere, so interessant sind die. Man spürt aber noch die Verlogenheit. [...]

Wir wissen, in welche Situation wir gekommen sind, aus welchen Gründen auch immer - wir lösen alles gemeinsam. Die Medien sind auf dem richtigen Weg. Man muß über vieles diskutieren, was es zu verändern gilt - dann Frage: Jeder muß arbeiten. Die journalistenunfreundlichen Zeiten sind ja nun vorbei. Weniger Verkündigungen, mehr Formen der Beratung finden. Das kollektive Wissen muß echt zur Geltung kommen.

Lage ist ernst und kompliziert, die Dinge müssen verändert werden. Veränderungen in den Medien kosten kein Geld und sind sofort möglich - die Leute sehen was. Hier wird das Mißtrauen der Bevölkerung abgebaut. Macht sich schon bemerkbar: Schlangen an Kiosken werden länger, Fernsehen bekommt Post. [...]

Natürlich weiter unsere Erfolge zeigen. Aber ohne Euphorie, ohne Schönfärberei, sachlich mit Falschem und Umwegen. Aufheben des Widerspruchs zwischen Realität und Darstellung. Kommt ein Mann aufs Polizeirevier und bittet um einen Ausreiseantrag. "Wohin denn?" fragt der Volkspolizist. "In die DDR", antwortet der Mann. "Was?" wundert sich der Grüne, "in die DDR? Da sind Sie doch!" "Nee, ick will in die, von der inne Zeitung steht!" Aufheben auch Widerspruch öffentliche Meinung/ veröffentlichte Meinung.<sup>41</sup>

Throughout Bürger's account, phrases and slogans were repeated, such as "wir lösen alles gemeinsam", "jeder muß arbeiten" above. Such phrases were a part of the avoidance of a discussion of the actual problems in the GDR and the role of the media in their resolution.

### **Wirklichkeit and Medienwirklichkeit**

The official answer to problems seemed always to be to present the party line, and concentrate on the positive achievements of the GDR. If necessary this could involve ignoring some of the facts and emphasising others in order to give the constant impression that all was well in the GDR and that these problems did not exist. This led to the problems of credibility of the media which Geggel mentioned above. His story about the man wanting to emigrate to the GDR portrayed in the newspapers indicates exactly the problem which existed in the contradiction between what was presented in the media and what reflected the true situation in the readers' everyday lives. Another humorous comment, this time by Wolf

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, pp 227-8

Biermann, also serves to highlight this huge discrepancy. At a concert in Leipzig on 1 December 1989, Biermann said that everyone would think that a circle was a square if Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler had described it as round beforehand.<sup>42</sup> Schnitzler had presented *Der schwarze Kanal*, a weekly television programme attempting to criticise and ridicule Western television reporting. This was essentially a damage limitation exercise arising from a realisation that almost all households had access to and watched West German television. The programme was initially popular, but Schnitzler's style and manner of presentation lost him much of his popularity, and in the demonstrations in 1989, some of the chants were for his resignation, which followed soon after. Feige summarised the success among the population at large of the SED's media policy in general, and his comments, although written primarily about television, could be applied equally well to the print media:

Das Ziel dieser monopolisierten Informationszuteilung - nämlich Meinungen im Sinne der Partei- und Staatsführung zu bilden - war nicht nur wegen des stets präsenten West-Fernsehens kaum zu erreichen. Der Mißerfolg ergab sich vor allem wegen des permanenten Dissonanzerlebens zwischen Sein und (Medien-)Schein. Keine noch so bemühte psychologische Balancierungsaktivität konnte diese Dissonanz aufheben. Im Gegenteil: auch Wahres erschien nicht mehr glaubhaft.<sup>43</sup>

A further factor which needs to be taken into account was the issue of expectations in the media. First of all, the journalists themselves were aware of the reality of the problems in the GDR, but were not permitted to write about them. The readers in turn knew only too well what difficulties they and those around them were facing, and saw that these were not addressed in the media. These two facts reinforced each other over the years to the extent that a *Teufelskreis* resulted:

1. Da die Leser das, was sie in der Zeitung lasen, nicht mehr für voll nahmen, sagten sie den Reportern das, was sie glaubten, diesen von Staats und Partei wegen sagen zu müssen, das stand dann in der Zeitung, in der Folge, nahm man diese noch weniger ernst. 2. Trotzdem berichteten die Leser den Journalisten immer noch von Zeit zu Zeit, wo der Schuh drückte, das gelangte jedoch nicht in die Zeitung, die Mängel wurden nicht behoben und in der Folge - siehe 1. Es machte gewiß keinen Spaß, derlei sinnlose Spiele zu spielen.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Feige (1990), p389

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Pannen (1992), p44

The divergence of *Wirklichkeit* from *Medienwirklichkeit* was therefore preserved in part by the expectations of those who were called upon to give journalists information, and this also had the effect of complicating the journalist's own perception of what was true and what was merely being said because it was expected. The credibility of the media was damaged by such a process, as neither the journalists who were reporting what others were telling them nor those who then read these statements in the paper knew what was true and what was politically necessary or expedient. Even when both the journalists and their sources sought to give an accurate picture of what was happening, they were hindered by the interaction with these expectations.

### The Schere im Kopf and personal responsibility

The system of control so far described was not without its effect on the thinking of journalists in the GDR. First of all, while much was laid down from above, the actual censorship really took place within the newspapers or other media:

Der Zensurbegriff fälscht die Vorgänge, wie sie sich mal vollzogen, das negiert die innere Beteiligung. Das System war anders. Nicht die Zensur außen, nicht die Fremdzensur war es, das war ausgeklügelter, allgegenwärtiger. Wöchentlich fand die Agitationsanleitung für die Medien im ZK statt. Im Hause funktionierte das Kontrollsystem, da wurde die Zensur verwirklicht.<sup>45</sup>

It was at the level of the individual journalist that the SED's unofficial censorship had to work: the journalists themselves had to comply with the instructions they were given. But this process went even further. Essentially the system worked as follows. First of all, an inexperienced journalist would write an article which would then be rejected for publication. The second time, the journalist would think of what he wanted to write about, and then realise that there was no point in continuing with the same subject, as the article would never be published. The third time, he would not even *think* about writing an article on the subject. This is the origin of the phrase "Die Schere im Kopf" - and as Pannen has noted, in many ways, it made censorship from outside unnecessary.<sup>46</sup> This process was reinforced by the commitment which the journalists did feel toward some form of socialism, the exact nature

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<sup>45</sup> Schubert (1992), p21 (Quotation by Wolfgang Spickermann, previously editor-in-chief of *Neues Deutschland*)

<sup>46</sup> Pannen (1992), p38

of which will be examined in a later chapter. But their commitment to socialism and their awareness of their role as political functionaries meant that this process of inner censorship could proceed rapidly. The journalists, knowing that resistance was futile, were often simply prepared to accept the overall authority of the SED, even if they did not necessarily agree with it. The implication that journalists were far from passive players in the media, but rather that they allowed the system to function by their compliance tends to reduce the sympathy which might be felt for the difficult situation in which they found themselves. But the question which has to be asked is what the real alternative was - active resistance of their instructions would have cost them their job, and some may say that the small attempts to get something past the censors were absurdly insignificant. The question of resistance to the party's directives will be returned to, particularly in the overall context of the journalists' behaviour in the GDR.

What is certainly the case is that following the *Wende*, many journalists tried to escape their own personal responsibility for what they had written in the GDR, and tried to portray themselves as victims in the whole system.<sup>47</sup> One of the exceptions was Henryk Goldberg, who acknowledged that,

Meinen Artikel hat nicht Joachim Herrmann geschrieben. [...] Den habe ich geschrieben, eigenfingrig, eigenköpfig. Und sagt nicht: unter Protest. Denn unter Beiträgen standen Namen, keine Proteste. [...] Wir mußten schon: wenn wir weitermachen wollten. Aber mußten wir weitermachen wollen? Wir haben doch selbst gestrichen, wovon wir wußten, es würde gestrichen werden, und gefragt werden würden wir zudem: Warum hast du das nicht gestrichen, bist du doof? Und doof wollten wir nicht sein, wir sind nicht doof. Wir haben das Maul gehalten in den Blättern, und, unter uns, wißt ihr noch, Freunde, unter uns haben wir sarkastische Bemerkungen getauscht. Mein Gott, was konnten wir spöttisch sein. Aber den Beruf, den haben wir nicht getauscht.<sup>48</sup>

Such sentiments are very simplistic. They ignore the practical ramifications of resistance and the knock-on effects such a course of action would have on others, as well as the direct impact on the journalist. In addition, the view expressed by Goldberg completely ignored wider questions of the role in which the journalists saw themselves in the GDR.

Similar reservations can be applied to Pannen's own summary of the motivation of

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p43

<sup>48</sup> Goldberg (1990), p429



journalists to comply with what was expected of them:

Pflichtgefühl und Verantwortungslosigkeit der DDR-Journalisten erweisen sich als die zwei Seiten der Medaille für Untertanengeist.<sup>49</sup>

Pannen then went on to relate the journalists' actions to the legacy of the Third Reich and even further back in history, but essentially, there appeared to be an attempt to disregard the realities of a journalist's career. Pannen appeared to be advocating a very Western viewpoint here - something along the lines of "surely the journalists could have done more." However, this reasoning appears unsatisfactory. Pannen only criticised the GDR media and its journalists, but did not look at all at the actions of journalists in the West, who faced similar problems relating to financial security when they opposed their superiors and the newspaper owners. In addition, Pannen's arguments are more an attempt to impose some sort of blanket condemnation on all that was done in the GDR. The same could be said of Goldberg's article. On the one hand, it was certainly unusual for this degree of self-condemnation to be voiced. But there is at the same time somehow a suspicion that in this kind of criticism of *all* journalists and *all* the missed opportunities to turn their private criticisms into public ones, there is an attempt to allow personal responsibility to merge into a vast collective responsibility and thus excuse the actions of the individual. Writing such damning articles could then be seen as a way of diverting public, and one suspects also private attention away from the individual accountability for what was done. After all, the comments made by Goldberg applied just as much to himself as to most other journalists.

These fundamental weaknesses in previous explorations of the behaviour of journalists in the GDR show very clearly the need for a more detailed look at this question, and the importance of looking at it in its true context. The issue cannot be dealt with using Western assumptions and applying Western standards and ideals, as these were simply not present, and were certainly not valid in the GDR.

At points, however, Pannen came closer to a more realistic appraisal of the GDR press. He himself found the problem of "job security" to be a relevant factor in his interviews:

Thomas Wunderlich: "Ich hab' viele Fragen inzwischen gehört, mit vielen Leuten drüben gesprochen, die gesagt haben: 'Ja, warum habt ihr denn

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<sup>49</sup> Pannen (1992), p43

dann nicht aufgehört? Wenn ihr nicht konntet, warum habt ihr denn dann nicht das Handtuch geworfen?' Ich habe zum Beispiel gesagt, was Gera hier betrifft und andere Städte, in Berlin und so, mag was anderes sein, was hätte ich denn hier tun sollen in diesem Gera? Ich habe Journalist gelernt, ja, was sollte ich denn machen? [...] Ich meine, man hätte versuchen können, irgendwo in 'nem Betrieb Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, aber, zumindest was hier in der Gegend war, die Stellen waren besetzt. Wir hatten noch zwei Blockzeitungen der Blockparteien damals, zwei, glaube ich, waren es, die hatten noch Lokalredaktion, die waren besetzt. Na ja, Rundfunk ist nicht meine Welt. Fernsehen auch nicht, außerdem waren die auch besetzt. Also, wer Journalist sein wollte, mußte sich in diesen Zwang begeben, oder er war's nicht."<sup>50</sup>

And as Pannen himself noted,

Das galt besonders für die Kollegen, deren Familien auf den Verdienst angewiesen war. Während der Zwang zur Existenzsicherung auch westlichen Journalisten vertraut ist, sorgte darüber hinaus ein DDR-Spezifikum für das journalistische Wohlverhalten: Wer negativ auffiel, mußte gewärtig sein, damit die Karrierechancen der eigenen Kinder erheblich zu beeinträchtigen.<sup>51</sup>

This view would appear to be more true to the real situation than the rather idealistic attitude of Goldberg seen earlier, and Pannen's point about the impact on journalists' families was also one which was very specific to the GDR. Nevertheless, the question of the extent to which journalists complied with their instructions and internalised them in time, as well as their reasons for doing so, is one which is important in understanding how journalists thought about what they were required to do. Only when this is known can any kind of appraisal of the consistency of their views and actions in the GDR be attempted.

### **Journalistic competence**

An important question to be asked in the context of *Medienlenkung* is to what extent journalists would actually be regarded as proficient in the West, given that their jobs were largely composed of transmitting information from government to citizens - the role of Pannen's *Weiterleiter* again. As Pürer and Raabe have noted,

Die zentralistische Medienlenkung führte überdies dazu, daß die (politischen) Nachrichtenseiten der Zeitungen der DDR inhaltlich

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p45

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p45

weitgehend identisch waren.<sup>52</sup>

Wolfgang Spickermann commented on this problem, and noted that in the specific case of researching articles, there was a significant problem following the *Wende*:

Die Rechercharbeit war verkümmert. Dieser Teil des Journalismus muß neu aufgebaut werden, da sind wir nicht zu Ende.<sup>53</sup>

The reason for this is also explained by Spickermann:

Man schreibt, was der Lehrer hören will, wie beim Schulaufsatz. Man paßte sich an, hat es aber innerlich nie gut gefunden. Es war eine sehr dümmlische und plumpe Art von Bevormundung.<sup>54</sup>

The analogy used here with school essays is reminiscent of Loeser's description of the way he felt at the *Donnerstag-Argus*, as if he were being treated as a schoolboy, and this image gives a good picture of the relationship between party and media. The problem with researching for articles is also picked up by Hans-Ulrich Conrad:

Das mehrdimensionale Betrachten, die klare Trennung von Information und Meinung fand anfangs überhaupt kein Verständnis bei den Journalisten. Sie wollten unbedingt ihre eigene Meinung hineinbringen, im Kommentar kann es ja sein. Wir machen jetzt sowas wie Schulungsprogramme. Im vergangenen Jahr hatten wir kostenlose Angebote: vierwöchige Lehrgänge, Ein-Tages-Seminare. Es vollziehen sich Klärungsprozesse zwischen guten und schlechten Journalisten.<sup>55</sup>

The SED's refusal to allow journalists to present genuinely personal opinions on subjects appeared, then, to have led to a different problem. After 1989, the journalists were so anxious to say what they thought that they had trouble in reconciling this new-found freedom with the generally preferred system of keeping facts and opinions separate. The perceived need to re-educate journalists in some of the skills needed for their job was reflected in the training programmes being made available, such as was mentioned by Conrad. Advertisements appeared in the trade magazines as well as short accounts of these courses after the event.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p369

<sup>53</sup> Schubert (1992), p20

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p39

<sup>56</sup> See for example Mast (1990)

Pannen found evidence from interviews that the system of detailed instructions on how to present and write articles led to a loss of initiative on the part of journalists, a factor which made the changes following the *Wende* personally significant for journalists. They were then able to begin to practise their profession in a way which had previously not been possible:

Bernhard Lübscher (“Dresdner Morgenpost”, früher “Zeit im Bild”): “Ich sagte ja, man führte nur noch das aus, was von Berlin kam. Und das machte natürlich nicht die Freude, die ich mir dann eben nebenberuflich erhalten habe, und die Freude, die ich jetzt voll ausschöpfen kann bei der ‘Morgenpost’. [... Eigeninitiative] ging mehr und mehr flöten, wobei dadurch, daß ich Kultur gemacht habe, es nicht so prekär war wie bei Politik oder Wirtschaft und so weiter.”<sup>57</sup>

This interview introduced another important facet of journalism in the GDR. So far, the discussion has primarily dealt with the treatment of political and economic topics, but a clear distinction needs to be made between these areas of journalism and other subject areas.

### *Distinctions between departments*

It was in the area of politics and ideologically laden topics that the SED regime had its greatest interest in presenting their viewpoint as the only realistic one. Since the SED was also knowledgeable in these areas, they were both keen and able to direct media activity in this area. But as one moves away from politics, the party lost both interest and ability to interfere in the day to day writing of articles. Consequently, journalists working in other areas were much more able to develop their journalistic talents and use their own initiative, although nothing could ever be said to be entirely safe from party censorship. Holzweißig explained that,

Im Grunde gab es kein Thema, nicht einmal Küchenrezepte, das nicht tabuisiert werden konnte. So wurde am 17. September 1982 gerügt, daß die “Liberal-Demokratische Zeitung” in Halle ein Rezept über Karotten und Mandeln brachte. “Das geht doch nicht. Wir provozieren doch nur Fragen und regen Wünsche an.”<sup>58</sup>

It is certainly true that it was possible for any journalist to have been writing on a subject which in some way conflicted with what the SED wished to have published, but the

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<sup>57</sup> Pannen (1992), p38

<sup>58</sup> Holzweißig (1990b), p369

difference arose in the degree of restriction placed on different journalists. Holzweißig continued by pointing out that,

Besondere Vorsicht war vor allem bei der Behandlung des Umweltschutzes, von Versorgungsfragen, der Altbausubstanz, der Flüchtlingsproblematik oder auch bei Zahlenangaben über die Kriminalitätsentwicklung und aus dem militärischen Bereich geboten.<sup>59</sup>

The differentiation made between political or ideologically significant subjects and others should not be seen as an either-or scenario. Instead, there were different degrees of journalistic freedom, in the sense of freedom from interference from the state, depending on the area concerned. The wish to find an area in which one could work relatively independently of outside influences was a strong one, and there was an informal hierarchy of freedom enjoyed by journalists in the various departments:

Die Hierarchie der Nischen: eine Skala von weiß bis rabenschwarz. Ganz oben stand die Kultur, cremefarben hell; dann folgten der Sport, freundliche Blässe; die Wissenschaft, erste graue Töne; die Außenpolitik, erste dunkle Flecken, schon keine Nische mehr. Innenpolitik und Wirtschaft - das waren die schwarzen, schmutzigen Schafe. Das "Neue Deutschland" empfand man schlimmer als die "Berliner Zeitung", das Fernsehen reglementierter als das Radio und Zeitungen verlogener als Zeitschriften.<sup>60</sup>

This search for niches was one way in which journalists attempted to remove themselves from the party's attempts to regulate their activities. It can help to explain some of the apparent contradictions existing in the GDR, such as between wishing to become a journalist and the general perception of journalists as being instruments of the state; between choosing this career and the relief which was felt immediately after the *Wende* when the journalists could write what they wanted to.

### **Freedom in the workplace**

There were other ways in which journalists could try to break free from some of the constraints placed upon them, both in their professional and private lives. To begin with possibilities arose, or were created, in their daily jobs, as Schwochow explained:

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> Schwochow (1995), p37

Zum banalen Alltag in der DDR gehörte die große und die kleine Feigheit, der Versuch, die eigene Taktik zu finden zwischen Anpassung und Widerstand. Manchmal war es nur ein Wort, das durchkam, ein Satzfetzen, eine versteckte Anspielung. Jede Einschränkung machte den kleinsten Erfolg des Widerstandes teuer. Was Journalisten damals als Revolte empfanden, ist aus heutiger Sicht nicht einmal ein Sturm im Wasserglas. Lächerlich, aber so war das Leben in der DDR.<sup>61</sup>

An example of such attempts to use language to suggest a more serious meaning comes from the weekly paper *Sonntag*:

Kleinste Formulierungen wurden registriert. Kuczynski schrieb "der sich entwickelnde Sozialismus", nicht entwickelter Sozialismus. Dafür bekam er Ärger. Die Leser reagierten: Das habt ihr gut gemacht. Es ist ja so. Heute haben solche Formulierungen gar nicht mehr diese Relevanz.<sup>62</sup>

Even when something had been written and published which resulted in a telephone call summoning the responsible journalist or his superior to the *Abteilung Agitation*, it was still quite possible to escape any punishment, but this really only applied to non-political areas or those which were not particularly sensitive. Wilfried Geißler, former editor-in-chief of *Sonntag*, described such an occasion involving an article which fell within the field of *Kultur*:

Wir veröffentlichten ein Gedicht von Dieter Kerschek, eine Parodie auf das Losungs-Unwesen zum 1. Mai. Er erhielt dafür den Johannes-R.-Becher-Preis des Kulturbundes. Ein Anruf kam, ich soll in die Agitationsabteilung kommen. Ich habe die Zeitung durchgeblättert, was können sie denn meinen? Eigentlich nur das Gedicht oder den Artikel auf Seite 3. Heinz Geggel und Klaus Raddatz: Wollt ihr die Partei verarschen oder die Mai-Losungen lächerlich machen? Eine Verächtlichmachung der Mai-Losungen. Ich hatte das nicht abgezeichnet, hätte mich rausreden können. Ich fand das Gedicht gut. Gedichte sind nicht für jeden, alle haben differenzierte Kulturbedürfnisse, das ist eher was für Humboldt-Studenten, für einen bestimmten Leserkreis des Sonntag. Man hätte es so öfter machen müssen. Ergebnis: Mag ja sein. Mach' in Zukunft nicht solche Scheiße.<sup>63</sup>

In such situations, it was not that difficult for the journalist to argue a different interpretation or innocent intent. The party was not competent in the assessment of the real intention of the journalist. Faced with such reasoning, the party could only really issue an order not to

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid

<sup>62</sup> Schubert (1992), p70

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p69

attempt anything similar in the future, as was seen in this example. But it was powerless to prevent a repetition. The greatest degree of freedom was to be found in cultural affairs. Particularly for those with a feeling for the use of language, such articles were an excellent opportunity to air their - albeit cloaked - views.

This was all very different from the position of some other journalists, as a similar example shows. Again, the example comes from *Sonntag*, but this time it relates to the environment, and has a very different outcome:

Wir führten ein Interview mit dem Direktor für Wasserwirtschaft Obere Elbe, in dem sich der Interviewte mutig zu Mißständen äußerte. Reaktion der Abteilung Agitation: Jetzt müßten im Sonntag Köpfe rollen.<sup>64</sup>

In such cases, little was achieved by publishing that kind of article, as the party watchdogs would have no trouble at all in identifying the intent of the article and acting firmly to punish those responsible and to prevent future occurrences of the same spirit of rebellion. It was clear that journalists did attempt in their own way to circumvent the restrictions and conditions placed on their work, and their actions need to be seen in the context of what was realistically possible.

### **Freedom outside the workplace**

The possibilities for many journalists of finding some degree of freedom *within* their work were simply non-existent, and other ways of finding some kind of personal fulfilment had to be sought. Spickermann, for example, admitted that he was well aware of what his job really entailed, and what he was doing, but found other ways of satisfying his personal interest in writing, regarding his actual job more as just something which had to be done:

Ich war mir ziemlich im klaren, was ich machte. Ich hatte noch vor Gorbatschow erkannt, daß dies ein hochgradiger Scheißjob ist. Ich habe es gemacht wie die Künstler im Verhältnis von Berufsjob und Nische: Ich habe mir hier im Haus Nischen gesucht - und außerhalb. Dort habe ich mich verwirklicht, habe Bücher geschrieben über Kernenergie, über Computerprogramme. Ich habe mein Bedürfnis nach geistiger Produktion gestillt. Hinzukommen ist das Gefühl, daß alles nutzlos war, die Pflicht erfüllen, das hat alles nicht genutzt.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p70

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p19

Such attempts to counteract the demands of the state were common phenomena in the GDR.<sup>66</sup> But Pannen raised a valid point when he questioned the separation of professional and private lives:

Zum einen beanspruchten Partei und gesellschaftliche Organisationen die Journalisten auch nach Feierabend: für Versammlungen, Leserforen, Auswertungen. Darüber hinaus liegen die Termine des Journalisten oft außerhalb der Bürozeiten: Theaterpremierer sind noch die angenehmsten Überstunden. Und schließlich ist nicht so leicht abzuschalten nach einem Arbeitsalltag, der stündlich neue Eindrücke bringt, die in der Kürze der Zeit nicht zu verarbeiten sind. All das läßt darauf schließen, daß die Trennung von Beruf und Privatleben nicht so absolut war, wie gelegentlich behauptet wird.<sup>67</sup>

### **Other factors affecting professional freedom**

In the case of the *Bezirkszeitungen*, which were subject to both the *Zentralkomitee* in Berlin and to the relevant *Bezirksleitung*, the degree of freedom enjoyed by the papers was in part dependent on the courage or attitude of both those at the middle level in the party control mechanism and the editors-in-chief of the newspapers.<sup>68</sup> This factor was important in determining the amount of freedom individual journalists enjoyed as well. There was a certain latitude available if those in a position to make use of it were both prepared to make the effort and had the courage to do so. The degree of courage of editors was also relevant to other print media than just the *Bezirkszeitungen*. Peter Theek, for example, commented that,

Das Verhalten der verschiedenen Chefredakteure war eine Frage des Charakters. Manche sind von der Anleitung im ZK zurückgekommen und haben **alles** hanebüchen an die Redakteure weitergegeben. Ich habe gesagt: Export, da besteht Informationsbeschränkung, das machen wir nicht. Import, das macht keiner, das machen wir.<sup>69</sup>

It appeared, then, that some journalists and editors were prepared to take risks in line with their convictions and which they believed they could get away with, but even so, the fear of losing their employment was always at the back of their minds. Political persuasion does not

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<sup>66</sup> Pannen (1992), p48

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> Grubitzsch (1990), p141

<sup>69</sup> Schubert (1992), p65



seem to have been a particularly significant determinant of the degree to which an individual was prepared to go beyond what he could be certain was acceptable - Theek was a good example of this, believing in the potential of Marxism-Leninism, but also having an awareness of the failings of the GDR state apparatus, which he felt he could not leave without any comment.

Theek's experiences with the *Weltbühne* also showed the fact that the SED's normal media policy was often not sufficient to dominate where staff of a particular paper were determined to find a way of saying something which would not meet with total official approval. On the one hand, Theek believed that,

In Wahrheit hat die Abteilung Agitation und Propaganda alles in den Griff genommen. Kam ein etwas kritischer Artikel über Gaus, hieß es, das ist ein diplomatischer Eingriff und es gab ein Theater. Schrieben wir über Persien, bedeutete es eine Einmischung in die Außenpolitik. Ich schrieb einen Artikel in der "Iswestija", da hieß es: In einer solchen Zeitung schreibt doch nur jemand wie Stoph. Andere Chefredakteure hatten vielleicht weniger Chancen, so viele Löcher zu finden wie wir.<sup>70</sup>

But on occasions, the normal procedures were not enough to deal with "troublesome" journalists or publications, and instructions came more directly:

Die Dame Honecker rief bei Herrmann an, der und der Autor darf nicht mehr veröffentlichen. Das waren Autoren der Weltbühne, z.B. Hans-Georg Mehlhorn. Der hatte einen Artikel zum sozialen Abstieg junger Leute geschrieben.<sup>71</sup>

Although a small body of literature exists dealing with the change in values experienced by journalists who worked in the GDR<sup>72</sup>, on closer reading, a number of deficiencies emerge which limit the value of these papers. Weischenberg et al did not distinguish between East and West in their work, as their study was designed to give an indication of the views of journalists in Germany as a whole.<sup>73</sup> While this was a reasonable approach in principle, it could be argued that after only four years of unification, they grouped the journalists from both parts of Germany together too soon. They did not allow for the possibility that the

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, pp 61-2

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p64

<sup>72</sup> See for example Weischenberg et al (1994) and Scheider et al (1994)

<sup>73</sup> Weischenberg et al (1994), p154

results they gained from the Eastern journalists would reflect the very different backgrounds and experiences. Consequently, some of the factors behind the respondents' answers are unclear. In addition, their results are of little value in providing a basis for this present study to examine in more detail the values journalists in Eastern Germany now hold. Of more use was the study by Schneider et al<sup>74</sup>. This study did look at the ethical values of journalists specifically in the Eastern part of Germany, doing so as part of a wider survey of the position and attitudes of Eastern journalists. The only real objection to their work is that it deals with ethical issues which are seldom clear-cut enough to allow only two possible answers. Attempting to do so neglects the range of answers which are likely and prevents information about the reasons for the given answers being obtained. However, in the case of Schneider et al's work, it is also clear that the section dealing with ethical values was a part of a much larger study. Given the requirements of such work, and the practical limitations involved when questioning over 1,500 journalists in East and West<sup>75</sup>, their methodology is perfectly reasonable.

There is, then, a real need for further information on the way in which the ethical systems journalists worked within in the GDR can be applied to their work today, and how the changes in their working circumstances have affected their perception of the morality of what they are required, or choose to do. The changes which they experienced from 1989 provide a very significant background to this area, and the events of the *Wende* as they affected the media are the next subject for discussion.

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<sup>74</sup> Scheider et al (1994)

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p219

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Press at the time of the *Wende* and reunification

With the coming together of the two post-war German states, a process beginning in 1989 and officially completed in 1990, new opportunities were created in both parts of Germany. Among these, the economic potential of the new state was enormous. Despite the huge problems seen in the Eastern economy, and the need for large amounts of investment to rescue many GDR firms, there were some sectors of the economy where Western firms were keen to invest. While the industrial legacy of the SED-ruled country caused much concern in both East and West, other areas showed potential for a substantial medium to long term profit. The policies of the *Treuhandanstalt*, given the task of restructuring former GDR-firms and finding a buyer for these firms, were guided by the necessity of maximising revenues and disposing of as many firms as possible to new owners who had to give commitments to invest in their new acquisitions. A speedy process was assured for those firms with some chance of surviving the immediate transition to a market economy. Media firms were clear targets for acquisition. The Eastern newspapers had large circulations and despite initial drops in sales, the regional papers managed to stabilise their circulation at a very promising level, although other papers suffered circulation falls which led to the closure of several previously widely read newspapers.

In order to provide an appropriate framework for a discussion of the changes experienced by the Eastern German press and its journalists, it is necessary to understand both the development of the press market itself and the legal changes which occurred in the period of change from the socialist GDR to the GDR which became a part of the reunified Germany. Under successive leaders, the framework within which the press in the GDR operated was altered, and these changes impinged on the way in which the market in turn developed. The two areas of market and legal changes are, then, closely related. Market changes required new legislation, and this legislation in turn brought about further changes in the market structure.

The development of the market itself in the East will be seen to show important, if

predictable, trends. This area of the press market in the East has received a great deal of attention from media researchers<sup>1</sup>, who have pointed to obvious parallels with earlier developments in the West, as well as noting the way in which the legacy of the SED contributed to the worrying developments of the press market in the East. Since many of the developments at the time of the *Wende* were not related to unification, some distinction needs to be made between the *Wende* developments and those at the time of reunification. But at the same time, drawing too sharp a divide between the two periods would lose the important sense of continuity. Accordingly, the development of the market will be looked at in its entirety.

## Market changes

Two aspects of the market changes which took place in the Eastern post-*Wende* press market are important. The first relates to the raw data for the circulation of the existing newspapers and the new initiatives. Here, marked differences were seen between the fates of the various types of newspaper being sold in the East, and these differences provided a great deal of information about the nature of the press market and of reader preferences. Second, there is the more complex issue of ownership and of Western involvement in the Eastern press market.

### *The press and the Wende*

When the term *Wende* is used, the period is meant beginning with the mass exodus of GDR citizens to Hungary and from there to the West in September 1989 and up to the point of reunification in October 1990, a period of just over a year. During this time, there was much debate about the future of the GDR state, and of its government and institutions. The SED leadership changed hands several times, and the name of the party was also changed from the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* through *SED-PDS (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands-Partei des demokratischen Sozialismus)* to the current title *PDS*. Changes in name were also seen in the press, thereby indicating its separation from party control. This process, begun in November 1989, was illustrated well by the example of *Neues Deutschland*, which in December 1989 dropped the “Organ des Zentralkomitees der

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Schütz (1994), Röper (1991b), (1993a), (1993b)

Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands” from its header, and instead used the phrase “Zentralorgan der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands” for two weeks, before appearing merely as a “Sozialistische Tageszeitung”, a designation which has continued to the present day. For a press system which was so tightly bound to party control, these steps had great symbolic importance, and showed that the press was finally prepared to take a stand, albeit long after the citizens of the GDR had decided to take action. It should be remembered that the country was still governed by the SED at this time, and that the decision to change the names of the majority of the papers of the SED or other parties was taken without any sanctioning by the respective parties. It was this separation of control from the parties which provided the opportunity for the realisation of press freedom such as had not been seen in either East or West. It provided great hope for the future.

The whole process of increasing media independence and press freedom began when the Leipzig radio station covered the demonstrations there on October 9 1989. For a few days more, the rest of the media remained obedient to the SED, and did not deal with the demonstrations in any meaningful way. But this soon changed as more and more of the media severed their ideological dependence on the SED and provided detailed and accurate reporting on the demonstrations and the issues involved. The months of October 1989 to March 1990 were the period of real freedom of the press:

Dies war die große Aufbruchphase, eine Phase, in der vieles möglich war, was es weder vorher noch nachher gab - vorher nicht, weil es das politische System nicht zuließ, nachher nicht, weil es mit den ökonomischen Fakten nicht in Einklang zu bringen war.<sup>2</sup>

This was also the time which the journalists themselves enjoyed immensely. The need to bow to political necessity had gone, and the need to consider economic criteria had not yet come. These were very satisfying months for them personally:

Die wirklich schönste Zeit journalistisch war die Zeit 89 und genau um diese Ereignisse im Herbst, die politischen Ereignisse, und das war für mich die schönste Erfahrung auch meines Lebens, weil eine neue Ära im Journalismus begonnen hat und man wirklich frei, ohne Zwänge recherchieren und schreiben konnte. Das hat sich zwar entwickelt, langsam, man hatte ein eigenes Selbstverständnis entwickelt, aber dieses [...] Gefühl des Grenzenlosen, das Gefühl, man läßt etwas hinter sich und

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<sup>2</sup> Meyn (1993), p186

beginnt etwas Neues und kann das Ganze auch mitbefördern.<sup>3</sup>

During this period, there was a huge surge in demand for newspapers as the effect of the *Schere im Kopf* of the journalists was reduced and journalists were finally able to say what they wanted. Typical of this new interest in reading newspapers was the comment that,

Wir schaffen es zur Zeit gar nicht, die Zeitungen ganz zu lesen. Vom Leitartikel bis zu den Wasserständen - alles ist ungeheuer interessant!<sup>4</sup>

One of the most significant features during this period was the change in the content of the newspapers. Whereas before the journalists had known beforehand what they would be allowed to print and had learned not even to begin writing something they knew would never be published - the *Schere im Kopf* - now, they could use their own judgement and were not tied to party instructions. For example, during the days of SED-control, certain subjects had been off-limits. For a long time, major accidents in socialist countries had been taboo subjects. In the last few years of the GDR's existence, however, this restriction was not so strongly felt<sup>5</sup>, perhaps as the government realised that the GDR citizens knew of these events from Western broadcasts anyway, and concluded that it was better to report such incidents themselves and influence the balance of coverage. In 1989, however, all subjects were suddenly open for discussion and this new openness was reflected in the number of readers' letters which were received by the newspapers:

In der "Leipziger Volkszeitung" gingen im November 1989 täglich 500 bis 600 Leserbriefe ein, das waren etwa fünf- bis sechsmal so viele Briefe wie in "normalen" Zeiten. [...] Nach Meinung der Mitarbeiterinnen der "Schweriner Volkszeitung" resultierte der Anstieg des Postaufkommens aus den veränderten gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen in der DDR. Die Leser hätten sich zur demokratischen Meinungsäußerung herausgefordert gefühlt, sie hätten zur öffentlichen Meinungsbildung beitragen wollen. Die erhöhte Zahl der eingehenden Leserbriefe könne zum einen als Zuwachs des Vertrauens der Leser zur Zeitung und zum anderen als erhöhtes Mitteilungsbedürfnis der Leser interpretiert werden.<sup>6</sup>

The content of the letters also reflected this new openness, with the subjects being addressed ones which were never raised in the old SED state. This new found ability to discuss issues

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Anthon Dörr, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>4</sup> Schmitz (1990), p266

<sup>5</sup> Holzweißig (1989), p21

<sup>6</sup> Bos (1993), pp 232-3

which were of importance to the citizens of the GDR was significant for the discussion about the future of the country.

The steady departure of the editors-in-chief of the SED daily papers commenced at the beginning of November 1989, and after a few weeks, only one of these *Chefredakteure* and *Verlagsleiter* was left.<sup>7</sup> But their replacements were also journalists who had worked under the same regime, and who had often been in positions of responsibility and had therefore complied with the system as had those who left the newspapers.<sup>8</sup> The only difference was really that those who replaced the old guard were somehow seen as being less “tainted”. As Schmitz stated at the time,

Was derzeit besonders fehlt, sind vor allem erfahrene und unbelastete Journalisten und Publizisten.<sup>9</sup>

This was a problem which affected the trust the population could have in journalists, but Bos' conclusions above, based on her analysis of readers' letters, indicated that this distrust was gradually overcome as the media demonstrated their capacity to report without the earlier restrictions. The general public in the GDR had by no means been blind to the nature of the media in the GDR. They had learned how to read a party newspaper so as to find out what was really happening, and they supplemented this information with Western media sources. With increasing trust in their own media, however, the significance of the Western broadcasting media diminished. But the West was far from inactive during this period, and plans were already being prepared to enter the Eastern market.

The involvement of the Western media in the East got off to a very bad start as far as press freedom and the development of the market were concerned. With hindsight, this start can be seen to have been a clear signal as to the way in which the Eastern press market would develop. In January 1990, the four largest press companies in the West - Gruner + Jahr, Burda, Springer and Bauer - negotiated with the Modrow government, dealing mainly with the postal service, to obtain a monopoly on the distribution of publications which were published in the West and were to be sold in the East. Although this cartel arrangement was discovered and stopped in March 1990, these same four companies subsequently marched

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<sup>7</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p422

<sup>8</sup> Schneider (1991), p73

<sup>9</sup> Schmitz (1990), p269

into the East with all the appearance of having divided up the area among themselves.<sup>10</sup>

At the time of the *Wende*, there was a complete regulatory gap as far as distribution and ownership of newspapers were concerned, and it was this lack of legislation which the Western companies made use of. In the end, the initial attempts of the Western publishers were thwarted only by *West* German intervention through the *Bundeskartellamt*. As Humphreys has pointed out<sup>11</sup>, this episode showed just how much power the large Western publishers had, especially when compared with the GDR administration. The responsible authorities in the East, in their defence, had simply never envisaged such a problem arising, since such aggressive activities had never been a part of the East German economy.

Western activity in the press market of the East took place in four main stages. To begin with, although there were some local editions of Western papers published in the East, the main method of achieving some market presence in the East was the exporting of newspapers and magazines by lorry to the East. At the time, there was little else which could be done. There had not been enough time to establish an efficient system of publishing and distribution in the East, and the necessary equipment for Western-style publishing was not yet in place. Even though this method was the best available at the time, there were still significant difficulties for Western firms when it came to delivering the newspapers, as the infrastructure needed was often sub-optimal.

At this early stage, many of the newspapers being distributed were paid for by individuals in the West and supplied to others in the East, and some Western newspapers gave free copies to public bodies such as libraries and archives. During this phase, it was still necessary to register newspapers from the West which were to be distributed in the East.<sup>12</sup>

In time, Western publishers began to produce newspapers in the East as well. These were still only different editions of Western papers, but specifically for the Eastern market. This development was seen mainly in border areas and partner towns and cities, and it was at this stage that the beginnings of co-operation between journalists and other newspaper staff from both East and West was seen.<sup>13</sup> The form this co-operation took was the exchange of articles

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<sup>10</sup> Humphreys (1994), pp 304-5

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p305

<sup>12</sup> Schneider (1991), p71

<sup>13</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), pp 419-20



and telephone consultation. Furthermore, in border areas, there was even movement of staff between newspapers, which gave the journalists the experience of working under different conditions and also increased the technical and business awareness of the journalists from the East.<sup>14</sup> Not only were individual newspapers keen to establish links with other press organs in the other German state, but also Western organisations encouraged their members to help Eastern newspapers:

Die Verlegerverbände der Bundesrepublik hatten ihre Mitglieder ausdrücklich dazu aufgerufen, ostdeutschen Publizisten und Verlegern technische Hilfestellung zu geben und dabei auch Satz-, Druck- und Kopiermaschinen zur Verfügung zu stellen.<sup>15</sup>

In the third phase, new titles began to appear, mainly created by publishers from the West<sup>16</sup>, and by May 1990, there were nine more independent newspapers in the GDR than in November of the previous year. The conditions for entering the market were extremely unfavourable, and with the exception of those newspapers produced in the West, the old problems of a low printing capacity and relatively small quantities of printing paper were still very evident.<sup>17</sup>

An assumption underlying the founding of new newspapers was that the old titles of the GDR were largely discredited. Because of this, it was believed that new newspapers would be in a strong position to establish a new press structure in the East, replacing the older ones. However, this theory was mistaken, as many of the major regional newspapers in the East remained successful as they changed their style and content. The readers of the GDR had a much closer identification with “their” paper than had been thought, and this contributed in part to the level of concentration which continued in the market after 1989. Because a more dramatic fall in circulation of all the old papers had been anticipated, they were perhaps not taken seriously enough as potential market players, and the consequences of their continuing success were therefore underestimated. Had the relationship between these papers and their readers been better understood at the time the political decisions were made which determined future policies, it is possible that different decisions would have been made. This

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p420

<sup>16</sup> Schneider (1991), p72

<sup>17</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p420

could have led to a greater degree of competition than concentration in the East.

The most significant method of gaining a market share in the East became that of *Kooperationen*, whereby Western companies formed links and partnerships with papers in the East. This process had begun in early 1990, when the SED relinquished control of all its large regional papers, thus opening the way for the Western press companies, both from the Federal Republic and farther afield, to buy up all that was on offer. Initially, outright purchase of Eastern papers was not possible, as the legal status of the newspapers was not yet clear, and co-operative ventures were seen as the best way to achieve a position which could later be capitalised upon in actually bidding for the papers. When the Western firms chose to establish these co-operative ventures with these newspapers, their intentions should have been clear:

Nach Überführungen der SED-Bezirkszeitungen in Volkseigentum (Anfang 1990) kooperierten westliche Verlage - meist ohne rechtliche Grundlage - mit diesen Zeitungen in der Absicht, diese Blätter später käuflich zu erwerben.<sup>18</sup>

With the attempts of the same large media concerns to establish a monopoly of distribution in the East, it ought to have been obvious that these other attempts to “co-operate” with Eastern papers were based on rather less altruistic motives than helping the Eastern newspapers adapt to the new situation. Instead, they were actually a response to the failure of their earlier attempts to capture the market without reference to the responsible bodies. As early as 1990, the first takeovers in fact took place, when the newspapers of the *Berliner Verlag* were bought by Gruner + Jahr and Maxwell. The *Berliner Verlag* was one of the largest publishing houses of the GDR, with a combined circulation of all its press products of ten million copies. It included amongst its publications two of the largest daily newspapers in the GDR, the largest weekly newspaper, and several prominent magazines.<sup>19</sup>

The later takeover of two of the large regional papers - *Freie Presse* in Chemnitz and the *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung* in Halle - was particularly significant as a precursor of later developments in the press market, when ownership of all the regional papers of the SED fell into Western hands. It was not only the regional papers which attracted Western interest.

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<sup>18</sup> Schneider (1991), p72

<sup>19</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), pp 421-2

The extent of the overall Western involvement as early as 1990 was shown by the fact that in May 1990, 26 out of a total of 39 (or 48, if the newly founded papers are included) were either already working with Western firms or seeking to do so.<sup>20</sup>

The decision of the Western firms to work with the existing print media in the East proved to be a wise choice from their own point of view:

Sowohl den überregionalen Titeln aus der Bundesrepublik als auch den Lokalausgaben westdeutscher Blätter für die DDR war relativ wenig Erfolg beschieden. Bereits 1990 zeichnete sich ab, daß die DDR-Leser aufgrund ihrer speziellen politischen, sozialen, aber auch materiellen Situation andere Interessen und Informationsbedürfnisse hatten als bundesdeutsche Zeitungsleser.<sup>21</sup>

Just why the old SED newspapers did so surprisingly well in their new circumstances is a question which will be returned to.

### *Towards reunification*

By the end of 1990, as reunification approached, the way in which the press market was developing had become clear. There were concerns about all sectors of the market. Competition among the successful regional newspapers had diminished, and among other newspapers there were financial difficulties. The stark contrast between the likely futures of the different types of newspapers warrants a closer look at these various sections of the Eastern market.

#### **The SED newspapers**

The SED, as the ruling party in the GDR, owned and controlled the main newspapers being published. The following table shows the circulation of the SED papers in 1988, before the *Wende* had begun, and these figures indicate the size of the SED's interest in the print media. The comparison with the same papers circulation in 1991 and 1994 can then be used as the basis of an analysis of what happened to these papers when the SED gave up its control of their activities.

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<sup>20</sup> Nölte (1991), p90

<sup>21</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p422

Old title	1 9 8 8 circulation (‘000s)	New title	1 9 9 1 circulation (‘000s)	New owner(s)	1 9 9 4 circulation (‘000s)
Berliner Zeitung	425		304	Gruner + Jahr, Maxwell (50% each)	250.7
BZ am Abend	204	Berliner Kurier am Abend	130	Gruner + Jahr, Maxwell (50% each)	160.3
Neues Deutschland	1100		128	Independent/PDS	79.6
<b>Bezirkszeitungen:</b>					
Freie Erde (Neubrandenburg)	202	Nordkurier	160	Augsburger Allgemeine/ Kieler Nachrichten/ Schwäbische Zeitung (33.3% each)	149.9
Freie Presse (Chemnitz)	661	Freie Presse	586	Die Rheinpfalz, Ludwigshafen	489.1
Freies Wort (Suhl)	178		142	Neue Presse, Coburg	118.8
Freiheit (Halle)	585	Mitteldeutsche Zeitung	527	Kölner Stadt- Anzeiger	428.3
Lausitzer Rundschau (Cottbus)	291		276	Saarbrücker Zeitung	205.4
Leipziger Volkszeitung	484		380	Springer Verlag/ Hannoversche Allgemeine (50% each)	364.3
Märkische Volksstimme (Potsdam)	348	Märkische Allgemeine	265	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	236.1
Neuer Tag (Frankfurt/Oder)	212	Märkische Oderzeitung	184	Südwest Presse, Ulm	162.5
Ostsee-Zeitung (Rostock)	292		238	Lübecker Nachrichten	221.1
Sächsische Zeitung	566		513	Gruner + Jahr (51%)/ Rheinische Post and Westdeutsche Zeitung 49% (together)	449.3
Schweriner Volkszeitung	201		171	Burda-Verlag	171.6
V o l k s s t i m m e (Magdeburg)	451		375	Bauer-Verlag	323.0
Volkswacht (Gera)	238	Ostthüringer Zeitung <sup>22</sup>	210	WAZ, Essen (40%)	175.1
Das Volk (Erfurt)	401	T h ü r i n g e r Allgemeine	350	WAZ, Essen, (50%)	297.7
Totals	6838		4939		4282.8

Compiled from: Röper (1991b), p422; Röper (1993b), pp 402-9; Schütz (1994), pp 373-91

The first and most obvious point which emerges is that all the regional papers owned by the SED were bought up when they came onto the free market. Furthermore, all the new owners

<sup>22</sup> This paper was essentially the same as the old *Ostthüringer Nachrichten* which the WAZ had tried in vain to purchase. Details of this case will be given at a later point.

were from the West. What the above table does not show, however, is the scale of the involvement of the largest West German publishers at this early point. The true extent of their interests is hidden by the recognised use of subsidiary companies and newspapers to buy other newspapers. The entire holdings of companies such as the Springer Verlag formed a very complicated web of cross-holdings and subsidiary interests.<sup>23</sup> In order to give a small indication of the complexity of the ownership structure and using the same example of the old SED papers, the following table shows the newspaper interests in the East of the largest Western media companies in 1991. The holdings of Maxwell were later taken over by Gruner + Jahr, and Maxwell's interests are therefore placed under those of Gruner + Jahr.

Media concern	Subsidiary holding (Western)	Eastern German newspaper
Springer Verlag	—	Leipziger Volkszeitung (50%)
	Kieler Nachrichten (24.5%)	Nordkurier (33.3%)
WAZ	—	Ostthüringer Zeitung (40%)
	—	Thüringer Allgemeine (50%)
	Südwest Presse	Märkische Oderzeitung
Bauer	—	Volksstimme
Burda	—	Schweriner Volkszeitung
Holzbrinck	Saarbrücker Zeitung	Lausitzer Rundschau
Gruner + Jahr	—	Berliner Zeitung
	—	BZ am Abend
	—	Sächsische Zeitung (51%)
DuMont Schauberg	Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger	Mitteldeutsche Zeitung
Stuttgarter Verlag	Neue Presse	Freies Wort
	Die Rheinpfalz	freie presse

Compiled from: Röper (1991b), p422; Röper (1993b), pp 402-9

Although the degree to which subsidiary companies were used to purchase Eastern German newspapers varied considerably, its use as seen above demonstrates the complexity of questions of market concentration, as the actual ownership of newspapers was not always easy to discern. This fact tends to complicate analyses of press concentration, as the true extent to which a market is controlled by a small number of media concerns is not always immediately apparent.

<sup>23</sup> A helpful diagrammatic representation of the holdings of 8 large Western German media concerns is given in *Media Perspektiven Basisdaten*, 1994

*Press concentration in the East*

The example of the SED regional papers is the most relevant to the question of concentration in the East, as such a high proportion of the total circulation was accounted for by these papers. Their current dominant position was significantly affected by the decision to retain the structures introduced by the SED. In the GDR, questions of monopoly were of little significance, as the economy was managed centrally and there was not the same potential for economic abuse of monopoly position as in the free market system of the West. There, monopoly influences were institutionalised, but because of the radically different nature of the Western market, it seems very strange that the papers were sold off so easily and with no apparent consideration of the market implications of such a move. One of the main issues in the media in the West had, after all, for many years been concentration, and the undesirability of allowing media concerns to control too large a slice of the media pie was widely accepted. When this pie was suddenly larger in 1989, the opportunity to reduce the overall level of concentration in the media presented itself, as there was a large market in the East, the division of which the government could influence through legislation. The federal government was not in a position to impose legislation on the GDR, but as only two of the regional papers were sold before reunification, the government must take a large share of the responsibility for the direction in which the media policy went. In addition, it was the Federal Republic which had experienced the problems of media concentration first hand, and which should have been anxious to prevent a repetition of the earlier mistakes. But despite this, nothing was undertaken to improve the situation when the federal government was in a position to enact new legislation. As Schneider concluded,

Die Verlage, denen die Treuhand bereits Zeitungen verkauft hat bzw. diejenigen, denen sie im April dieses Jahres [1991] ein Kaufangebot gemacht hat, profitieren also bis heute von den Monopolstrukturen, die die SED geschaffen hat. Die Treuhandanstalt hat noch nicht einmal eine späte Entscheidung der Regierung Modrow rückgängig gemacht, die ursprünglich getrennten Betriebe "Verlag" und "Druckerei" zu vereinen. Während also zur selben Zeit Kombinate z.B. in kleinere wirtschaftliche Einheiten entflochten wurden, sanktionierte man ausgerechnet im Pressewesen die wirtschaftliche Konzentration.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Schneider (1991), p73

### *The role of the Treuhandanstalt*

Criticisms of the policies of the *Treuhandanstalt*, such as those voiced by Schneider, are common, and it is useful to examine the decision making process of the *Treuhand*, as this demonstrates the way in which the press market was allowed to develop by the government body responsible. But while much of the criticism of the *Treuhand* is justified, it is also hard to see how else the market could have developed. As will be seen, the *Treuhand* had in many cases little choice but to accept the offers of the Western publishers.

The first criticism of the *Treuhand* concerns its awareness of the specific nature of the press market. On the one hand, the *Treuhand* could not be expected to have a detailed knowledge and understanding of each of the many markets with which it was dealing and where it had to make crucial decisions. However, in this case, the issues which the *Treuhand* failed to take account of were fundamental to the operation of the market. The concerns relating to concentration which arose even before the *Treuhand* was charged with the sale of the Eastern media companies seem to have been completely ignored. Given the history of the Western press, it seems strange that more attention was not directed towards the likely impact on the market structure. Part of the reason for this lack of attention may stem from the lack of consultation with those actually employed by the newspapers themselves. They could have been expected to be able to provide valuable information about the particular circumstances of their market:

Das Schicksal oder die Meinung der Belegschaften scheinen der Treuhand allerdings nicht besonders am Herzen zu liegen. Denn weder Geschäftsführung noch Chefredakteur oder ein Vertreter der Belegschaft wurden bisher angehört.<sup>25</sup>

Although the *Treuhand* appeared to be taking less interest in the fate of the workers involved than in the rapid sale of the newspapers, there were indications that it was prepared to challenge the existing structures in the Eastern market. It appeared to have recognised the potentially anti-competitive consequences of the cooperative ventures which gave the Western publishers an excellent basis for further expansion into the Eastern market. But the *Treuhand's* solution was little better:

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<sup>25</sup> Bloß (1993), p29

Die Treuhand trat die Rechtsnachfolge als Eigentümerin der Zeitungen in Ostdeutschland an. Sie fühlte sich an die Absprachen zwischen West- und Ost-Verlagen aus der Übergangszeit nicht gebunden, sondern setzte neue Verhandlungen und Verkäufe nach einem modifizierten Versteigerungsverfahren an, das vielfach kritisiert wurde.<sup>26</sup>

Although its decision to start the process of privatisation without regard to prior interests can be seen as encouraging a more diversified ownership of the papers, it was nevertheless very unfair. It ignored the cooperation which many Western publishers had initiated with the Eastern papers and even investments which had been made, essentially penalising the Westerners for having attempted to support the Eastern papers. True, their motivation was hardly altruistic, but the disregard with which investments of time and money were treated hardly rewarded the earlier initiative and use which was made of the opportunities afforded by the capitalist market system. The *Treuhand* decisions did nothing in practice to encourage competition, as it was very clear just which firms were actually involved in the purchases. Schneider's comment that the list of those interested in purchasing newspapers in the East looked like a list of the top ten West German publishers hits the mark.<sup>27</sup> The decision to make a fresh start with the allocation does not alter this reality. The simple fact that these media companies, with their history of concentration and self-interest in the press market, were the only firms showing a real interest, should have alerted the *Treuhand* to the need to ensure somehow that the previous developments in the West were not repeated in the East.

However, the *Treuhand* was faced with an impossible dilemma. It was given the task of selling the newspapers, but it was always likely that the only interested parties would be the existing large publishers from the West. The *Treuhand*'s courage when dealing with these large businesses was praised, but the praise was tinged with concern about the fact that it was essentially the largest publishers who were involved:

Mut haben die Verwalter des Volkseigentums allerdings bewiesen: Im Westen werden gerade die großen Zeitschriften- und Zeitungsverlage von der Politik schon seit Jahren hofiert und allenfalls mit Glacé-Handschuhen angefaßt. Die Treuhand packte zu und machte auch den Giganten des Verlagsgeschäfts manches Mal einen Strich durch die Rechnung. Dennoch ist auffallend, daß die Treuhand beim großen Deal fast

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<sup>26</sup> Röper (1991b), p421

<sup>27</sup> Schneider (1991), p73



ausschließlich größere Verlage bediente.<sup>28</sup>

The *Treuhand*, however, had little choice in reality, and was a victim of circumstances. The size of the papers being sold off meant that a large initial outlay was necessary, and their poor financial state meant that large sums for investment would also be needed, the extent of which could not be determined beforehand. Though the potential of the papers was recognised, smaller companies or newspaper publishers simply could not enter the press market. Certainly nobody in the East had a chance of raising the necessary funds. Even had this not been the case, the *Treuhand* may well have sold to the Western publishers anyway because of the greater degree of security they could undoubtedly offer. In fact, this outcome was virtually assured by the three criteria the *Treuhand* used to decide who should purchase the newspapers: the purchase price offered, the investment plans of the bidders, and the level of job retention guaranteed.<sup>29</sup> Given these conditions, only the large Western firms were in a position to compete, and then only amongst themselves. These firms were able to shoulder the short term financial burden of investment required to place the newspapers on a sound financial footing, and also had the technical expertise and experience which were equally necessary to turn the papers into successful products.

It is also important to recognise that the *Treuhand* was not the only party which made questionable decisions. While it is easy to criticise what was done, it is at the same time hard to imagine even with hindsight what concrete steps could have been taken to remedy the situation. It is far from clear how the desirable aim of widespread ownership of smaller firms could have been reconciled with the need for large investment and job guarantees. The criteria of the *Treuhand* were in themselves sound economic prerequisites. There was nothing to be gained in having the newspapers taken over by smaller firms or groups of investors if they were later not able to keep the papers afloat. This required the money and expertise which only the publishers had. While there has been much criticism of the *Treuhand's* decision to concentrate on security for the newspapers, real suggestions for improvements have been noticeably lacking. Wauschkuhn, one of the press speakers of the *Treuhand*, called this attitude of blaming the *Treuhand* for everything “blanke Theorie”.<sup>30</sup> Despite its failings, the *Treuhand* was faced with what was almost an impossible task. The

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<sup>28</sup> Röper (1991a), p29

<sup>29</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p447

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Mahle (1992), p15

fact that it did fail is partly a reflection of the lack of resources it was given by the federal government for such a huge programme. The *Treuhand* had to deal with the privatisation of a total of some 8,000 firms and 30,000 shops.<sup>31</sup> Relative to other organisations, the contrast between the resources given to the *Treuhand* and those which other organisations have at their disposal was noted by Wauschkuhn in the example of the *Treuhand's* public relations:

Angesichts der nahezu eruptiven Entstehung der Treuhandanstalt war es gar nicht möglich, von Anfang an eine Presse- und Kommunikationsstrategie zu entwickeln. Dennoch versuchen wir, mit 21 Mitarbeitern das Informationsbedürfnis über den wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Umwandlungsprozeß nach bestem Wissen und Gewissen zu befriedigen. D.h. die Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit der Treuhandanstalt betreut Anfragen zu immer noch 4.800 unterschiedlichen Unternehmen mit knapp 1,3 Millionen Arbeitnehmern. Im Vergleich nenne ich Ihnen nur Daimler Benz mit mehr als 160 Beschäftigten in der PR.<sup>32</sup>

However, even given this shortfall, the *Treuhand* made clear mistakes in its decisions. The *Bundeskartellamt* gave the *Treuhand* two clear instructions concerning the selling of newspapers, namely that each interested party should be involved with only one newspaper, whether or not this involved full ownership. In addition, the areas in which the purchasing and purchased newspapers were distributed should not border each other. Neither of these restrictions, although not overly strict in themselves, was reflected in the decisions the *Treuhand* made in the end:

Der erwünschte und auch von der Treuhand angestrebte Wettbewerb am Zeitungsmarkt kommt gerade nicht auf, wenn benachbarte Verlage im Osten an kooperierende Westverlage vergeben werden - wie etwa in Halle und Leipzig. Die neuen Besitzer in Halle und Leipzig, der Du-Mont-Schauberg Verlag und der Hannoveraner Madsack Verlag, kooperieren einträchtig bei der neuen Boulevard-Zeitung "Neue Presse Express", die unter anderem auch im Verbreitungsgebiet der "Mitteldeutsche Zeitung" und der "Leipziger Volkszeitung" erscheint. Konkurrenz zwischen den beiden Regionalzeitungen und der Boulevard-Zeitung, aber auch unter den beiden Regionalzeitungen scheint damit ausgeschlossen.<sup>33</sup>

It was not just the *Treuhand's* failure to adhere to the rules designed to reduce the concentration effect on the press market which caused problems, but the *Treuhand* did itself

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<sup>31</sup> Röper (1991c), p27

<sup>32</sup> Wauschkuhn (1992), pp 49-50

<sup>33</sup> Röper (1991a), p29

no favours with its less than transparent information policy. It was guilty of giving contradictory statements on the factors which were important in making its decisions and of arbitrarily deciding which papers should be included in the auction process and which were to be sold beforehand.<sup>34</sup> As such, it did not give others the chance to understand the rationale behind many of its decisions, and the general impression left is one of inconsistency in its decisions.

The failings of the *Treuhand* go even further than these points. A significant mistake made was to sell the newspapers as they were, with their existing huge dominance of their circulation areas, and total circulations so large as to place six of them in the top ten of all newspapers sold in the Federal Republic. The following table gives a comparison between the circulations of the papers in East and West (Eastern papers in bold):

Title	1991 circulation in thousands
Bild	4,745
Westdeutsche Allgemeine	653
<b>Freie Presse</b>	602
<b>Mitteldeutsche Zeitung</b>	510
<b>Sächsische Zeitung</b>	500
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	391
Süddeutsche Zeitung	389
<b>Super!Zeitung</b>	370
<b>Volksstimme</b>	363
<b>Leipziger Volkszeitung</b>	360

Source: Schütz (1992), p101

Given the size of the newspapers being sold, both in absolute terms, and relative to the German and more importantly the regional markets affected, it seems incredible that more stringent measures were not introduced to inject competition into the market and prevent a wholesale takeover of the market by Western publishers. There would of course have been practical difficulties in breaking up the existing newspapers, and in requiring more than one company to be involved in each purchase, but such problems were far from insurmountable. The impact on the press market of having followed such guidelines can only be surmised. Perhaps the most regrettable aspect is that the opportunity to attempt to create a different, and more diversified press market was not taken when it was still a possibility.

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<sup>34</sup> Röper (1991c), p27

Before looking at the other pressures which were partly responsible for the outcome in the press market, it is helpful to refer to some pertinent questions which Schneider asked about the relationship between the *Treuhand* and the politics behind the decisions made:

Drängt sich nicht der Eindruck auf, daß die Treuhandanstalt in Zusammenwirkung mit dem sonst so wettbewerbsfreudigen Kartellamt den Pressemarkt zur “West-Kolonisierung” freigegeben hat? [...]

Wann endlich registriert die Medienpolitik die Ergebnisse der Medienwissenschaft?<sup>35</sup>

This last question seems to summarise the problems seen in the policy towards the media. Instead of learning from the obvious lessons of the old Federal Republic, the policies adopted by the *Treuhand* seemed to ignore previous experience. Consequently, the same mistakes were made. In addition, there were suggestions at the time of the *Treuhand*'s decision that political considerations had been involved in some of their judgements, such as in the case of the *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung* and the *Freie Presse*, which were not included in the overall privatisation process, but were awarded before this process was completed:

Völlig unzureichend waren etwas die Erklärungsversuche dafür, daß die Treuhand die “Mitteldeutsche Zeitung” in Halle und die “Freie Presse” in Chemnitz aus dem Paket genommen hatte und schon vorab an den Kölner DuMont-Schauberg beziehungsweise an die Ludwigshafener Medien-Union “Rheinpalz” verscherbelt hatte. Nachdem “Der Spiegel” zunächst nur Vermutungen und später Belege für (partei-) politische Einflußnahme auf diese beiden Entscheidungen veröffentlicht hatte, war der Widerspruch der Treuhand nicht gerade überzeugend.<sup>36</sup>

This is another example of both the inconsistency of the decisions and the damage which was done by the lack of a transparent information policy from the *Treuhand* itself. Observers were denied the opportunity to understand the *Treuhand*'s thinking in these cases. Not only were the explanations given unconvincing, but so too have been the reactions in the aftermath of the privatisation of the papers. Despite all the problems which have been seen with market domination and concentration, the *Bundeskartellamt* merely saw fit to describe the developments as “problematisch”.<sup>37</sup> This is small comfort. Once again, the issues involved have been trivialised and the potential seriousness of the decisions made in the past either not

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<sup>35</sup> Schneider (1991), pp 75-6

<sup>36</sup> Röper (1991a), p29

<sup>37</sup> Schneider (1992), p39

understood or ignored.

The other party which contributed to the final outcome was the West German press industry itself. Pürer and Raabe have noted that,

Die Übernahmepraxis bei der Privatisierung der ehemaligen SED-Bezirkszeitungen ist jedoch nicht ausschließlich auf die Verkaufspolitik der Treuhand zurückzuführen. Sie ist auch das Ergebnis aggressiver Unternehmenspolitik der Westverlage, wie die Auseinandersetzung - bekanntgeworden als "Ostthüringer Zeitungskrieg" - zwischen der WAZ-Gruppe und der Treuhand um zwei thüringische Bezirkszeitungen zeigt.<sup>38</sup>

The example they gave demonstrated the relative powerlessness of the *Treuhand* when faced with determined Western publishers. During privatisation, the *Ostthüringer Nachrichten* and the *Thüringer Allgemeine* were excluded from the process as the WAZ group's 50% interest in both newspapers was being investigated. The holdings in the *Thüringer Allgemeine* had already been purchased under the Modrow government, and could no longer be annulled. The *Treuhand* wanted to stop the WAZ group from obtaining another majority holding, this time in the *Ostthüringer Nachrichten*. A compromise suggested by the *Treuhand*, whereby the WAZ group would be allowed to control 24.5% of the newspaper was, however, not acceptable to the WAZ group. At this point, their power was shown when they published a "new" paper in 1991, called the *Ostthüringer Zeitung*. A new subsidiary company of the WAZ group actually owned this newspaper. Although the publication was meant to be independent and new, it was virtually identical to the *Ostthüringer Nachrichten*, having the same staff, printing equipment, subscribers and layout.<sup>39</sup> Although the *Treuhand* did not sit idly by, and initiated proceedings against the WAZ group, the conflict ended to the definite advantage of the WAZ group:

[Der WAZ-Konzern] hat nunmehr eine 40prozentige Beteiligung an der "Ostthüringer Zeitung"; weitere 40 Prozent hält die "Mainzer Allgemeine Zeitung" und 20 Prozent wurden einer Mitarbeiter-Beteiligungsgesellschaft zugesprochen. Der Treuhand mußte die WAZ-Gruppe einen zweistelligen Millionenbetrag für die "leere Verlagshülse" der alten "Ostthüringer Nachrichten" zahlen.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p449

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, pp 449-50

This case demonstrated the fact that even when the *Treuhand* did try to adhere to its guidelines, its efforts could then be in vain as the publishers were prepared to fight decisions which went against their intentions. There can be no doubt that the Western companies profited from such behaviour. This is shown most clearly perhaps in the relative strength they had in their home market and in the new Eastern market. Remaining with the example of the WAZ group, it is interesting to note that,

der WAZ-Konzern bringt es beispielsweise in seinem Stammland Nordrhein-Westfalen auf einem Marktanteil von rund einem Drittel; in Thüringen beherrscht er gut zwei Drittel des Marktes.<sup>41</sup>

The fate of the former SED regional papers was unique in the post-1989 GDR. The other branches of the press market fared less well, particularly the national papers which the SED had run.

### *The SED national papers*

While the regional papers prospered under their new owners, the national papers previously owned by the SED fared very differently. These publications: *Junge Welt*, aimed at the youth of the GDR; *Tribüne*, a trade union publication; and the flagship *Neues Deutschland*; lost a huge proportion of their circulation following their separation from the SED. While the regional papers suffered some losses in readers too, the fall in their circulation was only about 20 to 35% from 1988 to 1994, whereas *Neues Deutschland* lost 93% of its readership in that same time period. Even more spectacular were the losses of *Junge Welt*, 97% between 1989 and 1993. *Tribüne* was forced to cease publication when its circulation fell from 413,600 in 1989 to 50,000 in 1991.

There were several reasons for the dramatic collapse in the fortunes of *Neues Deutschland*. The newspaper was more closely associated with the SED than the regional papers, and the continuing link with the PDS did little to alter this connection in the minds of the people. Allied to this fact was the contrast between the way in which the regional papers and *Neues Deutschland* treated the departure of their top staff and commented on their activities under the SED regime. Holzweißig used the example of the *Lausitzer Rundschau* to illustrate this point:

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<sup>41</sup> Röper (1993), p38

Die "Lausitzer Rundschau" meldete am 11. Dezember 1989, der bisherige Chefredakteur sei auf eigenen Wunsch von seinem Amt entbunden worden. Man habe den neuen Chefredakteur, Wolfgang Nagorske, "in freier, offener und geheimer Wahl" gewählt. Gleichzeitig entschuldigte sich das Blatt, daß es sich in der Vergangenheit in den Dienst einer falschen Medienpolitik gestellt habe, weil "dirigistische Eingriffe" von außen erfolgt seien, die die journalistische Arbeit behindert hätten.

Einer so deutlichen Sprache bediente sich der neue Chefredakteur des "Neuen Deutschland", Wolfgang Spickermann - zuvor Abteilungsleiter für Wissenschaften im ND - allerdings nicht. Neben allgemeinen Absichtserklärungen im Hinblick auf eine Verbesserung der Berichterstattung verwies er lapidar auf das neue Impressum, ohne die Namen des abgelösten Chefredakteurs Herbert Naumann und der vier ebenfalls entlassenen stellvertretenden Chefredakteure [...] zu nennen. Sie alle zählten zu den Falken in der ND-Redaktion. Über die Modalitäten ihres Ausscheidens war hingegen nichts zu erfahren.<sup>42</sup>

As has already been mentioned, *Neues Deutschland*, just as all other former SED papers, changed the description it gave of itself, and quickly removed the part which identified it as the organ of the central committee of the SED. However, whereas all the regional papers completely disassociated themselves from any political party, *Neues Deutschland* kept the designation "Zeitung der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands - Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus" in its *Impressum* long afterwards. Even after this had been dropped, the paper continued to identify itself with socialism by including the "Sozialistische Tageszeitung" in its banner. The unwillingness of the staff to break with their commitment to socialism undoubtedly had a negative impact on its circulation, but there are other factors involved which are probably more significant.

The role *Neues Deutschland* had played in GDR days also contributed to the rapid decline in the fortunes of the paper. Previously, the paper had been required reading for all party members in order for them to find out what the official party line had been on a particular issue. The paper often covered important issues in greater detail than the regional and other newspapers, in an attempt to increase the significance of *Neues Deutschland*. The circulation figures for the paper did not, then, reflect a *voluntary* readership as much as the fact that *Neues Deutschland* was effectively compulsory reading for party members in the GDR. When this requirement no longer existed, the readers had no further need to inform

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<sup>42</sup> Holzweißig (1989), pp 20-1

themselves by these means, and the paper suffered a consequent slump in its circulation.

A further factor in the decline of *Neues Deutschland* was the nature of the German press market, about which the paper could do nothing. Instead of a national press as in some other European countries such as Britain, the German press has a very regional setup. Even those papers with a supra-regional presence still have strongholds in the areas from which they originate. With the exception of the tabloid papers, *Bild* and until 1992 in the new states, *Super!Zeitung*, there are no truly national papers. With a very strong regional press market which had existed for many decades in the GDR, *Neues Deutschland* was bound to be in a disadvantaged position when the artificial market of the GDR, which had promoted it disappeared. As has been seen, the regional papers in the new states had circulations comparable with the largest of the supra-regional papers in the West, and there was therefore little chance of *Neues Deutschland* ever being able to overcome the trend of the rest of the German press market. This was especially the case given its continuing association with the SED and the PDS and its unrepresentative attitude. One last point should however be made in this connection, namely that for a time, *Neues Deutschland* fulfilled an important role in the post-*Wende* GDR, providing a national forum for real discussion, which was lacking in the regional papers. This fact was important in the survival of the paper in those difficult days. Since then, the paper has managed to keep a core of readers who value its different perspective on events, but the future of the paper remains in question as it has so far been unable to find new readers to ensure its continuing viability. The problems with the PDS's finances have also not helped matters. The party is in no position to help the paper financially, and the continuing wrangles over what is state and what is party property mean that *Neues Deutschland* cannot rely on PDS support for some time to come. The paper has already had to move premises because of the problem of ownership, and there is no sign of the paper being able to return to its former central location.

### **Newspapers of the GDR block parties**

Although the SED controlled the majority of the newspapers in the GDR, the other political parties also ran their own newspapers, albeit with much lower circulations than the SED press. Even before the widespread falls in circulation began to be felt across the entire market, the papers of the four block parties were in a weak position. Along with their central publications, 14 regional papers were also operated, and in total their newspapers had a



market share of less than nine percent.<sup>43</sup> Although the papers may have appeared unattractive to many outside buyers, the transformation into privately held newspapers was impressive in terms of its speed and comprehensiveness:

Erstaunlich schnell hatten die Blockparteien für die meisten ihrer Blätter westdeutsche Interessenten gefunden, die die Mehrzahl der Titel über 1990 hinaus weiterführten. So stieg bei fünf von sechs früheren CDU-Organen der Verlag der "Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung" ein; einzig "Die Union" aus Dresden kooperierte mit dem Münchener "Süddeutschen Verlag". [...] Vier von fünf ehemaligen LDPD-Blätter begannen Kooperationen mit dem Springer-Verlag (der diese Organe nach der Wiedervereinigung auch übernahm). Lediglich drei der sechs NDPD-Zeitungen mußten ihr Erscheinen zwischen Mai und Juli 1990 einstellen.<sup>44</sup>

But while the initial future of the papers seemed to be promising, this soon changed, as can be seen from the example of the four central party papers:

Title	1989 circulation	1991 circulation	1993 circulation
Neue Zeit (CDU-Ost)	114.0	25.0	39.4
Deutsches Landblatt (previously Bauern-Echo, DBD)	94.2	22.0	—
Der Morgen (LDPD)	63.0	—	—
National-Zeitung (NDPD)	56.0	—	—

Source: Schütz (1991), pp 113-8

Of the four original newspapers, only the CDU-controlled one remained in existence as long as 1993. The dramatic reversal in fortunes may be seen if the above comments on the papers' position in 1990 are compared with what had happened by as early as 1991. The earlier positive tones were replaced by a very pessimistic outlook:

Chancenlos [...] sind auch viele der heute mit Westverlagen kooperierenden Zeitungen der ehemaligen Blockparteien. Einige Titel wurden bereits eingestellt bzw. fusionierten mit anderen Zeitungen. Davon betroffen sind sowohl die Zeitungen in der Region als auch die ehemaligen zentralen Blätter. Daß hier - neben der geringen Kaufkraft der Bevölkerung - hauptsächlich wiederum die alten strukturellen Bedingungen "durchschlagen", hat der Fall "Der Morgen" mit seiner hochgelobten und preisgekrönten Redaktion erst jüngst deutlich werden

<sup>43</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p425

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

lassen.<sup>45</sup>

There was no question about the quality of these papers. The example of *Der Morgen* cited by Schneider demonstrated that this factor was not necessarily decisive in the battle for survival. Although *Der Morgen* was widely acknowledged as being an excellent product, market forces worked against its survival and eventually prevailed, although the paper was later revived in 1992 as a training tool for novice journalists on work programmes.<sup>46</sup>

By 1992, the trends in the press market were very clear. Concentration was the dominant theme, and only the SED regional papers were unaffected by the mergers between Eastern papers.<sup>47</sup> As Schneider pointed out, in addition to the loss of the central papers of the block parties, of the original 14 regional papers of these parties, only three were still in existence as independent entities. The others had either been closed down by their new Western owners, or merged with other papers.<sup>48</sup>

### **The papers of the *Bürgerbewegung***

The founding of new papers run by activists in the 1989 *Bürgerbewegung* began as early as November 1989 with the *Weimarer Wochenblatt*, and in time, a total of about 30 papers published by the citizens' movement and new political parties came into existence, with several called simply "Die Andere" or "Andere Zeitung".<sup>49</sup> When seen in the context of the citizens' movement as a whole, it is unsurprising that the number of these papers being founded peaked at the end of 1989 and beginning of 1990. Within this sector of the market, there were local, regional and supra-regional papers, with a circulation of up to 250,000 in the case of *das blatt*.<sup>50</sup> At this time of change and its challenge to the established values and norms, the press of the citizens' movement performed an important political role within the GDR:

Es ging ihnen darum, unverfälschte Informationen zu veröffentlichen und Mißstände offen anzuprangern. Dabei stellten sie die notwendige Öffentlichkeit zur Bewältigung derjenigen Probleme her, die der

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<sup>45</sup> Schneider (1991), p74

<sup>46</sup> Müller (1992), p54

<sup>47</sup> Schneider (1992), p36

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Kulick (1990), p47

<sup>50</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p424

gesellschaftliche Umbruch selbst aufwarf.<sup>51</sup>

Inevitably, many of the papers had only very short lives. Because of the nature of these newspapers, they were never on a firm financial footing, nor were they characterised by the degree of professionalism needed to transform a spontaneous reaction to the new order in the GDR into economic viability. In addition, there was disagreement within the movement as a whole and a sterilisation of ideas and scope of coverage, which meant that the papers did not adjust to the changing needs of their readers. Just as *Neues Deutschland* lost touch with many of its former readers by staying too close to the traditions and views of the “old” GDR, so the papers of the citizens’ movement stayed too close to the original themes of the *Wende* instead of moving on when its readers’ interests moved on to new issues. When the other established papers began to pick up many of the themes central to the citizens’ movement, their fate was permanently sealed.<sup>52</sup> Some of the papers later disappeared completely or merged with an established paper, a process which was made easier by the leaders of the movement having been given room in these older papers to express themselves freely. This was an important stage in the decline of the significance of the press of the citizens’ movement.<sup>53</sup>

### **The tabloid press**

When the success of the *Bild-Zeitung* in the West and the absence of any comparable newspaper in the East are considered, one might imagine that a paper which could use the same techniques as the *Bild-Zeitung*, and adapt them to the specific interests of the citizens of the former GDR, would become extremely successful. After all, the so-called tabloids of the GDR were really no such thing when seen relative to their counterparts in the West, and there appeared to be a great deal of scope for a new, Western-style of tabloid journalism in the East. The GDR tabloid press was very much an instrument of party control like the other more serious papers, but adopted a slightly different style of reporting. A contender for this role of the Eastern *Bild* did arise, in the form of the *Super!Zeitung*, published by the Burda and Murdoch publishing houses.

At first, the *Bild-Zeitung* appeared to be repeating its success story in the East, but with the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

arrival of the *Super!Zeitung* in May 1991, *Bild* had its first real competitor. The circulation of *Bild* fell by over one half, and the *Super!Zeitung* seemed to have found the right mixture for the Eastern market:

Sie beutet soziale Spannungen aus, profitiert schamlos von Neidgefühlen und Unsicherheit und hat damit einen eigenen "Ost-Chauvinismus" entwickelt, der - in Kombination mit "sex and crime" - die redaktionelle Linie bestimmt.<sup>54</sup>

Because of the much greater experience of Western journalists in this area of journalism, the product of the *Super!Zeitung* was in reality a Western one, albeit aimed at the Eastern market:

Nichts, was es drüben an journalistischer Geschmacksverirrung gegeben hat, ist denn auch Originalton Ost. Es waren als Ossi verkleidete Westjournalisten, die jene Schlagzeilen formulierten, über die sich der Westen dann echauffierte: "Angeber-Wessi mit Bierflasche erschlagen. Ganz Bernau ist glücklich, daß er tot ist." Oder: "Westfrau lachte über nackten Ossi - Kehle durchgeschnitten."<sup>55</sup>

As soon as *Super!* appeared, the problems which could be caused in the East by such sensationalist reporting were noted.<sup>56</sup> The readers in the East were totally unaccustomed to this style of tabloid reporting. Several years later, Köpke identified this factor in the Eastern market as one which inhibited the chances of *Super!* succeeding. The readers in the East had problems with the application of press freedom, and thought that the press went too far in many cases:

[Die Leser] haben Schwierigkeiten mit manchen neuen Freiheitsrechten der Presse. Umfragen ergeben, daß das ostdeutsche Publikum eher geneigt ist, der Presse die Zügel anzuziehen als westdeutsche Medienkonsumenten. Manchmal scheint ihnen die Pressefreiheit einfach zu weit zu gehen.<sup>57</sup>

In addition, there was also a great deal of competition between *Super!* and *Bild*. This made it much harder for *Super!* to survive given the vast resources behind *Bild* and the experience the paper's management had of making a success of a German tabloid paper and maintaining

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<sup>54</sup> Schneider (1991), p75

<sup>55</sup> Liedtke (1992), p24

<sup>56</sup> Kulick (1991b), pp 30-1

<sup>57</sup> Köpke (1994), p42

that success over decades. Senior staff members moved between *Bild* and *Super!*, and the competition between the two newspapers was intense, partly because Murdoch believed that there was room for a second national tabloid paper on the German market, and that his *Super!* would assume that role.<sup>58</sup>

The first step in the fight between the two papers came when the *Super!* was sold for only 30 Pfennigs, a price which the *Spiegel* called a “Kampfpreis”<sup>59</sup>, and which openly challenged the *Bild-Zeitung*. Within only two months, the circulation of the *Super!* was 420,000, and the half-million mark was reached three times in 1991/92.<sup>60</sup> This achievement was not made without some cost, however. The newspaper’s style and content were criticised by the Western media. Many legal moves were made against the paper, resulting in fines and requirements to publish several *Gegendarstellungen*.<sup>61</sup> But while these undesirable aspects of the paper were accumulating, the all important financial figures were not good enough:

Weder die aggressive publizistische Grundlinie noch der Versuch, den entstandenen Negativ-Eindruck zu verwischen, konnten die “Super! Zeitung” vor dem einsetzenden Niedergang bewahren. Zum einen brachte es die Zeitung nicht auf die erhofften Anzeigenaufkommen, deren Erlöse eine solide ökonomische Basis für das Überleben der Zeitung bedeutet hätten. Die werbetreibende Wirtschaft zeigte sich sehr zurückhaltend, in dem umstrittenen Blatt zu inserieren. Zum anderen hatten sich die Regionalausgaben der “Bild”-Zeitung inzwischen am ostdeutschen Lesermarkt etabliert. Das mag nicht zuletzt damit zusammenhängen, daß Springer für “Bild” ein eigenes ausdifferenziertes Vertriebsnetz aufgebaut hatte, während “Super!” auf ein solches Vertriebsnetz nicht zurückgreifen konnte.<sup>62</sup>

The paper’s losses mounted up, and efforts to rectify the situation, such as raising the paper’s price, did not solve the problem. Eventually, Murdoch abandoned his hope of establishing the paper in the long term and withdrew from the loss-making enterprise. Although Burda assured all concerned that it wanted to continue publishing the paper, it ceased publication in July 1992. There was no prior warning of this either to the journalists or to any other involved parties.<sup>63</sup> Estimates of the losses of the *Super!Zeitung* were around the 300 million

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<sup>58</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p459

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p460

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p461

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, p461

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, pp 461-2

<sup>63</sup> Kaiser/Martini (1992), pp 48-9

DM mark.<sup>64</sup>

As well as these two newspapers, there were other tabloid papers in the Eastern market, which sought to exploit the clear differences in taste in newspapers which existed between Eastern and Western readers.<sup>65</sup> These differences were seen in the differences in the Eastern and Western editions of *Bild*, which reflected the traditional differences between regional editions in the West. But there was still room for a paper which had a readership base from GDR times. This gap was filled by the *Berliner Kurier*, which made explicit reference to the differences in taste and interests in the East in its commentary on its new title and appearance on December 3 1990:

Der "Kurier am Abend" wird von Reportern und Redakteuren aus Ost und West gemeinsam gemacht. Er wird sich besonders um die Menschen kümmern, die im Osten der Stadt leben und noch ganz andere Sorgen haben als die Berliner im Westen.<sup>66</sup>

It was no coincidence that the paper made reference to the concerns of the citizens in East Berlin. The paper saw the difficulties faced by this part of the population, next door to the ultimate symbol of capitalism from the cold war era, West Berlin, as being something which could be used to attract readers disillusioned both by the Western press, and more especially by the reality of the change to the Western market economy and the absence of the booming economy they had been promised. The *Berliner Kurier*'s survival was attributable to its continuing appeal to this Eastern market. Although the top management is now from the West, they have obtained their information about the most relevant topics from the members of staff from the East rather than trying to decide themselves which subjects will be attractive in the East.<sup>67</sup> In many ways, however, the *Berliner Kurier* is also a Western paper under the guise of an Eastern one. A large proportion of the staff from the East have been replaced by others from the West, who are more experienced in this kind of tabloid journalism, and there is some resentment among the Eastern staff about this fact.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p462

<sup>65</sup> Höhne (1992), p32

<sup>66</sup> "Guten Tag! Ihr "Berliner Kurier am Abend" ist da. *Berliner Kurier am Abend*, 3 December 1990, p3

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Wieland Sandmann, Chefredakteur, *Berliner Kurier*

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Michael Schneider, *Berliner Kurier*

### *Reasons for the decline of the press*

The primary reason for the difficulties of the majority of the press was the dominant position of the old SED regional papers. As has already been mentioned, this was essentially a result of the continuation of the structures of a press market in which competition and monopoly were not issues of any real importance. Schneider has explained the significance of these regional papers in determining the future of the Eastern press:

Alle 15 ehemaligen SED-Bezirkszeitungen waren und sind bei einer nach wie vor hohen Haushaltsdeckung großräumig verbreitet. Neugründungen hatten es unter diesen Bedingungen selbst an den Rändern der Verbreitungsgebiete äußerst schwer, eine nennenswerte Marktposition zu erreichen. Nur Veränderungen der strukturellen Ausgangsbedingungen etwa durch Aufteilung der Verbreitungsgebiete, hätten Wettbewerb und Chancengleichheit überhaupt erst ermöglicht. Inzwischen allerdings ziehen sich selbst Verlage von Lokalzeitungen mit einer starken Position im Verbreitungsgebiet aus den neuen Bundesländern zurück. Die auch für die nächsten Jahre zu erwartenden Verluste seien, so die Begründungen, auf Dauer nicht tragbar. Die Ungleichheit der Bedingungen wirkt sich nämlich auf allen Gebieten nachteilig für die Konkurrenten der ehemaligen SED-Bezirkszeitungen aus.<sup>69</sup>

This general problem was also manifested in more specific areas, both financial and technical.

#### **Financial considerations**

Under the old regime, the press was heavily subsidised by the government, and because of its role in the GDR society, it was not thought that newspapers should be dependent on their readers for their success. Rather they were offering a service which was of much greater importance than mere profit. There was little advertising, and the price of the papers was nominal, contributing little to the finances of the papers. When the state subsidies were ended on 31 March 1990, the price of newspapers rose by 40 to 50 Pfennigs. Even at the new price level, receipts from sales of newspapers were not able to achieve the share of total revenue of around 30% seen in the West. Schneider estimated that the prices of newspapers in the East would only reach that of the West at the beginning of the next century.<sup>70</sup> Before the market stabilised in its present form, a pronounced feature of the market in the East was

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<sup>69</sup> Schneider (1992), p38

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

the degree to which the level of competition in a particular area determined the pricing of papers there:

Auffallend ist, daß Zeitungen in Monopolstellungen die vergleichsweise höchsten Abonnementpreise erzielen. Vor allem im ehemaligen Grenzgebiet aber, wo es den noch verhältnismäßig größten Wettbewerb gibt, existiert mit der "Thüringer Allgemeinen" die billigste Abonnementzeitung Deutschlands. Nur Großverlage können diesen Konkurrenzkampf fast beliebig lange durchhalten.<sup>71</sup>

There were clear abuses of monopoly position taking place in the East, and the pricing differentials identified by Schneider were classic examples of monopoly pricing. Subscription prices were over 10DM a month less than in the West to begin with, and only the largest papers could survive in such a market, giving the regional papers excellent prospects.<sup>72</sup> Even had the prices being charged been higher to begin with, new entrants to the market would not have been able to use this fact to secure their own position. In any such venture, new entrants are faced with the problem of significant sunk costs, set-up costs which are not fully recoverable in the event of an exit from the market, and they need a greater degree of certainty of revenue and profit in order to be prepared to enter the market at all.

An excellent example of the phenomenon of price discrimination was seen in the case of the *Thüringer Allgemeine* mentioned by Röper above, which clearly applied very different subscription prices according to the level of competition it faced in various distribution areas. The aim was clearly to damage the chances of its competition:

Der Abonnementpreis [der Mitteldeutschen Allgemeinen] von bisher 13,50 Mark sinkt zum 1. September [1994] auf 9,80 Mark. Zu dieser ungewöhnlichen Maßnahme sah sich die MA veranlaßt, weil die beim Verkauf der "Eisenacher Presse" leer ausgegangene "Thüringer Allgemeine" ihren Abopreis auf 9,80 Mark reduzierte, von der Konkurrenz den Preiskampf aufzuzwingen. Zum Vergleich: In der nur 60 Kilometer entfernten Landeshauptstadt Erfurt kostet ein TA-Monatsabo 13 Mark. Ob sich von den drei Anbietern auf dem schon immer heiß umkämpften Eisenacher Markt einer verabschieden muß - in Thüringen wäre das kein Novum.<sup>73</sup>

In fact, two complaints about the actions of the *Thüringer Allgemeine* were lodged with the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid

<sup>72</sup> Röper (1992) p34

<sup>73</sup> Traut (1994), p35



*Landeskartellamt*, specifically related to its practice of selling its papers at an artificially low price, a practice which it was also pursuing in Suhl.<sup>74</sup> Such practices led in part to the loss in competition which was seen in the press market in the years following reunification.

The reasons for the lack of new entrants to replace the failed newspapers have been clearly identified. Drawing on Baumol's work on contestable markets<sup>75</sup>, the press market can be seen as being characterised by high sunk costs. These are costs which are not recoverable in the event of leaving the market. Consequently, existing firms were able to practise limit pricing. This involved them setting a price for their newspapers which was high enough to earn them a profit, and at the same time low enough not to encourage new entrants. This they were able to do because they first eliminated their existing competition, reasoning that the short-term losses which were involved were more than compensated for by the longer term prospects of a competition-free distribution area.

The second aspect of the financial reasons behind the newspapers' difficulties and failures was advertising income. Although the situation in the advertising market was not as bad as had been anticipated, advertising income was not able to make up the losses from sales of the newspaper.<sup>76</sup> Again, the large regional newspapers had a clear advantage simply because of their size and their circulation, which made them attractive to advertisers, whereas smaller papers could not aspire to the potential reach of their larger competitors. Added to the higher unit costs of smaller publishers, the net result was that the losses of newly founded papers were around 1.5 to 3 million DM in 1992, and in some cases as high as 15 million DM.<sup>77</sup> These were the financial considerations which limited the success of smaller newspapers. There were also technical factors which worked in favour of the regional papers.

### **Technical factors**

To some extent, the technical difficulties of producing newspapers in the East were allied with the financial factors already identified. In other ways they are quite distinct. When the SED was no longer in charge of the GDR, modern printing equipment was simply not available in the East, and it took time for such equipment to be set up. At this stage, the

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid

<sup>75</sup> Baumol/Panzar/Willig (1982)

<sup>76</sup> Schneider (1992), pp 38-9

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p39

alternatives were not promising. Newspapers produced by Western publishers could be printed in the West and transported to the East, but this involved high labour and transport costs. An alternative was to use the printing presses of the regional papers. Although this reduced the costs, it left control in the hands of staff at the regional papers. They were then able to determine when their competitors could use their equipment.<sup>78</sup> Because the regional papers wished to ensure that they had the latest printing times in order to be as up-to-date as was possible, the smaller papers often suffered from lack of actuality.<sup>79</sup> By the time the new presses were available for use, many of the potential users, the smaller local papers, had already left the market<sup>80</sup>, and Schneider's conclusion was that,

Nur wenn die Treuhandanstalt zumindest eine Entflechtung zwischen Verlagen und Druckereien betrieben hätte, wäre eine positivere Entwicklung möglich gewesen. In den neuen Bundesländern hätte dann auch ein dezentralisierter, prosperierender Zweig mittelständischer Unternehmen entstehen können.<sup>81</sup>

It is clear that the main factors at play in the Eastern press market - the dominant position of the old SED regional papers, and the power this gave them - were the root cause of the difficulties the other papers experienced. Calls for the circulation areas of these papers to be split up were an inevitable corollary. Once again, the lessons of four decades of experience of press concentration in the West were simply not heeded. The result was an unnecessary loss of competition in the market, which led to levels of concentrations far exceeding those in the West.

### **Relationship with the readership**

Oette, examining the contrast between the fate of the successful regional papers and the other press branches, also noted the significance of the strength of the old SED regional papers. However, his starting point was to look at the question from the journalists' point of view. In his analysis, he identified two decisive factors:

Die kreative Aufrüstung der Redaktionsteams unter Einbeziehung der besten Erfahrungen und leistungswilliger, feinfühligere Journalisten aus den

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p39

<sup>79</sup> Kulick (1991a), p23

<sup>80</sup> Schneider (1992), p39

<sup>81</sup> Ibid

alten Bundesländern sowie die konsequente Hinwendung zum Leser und seinen Bedürfnissen.<sup>82</sup>

This second point was a particularly crucial one. As has already been seen when considering the fate of *Neues Deutschland* and the papers of the citizens' movements, an awareness of the changing demands of the readership was important in deciding the future of the press. On the one hand, Oette pointed to the disparity between the interests of East and West, which was not recognised by many papers from the West. This contributed to their lack of success in the East:

Die Entwicklung seit dem Oktober 1990 hat gezeigt, daß die innere Vereinigung der Menschen in Deutschland wenig Fortschritt macht. Es gibt dafür eine Menge Indizien, die hier anzuführen überflüssig ist. Tatsache jedenfalls ist, daß vieles, was aus den alten Bundesländern kommt, von den Regularien des Regierens in Bonn bis hin zum Lebensstil, vielen im Osten immer noch fremd geblieben ist, auch undurchschaubar erscheint.<sup>83</sup>

This point was echoed by Liedtke:

[Die seriöse Westpresse] bekam im Osten das sprichwörtliche Bein nicht auf den Boden. Nicht etwa weil die Ostleser einen grundsätzlichen Hang zum Primitiveren hätten, sondern weil jenes Publikum, das normale, differenzierende Berichterstattung wünscht, bei den Blattmachern Kenntnis seiner Mentalität, seiner Erfahrungswelt voraussetzt. Die Westschreiber, aber, vom SPIEGEL bis zur FAZ, sprachen eine andere Sprache, schrieben vor anderem Hintergrund, waren in ihrer Sicht aller Dinge westlich orientiert. Ihr Produkt - einmal abgesehen davon, daß es zu teuer und für die Lesegewohnheiten im Osten zu dick war - blieb fremd; da zog man es dann doch vor, bei den gewendeten und inzwischen auf Weststandard gehobenen Heimatblättern zu bleiben.<sup>84</sup>

On the other hand, some of the papers from the East experienced similar difficulties, but for different reasons. Again this was seen in the case of *Neues Deutschland* and the papers of the citizens' movement. These papers did not evolve in line with readers' wishes and suffered accordingly. The relationship of the papers to their readers was, then, a fundamentally important factor in the success or failure of the newspapers. Schneider drew this conclusion and found that readers' interests were most closely reflected by the large

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<sup>82</sup> Oette (1992), p96

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p98

<sup>84</sup> Liedtke (1992), p23

regional papers.<sup>85</sup> Allied to the other financial, technical and market-dependent factors already mentioned, the reasons for the perhaps surprising success of the former SED regional papers become clear. The consistent inability of other papers to compete successfully was due to a variety of reasons, most of which were, however, a result of the common factor of the regional paper's existing dominance and the decision to allow this market structure to remain intact rather than pursue an alternative course.

## Legal changes made

The legal changes seen in the months and years after the *Wende* affected the eventual shape of the market less than the decisions of the *Treuhand*, but were nevertheless important in any demonstration of thinking on the role of the media in the GDR. In addition, the interaction between newspapers and the political parties and government of the GDR in the months after 1989 can be seen in the legal developments.

Discussion of the future of the media in the GDR began well before there was any real talk of reunification. Not for the first time, the issue was raised first by the ordinary people, who had been all too aware of the way in which so-called *gesellschaftliche Information* had been used in the SED's own interests. Although these demands were not part of the legal changes made in the GDR, they did herald the creation of the new media order, and many of the ideas later officially developed were seen in embryo in the demonstrations of 1989. There were three parts to the demands of the people in the autumn of 1989 as they related to the media: freedom of information, opinion and the media. From the previous discussion of the media system under SED rule, it will be clear why these three areas were of such importance.

First, as far as freedom of information was concerned, in the GDR, the media were in principle not allowed to obtain their own information, but had to use official sources, primarily the state-run ADN. Even when other information was known, it was only allowed to be used in certain clearly defined circumstances. The unrealistic nature of this policy was clear, as GDR citizens were able to supplement their domestic media coverage with information from foreign media, particularly from the Federal Republic. A result of the *Wende* was that the citizens were finally in a position to be able to change this situation and create a media system which would be comprehensive and at the same time focus on *their*

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<sup>85</sup> Schneider (1991/92), p5

needs, rather than relying on information from foreign sources which were largely unaware of what the GDR citizens wanted and were not specifically catering to these requirements.

Second, although the GDR constitution theoretically granted freedom of opinion, this freedom was never seen in practice, as has already been discussed. The only way in which the newly emerging freedoms and opportunities could be discussed would be if there was room for real discussion without fear of censorship (of any form, whether direct or indirect) or discriminatory reprisals. Yet this freedom of opinion, and specifically the freedom to have and voice an opinion other than that of the SED, was a vital prerequisite to the development of democracy in the GDR, the fundamental aim of the citizens' protests.

The third freedom demanded, the freedom of the media, encompassed these other two freedoms, but also went further, involving the separation of the media from state control. Only then could the country have a truly independent press capable of fulfilling the role it was beginning to acquire. The media had for so long been a tool of the SED that their removal from party control was a vital stage in realising the true democracy desired. Only then would they really be able to practise their art in an independent and responsible manner.

The demands made in the citizens' protests at this stage were still fairly general, but as early as November 4 1989, more concrete suggestions were being made in a demonstration in Berlin:

- das gemäß Artikel 19 der Allgemeinen Erklärung der Menschenrechte der UN von 1948 jedermann zustehende *Recht auf freie Meinungsäußerung* "uneingeschränkt wahrnehmen zu können, ohne befürchten zu müssen, dadurch persönliche Nachteile zu erleiden";
- "ungeachtet von Grenzen *freien Zugang zu den Medien (...)* zu haben, um sich umfassend über das nationale und internationale Geschehen informieren zu können";
- *von staatlicher Lenkung und Kontrolle befreite Massenmedien*, die als "freie und unabhängige Institutionen allein dem Bürgerwohl verpflichtet sind".

Diese Forderungen mündeten zum einen in den Ruf nach personeller Erneuerung in den DDR-Medien. Zum anderen kam die Vorstellung eines Mediengesetzes auf, das die einmal errungenen Freiheiten rechtlich absichern sollte. Denn Meinungs- und Pressefreiheit in der DDR, wie sie laut Artikel 27 der DDR-Verfassung gewährt wurden, waren keine Abwehrrechte des Einzelnen oder der Presse gegenüber dem Staat

gewesen. Überdies waren die Kommunikationsgrundrechte durch sog. Verfassungsgrundsätze eingeschränkt, zu denen die Anerkennung der Führungsrolle der Partei, die politische Machtausübung durch die "Werkstätigen" und das Prinzip des demokratischen Zentralismus gehörten.<sup>86</sup>

The difference noted here between the laws of the GDR under the SED and the type of laws envisaged by the protesters is important, as there *had* been laws in the GDR which granted freedom of the press and declared that there was to be no censorship. However, the restrictions placed on these laws had been so all-encompassing as to make the written concessions to press freedom irrelevant. In time, the citizens' concerns would all be addressed by the various GDR governments which came into being in the period between late 1989 and reunification in 1990. In order to give an overview of developments, the main changes under the four governments of Erich Honecker, Egon Krenz, Hans Modrow and Lothar de Maizière will be summarised. The specific changes can then be examined in more detail.

### *Main changes in media law and practice*

#### **I Erich Honecker**

Erich Honecker was the last GDR leader to operate under the old system of media control and became increasingly far removed from recognising and accepting the changes which had taken place in the GDR as a whole, as well as those specifically within the media. Typical of the old regime was the way in which events in 1989 were dealt with. When there was a mass exodus of GDR citizens to the West German embassy in Prague, via the Hungarian/Austrian border,

Die Medien der DDR wurden angewiesen, über diese Ereignisse nicht zu berichten. Das galt auch für die Anfang Oktober 1989 aufgekommenen, von Sicherheitskräften der DDR zum Teil hart unterdrückten Demonstrationen für Reformen, wie sie vor allem in Leipzig und Berlin stattfanden. So wurde die Hörfunk- und Fernsehberichterstattung westdeutscher Rundfunksender in dieser Zeit für die DDR-Bürger zur entscheidenden Informationsquelle über die Vorgänge im eigenen Land. Überhaupt wird man sagen müssen, daß Hörfunk und Fernsehen der Bundesrepublik für die Wende in der DDR sicherlich eine nicht zu

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<sup>86</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p412

unterschätzende Rolle gespielt haben.<sup>87</sup>

Two things are significant here. First, the regime was still pretending in the media that nothing untoward was happening in the GDR, and that everything was perfectly normal. At the same time, however, it was ordering the suppression of demonstrations. This paradox between what the government knew was happening and what it allowed to be reported may well seem incredible to Western observers, but when seen in the context of the general SED policy, it becomes understandable, if not realistic in the long term. There could be no admission that the government was no longer in control of the GDR, and as the media were still subservient, the government retained an instrument of power which it could use at least to postpone what now seems to have been inevitable. By this time, the government of the GDR seemed to have become divorced from the reality of what had happened in the GDR. To others, the events were seen as simply being typical of the class conflict between East and West. They were used to the manipulation of events by both sides in this conflict, and regarded the attention given in the Western media to the exodus from the GDR as the normal posturing to which they had become accustomed.<sup>88</sup> As a result, the specific events of 1989 were at first not treated with the seriousness which they deserved, and many people in the government and the media were simply not aware of the impact these events would eventually have on the GDR.<sup>89</sup>

Second, the Western media still played an important role in informing the GDR citizens of events both without, and more significantly, within their own country. When Honecker finally stepped down, ostensibly for health reasons, there was an important change in the relationship between the media and the state. The “Secretary for Agitation and Propaganda”, Joachim Herrmann, also lost his position as the person directly responsible for media control. When he left, his position was abolished, as were the “Agitationskommission” and the “Abteilung Agitation beim Zentralkomitee der SED”, which signified the end of the centralised control of the media in the GDR.<sup>90</sup> This process was given another boost, albeit after Honecker’s fall from power, when the SED’s claim to power, anchored in the constitution, was dropped on December 1. Consequently, Article 27 could no longer be used

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p408

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>89</sup> Ibid

<sup>90</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), pp 408-9

to justify the SED's control of the media, as the phrase "den Grundsätzen dieser Verfassung gemäß" no longer included the SED's right to power.

## **II Egon Krenz**

Whereas under Honecker demonstrations were not covered by the media, when Egon Krenz came to power, the media were all reporting on the *Montagsdemonstrationen*, which had by then become somewhat of a tradition. The coverage was often extensive, and far from the cursory mention it had been in earlier months. In addition to this loosening of restrictions, many organisations, particularly those in the artistic and cultural field, were demanding that the freedom of information and opinion which had developed be secured by legislation, so as to ensure that there would not be and could not be a return to the old system.<sup>91</sup>

## **III Hans Modrow**

The changes which took place under Modrow's government were very profound, and signified the separation of media and state:

Die SED gab ihren Monopolanspruch auch im Blick auf Presse und Rundfunk auf und trennte sich von den meisten ihrer Parteizeitungen und -zeitschriften. Die Chefredakteure dieser Organe wurden ausgewechselt. Der Ministerrat der DDR erklärte, daß allen demokratischen Parteien der freie Zugang zu den Medien garantiert sei. Eine Kommission zur Ausarbeitung eines Mediengesetzes wurde konstituiert, ein vorläufiges Gesetz (der sog. Medienbeschluß) verabschiedet und ein Gremium eingesetzt, das den Übergang zu einem demokratisch-pluralistischen Mediensystem überwachen sollte. [...] Darüber hinaus entfielen ab dem 1. April 1990 die bisherigen Subventionen für Presseerzeugnisse, womit erhebliche Preissteigerungen verbunden waren, die die Existenz vieler ehemaliger Titel der DDR-Presse bedrohten.<sup>92</sup>

The *Medienbeschluß* was a significant step in the process towards a set of media laws specifically for the GDR, and its details will be examined at a later point.

## **IV Lothar de Maizière**

Under de Maizière's government, the last independent government of the GDR, a *Ministerium für Medienpolitik* was created, led by Gottfried Müller, himself an experienced

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p410

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p410



journalist and editor-in-chief of the Jena *Glaube und Heimat* newspaper. The ministry's main task was to work on the planned media laws<sup>93</sup>, but at the same time, because drafting such laws was a complex process, other media concerns were being raised which needed more immediate attention. At the beginning of May, the government passed the *Verordnung über den Vertrieb von Presseerzeugnissen*, which was designed to prevent press distribution in the East from being dominated by the Western media giants.<sup>94</sup> In addition, adherence to the *Medienbeschluß* needed to be monitored, and, where necessary, enforced:

Ein Ende Mai 1990 eingerichteter, aus 13 Mitgliedern bestehender Ausschuß "Presse und Medien" sollte Entwürfe der Mediengesetzgebungskommission beraten und gemeinsam mit dem Medienkontrollrat die Einhaltung der bestehenden Bestimmungen (des "Medienbeschlusses") überwachen.<sup>95</sup>

With all the complexity of the deliberations taking place to create a media law, it was unfortunate that the effort put in ultimately turned out to have been in vain in some ways. Because of the reunification of the two German states in October 1990, some of the proposals made were never realised. Instead of the planned law for the whole country, the new states each had to develop their own set of press laws, which were based on those of the old states of the Federal Republic.

One change which was, however, successfully completed was the change in the status of ADN, the old state news agency. In June 1991, the agency became a limited company, and was sold a few months later to ddp (*Deutscher Depechen Dienst*). Given the significant role the ADN had played in the GDR, this move to the private sector, and then to Western ownership was an important stage in the transformation of the whole media system of the GDR.

### *Moves towards a media law*

In November 1989, Günter Schabowski, by this time in charge of media issues in the GDR, gave a talk at the 10th conference of the *SED-Zentralkomitee*:

Aufschlußreich an Schabowskis Darlegungen waren zwei Aspekte. Das

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p411

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p411

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p411

war einmal seine durchaus kritische Analyse und Abrechnung mit der bisherigen Anleitungs-, Gängelungs- und Kontrollpraxis des DDR-Journalismus durch Staatspartei und Regierung, die den ehemaligen Chefredakteur des "Neuen Deutschland" veranlaßte, die Journalisten gegen unberechtigte Kritik zu verteidigen, zumal es da nach Schabowskis Ansicht erst der Journalistenverband war, der den Anstoß für ein Mediengesetz gegeben habe. Zum anderen war das die Perspektive, die Schabowski für ein neues Verständnis von Medienfreiheit und -funktion in einem "demokratischen Sozialismus" entwarf. Dabei ging er von einem Interessenpluralismus und davon aus, "daß die im Sozialismus existierende Vielfalt und Unterschiedlichkeit von Interessen auch mit Interessenskonflikten einhergeht, die ausgetragen werden müssen." Solche Interessen- und Meinungsvielfalt erfordere aber die Differenzierung und Eigenverantwortung der Medien. Denn ihre Funktion könne sich nicht mehr, wie bisher, als Sprachrohr der Einheitspartei erschöpfen, deren Folge nur ein "Schönfärbe-Journalismus" oder "Abwarte-Journalismus" sei. Vielmehr erkannte er jetzt als Funktion der Medien "die beständige und weitest verbreitete Form des Dialogs zwischen Volk und Partei, zwischen Volk und Regierung", und dieser Dialog diene wiederum "der Kontrolle von Verantwortlichkeiten in der Gesellschaft."<sup>96</sup>

Such criticism of the old media order and the recognition of the necessity of change and of a new framework was an important step for the SED in moving towards a more realistic policy. Shortly after this speech was given, Wolfgang Kleinwächter, the director of the "Institut für internationale Studien" at the Karl-Marx-Universität in Leipzig suggested the following moves:

- Artikel 27 der DDR-Verfassung, nach dem jeder Bürger der DDR das Recht besitze, "den Grundsätzen der Verfassung gemäß seine Meinung frei und öffentlich zu äußern", müsse insofern praktiziert oder erweitert werden, als die Einschränkungsgründe für dieses Grundrecht in der Verfassung nicht erläutert seien;
- das Grundrecht auf freie Meinungsäußerung müsse ebenso wie die Medienfreiheit einklagbar sein;
- die parlamentarische Kontrolle über die Gewährleistung der "Interessen- und Meinungsvielfalt" in der DDR sowie darüber, ob "Presse, Rundfunk und Fernsehen ihren gesamtgesellschaftlichen Aufgaben gerecht werden", sollten in einem jährlichen "Medienbericht" erfolgen, den ein "Medienbeauftragter" der Volkskammer vorzulegen habe;
- die allgemeinen Gesetze "müßten dahingehend überprüft werden,

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<sup>96</sup> Kutsch (1990), pp 123-4, quotations from *Neues Deutschland*, 11/12 November 1989, p11

ob ihre Bestimmungen noch in Übereinstimmung stehen mit den Forderungen nach einem tiefgreifenden Wandel in der Medienpolitik“. Das betreffe die Informationspflicht von Regierung, Staatsorganen, Parteien und von Verbänden, ferner den Import ausländischer Druckerzeugnisse, die Verordnung über die Tätigkeit von ausländischen Korrespondenten in der DDR; das betreffe aber auch eine “Spezifizierung von ‘Gummiparagrafen’ des Zivil- und Strafgesetzbuches”;

- das künftige Mediengesetz selbst müsse außer einer Regelung für die Medienorganisation auch inhaltliche Grundsätze enthalten, etwa für das Recht auf Gegendarstellung, für Regelungen über das Verhältnis zwischen Herausgebern und Journalisten, für das Urhebergesetz sowie für das Recht auf freien Zugang zu den Medien;
- einen nationalen Journalistenkodex und die Bildung eines Presserates in der DDR, der ebenso die Unabhängigkeit der Journalisten vom Staat stärke wie ihre Eigenverantwortung gegenüber der Gesellschaft.<sup>97</sup>

These, and various other suggestions demonstrated the personal dissatisfaction with the existing situation in the GDR, but there were two more positive aspects for the SED which can be seen in the suggestions made at that time. First of all, because of its links with these experts on GDR media, the SED had a potential source of knowledge and advice which the other parties, including the CDU, simply did not have at their disposal. In addition, the suggestions being made indicated a wish to find a middle road between the socialist system of the old GDR and the liberal-democratic order in Western Europe, rather than a wholesale rejection of everything associated with the old order.<sup>98</sup> This third way was characterised by

(1) die durch die DDR-Verfassung zwar zugesicherte, in der Realität aber nur eingeschränkt verwirklichte Rechtssicherheit, (2) möglichst staatsferne, gleichwohl nicht privatwirtschaftliche Organisationsformen der Medien (im neuen Sozialismuskonzept sollte die “Vergesellschaftlichung” die “Verstaatlichung” ablösen) sowie (3) die Neudefinition der Medien als Subjekte und zugleich Objekte eines pluralistischen Meinungs- und Willensbildungsprozesses.<sup>99</sup>

Although not explicitly stated, these suggestions would have finally ended the concept of the

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<sup>97</sup> Kutsch (1990), pp 127-8; information and quotations from *Neues Deutschland*, 11/12 November 1989, p10

<sup>98</sup> Kutsch (1990), p128

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, p128

media as being a collective agitator, propagandist and organiser.<sup>100</sup> It is important to recognise that the move away from the central principles of the SED media system took place gradually. At the time, people were often not aware of the significance of the changes being made. This significance was often only appreciated some time after the event when the individual events in the process of reform were seen in their broader context.

Unfortunately, despite the interest and input of several media experts, such ideas and suggestions received little recognition and acceptance by the SED leadership. In fact, the developments in the GDR often directly contradicted the suggestions made. The SED did not make enough use of these human resources which it had at its disposal, and which could have given it the edge in competition with other parties. Despite all the suggestions being made from several sides, there was no actual attempt for a while to progress towards a media law based on what had already been worked upon. Given the detail which was included in some of the concepts being discussed, this appears with hindsight remarkable. In the end, it was the publishing industry itself and not the political parties which initiated moves towards a media law.<sup>101</sup>

On October 31 1989, a working group from the VDJ (*Verband deutscher Journalisten*) and the VFF (*Verband der Film- und Fernsehschaffenden*) was set up, which in turn created a smaller group to work on a media policy. Ten theses for such a policy were soon produced:

Sie zielten darauf, Grundrechte, die die Verfassung der DDR theoretisch garantierte und deren Verwirklichung seit dem politischen Umbruch möglich zu werden schienen, zu präzisieren, zu erweitern und dadurch so zu sichern, daß ein Rückfall in die alten Praktiken der willkürlichen Rechtsbeugung unmöglich wurden. Außer dem Grundrecht auf Meinungs- und Informationsfreiheit sowie auf die "Teilnahme an der Massenkommunikation" zählten dazu auch die Medienfreiheit und spezifisch publizistische Berufsrechte. Um sie zu gewährleisten, setzte man nicht mehr auf die Normen einer - wie auch immer definierten - sozialistischen Gesellschaftsordnung, sondern auf liberal-demokratische Vorstellungen von Medienfunktion und -organisation im offensichtlichen Vertrauen auf ihre Fähigkeit, staatlich oder einseitig parteipolitischen Einfluß auf Publizistik und Journalismus zu begrenzen. [...] Funktion der Medien sollte es sein, die gesellschaftliche Interessenvielfalt zu vermitteln, dem Meinungspluralismus Ausdruck zu verleihen und dadurch

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p128

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p131

Öffentlichkeit herzustellen und öffentliche Kontrolle auszuüben.<sup>102</sup>

The aim of ensuring that the impetus towards progress was not lost was an important one, and indicated the degree of uncertainty existing at this early stage in the *Wende*. Only when the existing freedoms were safe could any further advances be made. The suggestions made were similar to the earlier demands of the demonstrators, and one important feature related to an unwillingness to adopt essentially Western concepts. There was a desire essentially to keep the constitutional framework of the GDR, which had in theory guaranteed the freedoms which were sought. But these freedoms had to become a reality. The suggestions being made had to address longer-term issues. The developments already made had to be secured within a legal framework to ensure that what had already been won could not later be taken away by a revitalised SED.

### The Mediengesetzgebungskommission

In December 1989, the Modrow government formed a commission to work on a media law for the GDR. The commission was composed of 60 people - representatives from the government ministries involved, delegates of the parties and groups represented in the *Runder Tisch*, churches, publishing organisations and several experts in the media field.<sup>103</sup> When the commission first met, four basic principles were agreed on, which were very similar to those the citizens of the GDR had been demanding in their earlier demonstrations:

- Garantie der Grundrechte und Freiheiten im Bereich der Information;
- Gewährleistung der Unabhängigkeit der Medien von Regierung und Staat;
- Sicherung des öffentlichen Auftrags der Medien zur Befriedigung der Informations-, Kultur- und Bildungsbedürfnisse der Bevölkerung;
- Ausschluß künftiger Monopolbildung im Medienbereich.<sup>104</sup>

The second point was a common theme throughout all the suggestions made, and given the peculiar past of the media in the GDR, the need to secure the media from state control was

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p133

<sup>103</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p412

<sup>104</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p413

both vital and predictable, if the other aims were ever to be realised. The other familiar point made was the necessity of securing the basic media freedoms, and in this respect, the proposals made by this group were not original. But the fact that they were being repeated by all the groups concerned was an indication that the future of the media was being taken very seriously, and that the need to secure a firm foundation before further moves could be made was also obvious to those concerned. There was clearly a degree of consensus about these fundamental matters. However, although there was agreement within the commission in this area, this did not stretch to the details of the proposals:

Einigkeit herrschte in der Kommission hinsichtlich der Notwendigkeit, das alte Mediensystem zu überwinden und die DDR-Medienlandschaft dabei europäischen Medienverhältnisse anzupassen, aber es gab "keinen Konsens über die konkreten Konturen einer neuen Medienordnung. Schon das Problem, ob ein einheitliches Mediengesetz oder ein Presse- und ein Rundfunkgesetz ausgearbeitet werden sollte, wurde kontrovers diskutiert".<sup>105</sup>

It is noteworthy that in relation to the four points agreed on, even at this stage, concerns about monopoly formations in the media were being raised. When the other moves to circumvent such developments are also considered, it is surprising that so little was actually done effectively to protect the media from concentration pressures, a problem which has already been addressed.

Because of the scale of the task the commission was faced with, it was decided to divide the legislation into two stages. First of all, a draft proposal of a law - the *Medienbeschluss* - was to be agreed upon, which would then be submitted to the *Runder Tisch*. The timing of this part was such that the *Runder Tisch* would pass this provisional law in January 1990, after which it would pass to the *Volkskammer* for approval. The law was intended to be provisional until a final law could be implemented, the drafting of which would take much longer. It was designed to fill a vacuum in the GDR legislation. Before this final, permanent law was to come into force, it was envisaged that there would be an entirely new constitution for the GDR. Such a new constitution would provide a framework for the more specialised considerations of media issues and would allow for a final media law to be devised. In the end, due to the rapid pace of the political developments taking place, this final stage was

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p413; quotation from Kresse (1992), p5

never completed, and when the GDR joined the Federal Republic in 1990, the old laws applicable in the Federal Republic's *Grundgesetz* became valid for the whole of the new German state. As a consequence, the newly created *Länder* in the East had to draft their own set of press laws as the states of the old Federal Republic had had to do several decades earlier.

### **The Medienbeschluß**

There are several points to note about the so-called *Medienbeschluß*, the “Beschluß der Volkskammer über die Gewährleistung der Meinungs-, Informations - und Medienfreiheit” (5 February 1990). Awareness of the fact that freedom of opinion had not been a reality in the GDR, despite its inclusion in the constitution, led to a part of the text of the United Nations convention on human and civil rights being adopted word for word for the first point of the *Medienbeschluß*. This then gave the GDR a point of reference, and a higher authority which by association helped to maintain the fragile press freedom. While the citizens of the GDR were granted freedom of opinion, this freedom was not unconditional. Just as in the Federal Republic, there were certain restrictions placed on the extent to which it could be exercised. Exceptions were explicitly stated, such as inciting racial hatred or war-mongering. But these were not a continuation of the old restrictions on press freedoms. Instead, they were designed to prevent the abuse of a potentially very powerful freedom.

Although there was not an official censorship policy in the GDR, the repetition of a statement in paragraph 5 that there was to be no censorship was still significant, as it was in line with the Federal Republic's press laws. Indeed, this similarity to the legal provisions for the press in the Federal Republic can be seen throughout the *Medienbeschluß*. Examples of this include the requirement that whatever was published had to be checked for content, accuracy and source (paragraph 6), and that public bodies had a duty to disclose information to the media on request (paragraph 8).

A significant development from the SED days was seen in paragraph 7. Whereas previously, journalists had the task and the duty of passing on official news (reflected in Pannen's choice of title, *Die Weiterleiter*<sup>106</sup>), the *Medienbeschluß* gave them the explicit right to refuse to work on material which conflicted with their personal convictions. This also included not

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<sup>106</sup> Pannen (1992)

having to represent views which did not reflect their own. Under the SED regime, such a state of affairs would have been impossible, as the journalists essentially presented the official view as the only viable one in existence, with the rare exception of inner-party disputes being reflected in press coverage.

The *Medienbeschuß* appeared to have done justice to the expectations placed on it, and was acclaimed by all the political parties:

*Konrad Weiß* bezeichnete ihn als einen "ausgewogenen und konstruktiven Kompromiß", der die Weichen für "eine ordnungspolitisch-demokratische Umgestaltung der Medienlandschaft" bahnen würde. Daran gemessen kann er auch als Gründungsakt der Medienfreiheit bezeichnet werden. Der Beschluß betrachtet das Anspruchsrecht des Bürgers auf freie und umfassende Information primär als Kultur-, nicht als Wirtschaftsgut, gibt im Konflikt zwischen Kultur und Kommerz ersterer eindeutig Priorität.<sup>107</sup>

Nevertheless, several important issues were not addressed in the *Medienbeschuß*. First of all, media concentration received no attention at all, which is surprising since concerns had already been voiced by other groups. Yet no anti-monopoly clause was included. Also surprising was the omission of anything dealing with the question of the distribution of foreign press products. The reason why these two areas were not dealt with is not clear. Graf and Graf have suggested that an awareness of the limitations of written laws which were not enforced, and of the existence of grey areas led to the formation of a separate body responsible for the implementation of the *Medienbeschuß* - the *Medienkontrollrat*.<sup>108</sup>

### **The Medienkontrollrat**

Paragraph 12 of the *Medienbeschuß* introduced the concept of a *Medienkontrollrat* (MKR), which had the main task of ensuring that the freedoms of information, opinion and the press were not subsequently impinged upon or compromised. Its role has been described as follows:

Im wesentlichen nahm der Medienkontrollrat dreierlei verschiedene Funktionen wahr, die [...] in appellative, exekutive und legislative Funktionen unterteilt werden: Die *appellative* Funktion des Medienkontrollrates bestand darin, zu überwachen, daß die im Medienbeschuß verankerten Meinungs-, Informations- und

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<sup>107</sup> Graf/Graf (1991), p9

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, pp 9-10



Medienfreiheiten unangetastet blieben. Allerdings hatte das Gremium zur Wahrnehmung dieser Funktion keinerlei exekutive Kompetenzen; es konnte gegebenenfalls lediglich den regierenden Stellen gegenüber "Handlungsbedarf" signalisieren. Wirklich *exekutive* Funktion hatte der Medienkontrollrat nur in zwei Bereichen: bei der Berufsbestätigung für Intendanten bei Hörfunk und Fernsehen und den Direktor des ADN; sowie bei Fragen der Genehmigung von Auslandsbeteiligungen an DDR-Medien. Die *legislative* Funktion des Medienkontrollrates erstreckte sich auf die Erarbeitung von Bestimmungen für die Zulassung von Werbung im Rundfunk sowie darauf, die "Ausarbeitung der Mediengesetzgebung kritisch zu begleiten und Anstöße für die gesetzgeberische Tätigkeit zu geben".<sup>109</sup>

With the creation of the MKR, the position of the government appointed commission did not change substantially. It still had the task of drawing up a final set of laws to govern media activity, as stipulated in paragraph 15. The 24 member body of the MKR met on February 13 1990 for the first time, only a few days after the *Medienbeschluß* had been passed.

In many ways, the *Medienkontrollrat* assumed the position of a

Wächteramt, gewissermaßen eine moralisch-appellative Instanz mit dem imperativen Mandat, die Meinungsvielfalt und Auswahlfreiheit für den souveränen Medienbürger zu begleiten. Zugleich ist damit die transitorische Natur dieses Gremiums umrissen. Es stellt einen Kompromiß zwischen einer möglichst raschen und effektiven Sicherung der Medienfreiheit einerseits und der Unmöglichkeit, alle drängenden politischen und rechtlichen Probleme ad hoc lösen zu können, dar.<sup>110</sup>

The MKR was a body without any powers of its own - the *tageszeitung* called it "Ein Wolf ohne Zähne". But while many would for this reason lament the way in which the MKR was brought into existence, others saw in this very fact a positive statement:

Medienkontrollrat *Wolfgang Kleinwächter* nahm dieses Bild mit Vergnügen auf, um allen Anfragern die Kompetenzen des Rates so zu erklären: "Ein Wolf ohne Zähne. Dies ist in der Tat so. Aber das ist nicht zu bedauern, sondern das ist gewollt. Der Medienkontrollrat muß bellen, beißen muß dann die Exekutive, also der Ministerrat, der Minister oder andere Gremien, die für die Durchführung von Verordnungen zuständig sind."<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p417

<sup>110</sup> Graf/Graf (1991), p10

<sup>111</sup> Ibid

Rather than seeing the MKR as an independently functioning unit, Kleinwächter took the more realistic view of its being a part of the overall government protection of the media. It is essential to realise that the MKR was not created to control the media, but to control the application of the *Medienbeschluß*. It leaped into action when the four large Western media firms, having already attempted to divide up the Eastern market amongst themselves, began to distribute their publications in the GDR. The MKR “barked” early on in this process, and was the first public body to react. On March 7, the MKR demanded “ein offenes, wettbewerbsneutrales und verlagsunabhängiges Vertriebssystem”<sup>112</sup>, but was itself unable to initiate steps to ensure that these demands were met. At the same time, in this period of political uncertainty and apparent powerlessness, there was no effective executive power to be used on behalf of the MKR, and the role which was envisaged for it was superseded by events to some extent. The minister responsible for the media did not “bite” until May 2, which was considerably later than desirable or as had been intended by those involved in defining the duties of the MKR.<sup>113</sup> With hindsight, it would appear that a more active role for the MKR would have been desirable. It certainly fulfilled the tasks it was given promptly and well, but was hindered mainly by its lack of power. In the end, the life of the MKR came to an end in September 1990 because of imminent reunification, a fate shared by all the legislation which had been passed during the months between the *Wende* and reunification. When the two German states were reunified, the new states in the East had to devise their own set of media laws, as the West had always done, and the Western system of government involvement in the media was adopted in the East.

In many ways, it seems that little was learned or gained by the process of reforming the GDR’s media laws. The *Medienbeschluß*, the nearest the GDR came to a new set of laws governing the media, was a great improvement on the old system, but many of the lessons learned in the West in the previous four decades, particularly concerning media concentration and domination, seemed to have gone unheeded, as there was no mention of these issues in the *Medienbeschluß*. On the other hand, the *Medienbeschluß* was never intended to be a long-term legal framework, but merely to provide some basis for the operation of the media until the final version of a legal framework could be worked out, and it is unlikely that this final law would have omitted such important issues. Reunification coming so close to the

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p12

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, p12

drawing up of permanent laws may well have prevented improvement in legislation in the East, and from thence to the whole of the new German state. Had the laws been in force before reunification, they might have been included in some form in the reunification treaty or, more likely perhaps, in the individual states' laws. As it was, the Eastern states merely used the existing Western state press laws to create their own, without significant improvements being made.

Having looked both at the market and legal changes which were made in 1989 and 1990, there is one area still to be covered, that of the experiences of the journalists themselves. This area was covered by conducting interviews with journalists who worked in the media in the GDR, and will be covered in later chapters. This analysis takes place within the framework of the changes which have already been looked at, but also within the contexts of ethics, and particularly media ethics. This area will be examined briefly before a presentation of the results of the present research.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Censorship, ethics and the media

That a piece of writing is good doesn't override other considerations - moral considerations - when it comes to damaging others. That's an absurd overvaluation of the printed word.

A S Byatt, *The Game*, p68

#### Censorship

Ever since the first publications approximating to the current functions of newspapers began to appear, rulers, governments, institutions and individuals have wanted to exercise some sort of control over what is printed. While this was possible with printed media, with the advent of radio and television, the desire to control became steadily harder to realise as physical control of another country's broadcasting, short of an invasion of that country, is impossible.

Going back several centuries, as early as the 15th century, censorship had become "necessary" because of the impact of the invention of the printing press in 1452, which had for the first time made possible the large-scale production and accessibility of printed documents. The first forms of censorship were introduced by the church, such as that at the university of Cologne in 1475, and twelve years later, the first censorship originating in the Vatican was declared in the form of a papal bull.<sup>1</sup> In the following centuries, the church continued to play a significant role in the use of censorship, seeking rather to preserve its own power base than to defend real religious principles. In this regard, the church's role was very similar to that of the political censors of the time, and the two often worked closely together.

In these early years of censorship in Germany, the fragmented political situation led to difficulties in achieving a consistent censorship policy:

Daß das Zensurwesen trotz mehrfacher Verschärfung und Ausdehnung obrigkeitlicher Kontrolle oftmals nicht in der gewünschten Weise griff, lag vor allem an den Kompetenzstreitigkeiten zwischen Kirchenfürsten,

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<sup>1</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p48

## Kaiser und den Landesherrn.<sup>2</sup>

In the centuries that followed, many very different forms of censorship were seen in the German-speaking area of Europe, including

- die Schaffung von Zensurkommissionen;
- Verzeichnisse verbotener Bücher;
- Vorzensur (Maßnahme zur Prüfung von Schriften vor der Drucklegung);
- Nachzensur (Kontrolle von bereits gedruckten und im Handel zugänglichen Schriften);
- Impressumpflicht zur Identifikation von Druckwerken;
- Beschränkungen von Berufszulassungen für Drucker;
- Berufsverbote für Drucker und Entzug von Druckkonzessionen;
- Untersagung bestimmter Inhalte und Aussageformen;
- Beförderungs-, Verkaufs- und Erwerbsverbote von Druckwerken;
- Beschränkungen der Erscheinungshäufigkeit periodischer Druckwerke;
- Zeitungssteuern (sog. Stempelsteuer), Kautionszwang, erhöhte Beförderungsgebühren;
- Bindung der Herausgabe von Zeitungen und Zeitschriften an Privilegien und Lizenzen, die wieder entzogen werden konnten.<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to consider just how many of these forms of censorship were seen in the GDR in various guises and at various points in its short history, especially when it is remembered that the above examples were taken from different periods over the course of many hundreds of years.

## A brief history of press freedom

The introduction of press freedom after this long period of strict censorship took place relatively late in Germany. Whereas on the one hand England had abolished its censorship laws as early as 1695, America had introduced press freedom in the Bill of Rights in 1776, and France had removed its censorship in 1789, the discussion about press freedom in Germany did not even begin until the late 1700s.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp 49-50

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p51

In the discussion in Germany, three main arguments were put forward for the implementation of press freedom:

Pressefreiheit als Gnadenerweis (im Sinne einer Gunstgewährung des absolutistischen Fürsten gegenüber den Untertanen), Pressefreiheit aus Zweckmäßigkeit (Erlaß eines entsprechenden Gesetzes, weil es einer Regierung für die politisch-gesellschaftliche Entwicklung opportun erschien) sowie die am weitesten gehende Forderung nach Pressefreiheit als Menschenrecht (individual einklagbares Recht).<sup>5</sup>

Ironically, but at the same time, perhaps, not surprisingly, the calls for press freedom actually led to an intensification of the existing censorship measures<sup>6</sup>, but the issue could not be suppressed despite the efforts of those who feared a loss of their power. Attempts to prevent the issue being discussed freely ultimately foundered. Nevertheless, while the debate continued, it was clear that those in power were keen to control public opinion by censoring unfavourable articles in the press. In spite of this, however, there was a constant stream of journalists who were willing to defy the authorities in defence of what they believed to be a higher duty towards truth. They believed that the cause of truth was of greater importance than their own well-being, and were prepared to risk personal danger in order to follow their consciences in this regard. In so doing, they displayed professional principles - or professional ethics - which led them to see in their job something greater than just the fulfilment of a set of tasks. Many saw a type of calling in their profession, a calling to distribute facts and information free from outside interference and imposed restrictions, such as the political powers sought to implement, and also free of bias. This idea of professional ethics among journalists has evolved considerably since those early days, but the idea that a set of principles higher than concepts of money or power can be applied to the journalistic career has been a continuing theme.

When Napoleon gained control of the French state, he introduced a very different press philosophy from the crude censorship which had been in place prior to his coming to power. However, whereas in France, censorship was replaced by propaganda, when it came to the occupied German states, his views were rather different, and he used the existing censorship system for his own political aims.<sup>7</sup> He did not by any means apply the same standards in

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p51

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p51

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p51

Germany as had been in force in France, and a marked distinction between the two countries resulted. In Germany, it was Napoleon who determined the number of newspapers as well as what they could print, which meant that in several areas only articles from the Paris *Moniteur* could be printed.<sup>8</sup> When Germany later regained its independence from French rule, press policy was determined by a concept of “vernünftige Preßfreiheit”, which meant that press freedom was in principle granted, but restrictions through legislation were also held to be acceptable and correct. By this means the unrestricted right to publish was curtailed.<sup>9</sup>

During the dramatic social changes of the nineteenth century, the Austrian and Prussian governments attempted to secure political stability by targeting universities and other institutions which were regarded as being potentially subversive or dangerous to the existing political order. A further main target was the press, whether liberal or patriotic to their respective countries.<sup>10</sup> In 1819, this had reached the stage where the laws which had implemented press freedom after Germany’s independence from France had been realised were not only revoked, but in addition, the “Karlsbader Beschlüsse” were passed,

denen zufolge es in den Staaten des Deutschen Bundes eine strenge Vorzensur aller Druckschriften unter 20 Seiten wieder eingeführt wurde (das betraf von wenigen Ausnahmen abgesehen alle Zeitungen und Zeitschriften); zahlreiche Zeitungstitel wurden verboten, Journalisten verfolgt und verhaftet und einige Verleger mit fünfjährigem Berufsverbot belegt.<sup>11</sup>

These were regressive times as far as press freedom was concerned. They were also hard times for journalists and publishers. They could not report on how the censorship worked or indicate what had been censored, and one result of this press policy was that journalists and writers who had emigrated started publications abroad. Because of this, foreign press products were increasingly bought in order to circumvent the censorship.<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note that neither of these possibilities were available in the GDR, as the importing of foreign newspapers and magazines was strictly controlled. As far as the print media were concerned, the SED only allowed the press they desired to be represented in the GDR, even

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p52

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p52

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p52

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp 52-3

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p53

going so far as to ban the Soviet *Sputnik* publication when it was considered to be too revolutionary (in the sense of too liberal) for the SED's tastes. In addition, it was unlikely that talented journalists would ever be allowed to leave the country permanently in order to be able to set up newspapers in exile.

Another aspect of the censorship of the nineteenth century which has parallels in the GDR was the attempts of the journalists to circumvent the censorship by using their professional skills to frustrate the aims of the censor:

Beliebt waren in jener Zeit auch Artikel, die ihre z.T. scharfe Systemkritik in Parabeln, fiktiven Erzählungen und feuilletonistischen Essays "versteckten" sowie die Offenlegung der Zensur durch Leerstellen im Text. Auch erlebten politische Flugschriften (die sich besonders gut der staatlichen Kontrolle entziehen konnten) eine nochmalige Blütezeit.<sup>13</sup>

Such use of journalistic ability produced articles which were not easy to censor because of the artistic element which could, at least theoretically, be interpreted in several ways. It was always possible to find one interpretation which could be used as a defence, explaining how the article was not criticising or opposing the state. The SED ran into this problem frequently when dealing with articles addressing culture and art in its various forms. It was impossible to pin down a specific text or production to one indisputable interpretation, and the party always ran the risk of blowing such incidents out of all proportion, thereby doing more damage to their own interests than if they had simply left the matter alone in the first place. But where dissent is attacked regardless of the wider consequences, such logic is seldom seen in ideological systems. Although the ability to use technical skills to evade or frustrate attempts at censorship could well have gone some way towards producing a more acceptable result, there was a danger that using such skills replaced the perceived need for a sense of ethics, for something higher than mere skill:

Die Frage der Moral spielt gar keine Rolle mehr, sondern nur die Frage der etwas größeren oder etwas geringeren technischen Brillanz.<sup>14</sup>

This statement may seem a little extreme, but in that in the long run certain values were needed to ensure that the press operated with real freedom, rather than merely reacting to

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p53

<sup>14</sup> Jens (1988), p4



events outside the direct control of the journalists themselves. A proactive attitude was better than a reactive one. Being proactive involved accepting the fact that the journalists had the capability (as well as the duty) of taking responsibility for their actions - being response-able rather than merely reacting after the event.<sup>15</sup> The significance of this distinction will be seen later.

Any discussion of press censorship and control would not be complete without mention of the policies of the National Socialists from 1933 to 1945. Pürer and Raabe have given a useful summary of the way in which the NSDAP controlled the media during its years in power:

Es gab Zugangsbeschränkungen (und Zugangsverbot für Personen nicht-arischer Abstammung) zum Journalistenberuf und zu dessen ständischer Organisation, der Reichskulturkammer, die dem Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda (Goebbels) unterstellt war. Die Kompetenzen zwischen Journalisten und Verlegern waren genau abgegrenzt: Die Journalisten waren dem Staat verpflichtet, die Verleger hatten sich auf die Wahrnehmung ökonomischer Aufgaben zu beschränken. Eine strenge Berufsgerichtbarkeit konnte Verwarnungen aussprechen, Ordnungsstrafen verfügen oder die Streichung aus der Berufsliste vornehmen, was einem Berufsverbot gleichkam. Kommunistische und dann auch sozialdemokratische Blätter wurden verboten, Verlage zwangsgeschlossen oder aufgekauft, vielfach wurden auch Journalisten verhaftet und deportiert.

In einem Reichsgerichtsurteil von 1936 heißt es, in Deutschland bestehe nicht mehr eine vom Grundgesetz nahezu unbeschränkter Freiheit beherrschte Meinungspressen, sondern eine "geordnete Presse". Die nationalsozialistische Regierung, die die Presse als "Mittel zur Erziehung der Volksgemeinschaft im Geiste des Nationalsozialismus" und als "Führungsmittel im Dienste des Staates und der Nation" betrachte, erwarte auch von ihr, daß sie Entscheidungen dieser Regierung decke. Die Pressefreiheit der "geordneten Presse" sei daher "anderer Art". Und Goebbels kommentierte, es sei "ein politischer Wahnsinn, einem einzelnen Individuum eine Meinungsfreiheit dergestalt zuzubilligen, daß es in der Lage ist, mittels dieser Freiheit alles und jedes zu vertreten".

Ein ausgefeiltes System inhaltlicher Presselenkung durch tägliche Presseanweisungen an die Redaktionen führte schließlich zur Gleichschaltung der Presse, die unter der Aufsicht der Reichspressekammer (als Teil der Reichskulturkammer) stand. In ähnlicher Weise war das gesamte nicht-periodische Schrifttum gelenkt und auch der der Reichsrundfunkkammer unterstellte Rundfunk (damals nur

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<sup>15</sup> Covey (1994), p71

Radio) kontrolliert.<sup>16</sup>

The media in both eras were ultimately subject to political as opposed to editorial control, and evidence of this was seen all through the media systems of the two periods. Pürer and Raabe's comments suggested several parallels to the press in the GDR. Both the National Socialists and the SED saw the need to control entry into the journalistic profession in order to ensure that committed or at least compliant individuals worked in the media. They both had the political power to ensure that this type of control was possible and practically realistic. The profession of a journalist was still regarded with some degree of awe, and there was no shortage of willing candidates for the available positions. The parties then had sufficient opportunity to select those who best fitted their preferred mould.

In both cases, press freedom was defined very differently from the concepts used previously, and individuals had no rights to publish their personal opinion if this was not in agreement with the official government point of view. And in both systems, this was not something which was covered up, but instead was proclaimed as signifying a "higher" type of freedom which had the best interests of the country as a whole at heart, even of mankind. As such, it was logical for only these "higher" views to be presented in the media. Other voices would simply distract from the real messages which had to be imparted to the country at large. This meant that in the National Socialist system, socialist and communist views were not heard, and in the SED's system, right-wing opinions were never voiced in the media. Although in this respect, the two systems brought about entirely opposing results, the principles behind each were the same. It is interesting that two diametrically opposed systems could devise and operate such similar media systems - one of the few things the two had in common.

There are, however, also significant differences between the two types of press control. The punishments for non-compliance in the National Socialist state were much more severe than the potential loss of a job or *Berufsverbot* in the GDR. The Nazis could and did arrest and deport transgressors, and did not feel the need to exercise the same degree of restraint in punishing disobedience. This option was not open to the GDR. It was, however, a feature of the Soviet Union under Stalin in particular, who used some of the concentration camps which had been built by the Nazis and which were located in the SBZ to deal with the

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<sup>16</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), pp 54-5

“enemies” of the Soviet Union, such as former Nazis. Generally speaking, the National Socialist press policy was, and could afford to be, more extreme than that of the SED, partly as a result of their stranglehold over most of Europe for many of the years during which they were in power.

## **Censorship in the GDR**

The GDR was able effectively to control the movement of print media, and for a time also made efforts to ensure that its citizens did not tap into Western radio and television broadcasts. Various methods were used in an attempt to reach this goal, such as encouraging citizens to sign a declaration that they would not use their television sets to receive Western programmes and the physical removal or re-positioning of aerials which were clearly directed towards the Western transmitters. In addition, school children were sometimes asked to draw the clock which they saw on the evening news programmes. As the clocks on the news programmes of the GDR and the Federal Republic were different, this indicated which parents had been watching Western television. In time, however, the futility of such efforts, and the fact that most GDR families regularly watched Western television was publicly acknowledged by Erich Honecker. This was tantamount to an unofficial sanctioning of the consumption of Western broadcast media. At the same time, however, the GDR regime was by no means prepared to sit back and let the West influence the citizens of the GDR without providing any opposition. Some GDR television broadcast programmes were specifically aimed at the Western programmes, criticising the quality, accuracy and reliability of information from the West and presenting the GDR’s position and views in a favourable light. The most famous, or infamous, of these programmes was *Der schwarze Kanal*, presented by Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler. That this policy of damage limitation and counter-attack was ineffectual was clear from the total lack of credibility von Schnitzler’s broadcast had within the GDR.

The GDR’s more successful attempts to promote their view of world events took place largely within the print media, which were much easier to oversee. It was easy to regulate the large-scale inflow of foreign publications into the GDR, and the press was very much under the control of the party. The regime also had no scruples about ensuring that clear violations of its instructions were punished. There were several rather amusing cases in the press which produced a clear response from the SED, but which showed also the obsessive

nature of the controls in place:

Einmal [haben] die Setzer in der Druckerei aus dem Genossen Honecker den "Genossen Hocker" gemacht. "Da hat der Stuhl des Chefredakteurs kräftig gewackelt".

Umgekippt ist ein anderer Chefsessel, als eines Morgens unter einem Bild der fröhlichen sozialistischen Jugend zu lesen war: "So ist das Leben im Faschismus", statt "...im Sozialismus". Der Chef mußte gehen und der Chef vom Dienst und der verantwortliche Abteilungsleiter. Nur der Setzer wurde nicht gefunden.<sup>17</sup>

However, although the policy was successful in terms of the compliance of the majority of the journalists and the enforcement of the SED's punishments, the population by and large did not find the press credible when it came to reporting political events either in the GDR or abroad. Although some of this can be credited to the influence of the Western media, the newspapers themselves were not produced in such a manner as to promote credibility amongst their readers. The comments of one GDR citizen showed the view prevailing in the population at large:

Wer Schuldirektor oder Offizier sein wollte, hatte das ND als Gesetz zu betrachten, ob wohl da am Donnerstag durchaus das Gegenteil von dem niedergeschrieben stehen konnte, was er noch am Montag gelesen hatte.<sup>18</sup>

Reading some newspapers, such as *Neues Deutschland*, was not something which was done for pleasure, but rather as a necessity for some people. More significantly, the contradictions which political and ideological necessity sometimes required were anything but unnoticed among the population at large. The majority were aware of much of what the press were required to do, and were also skilled at reading between the lines of some of the articles. This involved, for example, knowing that a small item placed at a certain place on a particular page had a special significance outside of the mere information involved. Through such means, the readers of the papers learned to discern some of the information the journalists were attempting to convey within the narrow band of possibilities not covered by the SED. This was an attempt by the GDR journalists to circumvent where possible the lack of credibility the stories themselves often had. But when the SED was no longer in control of the GDR, suddenly, these skills of reading between the lines and interpreting stories and

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<sup>17</sup> Schmitt (1990), p31

<sup>18</sup> Skibbe (1995), p192

information in a very different manner were no longer needed. However, the job of the journalists was not about to become any easier. After a brief period of total freedom, other pressures, mainly those already seen in the Western press, came to the fore, and the journalists found themselves having to deal with different restrictions and limitations. The difference was that in the post-SED GDR and in the reunified Germany, they seemed to have the ability to make their own decisions about how to act and how to deal with these new situations. •

## After censorship

Journalism ethics is necessary for the media to retain respectability and credibility - both are *conditio sine qua non* for their social and political roles. [...] journalism ethics is not enforceable by law or codes but is an attitude of mind, a conviction that manifests itself in behaviour. Precepts are merely reminders of human weakness, but cannot, and should not, replace convictions. Unless people are convinced of the necessity of behaving in a desirable manner, legal enforcement cannot bring about any substantial change to ethical praxis. Moreover, human beings often find loopholes in laws to justify certain behaviour. The point is, that what [is needed] are journalism mores among media people which would be the driving force for professional journalism concerns.<sup>19</sup>

Whenever there is strict censorship in place in a country, the decisions journalists have to make are limited. They may, as in the GDR, attempt to find ways round the restrictions placed on them, but inevitably, as long as the journalists are not prepared to sacrifice their career, the possibilities are curtailed. When the restrictions are removed, however, the journalists are suddenly much more responsible for what they write, and it is here that ethical considerations come into play:

Freedom and responsibility are inseparable. If there is no freedom, there is no need for responsibility. But if people are free, they must by definition be responsible. And this applies to organizations of people, just as it applies to individual citizens.<sup>20</sup>

In the case of journalists, it is necessary for them to have their own personal set of ethical guidelines, as there is no professional body which can deal with transgressions from a stated

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<sup>19</sup> Kasoma (1994b), pp 3-4

<sup>20</sup> Swearingen (1984), p102

set of principles, as there is for the legal, accounting and medical professions for example<sup>21</sup>, where individual ethical standards are given a framework in standards laid down by a supervisory body. As a result, individual responsibility is demanded from journalists. At the same time, however, Germany does have bodies specifically concerned with ensuring that journalistic practice does not exceed certain boundaries. The *Deutscher Presserat* was founded in 1956 and has issued a code of practice for journalists, similar to the many guidelines which exist in other countries. This code of practice was to serve the “Wahrung der Berufsethik”<sup>22</sup>, and there is also a sense in which it contributes to press freedom:

Die Aufgabe des Presserats besteht darin, Mahner und Wahrer ethischer Normen im Journalismus zu werden. Und damit festigt er die Basis für den anderen Teil seines Auftrags, die Unabhängigkeit der Presse gegenüber der staatlichen Gewalt zu sichern und zu verteidigen.<sup>23</sup>

But there are also many cases which fall outside of the *Presserat*'s competence where a decision has to be made by the individual journalist. The code of practice can only come into play for judgements after the event; the journalist has to make decisions involving ethical considerations on the spot and on a daily basis. For the same reason, political interest in media ethics is also not helpful for the actual operation of the press:

Journalistische Ethik gelangt immer dann auf die politische Agenda, wenn sich gravierende Anlässe öffentlich einstellen.<sup>24</sup>

This is of little assistance to journalists in dealing with daily issues. One practical example of the ethical issues involved in journalism is the case of photo-journalists deciding whether to take, and editors deciding whether to print, photographs of grieving family members or of dead bodies. In this connection,

using freedom wisely is not a simple, clear-cut matter. We have seen how compelling are the news values involved in the agony-and-anguish photographs, or the peeks into intensely personal moments. The journalist intent on reporting the news inevitably becomes at least somewhat calloused and indifferent to the subjects about whom stories must be written, and of whom photographs must be taken. There is no simple, one-

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<sup>21</sup> Stern-Rubarth (1964), p209

<sup>22</sup> Kreitmeir (1988), p6

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Dorsch-Jungsberger (1993), p205

size-fits-all rule that can be applied.<sup>25</sup>

### *Outside influences and personal responsibility*

The types of issues which become relevant relate to the journalist's own personal standards and moral values, which could be termed their principles. These principles come from a variety of sources. In part, they are conditioned by the society in which the journalist has grown up. Family background and upbringing play a role, as do the experiences the individual has in the course of his or her life. School, leisure interests, religion, relationships and contact with others all affect the way in which an individual thinks about issues and the principles which he or she considers to be paramount. These formative experiences contribute to the decisions which each person makes later in their life. However, they are free to decide how to act in each given situation, whatever the political system in which they find themselves. It is important for individuals to realise this: that despite conditioning by society, family, religion or whatever other source, each person is capable of making conscious decisions as to how he or she will act. When they do this,

they do not blame circumstances, conditions, or conditioning for their behavior. Their behavior is a product of their own conscious choice, based on values, rather than a product of their conditions, based on feeling.<sup>26</sup>

Of course, this does not mean that external events or conditions have no impact on an individual:

Proactive people are driven by values - carefully thought about, selected and internalized values.

Proactive people are still influenced by external stimuli, whether physical, social, or psychological. But their response to the stimuli, conscious or unconscious, is a value-based choice or response.<sup>27</sup>

If this reasoning is applied to the case of GDR journalists, it becomes clear that they *were* responsible for their actions, irrespective of the external conditions imposed by the SED. But this is not the same as saying that their compliance with the GDR media policy was a result of their lack of principles. Such a view would not be correct, but it would be equally wrong

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<sup>25</sup> Hulteng (1985), p154

<sup>26</sup> Covey (1994), p71

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p72

to say that journalists had no choices to make. The true situation will be explored in greater detail when looking at the views the journalists had on this subject.

Ethics are taken to be moral principles which guide individual actions, and the term will be used interchangeably with “morals”. It is important to remember that ethics relate essentially to practical issues. Although a “science” has been built up around the subject, in reality, ethics are about the way in which we behave, our reasons for doing so, and the consequences of these decisions. Singer’s comment is particularly appropriate:

Ethics is not an ideal system that is noble in theory but no good in practice. The reverse of this is closer to the truth: an ethical judgment that is no good in practice must suffer from a theoretical defect as well, for the whole point of ethical judgments is to guide practice.<sup>28</sup>

### *Consequences of decisions*

As just mentioned, a practical consideration involved in ethical decisions has to do with the consequences of decisions. While individuals can choose how to act, they cannot decide the consequences of their actions.<sup>29</sup> They can choose which principles they wish to live by, but not the consequences of remaining true to those principles. At an individual level, following personal principles has clear advantages:

Living in harmony with them brings positive consequences; violating them brings negative consequences. We are free to choose our response in any situation, but in doing so, we choose the attendant consequence.<sup>30</sup>

It is in the area of consequences rather than principles that the differences between the various political and ideological systems are seen in sharpest relief. In a dictatorial system, whether an individual, a political party or a ruling group is involved, the ability of those at the top of the system to control and influence those lower down is much greater than in a system which is democratic and which subscribes to certain values of personal freedom and public accountability. In a dictatorship, the consequences of individual actions which affect the state are usually more immediate and more noticeable. Those in power may be able to cancel someone’s employment, affect their chances of advancement, influence the

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<sup>28</sup> Singer (1993), p2

<sup>29</sup> Covey (1994), p90

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pp 90-1



possibilities which are open to their children, or even deport or imprison individuals largely arbitrarily. In such systems, the extent to which individuals can make decisions based upon personal choice is limited by the extent to which they have to take account of the possible repercussions from above. In the GDR, then, the journalists could make decisions based on their own convictions, but there were consequences. Dissent and defiance were severely punished, and such possibilities had to be integrated into an individual's decision-making process. It was not sufficient to decide that something conflicted with their conscience, and that that thing should therefore not be done. Instead, there was a further set of considerations which had to be borne in mind, considerations which are simply not relevant to the same extent for those living in a democracy.

Even aside from considering the consequences of actions, the attempt to live by principles - behaving ethically - can lead to other difficulties. These principles may not always be mutually consistent, and conflicts of ideals may result in certain specific cases. Returning for the moment to the concrete example of the use of photographs, one of the issues involved may be the consideration of the possible effects on the audience which such harrowing photographs can have. In the case of serious road accidents, the journalist may, however, think that photographs could serve as a reminder of the dangers of speeding, and that this benefit to the readership outweighs their distress at seeing the photographs. This would indicate a different view of the journalistic career than that of another journalist whose motivation in publishing the photographs is in order to provide a more accurate portrayal of the event than would be given by words alone. But both come to the same conclusion. It becomes necessary, therefore, to examine *why* the journalists find the publication of such photographs acceptable, information which is not obtainable by simply asking them if they would publish such photographs. In addition, each case is different. In one road accident, a young child may be involved, and a journalist may deem this to be more harrowing than if only adults were involved. Discussion of such possibilities is, however, often largely theoretical and journalists are not necessarily guided by these ideas at the time the decision has to be made. The deadlines and pressures of practical journalism do not often allow a lengthy decision-making process every time some sort of conflict arises. The reality is more that deep-seated values guide actions, and the decision-making is an automatic response to these values rather than a carefully thought-out response to each and every situation. The problem faced by journalists then becomes clear, as there are situations where the responses

generated by two different values held would produce completely different actions. By examining actual decisions, the values involved can then be identified and their relevance to practical decision-making examined.

An important aspect of media ethics is then this difference between the theoretical and the practical. Problems can arise when general principles are to be applied in real-life situations. Newman's comments are apposite in this context:

Somebody has to make these decisions. There is no way out of that. What matters is how well the decisions are made, whether those who make them are qualified to do so. There cannot be certainty and uniformity in the news business. That is not the kind of undertaking it is.

I think the key to the whole thing lies here: It is easy to state general principles. It is easy to talk about the noble undertaking of journalism. The real questions are: How good are we? How competent are we? And is there a demand [...] for first-class journalism?<sup>31</sup>

It is important to understand the way in which journalists are applying their principles to the reality of their work and why they make the decisions they do. Applied to the case of journalists in the GDR, questions which arise are why the journalists complied with the SED's media policy despite not agreeing with it, what principles they *did* attempt to apply in their work, and how these principles are implemented today under very different circumstances. This study attempted to answer some of these questions.

### *Parallels from other countries*

The changes in the GDR following the *Wende* are in many ways unique in press history. But there are important similarities to other eras of press censorship and subsequent freedom. The case of some African states is, for example, reminiscent of the changes which took place in Eastern Germany. If the following references to Africa are replaced by "Eastern Germany", these comments have real value in the discussion of the development of ethical concepts in Germany:

Even if some of [the various ethical systems and philosophies according to Western paradigms and philosophies] are useful, they cannot simply be transplanted to Africa. Africans should make a conscious effort to adapt them, or replace them, with indigenous African ethical systems and

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<sup>31</sup> Newman (1984), p31

philosophies. Whatever African journalists decide to do, they have to make the ethical norms and principles they choose their own - African - so that they are responsible for professional decisions and actions arising from them. Even if African journalists choose to ignore Western ethical systems and principles, there will still be areas where the African norms and practices they adopt will be shared by journalists outside Africa, for journalism still remains a universal profession whose general principles and values are shared by journalists worldwide.<sup>32</sup>

One question which arises for Eastern German journalists is to what extent their ethical values differ from those of the West. A comprehensive study of journalists by Schneider et al<sup>33</sup> touched on some ethical questions which the present study then explored in more detail. The authors of that investigation examined the extent to which journalists would be prepared to use less conventional means of obtaining information for their work. Their results showed a greater reluctance on the part of Eastern German journalists to engage in these practices, when compared with their Western colleagues.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to the issues raised by the 1994 study, another parallel from Africa suggested a second area which could profitably be examined:

Because most of Africa's journalists have been working for media either owned and/or tightly controlled by the state, their professional performance has been overshadowed by the need to obey orders and survive. With the 1990s, and the coming of pluralist politics to Africa, hopefully accompanied by the necessary liberalisation of the media, journalists will increasingly be unable to use the need to obey orders as a shield against unethical performance. They will have to take responsibility for their unethical actions instead of blaming them on government.<sup>35</sup>

An area which has received little attention in media research has been the ethical reasoning behind journalists' actions in the GDR. The concept of "obeying orders and surviving" mentioned here is particularly appropriate. Researchers have identified some ways in which journalists attempted to foil the SED's media control, and how they themselves dealt with their lack of free choice in much of their work, at least as far as political coverage was concerned. However, their actions have never been linked to any ethical concepts the

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<sup>32</sup> Kasoma (1994a), p xiv

<sup>33</sup> Schneider et al (1994)

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p219

<sup>35</sup> Kasoma (1994b), p1

journalists may have had. Consequently, any surmises as to why journalists chose the path they took are necessarily hard to defend empirically. There is, then, a need to identify the reasons for the extent to which journalists did (or did not) comply with the SED's clear instructions, and the extent to which ethical and moral values were involved in this process.

One last comment concerning African journalism serves to indicate the necessity of journalists developing an ethical base for their work, and why it is therefore important to understand how far journalists have come along this path to date, and how much they have had to learn since 1989:

There can be no doubt, then, that the journalistic profession throughout Africa needs to develop an ethical basis from which to work. This would put an end to journalists' being dubbed liars and puppets of the state, and accord them some personal respectability and pride. An ethical base to journalism would also help to restore public confidence and credibility to a profession that has largely, and often justifiably, been identified with oppressive and exploitative governments.<sup>36</sup>

There is, in other words, a personal value for journalists in acquiring and applying ethical values to their work. Their doing so conscientiously is the only way in which readers are able to move on from their previous perception of journalists and journalism in general, and see the emergence of a new type of journalism - new, at least, for Eastern Germany.

But the wider changes this involves are without the scope of this study. Rather, it attempts to fill a need which Roegele identified:

Welchen Wertvorstellungen, welchen Zielen, welchen beruflichen Standards weiß der Journalist sich verpflichtet? In einer Konstellation, in der (medien)grenzüberschreitende Technik, politisch-gesellschaftliches Umfeld und Berufsstrukturen sich immer rascher verändern, scheint es mir zunehmend wichtiger zu werden, diese Fragen zu stellen.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p11

<sup>37</sup> Roegele (1993), p126

## CHAPTER SIX

### Methodology

The study aimed to answer the five research questions which had arisen from the existing literature, and which allowed a comparison between the two eras of journalism in Eastern Germany, before and after 1989. The research questions which were looked at were as follows:

1. What were the reasons for the extent of journalists' compliance with the SED's instructions to the media in the German Democratic Republic?
2. What moral and ethical values did journalists hold which they attempted to apply to their work, and to what extent were they successful in applying them?
3. How did journalists attempt to follow their own consciences in determining how to act in light of the SED's demands on them?
4. What ethical work-related problems arose for Eastern German journalists following reunification, and how were these dealt with?
5. To what extent are journalists in Eastern Germany aware of ethical issues in the media, and how much do ethical constraints impinge on their professional work?

These questions were designed to paint a more detailed picture of the feelings and thoughts of the journalists involved than had been the case in previous studies. Earlier studies<sup>1</sup> had taken a much broader approach, and where journalists had been contacted directly, the method adopted had been telephone interviews, which posed simple yes-no questions, but did not look at the question of *why* the journalists gave the answers they did. This was seen as a promising area to explore, and questions were designed to elicit the rationale for journalists' behaviour in the GDR and their subsequent reaction to and attitude towards their new working conditions and experiences. In order to explore this topic, a means of acquiring

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<sup>1</sup> For example Böckelmann/Mahle (1994), Schneider et al (1994), Mast et al (1994)

the necessary information was sought which would maximise the quality of information and at the same time deal with a sample large enough to be able to draw concrete conclusions. Several possible methods were examined in this light, and the pros and cons of each considered.

## **Information gathering**

Three potential approaches were identified, and these three methods were examined to determine which would be most appropriate within the constraints of this study. The importance of making this decision based on the value to the research as opposed to personal preferences<sup>2</sup> was clear, and the advantages and disadvantages of each method were weighed up in terms of their potential for obtaining useful and reliable information.

### *Observation*

Observation of the respondents was the first possibility which arose. Observation is most appropriate when

accurate and full information cannot be obtained by the questioning of respondents. There are several reasons why people may be unable to give information to an interviewer. A person who is participating in an event may be so thoroughly involved in his own participation that he cannot be aware of dimensions of the event that would be apparent to a detached observer.<sup>3</sup>

The advantages of this approach for this study would have been the close link with actual working practices which would have been created. It could have formed the basis for posing subsequent questions on the behaviour which had been observed, so as to provide concrete examples of the issues involved in ethical decision-making. Doing so would also have allowed the researcher to become better acquainted with the respondents before discussing what had been observed. A final advantage of observation was identified in the possibility that some individuals may have been unwilling to be interviewed<sup>4</sup>, a factor which was not known before initial contact was made with the newspapers.

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<sup>2</sup> Brenner et al (1985), pp 5-6

<sup>3</sup> Richardson et al (1965), p9

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p11

There were several disadvantages to using observation as a method. First, it is not possible to observe ethical thinking, so information on the journalists' thinking would have had to come from another source. Similarly, in terms of information on the GDR, observation was no longer possible at all, and so was not an option for that part of the study. Second, observation of sufficient duration to gather a useful number of examples of cases involving ethical decisions and to become better acquainted with the respondents would also have required a great deal of time. As well as the time constraints on the researcher, it was felt that requesting such a long period of time from a number of journalists at each newspaper would have been an unfair burden on the newspaper itself and on the individual journalists. Third, had a shorter period of observation been chosen, it was very unlikely that relevant cases involving ethical issues would arise during the period of observation. Finally, in the case of journalists being unwilling to be interviewed, it seemed unlikely that anybody with this attitude would nevertheless allow someone to spend a considerable amount of time observing their behaviour.

Observation was felt to be an inappropriate method given the constraints of both the journalists and the researcher, as well as in light of the nature of ethical decisions. The lack of examples of decisions with ethical aspects which resulted from not observing the daily work of journalists was overcome by asking for the respondents' views on certain specific ethical issues of the media, and where appropriate, these questions were followed up on by discussing other areas of ethical conflicts which the respondents had experienced themselves.

### *Questionnaires*

Questionnaires allow a large number of respondents to be contacted, which reduces the problem of drawing conclusions based on a small and perhaps unrepresentative sample. They are also cheap to use. Questionnaires do not require a large portion of time from respondents, and can be completed at any time of day, according to the individual's own demands on his time.

In some cases, however, questionnaires can be too rigid. They can only allow for small variations in the experiences of the respondents, and cannot follow up on information which is given in the course of filling in the forms. A further disadvantage is that the response rate

from questionnaires is poor.

For the present study, it was felt that the use of a questionnaire would merely have repeated the study by Schneider et al<sup>5</sup> and added some small insights into the question of *why* the journalists view these cases as they do. What was sought was a more detailed understanding of the reasons the journalists had for accepting or rejecting certain methods of obtaining information, as well as what experiences they had already had of ethical dilemmas in their work. This required the flexibility of following leads offered by individuals' responses, which would not have been possible with a standard questionnaire. Questionnaires were felt to be insufficiently sensitive to individual experience. All the journalists had different experiences both in the past and at the time of the study, and it was important to take account of these differences, as they were likely to be contributory factors to the overall attitude of the journalists towards their profession and the values they associated with it.

### *Interviews*

The third method of obtaining information, interviews, was in the end selected as the most appropriate one.

Because the interview as a research tool is very flexible, it can deal with a variety of subject matter at different levels of detail or complexity. It can cope with the general public or specialist groups as informants. Reports of the data can reflect sequences of actions and their content or propriety. Information may deal with past, present, or future happenings, with the informants' own behaviour, or with commentary on others. It is a happy circumstance that human behaviour includes speech, which allows social scientists access to techniques denied other disciplines. Not only can the social scientist ask questions about her/his informants' behaviour and experience, but the informants themselves can give answers.<sup>6</sup>

Interviews allow direct, face to face communication with the respondents, which is important in establishing trust with the interviewer. This is important when discussing sometimes sensitive subjects as well as topics where there is the potential for the information obtained to be abused. Another advantage interviewing has which was considered important for this study was the ability to ask immediate follow-up questions to clarify previous answers, ensure internal consistency and draw on the respondents' individual experiences.

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<sup>5</sup> Schneider et al (1994), pp 218-20

<sup>6</sup> Brenner et al (1985), p7



The term “interview” can be used to describe a variety of types of direct personal communication, and there are several forms of research interview which can be used. In this study, a combination of the standardised and nonstandardised interview was used.

The standardised schedule interview involves asking each respondent exactly the same questions. Such questions were used at several stages in the interview. For example, questions about the training and background of the journalists were the same for each respondent, and were used, particularly in the first part of the interview, to ask non-threatening questions designed to allow the respondent to relax and become involved in the interview. Towards the end of the interview, identical questions were used for all respondents asking them about their experiences with certain ethical conflicts and their attitude to specific methods of obtaining information. The set of questions dealing with information gathering was grouped into categories according to the level of acceptance found among journalists in the study by Schneider et al.<sup>7</sup> This allowed a smaller number of questions to be asked from this group if the specific respondent had little time, while still ensuring that a selection of possibilities was examined which took account of the range of acceptance found in this previous study. As such, it was possible to ask about a method which most journalists considered legitimate, one where opinions varied a great deal, and one which most rejected.

At times, the individual respondent’s own background and experiences were such as to make some questions irrelevant and others very important, and at this point, the interview schedule followed the lines of the nonstandardised interview. This allowed questions to be suited more to the respondent’s own experiences and also allowed the necessary degree of flexibility. It also permitted deviations from the actual interview schedule to probe further where the answers given were not adequate or were too vague or imprecise.

In some cases, the flow of the interview precluded some introductory questions being asked at all, as the information had been obtained without specifically having to ask for it, and in some other cases, the question was never asked, as the interview had moved on to other areas, and to return to earlier questions on the interview schedule would have broken the flow of the exchange. In such cases, the drawbacks of not having a portion of background

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<sup>7</sup> Schneider et al (1994), p219

information were considered to be secondary to the overall results obtained from the interview. However, this problem arose very infrequently, and in most cases, all the standard questions were asked in the same order.

The interview schedule was examined and revised to ensure that all the questions being asked were clear, unambiguous, and non-directive, and that they would yield relevant and adequate information. A shortened version of the schedule was additionally prepared for those respondents who were willing to be interviewed, but did not have enough time to answer all the questions. It was felt that it was more valuable to have information on the most important questions in the interview schedule than to lose the insights which one individual could give to the study. Again, however, this proved to be necessary only in very few cases, as almost all respondents were prepared to devote sufficient time to the interview to allow the full range of questions to be discussed.

In most cases, the interviews took around an hour, and the respondents were informed of this before agreeing to participate. The first few interviews took two sessions of about an hour each, and in the light of the information gained from those interviews, the interview schedule was altered, since some questions were addressing areas which were not relevant to the practice of journalism in the GDR. Other issues were raised which needed coverage.

Over time, it became clear that some areas had been covered sufficiently and needed less attention, whereas data in other areas were lacking, and these topics needed to be explored in more detail. Consequently, the balance of time allocated to each question changed somewhat through the period spent interviewing in order to ensure that each question would produce a satisfactory amount of data over the course of the field work, while still taking account of each respondent's particular experiences.

The interviews were taped using a battery-powered recorder which was left to run on a table, and which produced a good quality recording of the interviews. In one case, the batteries ran out during the interview, and were only replaced after half an hour, but the detailed notes which were taken during that interview meant that no important information was lost, and accurate quotes from the first part of the interview were still possible. The interviews were subsequently partially transcribed, with those parts of the interview not relevant to the study being left out of the transcription, and a note of the content of those parts being made in the transcript so as to allow them to be found at a later point if the analysis suggested that they

might after all be significant.

## **Sample**

The next area which had to be looked at was which parts of the media and which people to select for interview.

### *Newspapers*

For several reasons, the medium of daily newspapers was selected for interview purposes. There was not a sufficient number of magazines still in existence from the GDR era to give the necessary breadth to the research, which was only really possible with newspapers. In order to be able to compare the findings at each paper, it was necessary to restrict the category “newspaper” to those with similar characteristics in terms of practical, work-related pressures and deadlines, and for this reason, daily newspapers - those appearing at least five times a week - were selected. As the pressures at weekly newspapers are very different, and because there were not enough weeklies to be able to base the entire study on them, it was decided to exclude them entirely from the study. In the end, eight daily newspapers were approached, three in Berlin, two in Leipzig, and one each in Halle, Chemnitz and Freiberg, as follows:

#### **Berlin**

*Neues Deutschland*

*Berliner Zeitung*

*Berliner Kurier*

#### **Leipzig**

*Leipziger Volkszeitung*

*Bild-Leipzig*

#### **Halle**

*Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*

#### **Chemnitz**

*Freie Presse*

#### **Freiberg**

*Freiberger Zeitung*

Of these newspapers, *Bild-Leipzig* and the *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung* declined to participate in the study. *Bild-Leipzig* cited time constraints in its decision (which was made by its central offices in Hamburg), and the *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung* did not give an explanation, although one was requested and a written response promised.

The remaining sample proved to be very effective in covering the main types of daily newspaper from the GDR era, as well as the main groups of paper now in existence in Eastern Germany. *Neues Deutschland* was of course the SED's flagship newspaper in the GDR, and provided an excellent example of the previously prosperous newspapers which found their continuing existence after 1989 very difficult, as witnessed by the dramatic fall in circulation after the *Wende*. The *Berliner Zeitung* was also an SED-owned paper, which had Berlin as its main market, but was not one of the SED's *Bezirkszeitungen*. In terms of its post-1989 history, however, it has been in much the same position as the old *Bezirkszeitungen*, albeit with considerably more competition in its market than any of the other *Bezirkszeitungen*. With the *Tagesspiegel* and *Berliner Morgenpost*, produced in the Western part of the city, and appealing to similar groups of readers, the *Berliner Zeitung* is operating in the most competitive daily newspaper market in Germany, and is seeking to establish itself as *the* newspaper for both East and West Berlin. By way of contrast, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* has no local competitor (other than the *Bild-Zeitung*) and covers a large and very profitable area of Eastern Germany, with local editions in many outlying areas. As an old *Bezirkszeitung*, it is representative of both the old and the new dominant newspaper type. The same is true of the *Freie Presse* in Chemnitz. Because of the dominance of the old *Bezirkszeitungen*, it was felt that more than one should be included in the sample, and despite the *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung* not participating, it was thus possible to conduct interviews at two of these newspapers.

At the other end of the market, tabloid newspapers promised useful material, but the level of cooperation from these newspapers was disappointing. Despite promising initial contacts with the *Berliner Kurier*, the newspaper was not as helpful as had been hoped, and only two interviews resulted. Neither of these was with journalists covering the more fruitful areas of economic and local issues. *Bild-Leipzig* did not wish to participate at all, and the possibility of approaching the *Dresdner Morgenpost* was rejected after the experience with the *Berliner Kurier*, as the two papers had the same editor, and it seemed unwise to seek his help a second time. However, the deficit in information about tabloid journalism was somewhat

compensated for by an interview with one journalist at the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* who had spent time working at a tabloid newspaper in Eastern Germany, and was able to give detailed information about the problems he faced during that time, including the events which led to him leaving his job there. This information served to demonstrate some of the differences between the tabloid and more serious branches of the market, and provided a clear indication that more work is needed in this area of tabloid journalism.

The *Freiberger Zeitung* is a local edition of the *Freie Presse*, and was approached in order to examine the issues which semi-independent local newspapers face. The paper produces its own local section each day, which is then included in the *Freie Presse*, with the title of the whole paper being *Freie Presse* and *Freiberger Zeitung* the secondary title.

Three other separate interviews were conducted outside of this framework. One was with a newspaper photographer in Berlin who expressed interest in the study, and the other two with individuals who had worked as journalists in the GDR, but who had then left the profession. One had been the deputy editor of a CDU-orientated newspaper, the other a reporter for an LDPD-owned paper.

This sample thus represented all the types of daily newspaper in existence in Eastern Germany today, as well as being typical of the old structure in the GDR. Because of time constraints, it was not possible to conduct interviews at any other newspapers. The actual sample was also chosen because of the closeness of the newspapers to two central geographical points. The first set of papers could be dealt with from a base in Berlin, and the non-Berlin papers from Leipzig. This approach was necessary because of the difficulty in obtaining accommodation in each city or town for long enough to interview all the journalists willing to participate. It took up to three months from the initial contact with the newspaper to completing the interviews, as the journalists often had to make an appointment several weeks in advance.

Initial contact was made by writing to the editor of each newspaper, with a subsequent follow-up telephone call about a week later. From there, an appointment was made with the editor to discuss the project, or in the case of the *Berliner Zeitung*, this was done through another individual who knew the journalists well and had their trust. Where distance precluded a personal visit prior to interviewing, the details were discussed with the editor on the telephone. With the exception of the *Freie Presse* and *Freiberger Zeitung*, where time

and financial constraints required the interviews to be conducted on one day, the interviewing took place over a period of weeks. Where interviews were conducted at a paper on one single day, the same initial procedure for contacting the newspaper was followed. The number of journalists interviewed at each newspaper is as follows:

*Neues Deutschland* - **six**

*Berliner Zeitung* - **seven**

*Berliner Kurier* - **two** (two others declined to be interviewed)

*Leipziger Volkszeitung* - **nine** (one other declined to be interviewed)

*Freie Presse* - **three**

*Freiberger Zeitung* - **four**

No current newspaper - **two**

### *The sample of journalists*

The actual journalists interviewed were not selected by the researcher. In all cases, the editor of the paper, or someone to whom he had delegated the responsibility, approached certain individuals prior to the interviewing beginning. Interviewing then continued on the snowball principle, with those being interviewed suggesting, and in most cases also contacting someone else who they believed would be interested in the project and willing to be interviewed. Wherever possible, these people were then interviewed. Two journalists at the *Berliner Kurier* who were recommended declined to be interviewed. One considered himself unsuitable for the study, and suggested that his colleague would be more appropriate as an interviewee. This colleague, however, believed that she had already talked to enough people in the past about her activities in the GDR, and declined to be interviewed on these grounds. The only other individual who did not wish to participate was a journalist at the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, who had in the past spent three days talking to an American student, and had no interest in discussing his past any further.

In total, 33 individuals were interviewed during the period of April to October 1996. The interviews in Berlin were conducted from April to June, and those in the Leipzig area from August to October. The range of journalists interviewed is as follows:

Editors - **one**

Deputy editors or *Chef vom Dienst* - **five**

Geschäftsführer - **one**

*Ressortleiter* - **nine**

*Redakteur* - **sixteen**

Photographer - **one**

The journalists interviewed were from all the main *Ressorts* at a typical newspaper: politics, business and economics, local coverage, arts and culture, *Reportage*, readers' letters and *Ratgeber* and sport.

In light of the nature of the material which was being obtained, it was decided that the journalists should remain anonymous in the study. As such, fictional names were created for all the respondents, although the newspaper they worked for was not changed, as it was felt this would not aid identification of specific individuals, but would provide the necessary context for their comments.

## **Limitations**

The study was subject to several limitations. The first of these was limited resources. It was not possible to conduct interviews at all the main newspapers in Eastern Germany, as this would have taken too much time, and been too costly both in terms of travel and the high cost of temporary accommodation. However, the sample which was used did include all the types of daily newspaper in the area being examined, and the quality of data was seen to be better where there was less time constraint on completing the interviews. Where all the interviews had to be conducted on one day, it was not possible to interview as many individuals, and to talk to as wide a range of people, a disadvantage which would have been more significant had the entire study been composed of short visits to several areas rather than longer periods concentrating on fewer newspapers.

The fact that it was not possible to determine who was interviewed at each paper was a further limitation, in that it was not possible to have the same type of journalism represented at each newspaper. This meant that it was often not possible to determine whether differences between newspapers were due to the different areas the journalists were working in, for example business and politics, or to different policies of the newspapers. However, it is doubtful whether any firmer conclusions could have been drawn had the sample fulfilled this criterion, as any conclusions would have been based on the experiences of two specific

individuals, who may not have been typical for the newspaper as a whole. As a result, the analysis looks very much at the difference between *individual* experiences and perceptions, and includes the position and policies of the newspaper as only one factor among many.

Distortion of recall on the part of respondents was a potential problem, as the events discussed were in part from over seven years before the interviewing took place. This problem was seen in practice, as many journalists were not able to remember details when answering some of the more specific questions. Because of this problem, the number of questions asking for specific information about the GDR era was reduced as far as possible, and the questions selected sought to probe into the respondents' feelings at the time, which they were more easily able to recall.

In terms of the actual interviews, time was an ever-present issue. While most journalists were able to spare an hour for the interview, there were a number who had less time available, in one extreme case, only ten minutes. This problem was overcome by concentrating on the main questions, and asking very specific probe questions when further information was required.

In most cases, the interviews were conducted in a closed room without disturbance, but this was not always possible, either due to lack of available space or the individual respondent's need to be in contact with other members of his team. Six interviews were conducted away from the newspaper, but the recording of the interviews was still of acceptable quality to ensure accuracy of transcription even with background noise and music.

The last main limitation to the study was that it was not possible to become acquainted with the respondents before the interview began. Again, this was essentially a time limitation. However, this was largely overcome by giving them the opportunity to talk about themselves in the first part of the interview, and by the time the more challenging questions were asked, enough was known about the respondent to allow a reasonable degree of tailoring of the questions to their own experiences, which was particularly useful where they claimed that certain issues did not affect them. By encouraging them to apply the principle involved to their own experiences in the past, they were able to discuss some of the issues much more easily.

## **Analysis**



Transcripts of the interviews were analysed by topics and themes. Important sections were highlighted and then subdivided by topic. This allowed all the relevant comments from all the journalists on each of the research questions to be grouped together in order to gain a feel for the general concepts involved, and also to identify unusual or unique perspectives. At the same time, having a transcript of each interview allowed the specific portions selected to be reviewed in their context, which ensured that the quotes were not analysed in a vacuum, but represented accurately what the journalists had been attempting to convey.

The following chapters are the results of this analysis, which looked at each of the research questions in turn, and then drew conclusions based on each issue, and also the themes which had been seen throughout the interviews. The conclusions are then presented in a separate chapter which brings together the various sections of the analysis.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Reasons for compliance with party instructions

The career and working conditions of journalists in the GDR have already been examined, but the question which remained was *why* these people cooperated with the instructions they received in the way they did. This question has not been satisfactorily addressed by researchers looking at the East German media, who have tended to concentrate their attention on the *facts* of what journalists did in the GDR. However, in order to understand their ethical and moral values after the *Wende*, specifically as they stood in 1996, it is important to look also at the role such values played in the GDR, and to what extent these values contributed to their decisions regarding compliance with their instructions from the SED or the party which was responsible for their newspaper. The interviews which were carried out with journalists in Eastern Germany were able to provide the information which answers these questions, and the relevance of their personal and professional values becomes clear in this process. The terms “value” and “principle” are used interchangeably in this study to denote a person’s judgement as to what is important in life, specifically in his or her own life.

Three categories of explanations of why the journalists cooperated with the party instructions they received have been identified, and these will be looked at in turn. These categories are separate from the actual ethical values the journalists mentioned, which will be examined in their own right along with the role of the journalists’ consciences.

The first of the categories to be looked at is the journalists’ own inner convictions. This includes considerations of the effects on them of growing up in the GDR and the influence which earlier experiences had on them. This set of explanations can be termed “theoretical” reasons.

A related category is that of the personal values which the journalists held which guided their actions. These will be kept separate from the question of which values the journalists held which they applied in their work, although the later discussion of these other values will show that in some instances the two areas are closely connected.

The final set of considerations deals with the way in which the journalists dealt with the conflicts they faced on a daily basis, and why these conflicts and difficulties did not lead them to look for alternative employment.

## **Theoretical factors**

### *Upbringing*

The factor mentioned most often by the journalists interviewed was upbringing. For most of them, this exposure to the SED's aims and ideas began in the home and continued throughout the education system. The acceptance and internalisation of socialism was very much an ongoing process in the individual's life which went largely unnoticed at the time, much as in any society, where people generally absorb the conventions and assumptions of the country in which they grow up, and where a degree of internalisation is always seen before these values become those which the individual considers his own. The person who rebels against this social order is the exception. As such, comments such as

ich bin da so reingewachsen, ich bin hier geboren, und das war meine Welt, auch das, wo ich mit identifiziert habe, und natürlich gesehen durch die Eltern.<sup>1</sup>

would be true of almost any society. The process of internalisation of values and principles began in the family, but the family was only one factor in the development of the GDR citizen:

Bei mir ist das so, daß man in dem Staat erzogen wurde, aufgewachsen ist, die Eltern haben so gedacht, alle, die irgendwie Einfluß auf einen genommen haben, haben mehr oder weniger so gedacht, daß man doch sehr eingleisig war.<sup>2</sup>

In the GDR, the individual was almost certain to be surrounded by people who either were genuinely convinced by the SED's brand of socialism, or who would not dare to question it in public. The education system through which all children went had a strong "weltverbesserischer Anspruch"<sup>3</sup>, which tended to reinforce existing positive attitudes

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Hermann Peters, Freie Presse

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Katja Buchwald, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

towards socialism. This goal of educating others about the benefits and advantages of socialism also left its mark on many journalists, which was reflected in the educating role many of them saw in journalism.

Some of the experiences the future journalists would have during their time in the education system were typical of their later profession. As early as these school days, the school child

hat natürlich im Lauf seiner eigenen Entwicklung gemerkt, worüber ist zu reden, es gibt Dinge, also möglicherweise in der Schule so, daß also über bestimmte Probleme nicht gesprochen wurde. Das war nicht in dem Sinne, daß es direkt verboten wurde, also Umweltproblematik zum Beispiel, da konnte man sicherlich das ansprechen, aber im wesentlichen lief dann die Diskussion in die Richtung, ja, wir würden gern mehr tun auf der Strecke als Land, aber es fehlt eben an Geld. So, damit war die Diskussion im Prinzip erledigt.<sup>4</sup>

These earlier experiences with normal communication being restricted meant that when similar cases were seen in the course of journalistic training and practice, they did not have come as a great surprise. Because these same principles had already been seen in action so early in the past, they did not have as strong an impact as they would on someone who had grown up in a different country and under different conditions. For this reason, the reaction to these restrictions was not as strong as might otherwise have been expected.

Another part of this overall process which led to a positive view of socialism was the way in which socialism had been seen by individuals to have helped people they knew. Frank Grünewald explained how his view of socialism had been coloured by the way in which he had seen it benefit his parents. The improvements he saw in his parents' lives as they were removed from an existence of poverty were very concrete, and he could follow how their material prosperity improved as he grew up.<sup>5</sup> As such, he linked socialism with increasing prosperity in his own mind, and was therefore less likely to conclude subsequently that socialism was a bad or a negative thing. Similarly, Barbara Hanke also saw socialism in terms of the good it had done in practice, and the way in which it seemed to her to incorporate certain values which she personally considered to be important:

Ich habe eigentlich bei vielen Sachen gedacht, das ist schon ganz in

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Udo Meyn, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Frank Grünewald, Berliner Zeitung

Ordnung, weil ich vieles menschlich sah, zum Beispiel die Sache mit den Kindern oder der sichere Arbeitsplatz.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever the individual reasons, the overall effect of growing up in the GDR was that “man hat schon dieses System geistig also im Kopf gehabt”.<sup>7</sup> This was true, however, of the majority of the citizens of the GDR, and should not be regarded as something which was peculiar to journalists. In this sense, they were merely normal citizens of the GDR, and subject to the same influences as anyone else.

This influence of growing up in the GDR impacted upon the way in which its citizens thought. Because the citizens of the GDR had been brought up in this system, and had not been exposed personally to other forms of society, their thinking was very much set within certain confines. Rainer Stiehler described this phenomenon by comparing life in the GDR to a box:

Man war in einem System eingebunden, man war in einem Kasten, und in dem Kasten hat man sich bewegt, und wenn man ganz gut war oder sich ganz besonders mutig fühlte, dann hat man sogar eine Beule in den Kasten, nach außen, aber man hat nie durchgeschlagen, man ist nie raus aus diesem System. Man steckte in diesem Kasten, und empfand es als unmöglich, diese Grenzen zu überschreiten. Weil man war für eine humanistische Gesellschaftsordnung, für eine humanistischere Gesellschaft an sich, also was man mit dem Sozialismus identifiziert hat. Und wenn man jetzt [...] über den Tellerrand geguckt hätte, dann wäre erst mal ein großes Loch gewesen, deshalb hat man sich in diesem System bewegt, da wäre ein großes Loch gewesen, da hätte man weiter denken müssen.<sup>8</sup>

For the citizens of the GDR, socialism was essentially the things which they saw around them. It encapsulated the principles of equality and peace, the solidarity of the population. For them, rejecting the SED was equivalent to rejecting socialism, which was as good as rejecting these principles which they held dear. This view was supported by the SED, which saw in it a way of ensuring that its power base would not be challenged. It portrayed itself as being the embodiment of these principles and of socialism, and at the same time presented the capitalist system as being opposed to these values which the GDR citizens held to be important. With their limited knowledge of the reality of Western life, it was not hard for the

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Barbara Hanke, Berliner Kurier

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Albert Köhler, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Rainer Stiehler, Neues Deutschland

GDR citizens to believe that to question the SED's brand of socialism was to question the importance of peace, of a humane society, of common interest. As such, they never did question the SED's role in the GDR, or ask whether the fruits of socialism were possible without the SED being in control of the country. For them, the things they prized in the GDR were only possible with the SED, and they could see no way of having the life they wanted without the SED.

Theodor Ehrich commented on the role of this kind of ideology from his own experiences in the GDR:

Das ist das Geheimnis von Ideologie. Wenn man stark ideologisch geprägt wird, sich stark ideologisch prägen läßt, verliert man die Fähigkeit, Wirklichkeit auf den Grund zu gehen, also wirklich vorurteilsfrei und frei von bestimmten Schemata im Kopf sich die Wirklichkeit anzugucken und dann zu analysieren, ist es das, was ich will, ist es das, was wirklich fortschrittlich ist, ethisch relevant ist und so weiter. Da geht es schon, wenn man sozusagen auf der einen Seite stark ideologisch geprägt ist, in Richtung "dies ist meine Partei, dies ist mein Sozialismus, dies ist mein Land" und so weiter und so fort.<sup>9</sup>

This was exactly what had happened with the journalists. Because of the limitations which had been achieved in the way in which the citizens of the GDR thought, the SED was able to impose its will on journalists, knowing that they would not take the step of challenging its authority because that would be regarded as challenging the validity of "their" socialism. So because most people agreed with the aims of socialism, if not its practice in the GDR, they would never get to the point where a serious challenge of the SED's policies was possible. For the majority of GDR citizens, socialism was the impact their life in the GDR had on them. Any changes they sought were in the details of the practical operation of socialism, but not in the system itself. Wiedemann demonstrated this phenomenon of being unable to see the problems in the system itself when he said that he always thought that the faults in the GDR were not "dem System immanent"<sup>10</sup>, but the result of individuals' failings. With this attitude, fostered very much by the SED, anything could be explained away without coming close to questioning the legitimacy of the GDR or the SED, and the fundamental questions necessary to truly challenge the status quo were not asked. In this way, the

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Theodor Ehrich, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, Neues Deutschland

journalists were brought to the point where they would comply with the policy determined by the SED.

What has been seen so far is the way in which the journalists grew up in the GDR society, absorbing and internalising its ideology and goals to the extent that they were no longer able to think in terms outside of the construct socialism equals GDR equals SED. As such, their belief in the aims of socialism were used by the SED to preserve its monopoly on power and on the authority to determine how the theory of socialism should be put into practice. The citizens of the GDR were not capable of moving outside of this theoretical framework and accepting socialism as a *Staatsform* while rejecting the position the SED had taken within the GDR.

### *Commitment to socialism*

The way in which the journalists interviewed perceived socialism varied between the extremes of total acceptance on the one hand and the personal rejection of its goals on the other. The fact that the journalists grew up in the GDR meant that most of them were in agreement with socialism as the *Staatsform*. There were, however, exceptions, such as Peter Heym. In his case, he never believed in socialism or communism, “und dazu auch von zu Hause aus - wir sind mehr in einem bürgerlichen Elternhaus großgeworden”<sup>11</sup>, and he cited this as the reason for having never developed a relationship with socialism. However, although he did not have this initial stimulus to being favourably disposed towards socialism, he did not have anything against socialism being the *Staatsziel*, his rejection was more at the personal level.

There was also a clear relationship between the newspapers at which the journalists interviewed worked both in the GDR and now and their attitude towards socialism. In addition, the attitude of most has not changed fundamentally since then. All who commented on their view of socialism now said that they still believed it to be a better way, a more humane way, of operating than the capitalist model. Those who work at *Neues Deutschland* showed a much greater degree of acceptance of socialism. Several individuals had come to work at *Neues Deutschland* after 1989, when they had lost their jobs at other newspapers, and were looking for somewhere to work which had maintained its commitment to socialism.

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Peter Heym, Leipziger Volkszeitung

*Neues Deutschland* filled this requirement for them, and the paper is open about its commitment today. In its *Redaktionsstatut*, it describes itself as a “sozialistische Zeitung”<sup>12</sup>, in keeping with its description on the front page of the paper. There are several ways in which this commitment to socialism was manifest among the journalists. For Franz Becher, socialism

ist im Prinzip natürlich für mich auch letztlich der Anlaß gewesen, überhaupt Journalist zu werden, denn ich meine, darum war es mir auch klar, wenn ich Journalist werde, [...] dann ist das natürlich eine vorrangig politische Arbeit, und ich muß auch ein politisches Ziel verfolgen, wenn ich es nicht gehabt hätte, hätte ich es nicht gemacht.<sup>13</sup>

Such a connection between socialism and journalism was unique among the journalists interviewed, although the political nature of the journalists’ occupation in the GDR was clear to them all. Another example of the stronger identification with socialism which existed among those journalists now working at *Neues Deutschland* was Rainer Stiehler, who showed an affinity with the goals of socialism, while at the same time demonstrating that the journalists at *Neues Deutschland* were still subject to the experiences and frustrations common to GDR journalists, something with which each journalist had to deal.

Ich habe mich im Prinzip voll damit identifiziert, [...] aber man hat natürlich schon frühzeitig Widersprüche gesehen, auf die man selbst gestoßen ist, und hat versucht, die mit sich auszumachen, aber [...] grundsätzlich hat man immer sich dahinter gestellt.<sup>14</sup>

Stiehler identified strongly with socialism, but in the case of his colleague Henry Wiedemann, this degree of internalisation was even more pronounced. Wiedemann, who had worked for several years as editor of another newspaper prior to joining the staff of *Neues Deutschland*, commented on the particular role of a newspaper editor in the GDR:

Man war als Chefredakteur natürlich eins [mit den Zielen des Sozialismus], also ich habe nicht zwei Leben gelebt, also ein Leben, das privat gesagt hat, das ist alles Unsinn und schlecht, und die öffentliche Person, die das alles gelobt hat, sondern ich habe das sehr verinnerlicht, auch die Erziehungsfunktion der Presse verinnerlicht.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Redaktionsstatut der Tageszeitung “Neues Deutschland” zur Gewährleistung der inneren Pressefreiheit*, confidential internal document, reproduced with permission, p2

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Franz Becher, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Rainer Stiehler, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, *Neues Deutschland*



It is this degree of internalisation which was unique to the *Neues Deutschland* staff, and this was an important factor in their decision to remain in the journalistic profession and to comply with their instructions. It led to their having a different perception of their role in the media industry, less as individuals who were being acted upon than as people who were in part acting upon others through their work. This was reflected in comments made frequently at *Neues Deutschland* about the role of educator in which many journalists saw themselves. Although the other journalists sought to distance themselves from the media policy to some extent, despite at the same time acknowledging the important part they played in that policy, Wiedemann did not criticise the policies themselves, expressing instead his part in supporting these very policies:

Ich war also diese Medienpolitik also auch selbst, weil [...] man unter anderem auch eine verinnerlichte Selbstzensur hatte, also es war ja nicht so, daß das, was ich als Chefredakteur gemacht habe, durch einen anderen groß noch zensiert wurde, [...] sondern man hatte schon bei der Parteiführung ein gewisses Vertrauen, daß die Journalisten, also Wiedemann macht das schon, so wie wir...das war also eine gewisse Einheit.<sup>16</sup>

The other journalists pointed to an element of compulsion in their compliance with the SED, but Wiedemann had internalised the values of the system to the extent that he had willingly become one of those participating in devising and implementing the government's media policy. It should be borne in mind, however, that a part of this outlook stemmed from his post as editor of the paper, a position which necessarily required some direction being given to the paper, and that direction was of course socialist in nature.

The journalists' attitude towards socialism in general and towards the media policy of the GDR was not a static thing, but rather a process of development. In the case of Wiedemann, he had reached an advanced stage where, rather than feeling pressure to comply,

ich fühlte mich also nicht gepreßt, vergewaltigt von der politischen Linie, sondern ich habe das immer versucht, diese politische Linie umzusetzen, daß ich [...] als Journalist eine gewisse Befriedigung damit habe.<sup>17</sup>

In the majority of cases, this affinity with socialism was less marked. As well as the factor

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

of upbringing, there was a further impact which the commitment to socialism had on the journalists. They wished to *improve* the GDR so that it was more in line with their view of how socialism should operate. This view had an impact on the way in which they viewed their work, and will be explored in more detail. Before this, however, a related idea needs to be addressed. There was a perception among some journalists of their career as a calling. For those who were totally committed to the aims of socialism, the desire was also strong to impart this enthusiasm and commitment to others, as they saw the failings in the GDR as being the result of individuals' actions rather than a result of the system. As such, to educate the citizens would improve the overall performance of the socialist system. The words "Mission" and "Missionar" were common among those who had this desire to educate others, but there were also direct references to educating people through journalistic work. Wiedemann demonstrates this attitude well:

Man hat zu allererst sozusagen versucht, die Leserschaft für das zu gewinnen, was man als politisches Ziel selbst begriffen hat, insofern war es immer etwas Erzieherisches, also hatte die Zeitung immer etwas Pädagogisches, und insofern wollte man immer die Leserschaft mitnehmen, ja, man wollte sie ein bißchen erziehen, [...] also das steckt im DDR-Journalismus, glaube ich, schon tief drin, daß man sich doch in einer missionarischen Funktion sah und doch den Leser auch als Objekt sah, den man politisch, weltanschaulich und ideologisch zu erziehen hat. [...] Man fühlte sich berufen, andere Leute zu erziehen [...] oder missionarisch aufzutreten, insofern ist es ganz gut, daß man jetzt mit diesem Begriff etwas vorsichtiger ist, also missionarisch oder Berufung, aber es hatte schon etwas mit Berufung zu tun.<sup>18</sup>

This desire can be linked to the question of the morality of journalists' behaviour in the GDR. Those who showed a strong degree of compliance with the SED's media policy - such as *Neues Deutschland* journalists - were anxious to convince others of the validity of socialism as a working model for a society. While there was always the realisation that things did not always work in practice as they were meant to in theory, this was often put down to the failure of individuals to implement the theory correctly, rather than to a fault in the system itself. The compliance of the journalists with what they believed to be sound doctrine in theory, and their desire to see that theory implemented in a more consistent manner can be seen as moral justification for what they did. They were acting entirely in accordance with their personal beliefs in accepting the theory they agreed with and were then seeking to

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid

improve the practice they found fault with. For these journalists, their commitment to socialism was one of the principles they held which guided their actions, and as such, their behaviour was entirely consistent with *their* ethical viewpoint. This behaviour has to be judged by their standards. To do otherwise would be similar to a Roman Catholic criticising a Jew for keeping the Sabbath on Saturday. To the Catholic, this practice appears strange, but to the Jew, it is one of the religious principles he holds, and as such entirely correct for him. Likewise, those committed to socialism should not *necessarily* be condemned outright because of the actions this commitment leads them to. This view will have to be qualified in the light of some of the other motivations which journalists will be seen to have had, but for the moment, it is important to remember that the actions of the journalists also have to be judged by their own standards and principles.

The next area to be looked at is the way in which the journalists sought to remove the distinction they saw between theory and practice by working towards improving an aspect of that reality which they saw around them. This was also a result of their commitment to socialism, as they wished to see the things they held to be important reflected more clearly in the reality of GDR life.

### *Desire to bring about improvements*

The desire to improve conditions in the GDR was an important motivation in the work of GDR journalists. In some cases, it was the whole GDR they wanted to improve, a view more common among those who believed that their job involved a calling of some sort. In others, the desire was to better the newspaper they were working for, in others, the journalists wanted to improve the lives of others, usually at the local level. This ties in with the findings of Schneider, Schönbach and Stürzebecher<sup>19</sup> that a very high percentage of journalists in Eastern Germany believe that part of their role as journalists is to help people, either by informing the population about their rights, criticising deficiencies in society, or generally helping other people.<sup>20</sup> That a higher percentage of journalists in Eastern Germany agreed with these points than in Western Germany<sup>21</sup> then comes as no surprise, given that the journalists already had this attitude in their work in the GDR.

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<sup>19</sup> Schneider et al (1994), p209

<sup>20</sup> This view was also expressed by Udo Freitag, Freiberger Zeitung

<sup>21</sup> Schneider et al (1994), p209

### Wish to improve the whole country

All journalists commenting on their view of socialism pointed to the difference between their thoughts on the theoretical basis of socialism and the reality which they saw around them in the GDR. Although most had had positive experiences with socialism, they were nevertheless aware of the deficiencies of the practical operation of the SED's policies. For some, their awareness of this disparity led them to seek to change the way in which socialism was practised in the GDR. What has to be realised, though, is that there was never any sense of the best solution being to question the existence of either the GDR or the SED, a result of the box-mentality described earlier by Stiehler. The desire was rather to implement the socialist theory in a manner which was more beneficial to the ordinary people living in the GDR. An example of this difference was given by Theodor Ehrich in commenting on a discussion which had taken place in the 1980s:

Es gab zum Beispiel in der zweiten Hälfte der 80er Jahre eine Ost-West-Diskussion, die wurde von Vertretern der SED mit Vertretern der SPD in der Bundesrepublik damals geführt und die drehte sich [...] um die Frage, wie man den Wettstreit der Systeme, der beiden Systeme, möglichst so austragen kann, daß der *friedlich* verläuft und nicht zu irgendwelchen Eskalationen oder Spannungen führt, sondern sozusagen dem Frieden, der Entspannung und so weiter dient. Und da gab es zum Beispiel eine Diskussion darum, welche Vorzüge die eine Gesellschaft hat und welche Vorzüge die andere Gesellschaft hat. [...] Das Ziel dieser ganzen Diskussion [...] war bei mir, bei im Grunde fast allen Journalisten, die ich kannte, nicht, den Sozialismus als solchen in Frage zu stellen oder die DDR in Frage zu stellen oder die SED in Frage zu stellen, das Ziel bestand darin, die Dinge zu reformieren, im Interesse eines besseren Sozialismus.<sup>22</sup>

The prerequisite for this desire was the conviction that socialism was a viable model upon which to base a state, better than the capitalist system, and the realisation that the reality of the GDR's type of socialism was not the same as its theoretical basis. Because of these beliefs, there was no question of challenging the SED or the GDR by even joining an opposition group. Nothing which was perceived as being anti-GDR was seriously contemplated by the journalists. Instead, the goal was to serve the best interests of the GDR:

Der andere Schritt wäre gewesen, in eine bestimmte Form von Opposition zu gehen, öffentlich oder illegal. Den bin ich nicht gegangen. [...] Weil ich

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Theodor Ehrich, Berliner Zeitung

glaubte, dies wäre nicht gut für die DDR, für die Gesellschaft.<sup>23</sup>

One journalist interviewed even went so far as to say that he had become a journalist in order to improve the way in which the GDR operated. With most journalists, this desire for improvement was something which they only later tried to implement in their work, and was not something which they cited as being a factor in entering the profession in the first place. Arnulf Ernst, in contrast, describes his motivation as follows:

Mein Studium begann zu einer Zeit, wo in der DDR, sagen wir mal, eine gewisse - Moral will ich jetzt nicht sagen - aber doch, wo man, sagen wir mal, hoffen konnte, daß also der Sozialismus, der hier gebaut wird, immer mit demokratischen Strukturen irgendwie sich befaßt und demokratischer wird. Und demzufolge bin ich daran gegangen, habe Journalistik studiert, auch also wirklich in diesem Sinne auch zu arbeiten, also, sagen wir mal, für viel demokratischere Verhältnisse, für einen demokratischen Sozialismus. Und ich meine, mir war dann sehr schnell klar, daß das so schnell, wenn überhaupt, gar nicht gehen wird, und ich bin dann natürlich [...] inkonsequent gewesen, also ich habe nicht versucht, nach dem Westen abzuhausen, sondern habe dann versucht, hier an dieser Stelle das beste daraus zu machen.<sup>24</sup>

However, this behaviour was in no way inconsistent when viewed in the light of what has already been demonstrated about the journalists' reasons for complying with the SED's media policy. For them, the GDR was their state - "ich liebe dieses Land, auch noch"<sup>25</sup> - and they did not want to leave it or abolish it, but to improve it. As such, Ernst's decision to stay in the GDR and attempt to improve it was entirely consistent with what would have been expected. When he realised that these large-scale changes to the GDR were not possible, he did not leave the country, but turned his attention to other possibilities, which were more practically orientated and more concrete, but which were still attempts at improving reality in the GDR:

Die Akzente lagen darauf, eine Demokratisierung im Inneren des Landes, mehr Liberalität, und vor allen Dingen eine Großzügigkeit und Freizügigkeit, daß man also reisen konnte. [...] Es ging einfach darum, hier möglicherweise einen demokratischen Sozialismus, in dem sich die Leute (a) frei bewegen, (b) wohl fühlen können, und mit dem sie sich vor allem

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Arnulf Ernst, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Barbara Hanke, Berliner Kurier

auch identifizieren können.<sup>26</sup>

In reality, the way in which attempts were made in the papers to advocate change was very small, and was a contributory reason to the fact that the GDR papers were read very carefully, the readers having become used to the need to watch out for hidden criticism and the use of unexpected words or lack of expected words in articles. The difference between private opinions and what appeared in the newspaper indicated the relative size of the criticism and promotion of change which did in fact appear in the newspaper:

Da hat man eben versucht, auf dem außenpolitischen Sektor eben solche Dinge zu machen, [...] da hat man eben darüber berichtet, daß in Polen irgendeine Minireform und so, das war dann schon doch ein - daß man sagte also, es muß sich hier was verändern im Lande, darüber waren wir ja alle im klaren, da man's aber ganz öffentlich und in der Zeitung sozusagen nicht schreiben konnte, man konnte keinen Leitartikel verfassen, also die DDR muß vom Grund auf reformiert werden, ist logisch, [...] dann hat man's eben versucht, auf dem Wege, also mit kleinen, winzigsten Nagelstichchen irgendwie bißchen - es war nicht in Bewegung zu bringen, hat man auch gemerkt, aber wenigstens zu sagen, also ich mache das, was im Rahmen dessen möglich ist.<sup>27</sup>

Because the possibilities for criticism of the GDR were so limited, and the journalists realised that nothing was being achieved by these attempts, they sought other areas where they felt that change was possible. The two areas commented on in interviews were the journalists' working environment and the improvements they could bring about in their local area.

### **Improving working conditions at the newspapers**

The journalists were of course only too aware of the control which was exerted on their work and which restricted their possibilities of writing about certain issues. As such, a part of their focus was on their working conditions, where they stood to gain the most from any improvements:

Wir dachten irgendwo, es muß sich eine neue Qualität ergeben, und wir werden wirklich die Möglichkeit haben, die Sache anders zu machen, andererseits [...] haben wir im Prinzip natürlich hinter der Parteipolitik gestanden, nicht in den Einzelheiten, nicht in den Auswüchsen logischerweise, aber im Prinzip natürlich der Meinung waren, daß wir

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Arnulf Ernst, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Brigitte Fischer, Berliner Zeitung

diesen Staat und diese Partei stützen müssen.<sup>28</sup>

Here, the same way in which the thinking of the GDR journalists was limited to the existing structures of the GDR is seen. Additionally, there was a desire to see change within the working environment. Lohmann suggested that the disparity between theory and reality in the GDR was overcome by the

Hoffnung, daß bestimmte Unzulänglichkeiten und Unmöglichkeiten, diese Mission sozusagen auszufüllen, eines Tages auch wieder bessere Bedingungen finden würden. [...] Die ganzen Berufs- und Studienjahre waren Jahre intensivster innerer Selbstbefragung und intensivster Diskussion im Kollegenkreis. Sehr kritische Diskussionen übrigens auch, immer begleitet von der Hoffnung, daß irgendwann die Arbeitsbedingungen für einen Journalisten in der DDR besser werden würden und man offener, problemreicher würde schreiben können.<sup>29</sup>

The hope which Lohmann mentions was a factor which several others commented upon as well. Arnulf Ernst believed that most journalists had a “Prinzip Hoffnung”, which helped them to deal with the problems they faced in their work.<sup>30</sup> This aspect of hope is one which will be returned to when looking at the way in which journalists actually dealt with the restrictions they were subject to.

### **Improving conditions in the local area**

Those covering local issues in their newspaper found that while their work could not have a real impact nationally, they were nevertheless in a unique position to help some of those who lived in their local area, and make a positive difference to some people’s lives:

Ich habe in der DDR-Zeit gearbeitet immer in einer Lokalredaktion und da war man sehr dicht ran an den lokalen Interessen, unmittelbar an den Lesern, und innerhalb des DDR-Journalismus war das Lokale [...] bedingt eine Nische, es war also vieles, was auch sein mußte, wo Berichterstattung erwünscht wurde oder wo bestimmte Tendenzen erwünscht wurden, da mußte man sich anpassen. Aber auf der anderen Seite hatte man durchaus die Möglichkeit, gerade im Lokalteil, kritische Dinge zu verfolgen, also Probleme, die die Leute beschäftigt haben, die eigentlich, wenn man sie gründlich zu Ende verfolgt hätte, irgendwo auch politische Ursachen und Ursachen in dem System gehabt hatten, die konnte man so weit nicht

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Franz Becher, Neues Deutschland

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Arnulf Ernst, Leipziger Volkszeitung

verfolgen, das wäre nicht gegangen, aber man konnte diese konkreten Einzelprobleme durchaus ansprechen und kritisch verfolgen und [...] die Öffentlichkeit darauf aufmerksam machen, dann vielleicht auch irgendwie eine Reaktion hervorrufen und jemandem helfen.<sup>31</sup>

Andreas Klein's comments here can be related to those of Wiedemann which were analysed earlier. Wiedemann put the problems he saw around him down to the failings of individuals rather than of the system. Klein also relates these two areas, and points out that as it was not possible to tackle the fundamental problems in society, he concentrated on the symptoms of the underlying problems, and tried to cure them. It could well be that in attempting to improve local conditions, Klein and others were going as far as they could towards improving the GDR, given the practical limitations. As they realised that the concrete problems they saw around them were the result of deficiencies in the system, they then saw the possibility of moving towards improving the whole society by doing what they could at their own local level. This attitude is one which was seen more generally in the GDR. Many living in Eastern Germany miss the communal aspects of their lives in the GDR, where people were more inclined to help each other and participate in joint activities and projects. As most people were in a similar situation, they helped each other and cooperated, but when the possibility of moving in a different direction from everyone else came after 1989, this attitude of solidarity gradually vanished, being replaced by the more egotistic attitude of Western societies. Within this context, the attempts of journalists to contribute to their immediate surroundings is typical of the earlier mentality. However, the change which has been seen in the wider population has not been mirrored in the journalists' attitude to their work now. For example, Udo Freitag stated as the current "moral aims" of the *Freiberger Zeitung* as he saw them "den Leuten helfen, [...] ihr Recht zu kämpfen", and said that

wenn Sie die Eckwerte zusammenfassen wollten, dann wären das diese Information, diese Lebenshilfe, diese Unterstützung ihrer Anliegen und im Grunde - ich sage es mal christlich - gute Werke tun.<sup>32</sup>

In this sense, the journalists have continued with their earlier attempts to help their readers, with whom they feel a sense of solidarity. This also had a wider application. The journalists are very concerned with the way in which people are treated, which will become clearer when

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Andreas Klein, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Udo Freitag, Freiberger Zeitung



looking at the way in which they react to ethical dilemmas. In the GDR, they were keen to ensure that they helped their readers wherever possible and that they used the resources and opportunities which the newspaper afforded them to help these people. Because the system did not allow for fundamental criticism or improvements in its operation, the journalists instead concentrated on helping individual people who would benefit from their efforts.

### *Tradeoff between compliance and defiance*

Journalists in the GDR did have possibilities for working around the restrictions placed upon them, but this freedom had to some extent to be earned and created in a deliberate fashion. The general view of the journalists on this subject was expressed well by Andreas Klein:

Die erste Voraussetzung war natürlich, [...] überhaupt Freiräume sich schaffen zu können, daß man systemkonform als Journalist war. Also wenn man insgesamt den Eindruck erweckt hätte, daß man ein Systemgegner wäre, dann wäre man ja sofort aus dem Journalismus entfernt worden, also jener, der dort irgendwie tätig sein wollte, mußte bestimmte Forderungen abdecken. Und wenn man das aber gemacht hat, dann hatte man auf der anderen Seite Freiräume geschaffen, um zum Beispiel über kritische Alltagsdinge zu berichten, das war dann ein Stück journalistischer Freiheit, die man sich verwirklichen konnte, wobei man auch darin nur zu einem gewissen Punkt gehen konnte.<sup>33</sup>

The importance of this observation lies in the fact that it was a necessity to comply with those things which were deemed politically “necessary” in order to create the possibilities which the journalists had in other areas. In other words, a contributory factor to the decision to follow instructions was the fact that this compliance was the only way to ensure that in some areas a degree of criticism and individuality in writing were possible. The journalists had soon learned that in some areas there was no way in which they could determine what appeared:

Also gab es überhaupt nicht die Vorstellung oder den Ansatz, was wir in der Zeitung schreiben, entscheiden wir. Auch nicht im Kopf. So kann man das, glaube ich, überhaupt nicht sagen, sondern es war klar so, da gibt es Vorstellung, Vorgabe, Zielstellung und so weiter, da oben, und die werden in einzelnen Zeitungen umgesetzt.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Andreas Klein, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Theodor Ehrich, Berliner Zeitung

In these areas, there was no point in seeking ways of getting round the instructions which had been given. This was simply not a possibility. But by then doing what was expected in these areas, the likelihood was much greater that they would be able to go further where the journalist felt that there was a realistic chance of getting some sort of criticism published or tackling a subject of which the SED did not want any mention at all. That this was also a reason for some to remain in the profession is made clear by Frank Grünewald. He considered that when he had articles rejected for publication, the only real alternative he had to simply accepting this was to leave the profession entirely. He rejected this possibility, however, on the grounds that there would have been absolutely no mention of the subjects he was attempting to bring into the paper on a very small scale, whereas he was at least getting that far. Something was better than nothing. The question he asked himself was where he would be able to achieve more, within or outwith the system, and he opted for the former rather than entering some sort of opposition.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, Alfred Gärtner made this distinction between the limitations and the possibilities of a journalistic career in the GDR:

Ich war auch der Meinung, daß neben diesen ganzen Tabuthemen doch noch viele interessante Sachen sind, über die ich berichten kann, über die man schreiben kann.<sup>36</sup>

Because of the distinction which the journalists were able to make between these two parts of their reporting, it was quite possible for them to justify their compliance in some things because they were seeking to find some degree of professional satisfaction in other areas and knew that attempts at defiance in some cases were pointless, and would merely rule out anything similar in other cases. A reason for their compliance was, then, an awareness of their practical options, based on their previous experience, which led them to take the course which would maximise the freedom to write while not endangering their jobs.

## **Personal values**

While the area of the values which the journalists held in the GDR will be looked at in its own right, some other values were mentioned by the journalists interviewed which related to the question of why they complied with the media policy of the GDR when they were largely critical of it. These values are ones which were mentioned by only very few of the

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Frank Grünewald, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Alfred Gärtner, Berliner Zeitung

journalists, but they appear to cover a wide range of possible motivations for the actions of the journalists in general who were working in the GDR press. In contrast to the values which the journalists held and which they tried to apply to their work, the values in this section are largely ones which might be regarded as negative or undesirable. It would seem reasonable to hypothesize that it is partly because of this fact that so few journalists mentioned them. Too much should not be read into what was said by a small minority. Nevertheless, these factors contribute something to our understanding of the reasons for the journalists being so cooperative in their work.

### *Cowardice*

The first of the values which was mentioned in the interviews was personal cowardice. Robert Lohmann described this phenomenon as follows:

Ich hatte einfach nicht die Größe und die Courage, allen zu sagen, Schluß jetzt. Warum das so war, hing mit persönlicher Feigheit zusammen. [...] Das hören viele Leute nicht gerne, viele Kollegen, aber ich glaube wirklich, daß ein Erklärungsgrund wirklich auch persönliche Feigheit letzten Endes war.<sup>37</sup>

The issue of cowardice raises the question of its context. It related quite clearly to the disparity between what the journalists themselves thought and what they did about it. They complained amongst their friends and within their family, but actually *did* very little about their complaints in practice. Alfred Gärtner described his own position:

Ich habe mich [...] geärgert und habe das im kleinen Freundeskreis [...] und im eingeeengten Kollegenkreis, wenn man ja auch nicht mit allen über alles reden konnte, hat man darüber schon diskutiert, sich darüber geärgert, aber das führte zu keiner Änderung, weil der Punkt war, ich war nicht der einzige, dem es so ging, eigentlich ging es ja allen so, [...] und wir sprachen oft darüber, und man sagt dann eben auch immer, ja, das ist ein Mist, und das müßte mal anders sein, aber keiner hat mal, sage ich mal, den Anfang gemacht, so daß man [...] mitgerissen wurde. Das ist eigentlich eine ziemlich große Feigheit, die uns damals wirklich ausgezeichnet hat.<sup>38</sup>

This was the cowardice which was seen in dealing with the everyday restrictions and

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Alfred Gärtner, Berliner Zeitung

frustrations of the journalists' work in the GDR. Instead of standing up to the instructions which they disagreed with, they went along with them in practice, while criticising the system in private. In this sense, their behaviour could be seen as being unethical. It clearly contradicted their own principles, but they decided to place other considerations above these principles.

However, it would be unfair to paint a picture which appears so critical of the journalists. Although the factor of cowardice was certainly relevant to the extent of compliance of the journalists, it needs to be seen in the correct and fuller context. As Daniel Richter said,

man war da auch in gewisser Weise feige, man hat alles so mitgemacht, wie's langlief, weil man, sagen wir mal, eigentlich gar keine andere Möglichkeit hatte.<sup>39</sup>

This view of the practical impossibility of the individual journalist achieving anything significant on his own was supported by a colleague of Richter's, who went even further in his view of the realistic chances a newspaper had of defying politically-determined instructions:

Man war [...] sich auch der Sache bewußt, daß man nichts dann ändern könnte, als kleiner Journalist, selbst als Kollektiv, also selbst die ganze Freie Presse, da war ein Machtapparat auf der anderen Seite der Straße, gegen den man nicht ankämpfen konnte.<sup>40</sup>

This sense of the impossibility of going up against the political powers was a common one among journalists, and serves to qualify the issue of the journalists' cowardice. They believed that nothing would be achieved by opposing the instructions they had received.

### *Fear*

A powerful motivator in keeping the journalists in line was fear. There are three aspects of fear which need to be considered: firstly that of the consequences on the individual, secondly the consequences for those around him, and thirdly the effect on the cause he was supporting. The individual could lose his job and be assigned to another area where he would have no job satisfaction at all, or where he would be subject to the same or even greater political

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Daniel Richter, Freie Presse

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Reinhart Grobe, Freie Presse

restraints. His family could be affected, with his children's future possibilities restricted. Too hasty action could furthermore damage the overall movement and momentum towards change and progress.

The SED had almost total control over the individual's career path. It was quite clear from the interviews that this thought was present with most journalists, and that it played an important part in determining their reaction to the policies they were supposed to implement. Alfred Gärtner used the example of having had his texts altered and parts removed to suggest that too frequent argument on the part of the individual journalist could have negative consequences:

Ich hätte natürlich mich auch hinstellen können und sagen, nee, also wenn der Absatz hier nicht drin bleibt in dem Artikel, dann erscheint er, oder erscheint unter meinem Namen [nicht], aber das ist kaum geschehen, zwei-, dreimal, daß man auch gesagt hat, auch zu einem Auftragsthema, wenn man dann mal eins bekam, daß man gesagt hat, nee, das mache ich nicht oder so, weil man das nicht für gut hielt.<sup>41</sup>

What Gärtner implies was stated more clearly by others:

Man sagte, wenn du jetzt also hier versuchst, knallhart zu operieren und alles in Frage zu stellen, bist du also unmittelbar existenzbedroht. [...] Natürlich hat jeder gesagt, wenn ich jetzt hier also offen in Opposition gehe, ist sofort die Frage meiner Existenz gestellt.<sup>42</sup>

This area is a very practical one. The journalists had been trained *as journalists*, that was what they were good at, and had they decided to oppose the status quo, it was quite clear that they would lose their job. The question was then what else they could do. They would undoubtedly find another job, although this could take some time<sup>43</sup>, but it was unlikely to be one which they would enjoy at all. If they were offered a job in another area, and managed to progress in that career, they would soon find that they were up against the same kinds of problems which they had experienced at the newspaper:

In allen anderen Berufen waren ja die Reglementierungen mehr oder weniger auch vorhanden. In jedem Beruf, in dem Moment, wo man in eine Leitungsfunktion gekommen ist, ist man in der DDR auch politisch

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Alfred Gärtner, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Arnulf Ernst, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Hermann Schlesinger

reglementiert worden, es gab da keine ideologiefreien Bereiche.<sup>44</sup>

As such, any consistent opposition would have meant that the individual was never able to progress in any career, and this had implications for others as well. As Ernst expressed it,

man operiert ja nicht [...] im luftleeren Raum, sondern man hatte in dem Moment, wenn man verheiratet war und Kinder hatte, [...] Verantwortung.<sup>45</sup>

An example from Ernst's experiences shows how awareness of his family affected the way in which he made some of his decisions about complying with or opposing what was expected of him. He once refused to write a commentary on a subject where he felt that the story had been staged and the events manipulated in order to create favourable publicity for the GDR. The reaction to his refusal was that

mir wurde nur angedroht, daß ich mir das nicht leisten [noch mal leisten könnte], dann gäbe es also ein Disziplinverfahren oder so was, weil es wurde so ausgelegt direkt als Arbeitsverweigerung. [...] Eigentlich war das schon das Äußerste, was man machen konnte.<sup>46</sup>

The immediate reaction of his superiors was to point to the personal danger of a refusal to write an such article and the consequences to his own future. In response to the question of whether he would have done the same a second time or whether he would then have written the article, he stated that although the question was very hypothetical, he would most likely have written such an article the second time because "dann hat man automatisch an seine Familie gedacht".<sup>47</sup> Similar thoughts were expressed by Gärtner, who said that

wir hatten ziemlich früh Kinder und eine Familie, und damit ist man natürlich in so einem Land wie der DDR, war man in einer gewissen Art erpreßbar.<sup>48</sup>

Just what this involved was experienced by Ernst, who had family members who went to the Federal Republic illegally. Because of this, his father, who was a teacher, could not ever hope to become a headmaster. This would have been similar for the family, particularly the

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Peter Heym, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Arnulf Ernst, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Alfred Gärtner, Berliner Zeitung

children, of any journalist who lost his job because of overt criticism. The children would have been penalised in terms of their future progress and chances, and would have been powerless to do anything about it. It should be noted that as far as the GDR regime was concerned, criticism was criticism, and the issue of motivation was not a relevant question. It was of no importance to the SED that the journalists were seeking, through their criticism of the existing conditions in the GDR, to improve aspects of the country as it then was.

The final aspect of the fear with which the journalists lived had to do with their desire to improve things. Just as there was a tradeoff between their compliance on some issues where everything was totally rigid and their ability to create some freedoms for themselves in other areas, so there was also a tradeoff between short and long term goals. If they had never backed down on issues where they wished to do something other than what was expected of them, they would of course not have lasted long in the profession, but they also ran the risk of damaging their overall cause. There are two main aspects to this.

First of all, Michael Schneider believed that it was better to stay in his job, because he saw the alternatives as unacceptable, both for himself and for the readership:

Ich war eben der Auffassung, wenn ich dann hier rausgegangen wäre aus dieser Redakteursstelle in der Politik, dann hätten sie dann einen schönen alten Kommunisten eingesetzt, und das hätte natürlich auch nicht so richtig viel gebracht für die Leute unter dem Strich dann. Also das war so der Hauptansatz.<sup>49</sup>

For Schneider, it was better to stay at the paper and do what he could to improve things in some areas than to make way for someone else who may not have had these same goals, and who would have done exactly what he was told and much more conscientiously. For him, his short term interests were best served by leaving the paper and removing himself from all the problems. But in the long run, he realised that it was better to stay at the paper and ensure that there was someone there attempting to change things. The other alternative which Schneider saw was equally unappealing, but for different reasons:

Ich hätte auch weiter Nachrichten zusammenkürzen können, aber irgendwie wenn man so einen erzieherischen Impetus hat und gerne den Leuten irgendwo was mitteilen will, fühlt man sich auch irgendwie ein bißchen zu kurz, wenn man nur irgend etwas einkürzen darf, das war so

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Michael Schneider, Berliner Kurier

der Ansatz.<sup>50</sup>

This is similar to the fear others had of losing their job, but for Schneider, the alternative of merely editing news stories was not acceptable because it went against his perception of what journalism is about. This comes out in both statements just cited. It was important for him that he was able to do something for his readers, and he felt that it would be best for them, as well as for him personally, if he ensured that his behaviour was such that he would remain in the position he held at the newspaper. In other words, had he gone too far and lost his job, he would no longer have been able to help the readers who were important to him. The readers could then well have had someone else writing articles who was more concerned with the agitation and propaganda side of the media than with helping the readers with their problems. Anybody could edit news items from ADN, but if Schneider moved to such a position he would have lost the power to influence the people he most cared about helping. This is another example of the tradeoff which had to be made between compliance and defiance.

The second way in which too hasty opposition would have had a negative impact on others can be seen in the example of a letter written by Robert Lohmann and others protesting at *Neues Deutschland's* coverage of certain issues, and demanding that measures be taken to improve the conditions for journalists so that they could write more freely and truthfully. When this paper was distributed to selected individuals, there was an immediate political reaction, and Lohmann was summoned to explain his actions. Even in the conversation which ensued, it was pointed out to him that his actions ran the risk of damaging the general move towards change, and that as what had been written had had its effect already, it would be best to withdraw it again. The reasons he cited for agreeing to this are interesting, as they link together several of the aspects of fear which have been looked at, as well as providing an example of the way in which the longer term goals of those involved were more important to them than the short term effect which could be achieved by refusing to gather in the paper again:

Es ist gewesen aus einer Furcht heraus, aus einer Angst heraus, sich selber und auch diese Forderung, die man hatte, wegen des Faktors Timing womöglich zu beschädigen, aber es ist beides gewesen, aber es ist eine

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid



persönliche Angst gewesen auch, [...] aus einer gewissen Feigheit heraus, einer Angst vor Repressalien, könnte man sagen, eindeutig, wobei die so sehr groß nicht gewesen ist, [...] wir wußten eigentlich auch zu diesem späten Zeitpunkt, dieses Papier hatte seinen Zweck erfüllt, das spielte also auch eine Rolle.<sup>51</sup>

Lohmann here seems to have felt the various different types of fear which the SED managed to exert on the citizens of the GDR, and his experience serves as a useful example of how this fear was a motivator in a concrete situation. He was concerned about the potential implications for himself personally and for the movement towards change at a critical stage.

### *Opportunism*

There was also a degree of opportunism determining how the journalists would behave in the GDR. This seems to have begun before some of them entered the profession, and has to do with the way in which they were treated by the SED prior to becoming a journalist. However, this only applied to those who joined a newspaper from a non-journalistic training or background, such as Henry Wiedemann:

Man ist plötzlich geschmeichelt, wenn man also plötzlich von dieser Macht anerkannt wird als Intellektueller, man merkt, die Macht braucht einen, also die brauchen noch ein paar intellektuelle Leute, die besser formulieren können, und das ist so, Intellektuelle sind sehr gefährdet, wenn sie an der Macht beteiligt sein können, das ist so. Möglicherweise war ich gefährdeter als andere, ich fühlte mich da sehr geschmeichelt, [...] und weil ich mit diesen Zielen übereinstimmte, mit dem Ziel des Journalismus übereinstimmte, bin ich also in diese Funktion hineingewachsen.<sup>52</sup>

Because Wiedemann was made to feel needed and important, he was much more prepared to comply with the media policy which he later helped to implement at his newspaper. It was a natural reaction for him to support a system which was favouring him and which was presented to him as needing him, and he stood to gain a lot by complying with the party's wishes.

Opportunism was also seen as a factor by other journalists interviewed:

Man ging den Weg, [...] bestimmte Dinge zu versuchen, [...] alles

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, Neues Deutschland

halbherzig, sozusagen verbunden mit der Erfahrung, daß es eigentlich nie geht, daß es nicht funktioniert. Man hat dann opportunistisch reagiert, hat Dinge geschrieben, selbst geschrieben, von dem man wußte, daß sie so nicht stimmen, manchmal hat man's selbst gemacht, manchmal nur als aufgefordert wurde.<sup>53</sup>

This too can be seen in terms of the ethical basis for the journalists' decisions. For some of them, compliance offered enhanced career prospects and the chance to lessen conflict in their work lives. These potential personal gains in part guided their actions. At the same time, however, particularly in the case of Lohmann, there was still the desire to see changes brought about. These two values were often in conflict, and the balance between the two depended very much on the circumstances.

### *Enjoyment of the profession*

Working in an opportunistic manner was connected with the enjoyment the journalists had in their profession. They were willing to do what was necessary in their job because in principle they enjoyed their career, and did not want to have to give that up. In addition, the job offered them certain advantages which they did not want to lose, and this was a motivating factor in their decision not to endanger their position at the newspaper.

It is interesting to note the range of journalists who held this positive view of their profession, and which parts of the job it was which they enjoyed. On the one hand, there was Henry Wiedemann, who although totally committed to upholding the values of socialism and the SED's media policy, enjoyed his profession most when he was able to behave as a journalist, unrestricted by the stronger requirements of the SED, such as the coverage of the party conferences:

Man hat sich [...] beruhigt und gesagt, na gut, das ist die Spielregel, nächste Woche ist es vorbei, und dann machen wir wieder eine richtige Zeitung, also es war immer ein Wechselbad von Gefühlen, mal fühlte man sich nur als Papierträger des Politbüros, und dann hatte man wieder Freude am Journalismus.<sup>54</sup>

Despite his political allegiances, Wiedemann was also a journalist who took pleasure in being able to act as a journalist. He used to write a considerable amount during his time as editor,

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Theodor Ehrich, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, Neues Deutschland

which was uncommon for editors to do, but he found in this a degree of enjoyment which he was not able to find in the political coverage. In this way, he was able to compensate for the parts of his work which he found less satisfying. Referring to his attitude towards the political aspects of his work, he commented that

auch wenn man das alles verinnerlicht, bleibt man ja doch Journalist, und eine gewisse Distanz zu allem hat man ja trotzdem, man behandelt das ja nicht so hehr und ehrfürchtig, wie es dann in der Zeitung steht. [...] Man hatte zum Glück eben eine Zeitung, die nicht nur aus der Seite eins bestand, und nicht nur aus diesen notwendigen politischen Dingen, sondern man hatte eine Zeitung, in der es Kultur gab, in der es Sport gab, es also genügend Artikel auch gab, wo man einen gewissen Ausgleich hatte, wo man auch gesagt hat, also hier wollen wir jetzt mal versuchen, kritischer zu sein als andere, hier wollen wir jetzt mal versuchen, besser zu sein als andere, hier wollen wir mal Dinge tun, die in anderen Zeitungen gar nicht mal stehen.<sup>55</sup>

Wiedemann found a degree of satisfaction in working within the given boundaries and going as far as he was able to without straining at these limits. His political convictions did not allow him to challenge the necessity of political reporting, but he enjoyed being able to use what freedom he had in other areas. Again, this can be seen in terms of the tradeoff between political necessity and other possibilities within the paper, and also in the context of personal principles. Wiedemann placed his enjoyment of work above these principles, but of course, it was not simply a decision between these two possibilities. Instead, there were many other principles involved - his desire to see socialism succeed and develop, his concern for his family and so on. In each case, the journalists worked from the basis of a large number of principles, all of which combined to produce conflicts. They were forced to prioritise these principles in order to be able to make the necessary decisions and find solutions to the conflicts.

Alfred Gärtner saw a connection between his enjoyment of his job and the possibilities he had as a local reporter:

Es hat mir Spaß gemacht auch, der Beruf, mit allen Einschränkungen zwar, aber im lokalen Bereich konnte man eben viel selbst recherchieren und Leute befragen, war also viel selbstständiger, [...] das war schon eine ziemlich abwechslungsreiche Arbeit.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Alfred Gärtner, Berliner Zeitung

Gärtner's comment here is typical of the attitude of many journalists. Despite the restrictions, they enjoyed their job, and were unwilling to jeopardise their careers by defying clear instructions. Not only would that have had negative consequences for their future, but they would be leaving a chosen career.

This option of leaving the profession entirely was commented upon by Andreas Klein. He explained that first of all, this was not a practical alternative, as he had been trained as a journalist, but he then qualified the significance of this factor compared to the satisfaction he had in his work:

Ich habe also gar keine praktische Möglichkeit gesehen, irgend etwas anders zu machen, aber das war für mich auch gar nicht das Ausschlaggebende, sondern das Entscheidende war für mich, daß ich an dieser Arbeit durchaus Spaß hatte, daß es eine interessante Arbeit war.<sup>57</sup>

It appears contradictory that the journalists should on the one hand be so positive about their work in the GDR and yet so critical of the restrictions they faced. However, some comments by Anthon Dörr explain this apparent paradox:

Für mich gab's ein Problem, und zwar ich habe diesen Beruf gewählt, weil ich schreiben wollte. Ich wollte in den Journalismus, um einfach eine Arbeit auszuüben, die mir Spaß macht, ich dachte, daß sie mir Spaß machen könnte, und ich wollte zugleich weg aus meinem alten Beruf, ich [...] hatte immer das Bestreben, sehr viel Leute kennenzulernen, Umgang mit Menschen zu haben, und mich einzubringen.<sup>58</sup>

The satisfaction the journalists had came from aspects of their work which they were able to realise outside of the political confines. These were the parts of their job which had to do with their own personal reasons for becoming journalists in the first place, which, with the exception of the few journalists at *Neues Deutschland* already quoted on the subject, were in no way political or ideological. Instead, they wanted to be able to travel, to have a lot of contact with people, and to write. These provided an incentive to first of all enter the profession, and then to stay in it even when confronted by the reality of political control.

Journalists in the GDR were in many ways privileged. There was a degree of access to Western press products which the ordinary GDR citizen had no possibility of obtaining,

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Andreas Klein, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Anthon Dörr, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

although most could receive Western television and radio stations. This access to information was a factor mentioned by Michael Schneider in explaining why he did not leave the profession.<sup>59</sup> This was another contributory factors in the decision of the journalists to stay in the profession and comply with the state media policy's expectations of their behaviour.

### *Identification with a majority group*

The final personal value which relates specifically to the reasons the journalists had for their behaviour in the GDR is one which was only mentioned by one journalist. Theodor Ehrich made some very interesting observations on his view of human nature, and the questions which he had been asking himself about this very question of why so many people had gone along with a system they were critical of. He aired some of his thoughts on the human desire to belong to a group, and the consequent compliance with the behaviour of that group, and contrasted that with the ability of some to go their own way and not be concerned about what others - the majority - thought or did. He raised this question in relation to the availability of information for journalists, and from there went on to ask some more fundamental questions:

Als Journalist hatte man keinen Zugriff auf Primärinformation, man hatte immer nur Zugriff auf Sekundärinformation. Man hatte keinerlei Zugriff, sagen wir mal zum Beispiel, auf die reale wirtschaftliche Lage, man war immer angewiesen auf Analyse entweder aus Westmedien oder von einer Handvoll Wissenschaftler, die versucht haben, die Dinge ehrlich zu analysieren, und dann stand man vor der Frage, wer hat recht? - hat die Mehrheit der Wissenschaftler recht, die sagen, das ist so und so, oder hat die Minderheit von Wissenschaftlern recht, die sagen, dieses Land balanciert am Abgrund, was man auch gar nicht eingestehen wollte selbst, weil man dieses Land geliebt hat, und identifiziert war mit diesen Verhältnissen, da hat man sich dann oft entschieden für die Position der Mehrheit, und dahinter steckt auch, glaube ich, noch viel mehr, dahinter steckt eine bestimmte charakterliche Frage, neigt man dazu, zur Mehrheit zu gehören, oder kann man damit gut leben, zur Minderheit zu gehören und [...] von dort aus dann sozusagen zu arbeiten und zu leben, aus einer solchen Position, und ich wage mal zu behaupten, das gilt für mich, und ich glaube mal, das gilt auch gerade für viele Journalisten, eher die Auffassung, es lebt sich schon ganz gut, wenn man zur Mehrheit gehört, zu der Gruppe von Leuten, die hier was zu sagen haben, im Lande die

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Michael Schneider, Berliner Kurier

Macht haben.<sup>60</sup>

This can be applied to the journalists in the GDR. Very few were prepared to stand out from the crowd by leaving their job in protest. Most preferred to stay where they could be tolerably comfortable with their position and where they were one of a large group of individuals who criticised the media policy of the GDR but did little about it. They reserved their true views for private airing with their colleagues, friends and family.

There are clear links in these comments to the principles which the journalists had. So far, a number of different principles have been identified: fear, job satisfaction, commitment to socialism; but there are also more abstract principles such as Ehrich's ideas about wishing to belong to a group. For the journalists who wanted to belong to the majority group, a prerequisite was that they comply with the SED. Not only did the majority do this, but this was the only way to stay a part of mainstream society. If the group to which someone wishes to belong acts a certain way, it is necessary to behave similarly in order to be compatible with that group. In the context of the GDR, the necessary behaviour was compliance with the SED. A degree of latitude was of course possible, as the journalists were able to identify certain areas where they felt that criticism would not endanger their standing in society. Those who were willing to stand out from the crowd would have been unlikely to enter the journalistic profession in the first place, and would have been unlikely to stay there had they made it that far. Of course, the SED also wanted to ensure that the people working as journalists were a part of mainstream society, and were going to cooperate, and these two factors served to reinforce each other.

### **Ways in which the restrictions were dealt with**

Some of the ways in which journalists dealt with the restrictions they were under in the GDR have already been touched upon, both in the introductory chapters and in the preceding analysis. However, there are some aspects which should be looked at individually, as they indicate some of the variety of reactions which were provoked in the journalists and raise further questions about the nature of journalists' resistance in the GDR.

The journalists had a definite *need* to deal with the reality of their professional life. All those

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Theodor Ehrich, Berliner Zeitung

interviewed indicated a degree of frustration with aspects of their job which went beyond normal human dissatisfaction with any job. As would be expected, there were great differences in the reactions the journalists showed. Individuals such as Henry Wiedemann were less affected personally by the restrictions of the media policy, due to his identification with the system and his internalisation of the media policy. Other journalists found life as a journalist in the GDR much harder, such as Katja Buchwald. However, even Wiedemann has noticed the difference in his work more recently describing his experiences in the unified Germany as “eine gewisse Befreiung”, as he is now “von diesem ideologischen Druck weg”.<sup>61</sup> This awareness came only after 1989, whereas with others, their problems with the GDR system started much sooner. Comments indicating the journalists’ frustration and sense of powerlessness include:

Es ist also wenig gewesen an Möglichkeiten, relativ wenig, und das hat also eben wachsende Unzufriedenheit erzeugt und verbunden damit mit der Hoffnung an Änderung.<sup>62</sup>

Und wenn dann wieder so ein Artikel zusammengebrochen ist, oder wenn man den zusammengestrichen gekriegt hat, dann war das schon hochgradig frustrierend.<sup>63</sup>

Ich habe auch richtig doll geweint, also richtig geheult, vor Wut, vor Enttäuschung, vor Bitterkeit.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to these emotional responses, there was also the intellectual realisation that things were not right, which was experienced by some journalists:

Die Kluft, der Widerspruch zwischen diesem [missionarischen] Auftrag, diesem selbst empfundenen Auftrag, und den Möglichkeiten seiner Erfüllung [...] ist überlagert worden von fortbestehender Hoffnung, daß bestimmte Unzulänglichkeiten und Unmöglichkeiten, diese Mission sozusagen auszufüllen, eines Tages auch wieder bessere Bedingungen finden würden.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, Neues Deutschland

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Michael Schneider, Berliner Kurier

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Katja Buchwald, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

## *Hope*

The hope which Lohmann mentioned in the above quotation was one way in which the journalists dealt with the frustration they felt. It has already been mentioned in relation to the theoretical reasons the journalists had for their compliance with the media policy, but there is also a second, and more important aspect to this hope. Having a hope of change was a way in which the journalists were able to deal with the problems they had at the time, before the changes had been seen, as they believed that what they were experiencing would soon improve, and that the past would then be of lesser importance. That the journalists' hope was also a way of dealing with their current problems is also suggested by the fact that they did not actually *act* upon this hope to any great extent. Their hope was tempered by their experience of reality in the GDR, and did not lead them to push for more changes - "viel zu wenig Drängen auf Änderung".<sup>66</sup> Alfred Gärtner suggested that this may be a particularly German phenomenon: everyone looks upwards and waits for something to happen above them, while doing nothing themselves.<sup>67</sup>

## *Nische*

The best-known way in which GDR citizens dealt with what was often an unpopular regime was by finding a *Nische*. This concept was mentioned by some of the journalists interviewed. The most express mention was by Arnulf Ernst:

Um das vielleicht auf einen ganz einfachen Nenner zu bringen, es wurde damals der Begriff geprägt der Nischengesellschaft, jeder zog sich dann in seine persönliche Nische zurück und gab im Grunde genommen die offizielle Politik an der Haustür ab.<sup>68</sup>

## **Private and public**

The most common form of the *Nische* was the way in which GDR citizens differentiated between their private views and those which were aired in public. For journalists, this was particularly significant. The views they published in their newspaper often bore no resemblance to what they really thought themselves:

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Alfred Gärtner, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Arnulf Ernst, Leipziger Volkszeitung



Man hat unterschwellig ganz anders geredet, oder im privaten Kreis, aber offiziell auf Arbeit gab's das nicht, man war ja eine Parteizeitung, man mußte die Meinung der Partei vertreten, und danach habe ich mich gerichtet.<sup>69</sup>

The journalists' own feelings and views were only expressed to their close friends and family members:

Wir haben schon immer versucht, kleine Schritte zu gehen, also indem wir versucht haben, ein paar Themen in die Zeitung zu bringen, [...] relativ erfolglos. Außerhalb der Zeitung haben wir natürlich mit Bekannten aus verschiedenen Lebensbereichen [...] über diese Dinge sehr sehr oft diskutiert, also es gab bestimmt zweimal in der Woche lange abendliche Diskussionen darüber, wie man das alles besser machen könnte, oder darüber, wie beschissen das alles ist und so, aber das war's.<sup>70</sup>

The discussions which took place were often related to the actual work and working conditions of journalists, either specifically a discussion of the issues which could not appear in the newspaper, or a more general discussion of the problems journalists faced:

[Die Probleme wurden] häufig diskutiert, [...] im Journalisten-, im Kollegenkreis, fast durchweg unter dem Aspekt, was müßte man tun, was kann man tun, damit bessere Voraussetzungen, bessere Bedingungen für das Arbeiten von linken Journalisten in der DDR bestehen.<sup>71</sup>

Some of the discussions even took place at the newspapers where the journalists worked:

Was man hatte in der Redaktion, das war eine ausgesprochen offene Diskussion, also da gab's kaum [...] irgendwie Schönreden von Sachen, sondern dort wurden die Probleme sehr offen ausgesprochen, bloß [...] was in die Zeitung kam, das hatte relativ wenig, oder oft relativ wenig mit diesen Diskussionen zu tun, weil dann immer die Kontrollfunktion darauf lag, alles aus der Zeitung zu entfernen, was auch immer in irgendeiner Weise der offiziell vorgegebenen Politik widersprechen würde.<sup>72</sup>

The idea of improving things in the GDR was seen again in these discussions, as was the fact that they were very much only discussions, and did not lead to any concrete actions, rather like the hope which the journalists had. This point was made by Alfred Gärtner:

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with Daniel Richter, Freie Presse

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Theodor Ehrich, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Franz Becher, Neues Deutschland

Das ist so eine Frage, mit der ich mich auch auseinandersetzen muß, daß ich das eigentlich alles auch mitgemacht habe und richtig opportunistisch mich sozusagen verhalten habe, mich angepaßt habe, den Gegebenheiten, natürlich im kleinen Kreis mich darüber beklagt habe, was da läuft, was da eben nicht läuft, und was falsch gemacht wird, welche Sachen verändert werden müssen, aber letztlich hätte das eben Konsequenzen haben müssen auch für mein Handeln, ist eben nicht passiert, im Prinzip also, ich war ein sehr artiger Bürger, sicherlich keiner, der vorneweg rennt mit der Fahne, aber eben einer dieser Mitläufer.<sup>73</sup>

Because the discussions did not lead to direct action, it seems reasonable to ask whether they had another purpose. On the one hand, Antje Schneider thought that there were several factors which prevented the journalists from taking direct steps resulting from their convictions about the problems of the GDR. These factors had to do with the lack of direct need to change things:

Vielleicht ist man selber zu bequem gewesen, im Prinzip lief ja alles, man hatte die Arbeit, die Kinder waren untergebracht, die Familie stimmte, es war ja nicht so, daß wir menschlich zu leiden hatten. Es fehlte doch, ich glaube, zu allererst auch der innere Antrieb zu ändern, ändern zu wollen.<sup>74</sup>

This is a possible explanation for the lack of action resulting from the discussions. At the same time, however, the discussions can be seen simply to have acted as a pressure valve for the journalists as they were constantly confronted by restrictions on what they could do and instructions as to what they had to do.

Wenn man jung ist, sieht man vieles enthusiastisch und denkt, also das kann man ändern, und dann merkt man im Laufe der Jahre, nichts kann man ändern, und das bröckelt dann so nach und nach ab, und dann versucht man, sich eben irgendwo eine Ausweichmöglichkeit zu schaffen, und die hat bei mir darin bestanden, daß ich das, was ich nicht schreiben durfte, teilweise versucht habe, in Diskussionsrunden einfach umzusetzen.<sup>75</sup>

The journalists used their private discussions to provide a vent for their feelings which was withheld from them in their work, but was at the same time made necessary by the nature of this work. Discussing the problems of GDR-journalism among colleagues and friends was the most common way of dealing with these issues, but there were also other things done

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<sup>73</sup> Interview with Alfred Gärtner, Berliner Zeitung.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Antje Schneider, Freiburger Zeitung

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Brigitte Fischer, Berliner Zeitung

which come under the category of the public-private distinction, such as finding a different focus of interest and specialising in certain departments.

### **Focus of interests**

While the strong educational and ideological aspects of the journalistic profession for some journalists meant that their profession provided a focus for their lives, for others, the job of a journalist was not anything different from that of other people. For the latter group, their work was “für mich erst mal eine Arbeit gewesen wie jede andere auch”<sup>76</sup>, and it did not provide this focus to the same extent as for those who were more integrated into the system. Walter Hoff had a similarly detached relationship with his profession:

Ich habe den Job immer gesehen so wie [...] früher die Künstler, sagen wir Maler, nehmen wir mal die Renaissance, die haben dann ihre Auftragschinken gemalt, und wenn sie dann Lust und Zeit hatten [...], haben sie dann die Bilder gemalt, die sie selber noch wollten, und waren dann zufrieden, oder auch nicht. [...] Ich habe glücklicherweise in dem Fachgebiet, wo ich tätig war, viele Spielräume gehabt, privat also auch sehr viele Projekte machen können.<sup>77</sup>

This was one specific way in which a journalist was able to use his other abilities to provide an outside focus away from his work, which was not possible for all journalists, who had only received a journalistic training. Hoff was perhaps typical of some of those journalists who were *Quereinsteiger* and had never been trained as journalists, but had joined the newspaper because of their other abilities and specialities. They could more easily create a distraction from their work because of this, but at the same time, it was possible for them to believe that they did not need another focus in their lives. Nevertheless, even when they claimed not to have needed a distraction from their work, they often showed the signs of finding just such a distraction. The best example of this is Henry Wiedemann. Addressing precisely the issue of the distinction many made between private and public life, he claimed that

ich habe nicht zwei Leben gelebt, also ein Leben, das privat gesagt hat, das ist alles Unsinn und schlecht, und die öffentliche Person, die das alles gelobt hat, sondern ich habe das sehr verinnerlicht.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with Frank Grünewald, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Walter Hoff, Neues Deutschland

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, Neues Deutschland

While it is true that the positive picture of socialism which he painted in his work was also what he believed, he also showed how outside interests could take him away from the pressures of his work:

Ich selbst habe sehr viel geschrieben als Chefredakteur. Das machen ja Chefredakteure an sich nicht. Aber ich habe sehr viel selbst geschrieben, habe auch weiterhin Kulturartikel geschrieben, so daß ich also ein bißchen Ausgleich hatte, also immer wenn es alles zu politisch und zu offiziell wurde in dem ganzen Job, dann bin ich ins Theater gegangen und [habe] dann Theaterrezensionen geschrieben, also fühlte man sich dann wieder etwas wohler.<sup>79</sup>

For many, then, the way in which their private life could be used to reduce the pressure they felt from their work was very individual, depending logically on their interests and abilities. For others, however, this option did not really exist to the same extent. It seems also likely that they were not as aware of their coping strategies, taking these things for granted. For example, perhaps the role their family played acted as a pressure valve, but this was not something which they consciously sought to promote, and as such they did not mention such factors in the interviews. At the same time, their comments on the way in which they were able to discuss things with their families and friends would suggest that these people in a way provided “outside interests” which provided a focus for their attention which was not directly connected with their work.

### **Specialisation of department**

For many journalists, the department of the newspaper they were working in made a great difference to the way they felt about their work. In the introductory chapters, the differences between the degree of ideology and compulsion between departments was discussed, and the journalists interviewed confirmed this information both directly, and more interestingly indirectly through their comments on their experiences in each department. As has already been seen, some journalists used their work in the *Lokales* department to attempt to improve aspects of other people’s lives, but their decision to work in that department was itself often a conscious decision to enable them to deal with the SED’s differentiated policies towards each department. It was common for those who were dealing with *Kultur* and *Lokales* to have chosen to work in those departments as these were the only ones where they felt that

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid

they had any degree of freedom.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, Arnulf Ernst found that working in a small *Redaktion* away from large cities had definite advantages:

Man war etwas abseits, man war nicht so eingezogen in diese ganzen Sitzungen und Auswertungen und Beschlüsse und so, sondern man konnte selbstständiger arbeiten, demzufolge hatten wir auch größeren Spielraum.<sup>81</sup>

Working at a smaller paper which was affiliated with a larger one had the advantage that the journalists were far removed from the larger political aims and concerns of the party leaders, and as such, they were able to practise their profession in a more satisfying manner than the corresponding journalists at larger newspapers. This fact was also mentioned by Anthon Dörr:

Ich muß sagen, ich hatte während meiner Arbeit [...] in Halle das Glück, ich würde es als Glück bezeichnen, in der Lokalredaktion tätig zu sein. Das heißt also, ich beschäftigte mich viel mit Stadtgeschichte, viel mit lokalem Leben, auch mit Kommunalpolitik, und eigentlich das, was ich wollte, mit Menschen, und insofern war's, denke ich mal, schon eine Verwirklichung [meiner Berufsvorstellung], was ich gemacht habe.<sup>82</sup>

For others, a similar option to choosing which department to work in was the option of remaining at the university in Leipzig and conducting research and teaching other students at the *Sektion* there. The reasons for doing so were similar to those for moving into a certain department at a newspaper. There was more freedom available, and it was possible to introduce personal ideas about journalism into the courses taught. Annemarie Müller described her reasons for staying at the university until after 1989 as follows:

Ich wollte eigentlich nicht meinen Namen über so irgendwelche [...] Parteibeiträge setzen, also das war nicht das, was ich mir unter Journalismus vorgestellt habe. Ich habe natürlich angefangen halt wie eben viele junge Mädchen da, ach, Journalismus, kommen wir mit vielen Leuten zusammen und kann vielleicht mal *reisen*, das wäre ganz toll und so. Ja, und dann habe ich gemerkt, naja, es sind doch ziemlich enge Grenzen gezogen, und es ist wirklich also sturr parteiverbunden und gerade an der Universität im Forschungsrahmen und so weiter, es war doch mehr noch möglich und mit aufgeschlossenen jungen Studenten und so, das war eigentlich schöner.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Katja Buchwald, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Arnulf Ernst, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Anthon Dörr, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Annemarie Müller, Leipziger Volkszeitung

Udo Meyn found that more criticism was possible at the university than at a newspaper, which was his main reason for staying there rather than seeking a job at a paper:

Man hatte natürlich in bestimmten Fragen auch mehr Möglichkeiten, über kritische Dinge zu reden und sich zu streiten, als es im Tagesjournalismus möglich war. Das nahm dann natürlich auch zu, in den achtziger Jahren, daß also Orientierungen ausgegeben worden sind, oder Verbote, was also nichts in der Zeitung zu tun hatte, und davon war man eigentlich an der Universität ein bißchen frei davon, von solchen Verboten, also diskutieren mit Studenten über alle Themen, das war überhaupt kein Problem.<sup>84</sup>

At the same time, a reading of the *Sektion's* publication, *Theorie und Praxis des sozialistischen Journalismus* shows that just as at the newspapers, when it came to the written word, the writers had to follow and promote the party line. While the staff at the university were able to discuss issues openly with students, the journalists at the papers were also able to do that to some degree with each other, and the same extent of care was needed in deciding with whom they could share their views. At the same time, those who stayed at the university had also completed a *Volontariat* at a newspaper just as all other journalism students, and many journalists made decisions about their future career plans during this time in which they learned about the reality of working in each of the departments at the newspaper. The decision to stay at the university, therefore, was just as informed as the decision to attempt to work in a certain department. However, it was often the case that neither option was available to the individual journalist, who was assigned to a particular paper and a particular department, then finding that the possibilities for individuals in their work were very limited indeed.

### **Suppression of feelings**

For some, these more positive moves were either not possible or not sufficient. For them, the only option left to deal with the restrictions was to suppress their feelings about their work. Andreas Klein explained how this fitted into the larger picture of the ways in which people could deal with the restrictions imposed by the SED's media policy:

Letzten Endes [...] nur auf zwei Methoden. Es gab einige wenige Kollegen, die ich kenne, die damit überhaupt nicht klar gekommen sind und die dann aus dem Journalismus rausgekommen sind, und wenn man

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with Udo Meyn, Leipziger Volkszeitung

das nicht wollte, sondern wenn man weitermachen wollte, dann mußte man die Probleme erst mal ein Stück verdrängen und dann sehen, daß man also in dem Spielraum [...] interessante Arbeit macht, oder mußte sich dann persönlich also rangehen, an die positiven Erlebnisse orientieren und sagen, ach das andere ist nicht so wichtig. [...]

Wenn man [...] Dinge so sehr verdrängt und sich dann selbst ein bißchen täuschen will, dann führt es dazu, daß man dann insgesamt doch etwas unzufriedener ist [...] aber das ist die Situation, in der man sich dann auf Dauer nicht so wohl fühlt, und ich habe selbst gemerkt nach der Wende, daß ich mich auch etwas verändert habe und mich immer nicht wohler gefühlt habe, aber das empfindet man dann sicherlich erst hinterher.<sup>85</sup>

While the GDR was in existence, the journalists had no point of reference with which they could compare their own situation. They were often not aware of the pressure they were under, as they could not know what their professional life would be like under a different system. Perhaps a realisation of this would have led to more changing occupations, but the GDR's political convictions meant that the opportunity to experience life in other countries was limited.

As well as the principles guiding the journalists' behaviour which have already been examined, there were also a number of others which they discussed in the context of actual values they attempted to apply to their work in the GDR. Looking at them will allow the significance of the journalists' consciences to be examined, and from there, conclusions can be drawn about their ethical standards in the GDR.

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with Andreas Klein, Leipziger Volkszeitung

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### The values held by GDR journalists

In addition to those values which have been examined in the context of the journalists' reasons for complying with the state media policy, there are a number of other values which the journalists interviewed mentioned, which relate more to their perception of the standards of journalism than to their role as journalists working specifically in the GDR. However, also in this area, the clear impact of the GDR in the journalists' work is seen, and the way in which the application of values was restricted by the media policy becomes clear.

It is noteworthy that some of the values mentioned by the journalists are not those which would be regarded as personal values in the West. For example, in the West, "progress" is not a value in itself. However, in the GDR, "progress" was regarded as a value as much as more common ones such as honesty. As such, the terms used by the journalists have been retained, rather than rephrasing to use more Western terms.

#### Truth

The most common value journalists applied in their work was that of truth, which was for some the basis of all the other values they held:

Rein als persönliches, erstrebenswertes Ziel war es natürlich die Wahrheit.<sup>1</sup>

Ich habe zumindest immer versucht, in dem, was ich gemacht habe, soweit das irgendsmöglich war, [...] an der Wahrheit zu bleiben bei allem, also ob das nun Reportagen waren oder Interviews, Porträts oder solche Dinge, habe ich zumindest versucht, also nicht diesen sozialistischen Glorienschein über alles zu breiten, und versucht, so realistisch wie möglich zu arbeiten, und habe eigentlich auch mal versucht, daß ich mit dem Stück, was ich geschrieben habe, vor mir selber bestehen kann. [...] Da habe ich versucht zumindest, das immer so zu machen, daß ich es vor mir verantworten konnte und sagen konnte, also du hast nicht gelogen, du

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Franz Becher, Neues Deutschland



hast nicht die Wahrheit und die Realität so verbogen, daß sie jetzt in irgendein Bild paßt, was gerade gewünscht wird, und das ist eigentlich immer mein Prinzip gewesen, vielleicht das allereinfachste, was es gibt, aber das, denke ich, ist eine Grundlage für all das, was ich sowieso immer gemacht habe. Ich bin da weniger mit irgendeinem großen pathetischen menscheits-aufklärerischen Anspruch rangegangen als eben vielmehr zu versuchen, im kleinen, im einzelnen, im Detail doch zu zeigen, wie es richtig wahr ist, oder wie ich es als wahr und richtig empfunden habe beziehungsweise aufgenommen habe, auch widerzuspiegeln.<sup>2</sup>

From the previous discussion of the media in the GDR, it seems logical to question the way in which journalists could attempt and, more importantly, could manage to report truthfully. Of course, the limitations were again dependent on the area in which the individual journalist was working, but the desire to be truthful was one which was seen throughout the spectrum of those interviewed. In the case of Brigitte Fischer above, truth was to be found and applied in the details of her work, and the concept was clearly applicable to her daily routine. There is also a clear link to earlier comments about the greater frequency of attempts to improve conditions at a local and more immediate level than at the level of the state, and Fischer's attempts to tell the truth in her work rather than follow a desire to educate others seems to conform to this pattern. For the moment, it is useful to examine the way in which journalists believed that they were able to be truthful in their work, in terms of giving accurate and fair assessments of events taking place. In this area, the limitations in practice were recognized by the journalists:

Mein moralischer Anspruch war einfach, erstens nicht zu lügen, jedenfalls so weit wie möglich die Wahrheit so darzustellen, wie sie im Allgemeinverständnis ist, [...] was dann wahr oder nicht wahr ist, da kann man sich ja fürchterlich darüber verfransen, aber nichtsdestotrotz irgendeinen zumindest kritischen Journalismus und einen wahrhaften Journalismus rüberzubringen, und das habe ich eben möglichst versucht zu tun. Natürlich ging das auch nicht immer, ist ja auch keine Frage.<sup>3</sup>

Of particular significance is the phrase "so weit wie möglich", a clear indication that there were these limits to the application of truth. Theodor Ehrich expressed similar views on the applicability of the concept of truth to his work in the GDR, but in much stronger language:

Ein Wert ist Ehrlichkeit, oder Ehrlichkeit und Wahrheit, ich glaube, daß

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Brigitte Fischer, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Michael Schneider, Berliner Kurier

man damals schon wußte, daß der nicht haltbar ist. Es war manches wahr gewesen, was man in der Zeitung geschrieben hat, aber man [wußte] schon damals, daß eine Reihe von Dingen, die man im Blatt hatte, einfach nicht wahr waren, und insofern glaube ich, das war kein Wert.<sup>4</sup>

Most of those mentioning the importance of truth in their work pointed to the fact that in practice it was not something which could be realised. Of course, it could be argued that this is also not something which is realised in the Western media either, but application of truth in the GDR media was at a more basic level. Andreas Klein gives some useful indications of the differences:

Vom Grundsatz her habe ich mich als Journalist durchaus bemüht, die Wahrheit zu schreiben [...]. Man konnte es nicht immer so bis zum letzten Punkt verfolgen, man mußte auch Dinge weglassen und manche Dinge mehr in den Mittelpunkt schieben, als es eigentlich gerechtfertigt hätte, aber so die bewußte Desinformation oder die klare Lüge, also was man vermeiden konnte, ich denke, [...] das habe ich auch geschafft, daß ich da den Wert zumindest in den allermeisten Fällen also verwirklichen konnte.<sup>5</sup>

These remarks are somewhat similar to those of Brigitte Fischer seen earlier. The way in which these journalists attempted to apply their concept of truth was in ensuring that they did not lie for personal gain or to comply with something which was desired by their party superiors. This goes beyond the issues of objectivity and selection of information, and instead moves into the realm of deliberately altering facts. Klein believes that he was able to avoid introducing lies into his work, while others, such as Ehrich, felt that this was not a real possibility for journalists in all cases. Such questions of deliberate lies are very rare in the Western media, but because of the SED's perceived political necessities, journalists often found themselves in the position where they were required to write something which they knew was not true.

At the same time, some thought that even in the area of giving prominence to certain events and facts and neglecting to mention others truth was compromised, and in this sense, they were applying much more stringent criteria of truth. Klein himself noted that

es hat durchaus auch in meiner Anfangszeit als Journalist solche Phasen gegeben, daß ich den Eindruck hatte, also das ist jetzt nicht in Ordnung,

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Theodor Ehrich, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Andreas Klein, Leipziger Volkszeitung

das kannst du jetzt nicht machen. Da ging's also manchmal so um Sachen, die man sagt, also zum Beispiel wie [...] bei den Veranstaltungen dieser Partei und bei der Selbstdarstellung dieser Partei, daß das möglichst alles ein bißchen hochgebauscht und schöngefärbt werden sollte, und es war ja nicht die Unwahrheit, aber wenn man ehrlich zu sich war, war's ja nun auch nicht die Wahrheit, was man da schrieb, es war also eine sehr bestimmte Auslegung bestimmter Sachen.<sup>6</sup>

Although journalists in the GDR held truth to be an important value, it was at the same time one which they realised they were not able to apply to their work as they would have liked to have done. A part of their work involved suppressing information, for example about airline and train disasters in socialist countries, while giving overemphasis to the negative aspects of Western societies, such as unemployment and drug problems. In this area of news selection and presentation, they received clear instructions as to what was to appear in the paper and how it was to be presented. The possibilities for applying their own standards of truth were very limited in such circumstances, and the journalists were aware of the fact that their own values were being compromised in this respect. The only area where some felt able to be able to give truth the place it deserved was in avoiding deliberate lies. Even this, however, was not something which was achieved by everyone.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the mere fact that some believed that they had been able to work in a truthful manner indicates that in this area, they believed themselves to be acting in accordance with their principles. Not all could say this, however, and some were well aware of the compromises they were making.

The idea of there being a socialist truth, a kind of "higher truth", which should have been promoted by the journalists, is one which might have been expected to be brought up by the journalists interviewed. As has already been seen, they were committed to socialism and to the GDR, but despite this, none made the appeal that they were seeking to serve these things and to promote a higher truth. This would have served as a justification for their actions in their reporting, which they themselves admitted were not in keeping with the ideal of truthful coverage of events. However, from the interviews, it is clear that the concept of truth the journalists were using related not to a socialist truth, but to the way in which objective facts were dealt with and news was selected and presented. An exception to this statement is seen in the case of those who were extremely committed to the ideological aspects of their work,

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Theodor Ehrlich, Berliner Zeitung

such as Henry Wiedemann. These individuals did mention that values such as truth and honesty had to be subservient to political considerations. However, even in these cases, there is no sense of the journalists seeking to defend their actions; instead they seemed able to distance themselves from their actions in the GDR and provide a critical assessment of their work. This has become possible because they have since experienced another system of government and employment with which they can compare their working conditions in the GDR. However, they were also critical of the expectations which certain newspapers have of their employees now, and the way in which truth is compromised in their work today. These criticisms will be examined in the context of the journalists' experiences since 1989.

Allied to the concept of truth is the degree of honesty in reporting. Although it seems that some journalists used the terms "truth" and "honesty" interchangeably, others made a distinction between the two, and it is worthwhile looking at their comments.

## Honesty

The idea of honesty was seen as being primarily related to the interaction between a journalist and another individual. At the same time, however, there were the same restrictions as with the application of truth:

Dieses Prinzip der Ehrlichkeit hat man versucht, immer bis zu einem gewissen Punkt durchzusetzen, bis man praktisch an gesellschaftliche Schranken gestoßen ist.<sup>8</sup>

Of more interest, however, is the level at which the value of honesty was applied:

Ich glaube schon, daß es - oder zumindestens versuche ich, das von mir zu behaupten - ich habe immer versucht, ehrlich zu schreiben, und wenn ich über einen Menschen - wir haben ja viel auch Porträts geschrieben über Leute, die in der Firma gearbeitet haben oder die jetzt besondere Leistungen hatten oder so was - dann habe ich doch versucht, auch den Menschen darzustellen. Also ich glaube, wenn nicht eine gewisse Portion Ehrlichkeit da war, dann wurde man nicht ernst genommen, in unserem Job, auch zu DDR-Zeiten, das muß man sagen.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike truth, which was seen as being something which was specifically discussed by the

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Antje Schneider, Freiburger Zeitung

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

journalists in terms of their treatment of impersonal facts, honesty was something which was to be applied at the level of human relationships. This same value could be applied to the relationships they developed with their informants and their readers. Honesty gave the journalist a degree of credibility. This important distinction between the way in which people and inanimate objects were dealt with is central to the thinking of the journalists. This will become clear in their response to methods of gathering information, but the roots of this attitude are already seen here. Whereas the journalists were not so concerned in the GDR about the way in which they were dealing with facts, they were much more concerned that their treatment of people should be acceptable. Part of the rationale for this lay in the fact that they saw themselves as being in a comparable situation to the people with whom they were dealing. Because of this, it was important that these people be treated well. This principle of human relationships was one which many journalists could apply to their work, as Alfred Gärtner put it:

Also, ich hielt mal für sehr wichtig [...], daß ich [...] mit meinem Partner, mit dem ich mich abgebe, also mit dem ich spreche und ich interviewe und so, daß ich dem sehr ehrlich gegenüber trete und mich auch an Absprachen mit dem halte, weil ich meine, daß diese Ehrlichkeit ziemlich wichtig ist, gegeneinander.<sup>10</sup>

Paradoxically, the application of this value between Gärtner and the people he interviewed served the interests of the party, as he accepted individuals' reluctance to answer difficult questions. In cases where someone was avoiding giving a direct answer to a question Gärtner had posed, he tended to back down and avoid confrontation, a reaction which stemmed from his desire to treat the individual fairly and not put too much pressure on him. At the same time, he was aware of the fact that this put him into an impossible situation. On the one hand, he was attempting to apply the principle of honesty, and on the other hand, in doing so with interviewees, he confirmed what has already been seen about the limitations on truth - "man hat natürlich bewußt auch Sachen weggelassen und damit auch bewußt gelogen"<sup>11</sup> - a typical conflict which arose for journalists. Had Gärtner not backed down, but instead pushed for the answers he was seeking, he would have obtained the information he was looking for (although it is doubtful whether it would ever have appeared in the paper), but would have felt that he had treated another person unfairly and compromised the principle

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Alfred Gärtner, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

of honesty. Either way, a principle was at stake. But as people were more important than raw facts, the SED gained from the dilemma, as Gärtner would always let the information go rather than his relationship with the other person.

## Professional ethics

The role of professional ethics in the work of a GDR journalist is one which was also mentioned frequently by the journalists interviewed. Professional values were, however, very much subservient to political considerations. This was seen in the journalists' training and then later on in the practical discussion about the journalists' work:

Es gab schon bestimmte Grundsätze [in der Ausbildung], daß man Dinge, also zumindest in der Theorie also vermittelt hat, also auch immer im Interesse des Menschen, also humanitär und so, aber dennoch stand irgendwo, überall stand die politische Linie der Partei, die Linie wurde ausgeschlachtet bis zum geht nicht mehr.<sup>12</sup>

In the journalists' everyday work and work-related discussions with each other, ethics played a small role, but again, purely ethical debates were not seen, and any ethical considerations were very much a part of a broader ideological discussion:

In dem Maße, in dem sich Kollegen im vertrauten Gespräch, das gab es viel, über Unzulänglichkeiten, über Unmöglichkeiten und Begrenzungen bei der Ausübung des journalistischen Berufes unterhalten haben, sind natürlich auch bestimmte direkte oder indirekte ethische Fragen angesprochen worden. In der Lehre, oder in der Praxis in den Redaktionen eigentlich nicht. Also daß man gesagt hat, Genosse Lohmann, [...] du kannst in dem Kommentar nicht die Person A kritisieren, weil, oder nicht in dieser Weise kritisieren, weil das bestimmte ethische Kriterien unseres Berufes verletzt, oder ähnliches, das ist eigentlich kaum geschehen, kann mich nicht erinnern jetzt. Das ist, wenn es geschehen ist, nur sehr selten geschehen, und eigentlich nie unter dem spezifischen Aspekt des Berufsethos eines Journalisten. Sondern wenn, dann ist es mehr unter dem Gesichtspunkt der journalistischen Parteilichkeit, der Prinzipientreue eines Kommunisten oder eines Sozialisten angesprochen worden oder so etwas, und da gab es dann natürlich, könnte man sagen, bestimmte Brücken zu ethischen Fragen, indirekt mindestens. [...] Aber es ist mit einem etwas anderen Blickwinkel vielleicht betrachtet worden, und es ist sehr viel stärker unter einem individuellen moralischen Aspekt betrachtet worden, das würde ich sagen.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Annemarie Müller, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

Ethics were, then, based upon the application of socialist principles rather than values in themselves. This was also demonstrated by comments from Henry Wiedemann, who believed in the importance of ethics in journalism, basing this, however, upon his opinion that the task of a journalist is to seek to explain the events taking place in the world rather than upon the usefulness of ethics in and of themselves:

Ich glaube, daß der Beruf ohne Ethik nicht funktioniert, also aus meiner Sicht, weil ich glaube, ein bestimmtes ethisches Empfinden und ein bestimmtes humanes Empfinden für das, was man über die Welt erklärt, und der Journalist ist ja immer doch auf der Suche einer Erklärung dieser Welt, geht Journalismus nicht zu machen, glaube ich.<sup>14</sup>

For the committed socialist journalist, such as Wiedemann, the idea of explaining what is happening in the world had a special significance. This was his opportunity to explain how the events which were taking place fitted into the socialist theory and why the events were significant. Doing so was itself a matter of ethics for him. For such a journalist, there was a clear theoretical underpinning to his belief that the ethics of his profession were subject to the laws of the class conflict:

Diese ethische, diese ideologische Auffassung vom Leben, vom Sinne des Lebens, vom Sozialismus, vom Klassenkampf, also alles diese Dinge, die das politische Bewußtsein geprägt haben, die waren das Primäre, und dem hatte sich also das journalistische Talent oder auch der journalistische Auftrag unterzuordnen. Da gibt es also einen Satz von Bertolt Brecht, der sagt, wir haben die Gesetze unserer Ethik den Gesetzen des Klassenkampfes unterzuordnen. Und das war so etwa der Empfindungsrahmen für mich als Journalist, das heißt also, das, was der große politische Kampf erfordert, dem hat der Journalismus zu dienen.<sup>15</sup>

In order to understand fully how the ethics of journalism and socialist values were connected, it is necessary to examine some of these socialist ethical or moral values which the journalists mentioned. It is interesting to note that the values which come under this category were mentioned almost exclusively by journalists working for *Neues Deutschland*, which suggests that they had a strong set of values in their work, albeit not values which are normally associated with ethics. Their success in applying these principles is undoubtedly a result in part of the fact that these were the values which the state also sought to implement.

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*

Nevertheless, they were ones which the journalists had internalised, and which had become important for them personally.

## Socialist values

“Socialist values” were values which the SED promoted for all its citizens and for the GDR as a whole. The journalists tended to mention these values in a group, which justifies looking at them collectively to begin with:

Es gab [...] eine relativ große Überzeugung und auch eine relativ große Einheit aller Beteiligten, also aller Journalisten, [...] was diese ethischen Grundwerte betraf, also Frieden, Solidarität, antiimperialistisches Zusammenhalten, der Wert der Arbeit für den einzelnen Menschen, das war eigentlich also nicht strittig, strittig war immer nur, auf welchem Wege der Journalismus diese ethischen Prinzipien zu unterstützen hat, also die wurden auch nicht durch Journalismus in Frage gestellt, sondern es ging immer nur darum, und das war ja ein wichtiges ethisches Prinzip des DDR-Journalismus, [...] daß man immer nur von positiven Beispielen ausgeht, also daß man die Kritik unterordnet, daß man also immer denjenigen zu finden hat, der das zu verhandelnde ethische Prinzip vertritt, und nicht zu sagen, dort und dort ist es schlecht.<sup>16</sup>

Wiedemann here reinforced his earlier comments on the greater emphasis which was to be given to ideological considerations, but of more importance is his belief that among the journalists in the GDR there was a degree of consensus about the values which were important. These values were not specifically directed towards the work of the journalists, but were instead fundamental principles for them, which they then sought to promote in their work. Franz Becher appears to rank these socialist values alongside his desire to serve the truth:

Rein als persönliches, erstrebenswertes Ziel war es natürlich die Wahrheit, war's der Fortschritt, war's Frieden, war's soziale Gerechtigkeit, also eigentlich all die Ideale, die ich auch jetzt noch verwirklichen will.<sup>17</sup>

Other values mentioned included “Völkerverständigung” (Becher), the importance of the individual in society (Liebnitz) and equality between men and women (Grünwald). There can be no doubt that these values were all very much a part of the socialist system of the

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, Neues Deutschland

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Franz Becher, Neues Deutschland



GDR. However, although they were promoted by the SED, they were rarely practised by it. Peace was hardly promoted by the stationing of missiles in the GDR aimed at the West. The composition of the Politbüro showed how far equality between men and women extended. Advances in production were made primarily by manipulating data as was required, and *Völkerverständigung* applied to those countries with which the SED wanted closer ties at that moment in time. Although the SED was conspicuous in its lack of application of these values, they were nevertheless part of its stated programme, and an important part of the principles which the journalists attempted to apply in their work. The disparity between theory and practice at the SED level is typical of the difference between reality in the GDR and that which was portrayed as reality by the SED.

The first of the values mentioned by Becher was progress. The SED appeared to have convinced the journalists that the GDR was indeed a progressive country which had advanced further than the West:

Wir fühlten uns eigentlich als die geschichtlich, die historisch Fortgeschritteneren, die historisch Progressiveren, die die Ausbeutung beseitigt hatten.<sup>18</sup>

The capitalist model was presented as being an inferior system which was to be replaced by a socialist order which would allow the Western societies to advance further than they had managed to on their own.

Peace was also an important image for the SED to have. It portrayed itself as the great defender of world peace, forced to arm itself to protect itself from capitalist aggression. Time after time, the newspapers of the GDR proclaimed the great steps the GDR and its ally, the Soviet Union, were making towards peace, and the role which the socialist states took in implementing disarmament negotiations. Peace was also seen as the natural product of a socialist system, and would only be ensured when the class conflicts of the Western societies were finally removed.

Social justice was another important value which the SED claimed that socialism was pursuing. It believed that it had removed social injustice by bringing to an end the model of society which allowed for exploitation of workers, for a small minority to be able to earn

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

money at the expense of the majority. In its reporting, the GDR media were not short of examples of the way in which Western society was failing to meet the needs of those in difficulty, while ensuring that the wealthy wanted for nothing. Unemployment in the West was a favourite theme of the media, helped by the fact that there was essentially no such thing in the GDR, a result of the way in which the command economy was operated. Attention was also drawn to the drug problems of the capitalist system, identified as a typical byproduct of capitalism. In contrast, the GDR was presented as being a country which recognized the value of work, and which ensured that everyone could find a job.

Not all the values mentioned by the journalists which have been put under the heading of “socialist values” are overtly critical of Western society. Instead, some seek to promote a social good for its own sake, without feeling the need to relate this to the capitalist “bad”. One such example is the goal of “Völkerverständigung”. The SED believed that it was very important to have cultural exchanges with other countries to increase understanding of the differences between these countries as well as to recognize the similarities. Although the exchange of ideas and experiences was primarily with other socialist countries, visits with heads of state of Western countries were actively sought by Erich Honecker, who desired for several decades to meet with a chancellor of the Federal Republic. Amusingly, the typical anti-capitalist propaganda of the GDR media was altered prior to state visits. The criticism which was directed towards the specific country with whom the exchange was to take place ceased during the week or so immediately before the visit, but afterwards, normal coverage was resumed.

Solidarity among the citizens of the GDR and among the socialist nations was also an important value of the SED. Coverage of meetings between the leaders of socialist countries always stressed the unity and agreement between the countries, as well as the support which each country expressed for the successes and policies of the other. At the individual level, solidarity between the citizens of the GDR was always promoted. This was to be achieved by holding activities with neighbours and friends, in having joint responsibility for the maintenance of the block of flats in which people lived, and the media supported the concept of solidarity very strongly. Neighbourhood projects received a lot of coverage and newspapers often sponsored such ideas and ensured that they were successful. To some extent, this is still a noticeable feature of the media today. In cities such as Leipzig, the local paper is often involved in local projects, such as road safety, and still attempts to develop a

degree of solidarity with its readers. This is very much a result of the importance of the individual to the journalists, who still seek the best interests of their readers, but also of humanity in general. Of course, they can have only a limited impact through their work, but they do attempt to make the most of the opportunities this work affords them.

Some journalists experienced problems with their consciences when they were expected to demonstrate solidarity with allied socialist countries which had done something the journalists did not agree with, such as the Soviet Union's military campaign against Afghanistan, the "Prague Spring", or the Chinese suppression of the student protests. The point at which the journalists were seriously troubled by these events varied according to their age at the time and the extent to which they had actually been aware of what had been going on in these specific cases. For some, the Afghanistan situation had caused them to question the Soviet Union's actions, for others, this had been accepted as being a defensible move. The Chinese government's response to the student protests was then too much for them.<sup>19</sup> The relationship between such events and the journalists' consciences will be examined shortly.

These are the main socialist values which the journalists mentioned as having been important to them, and the principles which underlie them have not lost their significance for them individually since GDR times. One difference which is seen now is, however, that the journalists no longer have the support of the state in defending these values, at least not in the way in which they were understood and applied in the GDR, and as such, the journalists are less able to apply them in their work today. Part of the problem is that the terms used are associated by many readers with their negative experiences in the GDR, and articles about social justice are not well received by the readers, although they are at the same time very concerned about the problem of unemployment. Ironically, many of the points made by the SED during its years in power have been shown to be accurate in the post-SED era. Although many of the problems which have arisen are the result of the mistaken policies of the SED in the past, it is all too easy to point to the societal problems which exist now to argue that the ideas which the SED held were not so inaccurate after all, as indeed some of the journalists remarked upon.<sup>20</sup> It is then difficult for the journalists - who state quite

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Beate Liebnitz, Neues Deutschland

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

categorically that they do not wish to return to the old system under any circumstances - to deal with these issues in their newspapers. They are anxious to avoid giving left-wing parties ammunition with which to attack the capitalist model of society, but at the same time wish very strongly to deal with the issues which are concerning their readers, such as unemployment, price rises and drug-related problems. The staff of *Neues Deutschland* find this particularly difficult, as the paper is very critical of the current state of the German state, and is very pro-PDS in its orientation, but at the same time, the journalists do not wish to return to the old media order, and are all glad that this period is over. Part of the problem the journalists in general face here is the fact that they wish to help their readers deal with the changes which they have experienced after 1989, but at the same time, they are anxious not to create a false impression of themselves and of their work, particularly not when this impression would remind their readers of the less positive aspects of GDR life.

Returning for the moment to the values which the journalists held, it has become clear how the ideas the SED promoted were reflected in the press of the SED, not only by compulsion, but rather through the convictions of the journalists themselves. They recognized the importance of these values, and continue to do so today, albeit with a different understanding of their application, and these were principles which they could very easily apply to their work. In doing so, they naturally followed the SED's understanding of the way in which the values should be implemented and were subject always to the "suggestions" as to how certain topics should be dealt with. It is perhaps ironic that the areas in which these values could most effectively be applied, in dealing with political issues in the GDR, were also the areas where the SED was most anxious to have its views presented in a favourable light, and that the journalists' own convictions helped them to achieve this goal.

### **Work-related values**

During the course of interviewing, a considerable number of specifically work-related values were mentioned, often only by a single journalist, but in total they demonstrate a commitment to their profession which has continued to the present day, and which is a significant factor in making ethical and moral judgements.

The most common of these values was conscientiousness in reporting. This had several aspects. It was important for the journalists that they were fair when dealing with other

people, whether their sources or their readers - "Ich möchte den Lesern aufrichtig gegenüber sein,"<sup>21</sup> "Fairneß gegenüber den Menschen".<sup>22</sup> This reflected the importance of the individual to the journalists:

Das Wichtigste war für mich, daß im Leben immer das Individuum im Vordergrund steht. [...] Das entsprach durchaus nicht der Linie, die damals gefahren wurde. [...] Der Mensch im Vordergrund, da können Sie alles ableiten davon.<sup>23</sup>

This idea of the importance of the individual has now been seen in several forms. At a more theoretical level, Theodor Ehrich also commented on the importance of these human values to him in terms of comments Walter Jens, president of the *Akademie der Künste*, had made. Jens had described "Moral" as being "die Welt von unten zu betrachten".<sup>24</sup> In contrast to seeing the world from above, in other words from the point of view of those in power, whether political, legal or economic power,

die Welt von unten zu sehen heißt für mich, auf diese ganzen Leute, [...] ihre Position, ihre Strategien, ihre moralischen Positionen, ihre politischen Positionen und so weiter zu gucken mit den Augen aus der Sicht derjenigen, denen es eher in diesem Lande *nicht* so gut geht, also weder materiell noch was ihre Möglichkeit, [ihre] Entscheidung über gesellschaftliche Prozesse und so weiter betrifft, also Politik von da anzugucken, aus der Sicht der Interessen der einfachen Leute, nicht der Interessen *der* Politik oder *der* Wirtschaft, sondern der Interessen einfacher Leute.<sup>25</sup>

For Ehrich, the media play an important role in this process:

[Die Medien] können darüber nur schreiben und nachdenken, sie können an den gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen real nichts ändern, das ist klar, aber die haben sozusagen als diese vierte Gewalt die Aufgabe, die Position der kleinen Leute, die naturgemäß eher aus den Medien herausgedrängt werden, das ist klar, und eher drängen die großen Leute, wenn man mal so sagen darf, in die Medien hinein, das ist klar, also muß man als Journalist etwas tun, um den kleinen Leuten den Zugang zu den Medien zu öffnen. Also muß man versuchen, die Medien für die Sichtweisen, für die Lebensumstände, für die Position der kleinen, der sogenannten kleinen

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Daniel Richter, *Freie Presse*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Anthon Dörr, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Theodor Ehrich, *Berliner Zeitung*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*

Leute, zu öffnen.<sup>26</sup>

As far as Ehrich was concerned, this was not merely theory. Instead, he had some suggestions as to how this could be realised, and these are aspects which he also attempted to realise in his work in the GDR:

Man muß ihm Zugang schaffen in die Medien, indem man mit ihm redet, man muß beschreiben, wie sie leben, man muß als Journalist ihre Interessen versuchen zu artikulieren. Vielleicht ist das ein Element von sozialer Gerechtigkeit, vielleicht das einzige, sozusagen die einzige Möglichkeit, die man als Journalist hat, so etwas zu tun.<sup>27</sup>

Here again is the concept of the centrality of the individual in the work of a journalist. For Ehrich, it was important to try to counteract the natural tendency for those in power to gain exposure in the media by looking at the lives and experiences of the ordinary citizens. In the GDR, there was the same disparity as today in this respect, with the difference being that the media were encouraged to seek out firms and individuals who incorporated the socialist ideals. Positive examples were constantly being sought for the media in order to show how the socialist model was achieving its successes through the endeavours of individuals all fulfilling their duties.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, it was the country's leaders who were most prominent in the media.

Ehrich's comments about the journalists' ability to promote social justice demonstrate the way in which many of the values which are being examined are connected and interrelated. None of them stands in isolation, but is part of a larger set of principles which each individual holds. As such, several of the individual values which the journalists mentioned could easily have been looked at in a very different context, and some, such as honesty, have appeared at several points, each time shedding additional light on the nature of the values the journalists mentioned. The most important of these themes has been the importance of people to the journalists and the respect which individuals deserve.

For some, this was the most important value they held, and the one which underpinned all others:

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, Neues Deutschland

Ich bin ja nicht Journalist geworden, um einer Partei zu dienen, sondern einfach, um für den Menschen da zu sein, und das war für mich eigentlich immer das Wichtigste.<sup>29</sup>

This was also a value which at least Hanke believed she could realise. However, there appears to have been a realisation that there was more involved in this principle than the journalists could realise in the GDR. Robert Lohmann, for example, contrasted his actions with that of

der geistreiche, initiativreiche, auch gegen den Strom gegebenenfalls schwimmende Individualist, der sich darum bemüht, wirklich notfalls unter Einsatz auch großer persönlicher Courage spannende, beziehungsreiche und aufschlußreiche Geschichten zu recherchieren und zu schreiben.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, although Lohmann saw this contrast, he explained also that the readers had always been a factor for him,

eine Art korrigierendes, wenn auch unsichtbares im gewissen Sinne, aber ein korrigierendes Gegenüber.<sup>31</sup>

The importance of the readership for the journalists in the GDR was clear from comments made by several respondents. They hoped that the readers would be attracted to their newspapers and would enjoy reading them:

Ich habe immer als hohen Wert, moralischen Wert empfunden, eine journalistische Arbeit zu machen, [...] die von anderen begrüßt wird, die also von dem Leser, der dieses Produkt ja dann haben soll, daß ihn das nicht abstößt, daß er das nicht als lästig oder blöd empfindet, sondern daß er das mit Freude bei ironischen Sachen zum Beispiel, mit einem gewissen Unterhaltungswert, und dann mit Interesse liest. [...] Also das war für mich auch immer ein gewisser moralischer Wert.<sup>32</sup>

This value of considering what the readers wanted was one which could, within limits, be realised. Although there were political requirements for certain parts of the newspaper, the journalists were able to exercise their talent in other areas, and to attempt to provide their readers with useful and relevant information. Of course, there were limits to this too.

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Barbara Hanke, Berliner Kurier

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Andreas Klein, Leipziger Volkszeitung

However, the value of the individual, and particularly the individual reader to the journalist should not be underestimated. Many of the values which will be mentioned next can be traced back to the place of the individual in the journalists' thinking.

## **Other values**

The values already examined are those which were mentioned by several journalists, but they do not reflect the true range of values which were held by the journalists interviewed. In many cases, some of the journalists' values were mentioned in passing when addressing other issues, in others, they gave a list of the values they held, before proceeding to give more detail about one or two of them. In order to demonstrate the variety of values which the journalists mentioned, a list can be drawn up of those mentioned by only one journalist and not already covered, none of which merits special consideration on its own, but all of which taken together show the diversity in the principles journalists held.

Value of work

Family and children

Human closeness

Progressing in their career

Getting an article past their superiors on the first attempt

Being able to express their opinion

Order and respect

Seriousness

## **Conflicts between values**

As has been seen, the degree to which the values which the journalists held could be realised varied considerably. At the same time, not all the values could be realised at the same time, and the question then arose as to how these conflicts were dealt with. Gärtner's earlier example of the conflict between obtaining information in order to provide more accurate information and the way in which he wished to treat his interviewees is an example of such a conflict. Theodor Ehrich also commented on the way in which he viewed the question of sacrificing one value for another:

Also, ich glaube, der Hauptkonflikt lag vielleicht darin, daß man



sozusagen geprägt durch diese Werte, soziale Gerechtigkeit, Solidarität und so weiter, in die Versuchung gekommen ist, sich in die Tasche zu lügen [...] - ich weiß nicht, welche Prioritäten bestehen zwischen diesen einzelnen Werten, aber das ist, glaube ich, kompliziert, den einen Wert für den anderen zu opfern. Also ich glaube, das geht nicht, [...] es kann nur ein moralisches Gefüge existieren, wo diese Werte eine bestimmte Beziehung zueinander eingehen, wo diese Werte in einem bestimmten Spannungsfeld zueinander stehen, sich von mir aus auch in bestimmter Weise in Frage stellen, aber sie müssen da sein. Wenn eine Situation existiert, wo man im Interesse einer bestimmten Sache einen anderen Wert opfert, ist es sehr fragwürdig, nur haben wir darüber eher am Rande diskutiert, das weiß ich heute, damals war es eher ein Gefühl, damals war keine bewußte Auseinandersetzung um diese Dinge, sondern es war eher mehr oder weniger unreflektiertes Handeln.<sup>33</sup>

The element of “unreflektiertes Handeln” is very typical of the way in which GDR journalists dealt with situations which arose. Much of their decision making was in any case routine, they had learned what was possible and what was not, and in other cases, the decisions were often a matter of “Gefühlssache”<sup>34</sup> rather than sitting down and weighing up the options and making a decision based on the relative importance of the values at stake. In many cases, they could not progress to this stage of deliberation because their instructions or implied party rules had already essentially made the decision for them - where there is no freedom, there is no personal responsibility. In these cases, how they felt about the situation was not very relevant, and they had to resort to some of the methods of dealing with these limitations which have already been examined.

Ehrich’s comments about the lack of discussion of these conflicts is supported by statements from other journalists. Lohmann, however, puts this down to the lack of the type of controversial subjects being dealt with in the GDR:

[Diese Konflikte] spielten kaum eine Rolle im DDR-Journalismus. [...] Das hing auch damit zusammen, daß wir [...] an ganz heißen, brisanten Themen gar nicht gearbeitet haben, die dann im Zuge der Bearbeitung irgendwie hätten geschützt werden müssen.<sup>35</sup>

However, Lohmann did acknowledge the presence of conflicts which he personally encountered. In deciding how far he was prepared to go in making compromises, he applied

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Theodor Ehrich, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Walter Hoff, Neues Deutschland

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

something he had learned from his grandfather many years earlier:

Ich habe [...] immer darauf zu achten versucht, eine bestimmte Anstandsschwelle zum Beispiel nicht zu überschreiten, im Sinne von, was immer jetzt an Kompromissen zu schließen war, oder geschlossen wurden von mir, du mußt immer Mensch bleiben dabei. Das war so eine Maxime ein bißchen, eine Hauptdevise, die ich übrigens von einem meiner beiden Großväter übernommen habe.<sup>36</sup>

Once again, the idea of a certain degree of humanity being required is seen. A further application of this principle can be seen in the role which the individual conscience played in decision making among GDR journalists.

### **The role of conscience amongst GDR journalists**

Given the frustrations which the journalists felt in the GDR and the wide range of values which they held, it was to be expected that they would have had problems with their consciences when they were unable to be true to the principles they held.

#### *Problems of conscience*

The journalists began to experience problems with their consciences when they believed that they could have done more than they had actually done, or than they had been led to believe was possible:

[Das Gewissen] hat mich auch beschäftigt, wenn ich dann zum Beispiel über Sachen nicht schreiben durfte, wo ich der Meinung war, das wäre auch gegangen, auch unter den DDR-Verhältnissen noch gegangen, also wenn einem da von vornherein Steine im Weg gelegt wurden und gesagt wurde, das geht nicht, und man das akzeptiert hat, [...] mit den Fäusten in der Tasche, [...] das hat mich eigentlich doch ziemlich beschäftigt immer.<sup>37</sup>

This was, then, more than just the result of the restrictions placed on the journalists. The cases where it was quite clear that it was not possible to write about something were not the ones which led to problems of conscience, as the journalists had accepted these situations as being something which they could not change, and had learned to deal with this. In such situations they did not perceive there to be a realistic option of choosing another course of

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Alfred Gärtner, Berliner Zeitung

action.

The journalists had, however, considered the consequences of essentially ignoring their experiences of what was unalterable reality and instead following their consciences alone. There is a clear consensus among the journalists that to have followed their conscience consistently would have meant that they would have been led to make the decision to leave their career:

Eigentlich mußte ich ständig Kompromisse machen, und es gibt Kompromisse, mit denen man leben kann, und es gibt eben Kompromisse, die einen dann noch sehr beschäftigen, weil man sehr enttäuscht darüber ist. [...] Bloß wenn man konsequent sich jetzt gefragt hätte, ob das mit dem Gewissen zu vereinbaren ist, hätte man eigentlich schon bald, nachdem man jede Weile gearbeitet hat in der Zeitung, damals sagen müssen, es ist nicht mit meinem Gewissen vereinbar, deswegen muß ich den Beruf aufgeben. Eigentlich war die Arbeit eines Journalisten, eines ehrlichen Journalisten [...] nicht mit seinem Gewissen zu vereinbaren, also das halte ich für völlig aussichtslos.<sup>38</sup>

The first reason for this “either-or” situation was the fact that the media were not separate from the state. Where such separation exists, such as in most Western countries, the media can appeal to their independent status and to their public duty to criticise government and other institutions of power, but in the GDR, the media were a part of this power structure, and as such, the journalists could not exercise this same degree of individual decision making. Peter Heym illustrated this point when discussing the extent to which he could follow his conscience. Commenting on the question of writing about the GDR’s policy towards Israel, with which he disagreed, he remarked that

dem konnte man entgehen, man mußte ja sich dazu nicht äußern [...] und sagen wir mal, da an solchen Stellen konnte man dann Gewissen ansetzen oder wenn’s darum ging, sich schützend vor Kollegen zu stellen, wenn die durch einen politischen Fehler also irgendwie in Mißkredit gekommen sind, dies war vor allem so, daß man sagen wir mal Gewissen im praktischen Alltag und in der praktischen Arbeit aufbauen konnte. Daß man jetzt ein großes journalistisch-politisches Gewissen dort vor sich aufbauen konnte und dieses so als Handlungsgrundlage nehmen konnte, das war nicht möglich, dann hätte man in der DDR nicht Journalist sein können.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Alfred Gärtner, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Peter Heym, Leipziger Volkszeitung

As Heym suggests, it was not possible to appeal to a greater professional conscience. Instead, the journalists had to apply their personal conscience in day to day actions, such as declining to comment on some issues. The possibilities of this were, however, limited, and Heym's second example of protecting colleagues was something which also had limited possibilities, as too much association with someone who was frequently unpopular with party officials was not advantageous for their own career. But it seems fair to say that

die Frage Gewissen oder so wurde alles individueller und etwas kleiner behandelt.<sup>40</sup>

### *The influence of conscience*

Heym's first example of refusing to write something which conflicted with the conscience was the most common case of an individual's conscience playing a part in decision making:

Also man konnte erstens immer wieder versuchen, sich vor Themen, die einem nicht gefielen, zu drücken, das ist bei Diktaturen ja eigentlich immer so, meistens kann man sich ja irgendwie drücken. Und das ist ja auch für das Gewissen sehr positiv, weil man ist ja dann dadurch nicht belastet.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the limitations of this approach, there was agreement among the journalists that there were these possibilities to act according to their consciences. Some were prepared to do so regardless of the consequences, but how far the individual journalist was prepared to go depended of course on the individual concerned as well as the policy of the newspaper and its editor at the time, in addition to the nature of the subject about which the journalist did not wish to write. Beate Liebnitz cited several examples of the way in which she found that she was able to write articles which she knew would not be popular, as she realised that the problems would arise only after the article had been published, and her position at the paper she was working for at the time as well as her reputation appear to have given her enough protection from the harshest repercussions, although others could not count on the same leniency for themselves:

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Andreas Klein, Leipziger Volkszeitung

Man konnte [ein] Interview mit Christa Wolf machen, man konnte es aber auch lassen, wenn man es machte, dann wußte man schon vorher, kriegte man einen mörderlichen Ärger.<sup>42</sup>

An example of one refusal arose when Brigitte Fischer was asked to write about the Tiananmen Square killings in China, and how wonderful everything had been, with the clear purpose of the article being to protect socialism:

Da war wieder der Punkt, wo ich gesagt habe, nee, das mache ich nicht, das schreibe ich nicht, und werde auch nicht schreiben. Und entspricht, glaube ich, auch dem Ding, das ich gesagt habe, also wenn ich Kompromisse mache, und die mußte ich auch machen, dann müssen es solche sein, mit denen ich dann noch leben kann, bestimmte Dinge, die kann ich nicht gegen meine Überzeugung auch schreiben, und das mache ich auch nicht, auch wenn ich dadurch Probleme kriege. Und wenn ich einen Kompromiß finden kann, mit dem ich vor mir selber noch bestehe, und nicht sagen muß, also was ist denn da für ein unsägliches - gut, ich meine, wenn man im nachhinein vieles liest, sage ich heute auch, ist ja absolut idiotisch, aber es war zu damaliger Zeit, also waren es dann Sachen, wo ich mir gesagt habe, also das geht gerade.<sup>43</sup>

The contrast between the GDR era and the present day which Fischer saw, and the way in which the journalists now view their work in the GDR were also points which several journalists mentioned. The reason for the existence of these differences lay in the way in which the sensitivity of the journalists' consciences was lessened as time went on. Similarly to Fischer, Beate Liebnitz also noticed the way in which her perception of what she was doing changed, both during the period in which she worked in the GDR and in the years after 1989:

Gerade in bezug auf die DDR war das natürlich so, daß man bestimmte Sachen, wo man wußte [...] - wo man meinte zu wissen - daß das nun effektiv nicht geht, daß man die Frage vielleicht auch gar nicht mehr gestellt hat. [...] Ich muß aber sagen, daß ich niemals etwas geschrieben habe, was nicht meine Meinung war. [...] Ich würde heute bestimmte Dinge also völlig anders machen, klar, aber man [kann] ja nur aus dem Rahmen heraus schreiben, in dem man sich bewegt.<sup>44</sup>

The concept of the *Schere im Kopf* is quite clear from Liebnitz' remarks about knowing that

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Beate Liebnitz, Neues Deutschland

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Brigitte Fischer, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Beate Liebnitz, Neues Deutschland

some things were not possible. This development in the thinking of the journalists meant that their consciences began to trouble them less and less as time went on, as they were no longer confronted by as many situations in which they believed that they could act any differently. This was not because the situations were any different, but because the way in which they were perceived had changed. As has already been seen, when the journalists did not believe that they had a choice to make, they were not troubled by their conscience. When they began to think differently about what they were doing and began to accept more of the restrictions, thereby performing their own form of censorship, so their consciences began to trouble them less and less. The occasions when the journalists perceived another option which they did not take became fewer and fewer in number as they became desensitised towards the media policy of the SED. As Liebnitz also suggests, after 1989, the journalists again went through a change in their thinking, albeit much more rapidly than previously, and began to measure their performance in the GDR in very different terms. They were able to distance themselves from their thoughts and feelings prior to 1989 to the extent that they could give a very different appraisal of what they had done.

Returning to the issue of desensitisation, Andreas Klein made some very interesting comments on the way in which his conscience became less sensitive with the years:

Also mit dem Gewissen ist es immer so eine Sache. Wenn man das erste Mal etwas macht, was nicht in Ordnung ist, oder eigentlich so die geprägten Wertvorstellungen dagegen sprechen, dann meldet sich ja dieses Gewissen zu Wort. Und es hat durchaus auch in meiner Anfangszeit als Journalist solche Phasen gegeben, daß ich den Eindruck hatte, also das ist jetzt nicht in Ordnung, das kannst du jetzt nicht machen. [...] Und wenn man das so das erste Mal gemacht hat, dann meldet sich auch das Gewissen zu Wort. Wenn man das des öfteren macht, gibt's dann auch eine gewisse Routine, und dann spielt das eigentlich gar keine Rolle mehr.<sup>45</sup>

With time, the individual consciences adjusted to the new norm of doing things which would earlier have caused dilemmas, and this process continued, with the journalists going a little further each time. However, there were others who seem to have been able to follow their consciences to a greater extent, and for whom this process described by Klein was less relevant. Walter Hoff, for example, found that

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Andreas Klein, Leipziger Volkszeitung

ich bin auch in den letzten Jahren auch mal eingesetzt gewesen als Verantwortlicher für größere Berichterstattung und [habe] da versucht, nach denselben Prinzipien zu arbeiten. Und da hatte ich dann zunehmend damit zu tun, daß größere Artikel über Projekte, die ich da vorgelegt habe, letztlich nicht gedruckt wurden. Habe ich aber auch als völlig normal angesehen, das ist der Preis, wenn man seinen eigenen Maßstäben treu bleiben will, und nur die zählen, heute und damals, [...] und dann das Leben als eine Konfliktveranstaltung philosophisch betrachtet, so wie ich das tue, dann hält man das für völlig normal.<sup>46</sup>

Hoff was prepared to pay this price for following his conscience, and appears to have made a conscious decision about which of his principles were more important to him. His view of the world allowed him to take a more philosophical stance and he found other ways to find fulfilment in his life. However, Klein is more typical of the GDR journalists. They attempted to get out of having to write articles which conflicted with their own views, and were often successful in doing so. But when this did not work, they did sometimes have problems with their conscience. These problems decreased in intensity with time, and Klein found that he was also able to suppress his conscience enough to allow him to carry on working without having constant qualms.

### *The application of conscience*

The final aspect of the question of conscience is the way in which the journalists decided whether their proposed course of action would cause them problems with their conscience. As far as deciding in concrete cases whether his conscience was being compromised, Hoff believed that

das ist einfach Gefühlssache. Also in sich hat man seine inneren Wertmaßstäbe, und wenn man die Sorge hat, hier werden sie verletzt, dann hat man sich einfach verweigert.<sup>47</sup>

This was a typical attitude among the journalists. None was able to explain fully how they decided whether something was acceptable to them or not, and there was always the idea of it “feeling right” or “feeling wrong” implicit in their comments. This is, of course, typical of the workings of the individual conscience. However, there were some useful attempts to describe the considerations which were involved in deciding whether an action was

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Walter Hoff, Neues Deutschland

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

consistent with maintaining peace of mind. Robert Lohmann, for example, said that in the case of deciding whether to make a compromise or not,

ich habe mir dann wenigstens versucht, glaube ich, die Frage vorzulegen, schadest du jetzt jemandem, bist du jetzt hier sozusagen so ungerecht, daß du dem Nachbarn oder dem Kollegen so Schaden zufügst oder nicht, und ich glaube, diese Frage kann ich glücklicherweise zu meinem Trost, sozusagen zu meiner Beruhigung, so beantworten, daß das nicht geschehen ist. Aber es sind zu viele Kompromisse geschlossen worden.<sup>48</sup>

Lohmann's remarks are a reminder of the importance of the individual person to the journalists, and his own desire not to harm anyone by his actions accords entirely with this value. Conscience is something which comes to the fore when personal values are compromised, and as such, it was to be expected that in order to ensure peace of mind, the journalists would have to weigh up their options in terms of their own values and examine the way in which they could remain true to their principles. Lohmann's approach was perhaps a very simple one, but one which was likely to succeed. He did not try to weigh up conflicting goals, but merely attempted to ensure that his actions did not contravene a principle which was fundamental to him.

Beate Liebnitz applied a very different principle, but one which was still related to the worth of an individual:

Ich kann nicht von Berufungen oder so reden, Gewissen schon, also daß man nicht Leute zu irgendetwas hineintreibt, wovon man selber nicht überzeugt ist. Also wenn Sie das als Gewissen bezeichnen wollen, dann spielte das sicher eine Rolle.<sup>49</sup>

This is also consistent with Liebnitz' claim never to have written anything which conflicted with her own beliefs. In the course of the interview, she gave several examples of how she had managed this, and the consequences which such action had had. Again, the principle she applied was a very simple one, but is typical of the approaches the journalists took. They did not think in terms of abstract goals when deciding what the correct course of action would be, but instead applied very human values to their decision making, values which they themselves valued in other people. They did not want to be harmed by others or forced into

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Beate Liebnitz, Neues Deutschland



something by someone who did not believe in that thing, and as such, they attempted to apply this in turn to their work. That this is a principle which they have kept and which they apply to their decision making today will become clear when looking at the problems they have faced since 1989 and the way in which they deal with ethical dilemmas.

## CHAPTER NINE

### **Ethically related problems following the *Wende***

In 1989, the journalists of the GDR were given the opportunity to work for a short time in possibly the freest press market in the world. They had no financial difficulties, as they were still receiving state subsidies, and nobody but they themselves had effective control of their newspapers. In most cases, the existing editor of the newspaper was either fired or resigned, and a new editor was appointed after a secret ballot of all the journalists at the paper had been held. In some cases, other senior staff also left their paper, being replaced by former colleagues. Several journalists mentioned this period as being the highlight of their journalistic career so far, and talked enthusiastically about the freedoms they had enjoyed at that time.

Soon, however, control of the newspapers was for sale. The subsidies had stopped, and buyers were sought for the press, which badly needed investment in new production and printing equipment. Many papers were subsequently closed down, either because they were no longer financially viable, or in some cases because they were providing competition for another paper owned by the same company. Less frequently, two companies agreed that it was in their mutual best interests for each to close one paper in an area where the other firm owned a dominant newspaper. The result was that in most markets, there remained only one large newspaper, with the notable exception of the Berlin market, where there are still several large circulation quality papers competing for control of the most prestigious press market in Germany, although of these, only the *Berliner Zeitung* is from the GDR. Smaller circulation papers, such as *Neues Deutschland*, continue to exist, but in their current state, these are not in a position to provide real competition to the larger papers.

With the change in fortunes of the newspapers, the lives of the journalists in Eastern Germany also changed dramatically. The opportunities they had began to diverge rapidly according to which paper they were working for, the policies of that paper's new owner, and the opinions of the new editors as to how the newspaper should be run. This chapter will examine the current working conditions for journalists at the newspapers contacted, and what

lessons from their GDR experiences the journalists could apply to the new problems they faced.

The specific areas which were examined in the interviews were the journalists' general interest in ethics, the extent of interference in their work both from within the newspaper and from external sources, and the danger of the newspapers' financial constraints determining or influencing the journalists' behaviour. In addition, certain other areas where journalists had seen changes, either for better or for worse will be identified.

## **Neues Deutschland**

The journalists at *Neues Deutschland* declared a strong ethical commitment to their profession. On the one hand, they are very conscious of the importance of their own personal integrity and standards, and on the other hand, they see all too clearly the direction the Eastern German media have taken since 1989 and are critical of some of the ensuing changes. At the same time, however, they are also very glad that they have been freed from the constraints of the GDR and that they have the opportunity to take their newspaper in the direction they believe is the right one. They have clearly learned lessons from the past, and from the mistakes they now consider themselves to have made at that time. Indeed, they appear to have become very sensitive to anything which gives the impression that the paper is returning to its old ways.

### *General interest in ethics*

Robert Lohmann's interest in the ethical aspects of his profession was the strongest among the journalists spoken to:

Ich habe einen speziellen Hefter, [...] in dem ich mir gezielt Beiträge sammele, die in unserer, aber vor allem in anderen Zeitungen, anderen Publikationen erscheinen und sich mit berufsethischen Fragen beschäftigen. Also, es interessiert mich generell sehr, ich glaube auch, daß es namentlich [...] auf dem Hintergrund der Geschichte dieser Zeitungen ein unerläßlicher Punkt ist.<sup>1</sup>

From his comments, it becomes immediately clear that the specific history of *Neues Deutschland* is an important factor in the motivation of its journalists today, and that this

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

history plays an important role in the current operation of the paper. Consistent with this professed interest in media ethics, Lohmann was able to provide concrete examples of situations where ethical considerations had played a role in deciding with colleagues which articles should be printed, and which unsolicited contributions should or should not be included in the paper. One example of this will be discussed later in relation to the issue of outside influence on the paper.

Consistent with earlier comments on the nature of ethical principles, the journalists noted that the values which they held in the GDR have not been discarded since 1989:

Komischerweise haben [meine Werte] sich gar nicht so sehr geändert, also für mich, unabhängig davon, ob sie jetzt in dieser Gesellschaft realisiert werden und ob die wichtig sind, das hat ja damit nichts zu tun.<sup>2</sup>

This is to be expected, as the values they held were personal ones, and would not alter rapidly, even with the fundamental changes taking place in the outside society. Their personal values led them to evaluate the new ones they see around them from the capitalist value system. They rejected some of these values while adopting others as being valuable additions to their existing value system. However, these have been personal decisions, rather than something which has occurred automatically:

Ich kann nicht konform gehen mit der Auffassung der Gesellschaft, daß also sozusagen das Eigentum und das Geld die wichtigsten Werte sind, unabhängig davon, daß die Gesellschaft nun mal so eingerichtet ist. Allerdings glaube ich, daß ein wichtiger Wert [...] hinzugekommen ist, das ist sozusagen die individuelle Freiheit des einzelnen, das sozusagen Recht des einzelnen und seine Selbstbestimmung, die ist in dieser Gesellschaft in weitaus größerem Maße da, das ist eine Chance, das kann auch eine Gefahr für den einzelnen sein, weil die Bindungslosigkeit unserer Gesellschaft einfach größer ist als im Sozialismus. Im Sozialismus wurde man immer irgendwie aufgefangen.<sup>3</sup>

The journalists at *Neues Deutschland* are often critical of the way in which their “new” society functions. They miss the positive aspects of their life in the GDR, such as the concern the state showed in looking after each person and the attempts which were made to ensure that everyone was involved in society at large. At the same time, they are very willing

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

to praise the Western system for the benefits it brings, such as the individual freedom mentioned by Wiedemann. Instead of abandoning the values which were adopted in the GDR, the journalists have found that *Neues Deutschland* gives them a unique opportunity to continue to work towards the furtherance of these values in the wider context of society. An example of this is the way in which they continue to see one of their roles as making the world more understandable for their readers, as opposed to seeking to achieve the highest circulation possible. Wiedemann perceives it to be a duty which goes along with press freedom to make the world more understandable, and he considers that the attitude of other media organisations in seeking ever higher circulation or viewing figures “ist eigentlich eine Vergewaltigung von Pressefreiheit”.<sup>4</sup> He has retained his desire to educate others about their world, and has therefore rejected the policies which he believes are more important to a newspaper which primarily follows capitalist principles. Another example of the way in which the values of the GDR still play a role today is seen in the examples of some of the issues and organisations which the paper would not support:

Werbung für die Bundeswehr würden wir eigentlich nicht machen, oder für militärische Einsätze, [...] Rassismus, Ausländerfeindlichkeit selbstverständlich nicht [...], da gibt's schon eigentliche Grenzen.<sup>5</sup>

The objection to the *Bundeswehr* and military operations can be traced back to the importance of preserving peace, which was an important principle to the journalists in the GDR, even if the state's commitment to it may be questioned. Likewise, racism would conflict with the goal of *Völkerverständigung* and solidarity with other nations and people. It is interesting to note that the journalists continue to hold the values which were important to them in the GDR, even though they are stressed less by the Federal government. Their values are clearly not merely determined by prevailing political opinion, but are very much based on personal principles.

Perhaps the overriding change since 1989 was expressed by Walter Hoff, who pointed out that since 1989, *Neues Deutschland* is a newspaper “wo journalistische Kriterien das Entscheidende sind”, and where “man ist als Journalist nur auf sich gestellt”.<sup>6</sup> The validity of this statement can be demonstrated by the journalists' attitude towards the difficulties

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Franz Becher, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Walter Hoff, *Neues Deutschland*

which have arisen in the GDR press since 1989.

### *Influence and intervention*

In the following sections, some of the problems which have arisen since 1989 will be examined. The first area to be looked at is the way in which journalists' work can be influenced by other individuals and groups. Such influence can come from both external sources, such as advertisers and politicians, and internal sources, such as superiors.

#### **External sources**

The two main potential sources of external interference which will be looked at are political and economic in nature. These are the two dominating influences which journalists have been subject to in the history of Eastern Germany. In the GDR, political considerations guided media policy, and since 1989, the Eastern press has been a part of the capitalist economic system, which has profit as the motivation for most business activity.

#### ***Political pressure***

*Neues Deutschland* is still owned by the PDS, the successor party to the SED, and it seems fair to question just how far the paper is now independent of its new (old) owner. With the history of the press in the GDR, and the central role the SED played in determining the way in which the press market at that time was operated, it might be expected that *Neues Deutschland* remains under the strong influence of the party. As Franz Becher said,

Da [Neues Deutschland] im Prinzip das einzig große Organ ist, wo überhaupt linke Auffassungen unterzubringen sind, gibt's natürlich einen Kampf darum, auch den Platz sich in dieser Zeitung zu sichern.<sup>7</sup>

The paper has certainly been subject to serious attempts to influence its reporting and the viewpoint it takes, but it is interesting to note the origins of these attempts. The PDS leadership itself has been noticeably reticent about imposing its will on "its" paper. At the same time, however, there are individuals within the party who continue to think of the paper very much in GDR-terms, and consider the paper to be the organ of the PDS:

Es gibt nach wie vor immer noch von Leuten, die also [...] früher [...] in

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Franz Becher, Neues Deutschland

der DDR Funktion hatten, Verantwortung hatten, die haben natürlich früher bei den Zeitungen hineingeredet und haben gesagt, also jetzt muß das gemacht werden, mach mal das, und von solchen Leuten gibt's heute auch - es gibt auch welche in Kreisen der PDS, die also immer noch meinen, weil diese Zeitung hier eine PDS-freundliche Zeitung ist, sei das noch wie früher, indem man sagen kann, das muß in der Schlagzeile sein, und wieso ist das so klein, und das müßte man größer machen, also das gibt es.<sup>8</sup>

In such cases, the individuals concerned have not accepted the new media order of which *Neues Deutschland* is a part. This contrasts strongly with the attitude of the PDS leadership, which sees the possibilities of using its position as owner of the paper to influence its behaviour very differently:

Bisky und Gysi sind auch moderne Medienleute und wissen, das würde nie funktionieren, aber selbst wenn sie es versuchen würden, es würde natürlich heute nicht mehr klappen, weil die gesamten Rahmenbedingungen anders sind als zu SED-Zeiten logischerweise.<sup>9</sup>

The journalists' personal experience of attempted political influence varied considerably. While all acknowledged the potential problem and were aware of attempts which had already been made, the extent to which they had personally been affected depended on the areas they covered in their reporting. Henry Wiedemann noted that there was a clear tendency for the political coverage of the newspaper to receive a lot of attention from outside parties:

Das gibt es vor allen Dingen in den unmittelbaren politischen Bereichen, wo es also um PDS-Politik geht, wo es eine Berichterstattung von PDS-Veranstaltungen gibt, haben einige Funktionäre nach wie vor so ein bisschen die Meinung, sie könnten noch genauso in die Zeitung hineinredigieren wie das früher der Fall ist. Das gibt es, vereinzelt, aber das gibt es.<sup>10</sup>

Because *Neues Deutschland* continues to hold to a strong political agenda, it has a large number of journalists covering political issues, particularly those affecting Eastern Germany and the PDS. As such, it is relatively susceptible to outside political groups attempting to influence its reporting. The greater degree of contact with a single political party is also a further factor in the paper's vulnerability to such attempts.

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, *Neues Deutschland*

The response and attitude of *Neues Deutschland* to the attempts which are made to dictate or influence its decisions are of great interest. For example, while Robert Lohmann has experienced individuals within the PDS attempting to dictate the paper's course, he does not see this as a problem. Instead of seeing it as a GDR-related phenomenon, he regarded such attempts as normal for a paper with readers who had an interest in the direction their paper was taking:

Es hat Begehrlichkeiten gegeben, so nenne ich's immer, es hat also Wünsche gegeben, und gibt auch immer mal wieder natürlich Wünsche, im wesentlichen von Personen, von einzelnen Personen, nie eigentlich, das ist das Erfreuliche und auch das Wesentliche, von [...] Institutionen oder von Ämtern oder von Regierungsstellen oder so, das hat es nicht gegeben, aber es gibt immer mal wieder von einzelnen Personen, zum Beispiel aus der PDS, in einer konkreten Situation [...] Briefe oder auch Anrufe, in denen sie den Wunsch sichtbar machen, jetzt irgendeinen Text veröffentlicht zu bekommen. Also wenn eine laufende aktuelle Debatte ist, wir haben jetzt so 'ne Situation zu einem sogenannten Dresdner Brief von zwei führenden PDS-Leuten zum Kurs, zur Strategie der PDS, wilde Diskussionen geführt werden, in diesem Umfeld der PDS, und da nachdem wir den veröffentlicht, dokumentiert hatten, [...] zogen aus allen möglichen Richtungen sozusagen Veröffentlichungswünsche. Das halte ich aber für normal, und das schließt auch nicht aus, daß es im Einzelfall, daß wir dem Wunsch stattgeben.<sup>11</sup>

The difference between this situation and the experiences of the GDR is that no individual or organisation is able to dictate how and what the paper reports. As Hoff said, journalistic criteria are now the only relevant ones. This means, of course, that in some situations, articles sent in by individuals, for example members of the PDS, are indeed printed, but the reasons for doing so are based purely on the content of what is submitted. In such cases, the paper would decide to print the article

weil wenn wir zum Beispiel sagen, ja, das ist ein wirklich interessantes Stück, was jetzt hier so 'rumgeschickt wurde, na, dann veröffentlichen wir es ganz, in Auszügen, oder kombiniert mit anderen Texten. Aber *das Entscheidende ist, daß der Wunsch alleine, oder gar der Befehl oder der versuchte Druck nicht maßgeblich sind für uns in unseren Entscheidungen*, jetzt das abdrucken oder nicht abdrucken. Und insofern sind wir hier immer Herr unseres Schicksals geblieben, und das ist mir auch ganz wichtig, daß das so bleibt. *Wünsche kann man an uns herantragen, über*

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, *Neues Deutschland*



*deren Erfüllung entscheiden wir, niemand sonst.*<sup>12</sup>

Whereas in the GDR, the instruction from the SED to print something would have sufficed to ensure its appearance in the paper, articles or information are accepted for publication in *Neues Deutschland* based solely on the basis of merit, and the request to have the article published is not a relevant factor in the decision-making process. An example of the independence of action which *Neues Deutschland* now enjoys was the submission of two articles by Peter-Rudolf Zotl within two weeks, dealing with the proposed Berlin-Brandenburg fusion. The first article was not printed, as it was not considered to add anything to the discussion which had not already been printed in the paper, whereas the second article was published alongside another related article<sup>13</sup>, as it was felt that the two pieces complemented each other and added something to the paper's coverage of the debate.<sup>14</sup>

Although the experiences of the journalists dealing with politics are logically the most pronounced in the area of politically-motivated interference, other areas such as the cultural section of the paper can also be subject to similar pressures. Henry Wiedemann commented on the extent to which he personally had experienced people or groups attempting to dictate his actions to him:

In meiner Arbeit weniger, allerdings insofern erlebe ich es, weil ich betreue ja eine wissenschaftliche Seite, also sozusagen eine Seite, also neben meinen Interviews betreue ich eine Seite, die sich mit [...] linkem Denken, mit linken Denkstrategien beschäftigt, mit sozialistischer Theorie, und dort gibt es einige Wissenschaftler, die also, sagen wir mal Marxisten, die also nach wie vor meinen, nicht verstehen, daß ich also auf meiner Seite auch Leuten Raum gebe, die eine ganz andere Auffassung von der Welt haben, die also auch eine pessimistische Auffassung, philosophische Grundstellung haben, und da gibt's schon einige, die sagen, wieso, das gehört nicht ins Neue Deutschland, ins Neue Deutschland gehören also nur klare, optimistische, wegweisende Artikel, und den Leuten muß man dann sagen, das mag schon sein, ich bin sehr froh, wenn wir wegweisende Dinge hätten, aber die Welt sieht leider so aus, daß relativ wenige Leute den Weg wissen, und das ist vielleicht auch ganz gut so, weil wir haben hier auch schon mal gedacht, wir wissen den Weg, da würde ich also mit Wegen und Losungen und Rezepten sehr vorsichtig sein. Aber da gibt es einige Leute, die nach wie vor von der Zeitung erwarten, wie das früher war, sie muß eine Linie geben, sie muß orientieren, sie muß klare

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, emphasis added

<sup>13</sup> Löttsch/Zotl (1996), p6 and Grundmann (1996), p6

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

Handlungsweisen geben, und sie darf nicht unterschiedliche Meinungsbündeln geben und darf nicht dem Leser die Verantwortung dann auferlegen, sich aus dem für sich das richtige rauszusuchen.<sup>15</sup>

The experiences of Wiedemann are not typical for *Kultur*-journalists in Eastern Germany. At *Neues Deutschland* even areas such as cultural issues include more theoretical considerations, often dealing critically with various philosophies of the world, and the discussion is then taken up by readers with their own opinions. At other papers, however, the more theoretical aspects are not covered to the same extent, but in the case of *Neues Deutschland*, the inclusion of such articles is compounded by the nature of its readership structure. With such a high proportion of committed socialists from the GDR era among its readers, it is not surprising that there should be such a strong reaction to the introduction of ideas which challenge socialist views. Not only do the readers have their own well-defined views anyway, but many have not accepted the new role which *Neues Deutschland* sees for itself in promoting left-wing thinking. Such views are now not advocated to the exclusion of all other possibilities, as was the case in the GDR. The comments of the readers mentioned by Wiedemann, such as the suggestion that the contributors should be writing optimistic articles which show others the way to go, are very typical of GDR ideas about the role of a newspaper. *Neues Deutschland* has changed its own position to allow for different opinions to be presented and defended, but these changes have not gone down well with all its readers, some of whom cannot accept the system in which they now find themselves, nor the changes that have taken place at the newspaper. Just as groups and individuals within the PDS have had this difficulty and have attempted to change the paper's position, so some groups and individuals among the general readership wish to see changes in aspects of the paper which would bring it more into line with their own views.

### ***Economic pressure***

In contrast to the clear political pressures which *Neues Deutschland* is faced with, there are few problems with firms and other organisations seeking to put economic pressure on the paper. Furthermore, the journalists at the paper do not consider that there is a danger of their being put under such pressure to write certain things or take a certain viewpoint in order to improve the paper's economic viability. As the economic pressures put on *Neues*

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, *Neues Deutschland*

*Deutschland* are not that significant, they will be examined later in the wider context of the financial difficulties the paper faces.

### **Internal sources**

The other possible source of influence on a paper comes from its internal structure. There are two specific areas which caused some journalists at other newspapers concern, although those at *Neues Deutschland* felt that these problems had not arisen for them personally.

The first potential source of influence is at the editorial level of the paper, where departmental editors and the newspaper's editor-in-chief give instructions to their subordinates as to what they should write about, and what viewpoint should be taken, particularly on controversial issues. This has not been a problem for the journalists at *Neues Deutschland*. None of them thought that it would become a problem either, as there is a general consensus among the journalists there as to what the paper was attempting to do and what viewpoint it would take on issues. This is reflected in parts of the paper's *Redaktionsstatut*:

“Neues Deutschland” (ND), Zeitung der Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus, ist eine sozialistische Tageszeitung. ND fühlt sich den Wertvorstellungen des demokratischen Sozialismus und den politischen Zielen der PDS verbunden. Als überregionale Tageszeitung ist ND auch offen für Standpunkte anderer linker demokratischer Parteien, Organisationen, Vereinigungen, Gruppen und Personen. [...] Redakteur im ND kann werden, wer unabhängig von der Zugehörigkeit zu Parteien, Vereinigungen und Organisationen mit dem oben formulierten Selbstverständnis des ND übereinstimmt.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, the whole structure of the paper is less rigidly hierarchical, which means that there is much less of a sense of those “at the top” having different opinions from those “at the bottom”. There is consequently more of a sense of solidarity among the journalists. This is in part a result of the solidarity which was promoted in the GDR, but it also stems from the fact that all the journalists, from the editor to the trainees, are in the same situation at the paper: they are all paid well below market rates, and all have an interest in keeping the paper afloat despite the difficulties it faces.

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<sup>16</sup> *Redaktionsstatut der Tageszeitung “Neues Deutschland” zur Gewährleistung der inneren Pressefreiheit*, p2. Reproduced with permission of Neues Deutschland

Similarly, there appeared to be no influence coming from the business side of the paper, the second potential source of interference at a paper. Beate Liebnitz was very positive in her assessment of the role of the *Geschäftsführer*, Wolfgang Spickermann, who never interferes in the daily operation of the paper. She quoted him as saying that “alles, was der Zeitung schadet, muß man möglichst vermeiden”, but this opinion was shared by the other journalists, and the only time there would be any comment on the damage an article had done to the paper would be after the event when the actual impact had become clear. Before publication, there was no interference in the journalists’ work. This is in contrast to the situation in the GDR, where interference was seen before the articles were ever close to being published, and where even small deviations from the expected text were often heavily punished, particularly so if it was considered that they had been introduced deliberately.

### *Financial problems*

The financial difficulties facing *Neues Deutschland* are rather different from those other newspapers experience. Normally, such problems are closely related to the pressure advertisers can place on a paper. In addition, the economic importance of the subscription base of a paper and the paper’s financial requirements are also areas which Eastern German papers had to face for the first time after 1989, when the state subsidies were removed and the papers had to seek to achieve economic viability on their own. However, in the case of *Neues Deutschland*, advertisers do not pose a great danger to the paper’s ability to act as it sees fit. Instead, the paper has difficulties resulting from its small readership and its lack of capital.

### **Advertising**

The first, and for other papers most worrying, possibility of economic pressure being applied is through the advertisements a paper carries which are usually a large source of income for newspapers. Large advertisers may be in a position successfully to “persuade” a newspaper to write a positive article about some aspect of their operations by suggesting that the alternative is taking their advertising business elsewhere. However, for *Neues Deutschland* this is not an problem. First of all, as Walter Hoff pointed out, the paper is hardly dependent on advertising, and this alone means that the paper is in little danger:

Wir haben ja eine Kostendeckung aus dem Anzeigenbereich unter 10%.

Also von daher ist schon mal nicht die Gefahr.<sup>17</sup>

The image of the paper is also a factor in its lack of advertising. Beate Liebnitz commented that “es verbietet sich”<sup>18</sup> for larger firms to place advertisements in *Neues Deutschland* because of the image it has retained from GDR days. An example of the way in which *Neues Deutschland* has been sidelined by firms was when *Deutsche Telekom* apologised for overcharging some of its customers by placing a large notice in newspapers, but not in *Neues Deutschland*, “obwohl Linke auch telefonieren”.<sup>19</sup> The image of the paper, so important to its journalists, at the same time prevents it from being accepted by the economic establishment and therefore also from having a serious chance of operating profitably.

Franz Becher also addressed the issue of advertising income, but rejected the possibility of *Neues Deutschland* being in danger:

Die Frage ist, womit könnte man uns bestechen irgendwie. Vielleicht damit, daß wir sehr viel Anzeigen bekämen und so. [...] Rein praktisch würde es auch nichts bedeuten irgendwo, weil schon die Existenzberechtigung dieser Zeitung ergibt sich aus ihrem Charakter, und wenn wir anfangen würden, überzuschwenken auf andere Zeitungen, was weiß ich, ein links-liberales Blatt machen zu wollen [...] taz, oder [...] Süddeutsche Zeitung oder Frankfurter Rundschau oder so, ja, dann ist die Existenzberechtigung weg. Wozu braucht man dann das Neue Deutschland?<sup>20</sup>

For Becher, this concept of the *Existenzberechtigung* of the paper is very important. He believes that the paper only has a chance to survive because of its unusual political character, and that anyone who attempted to change this would most likely cause the demise of the paper. For the journalists of *Neues Deutschland*, the character and image of the newspaper seem to be more important than the mere fact of its survival, and if it came to a choice between adopting a more mainstream viewpoint or having the paper close, they would appear to prefer the latter<sup>21</sup>, although how true this would prove to be in reality is perhaps another matter.

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Walter Hoff, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Beate Liebnitz, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Franz Becher, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, *Neues Deutschland*

### Circulation and Readership

Although there is little danger from firms, other economic pressures are felt by the paper. Again, a result of its image, *Neues Deutschland* is continuing to lose subscriptions. Its readers find that they are categorised as communists who wish for nothing more than the return of the GDR as it used to be. Because of this perception of the paper, its readers can have serious problems themselves. Commenting on the financial difficulties the paper faces, Liebnitz commented that

Erst mal ist das generelle Problem natürlich der Auflagenverlust, es ist ja eben eine Zeitung, die hatte früher eine Million Auflage, und die ist eine Zeitung, die heute der PDS nahe steht, sage ich mal, also eine linke Zeitung ist, und es ist für viele Leute - die durchaus Interesse haben an der Zeitung, das ist nicht das Problem - ein Risiko, so ein Blatt zu lesen, zumal also, sagen wir mal, irgendjemand auf dem flachen Lande, wo eben jemand, der das ND liest irgendwo doch als Linker oder, um härtere Worte zu gebrauchen, als rote Socke gilt oder so was, und das ist eben dann existenzbedrohend, muß man sagen, das ist das Problem. Also bekennende Linke, die das gefahrlos tun können, also ohne sich zu gefährden oder so, gibt's eben nicht genug.<sup>22</sup>

Walter Hoff also gave the concrete example of a former reader of *Neues Deutschland* who was a teacher. She had written to the paper explaining that although she enjoyed reading the paper, she was cancelling her subscription because she had been advised against continuing to read it in the interests of her career.<sup>23</sup> For a paper with a small circulation to begin with, such problems can be very serious.

It is perhaps ironic that the paper's image should have such a strong negative influence on its economic viability. On the one hand, it is sympathetic to the PDS, and yet it appears that the PDS-voters are largely not interested in reading the paper:

Die PDS hat fast 3 Millionen Wähler im Osten, also generell in Deutschland, demnach müßten wir eine Riesenchance haben, eine Zeitung zu verkaufen, aber es ist eben, Wahlen sind etwas Geheimes, und eine Zeitung zu abonnieren ist etwas, was offen ist, und dann gibt's also eine Schere.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Walter Hoff, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Beate Liebnitz, *Neues Deutschland*

The perceived political stance of *Neues Deutschland* has a negative impact on its subscription success, and at the same time, it is unable to persuade people that it is not the old *Neues Deutschland* any longer, as many seem to believe, but a new successor paper:

Wir sind ja keine kommunistische Zeitung oder so was, das ND ist wirklich eine pluralistische linke Zeitung, aber nichtsdestoweniger sie hat eben dieses Image, das wird sie auch behalten. [...] Die Geschichte dieser Zeitung ist eben eine sehr problematische.<sup>25</sup>

*Neues Deutschland* seems unable to overcome this problem. Those who should be potential readers are unwilling to read it because of the image it has in the wider population, and at the same time, the image it has is not a fair one. To change the image would require too radical a move to the right, and even if this succeeded and people generally accepted that the paper *had* changed, it would then be in the equally unpromising position of competing with other papers such as the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* or the *Frankfurter Rundschau* in the supra-regional market, and with the *taz* in Berlin. It is noteworthy that the *taz* is a paper which itself is constantly in financial difficulty, suggesting the limited potential of this sector of the market. It would also be likely to lose many of its current readers, whose interests and views the paper would no longer represent.

Henry Wiedemann saw in these problems a potential danger to the integrity of the *Neues Deutschland* journalists, who may at some point be tempted to compromise some of their principles. Because most readers are old SED-members from the GDR, they do not like the way in which *Neues Deutschland* has been actively engaged in dealing with issues arising from its GDR past, and from the history of the GDR in general. The readers often expect the paper to reflect their own inability to come to terms with the new order in the country, whereas the paper is trying to move away from GDR notions of class conflict and old ideas of who the enemy is and so on.<sup>26</sup> Commenting on these different wishes, Wiedemann sees this as

eine Zwickmühle und ein Problem, das schon wieder Beeinflussungen der Ethik der Journalisten nach sich ziehen kann.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

But Wiedemann does not know how this problem can be successfully dealt with. He suggests that the paper can really only attempt to stick to its own programme and at the same time keep its left-wing profile, looking for areas where criticism is needed, and not being intimidated by anyone with different views. The problem for the paper is that this approach, essentially the one taken at the present time, is not producing the economic success which is necessary for the paper's survival, and new readers are not being won in large enough numbers to ensure long term survival.<sup>28</sup>

### **Other financial concerns**

Another area which causes financial problems for *Neues Deutschland* is the fact that they have very little money to work with. The PDS is in no position to subsidise any of the operations of the paper, which is therefore entirely dependent on its advertising and sales income. As has already been seen, advertising income is minimal, only 10% or so, whereas most newspapers operate with about 40-70% of their income from advertising.<sup>29</sup> The income from sales of the newspaper has also sunk dangerously low. From a daily print run of 1.1 million in the GDR, sales of *Neues Deutschland* dropped to 128,000 in 1991<sup>30</sup> and 85,000 in 1993.<sup>31</sup> The result of this has been that the paper has constantly been close to bankruptcy, and has had little money to invest in the paper. Not only has the newspaper not been able to gain a firm foothold in the Western German press market, it has not been able to do so even in the West Berlin market, despite its reduced price in Berlin and the new *Länder*.

This lack of funds has impinged on the way in which the paper has operated in two areas. First of all, it has attracted mainly enthusiastic rather than experienced or expert journalists to its ranks, as the paper is able to pay only 60% of the normal salary for journalists. But as Liebnitz pointed out, the enthusiastic workers are not always the best. She believes that there are many more good writers who would have no objection to working for *Neues Deutschland* in principle, but the paper would need to pay them more before they would come.<sup>32</sup>

The second problem which the lack of financial resources is causing is the restriction in what

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Franz Becher, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Beate Liebnitz, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>30</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p448

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p452

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Beate Liebnitz, *Neues Deutschland*



the journalists have time to do. In order for *Neues Deutschland* to establish a reputation as a serious competitor in the German press market, it would need to be able to devote more resources to in-depth reporting on subjects, and to allow journalists to look for unusual and original stories. But the money is simply not there, and instead of producing such articles, there is a tendency for the paper to publish more and more commentaries on current events, as a good reporter can produce such an article in three hours, but to fill the same amount of space with researched work would take two or three days. The paper cannot afford such an investment over time.<sup>33</sup> Rainier Stiehler perceives a danger that this problem will result in the paper not fulfilling the needs of its readers. Those who are currently reading the paper will do so until they die, he believes, but what is needed is to attract new readers. He does not feel that the paper in its current format can or will achieve this.<sup>34</sup>

### *Lessons from the GDR*

There was agreement among the journalists at *Neues Deutschland* that there were many similarities between what they had experienced in the GDR and what had subsequently happened. Referring to the attempted influence on the paper's decisions, Robert Lohmann said that

da gibt es natürlich Ähnlichkeiten in dem Sinne, daß beides - das, was von der SED praktiziert worden ist, und das, was es hier und heute mitunter versucht wird - ja, Ausdruck von eben solchen Begehrlichkeiten und von versuchter Einflußnahme ist. In diesem Sinne gibt es ganz allgemein gesagt Ähnlichkeiten.<sup>35</sup>

What is, however, more significant is what the journalists have learned since, above all from their experiences in the GDR. Lohmann believes that *Neues Deutschland* is now in a much stronger position to resist any attempts at intervention, and that this strength can be traced back to lessons which have been learned from the GDR past:

Es gibt natürlich dieses Problem [der Einflußnahme] auch, die Frage ist bloß, wie stark ist die Zeitung, um sich dem zu widersetzen, und ich glaube auf dem Hintergrund namentlich der Geschichte des Neuen Deutschland, auf dem Hintergrund der Geschichte der SED, ist unsere

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Rainer Stiehler, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, *Neues Deutschland*

Position jedenfalls in den letzten Jahren diesbezüglich sehr gut, sehr stark, denn sowohl die Journalisten hier im Hause als auch die Politiker der SE-, eh, der PDS heute sind ja alles gebrannte Kinder. Sie wissen [...] wie verhängnisvoll die Interferenzpolitik der SED diesbezüglich gegenüber den Medien gewesen ist, und alle haben Angst, dabei erwischt zu werden, wie sie womöglich eine Renaissance dieser "interference"-Politik sozusagen betreiben, das heißt, bis zu einem gewissen Grad profitiere ich, und profitiert die Zeitung *heute* von der Angst vor den alten Zeiten. [...] Das hilft uns ein bißchen, diese Angst vor dem Alten hilft uns heute. Und das ist ganz gut so.<sup>36</sup>

The close connection which those associated with *Neues Deutschland* feel with their own past, renders them extremely sensitive to anything which reminds them or which might remind others of this past. Their experiences with the media policy in the GDR mean that they are careful to avoid situations which could be construed as being a continuation of those times. As Lohmann says, the paper actually is in a position to profit from the fear which many have of the "old ways" of the GDR, and is able to steer well clear of anything which comes close to the methods employed in the GDR. The paper is prepared to make use of the negative experiences of the past in strengthening its current position, and still publishes many articles dealing critically with the role of the media and of journalists in the GDR. This helps to keep the lessons of the past in people's minds. An example of this can be seen in the paper on 23 April 1996, the fiftieth "birthday" of the newspaper, when the history of the paper was discussed critically<sup>37</sup>, and the paper's perceived direction for the future was defined.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, it has very much been a conscious decision on behalf of the paper also to resist actively any attempts at interference; this did not come about by default because of limited experience with economic pressure from advertisers and others. It would have been very easy for the journalists to have continued to look to a political party for direction, but instead of this, they have moved firmly against this possible trend. Not only do they resist any attempts at interference, but Lohmann also said that

ich für mein Teil bin auch fest entschlossen, und hab' das auch schon ein paar Mal gemacht, in dem Moment, wo seitens der PDS jetzt zum Beispiel, als Gesellschafter der Zeitung, jemand in unverschämter Weise, offener, direkter Weise, versuchen würde, Druck auf mich oder uns hier

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>37</sup> "Jahrestag mit Wenn und Aber", in *Neues Deutschland*, 23 April 1996, p3

<sup>38</sup> Reiner Oschmann, "Wir sind 50", in *Neues Deutschland*, 23 April 1996, p1

auszuüben, würde ich sofort an die Öffentlichkeit gehen, also das habe ich mir fest vorgenommen.<sup>39</sup>

The paper is now prepared to fight any such attempts, something it did not do in the GDR, and it is clear that in this respect, its journalists have learned a clear lesson from what they see as their mistakes in the past:

Diesmal können wir wenigstens, wenn wir schon zur Schlachtbank geführt werden sollen, ich sag's jetzt symbolisch, als Schafe, dann werden wir wenigstens blöken dabei, und wir werden nicht schweigen dazu, also das Schweigen der Lämmer wird es nicht geben.<sup>40</sup>

A willingness appears to have developed on the part of the journalists to stand up for the principles which they hold, and if necessary to lose the paper, but under no circumstances to lose their own integrity. In the GDR, they subscribed to these same principles, but chose instead to make the compromises which they thought at the time were necessary. Having recognised that there was perhaps another way of reacting to the conditions in the GDR, they have determined not to make this same mistake twice. This has been achieved firstly by using the current advantages the paper has inherited as a result of its past to strengthen its ability to resist outside interference, and secondly by consciously making the decision that the principle of newspaper independence and press freedom is more important than personal self-interest.

The journalists at *Neues Deutschland* are generally critical of the way in which the media market in the unified Germany has developed. Henry Wiedemann, for example, was worried about the influence the media have in Germany:

Schlechter ist sicher auch geworden, daß [...] die Medien, nicht unbedingt Neues Deutschland, aber die Medien an sich, zu einer politischen Gewalt geworden sind, die fast schon mehr entscheiden als manche Politiker.<sup>41</sup>

Wiedemann saw a close connection between the operation of the media systems in the GDR and in the unified Germany, specifically in the way in which the media used this political power:

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, *Neues Deutschland*

Das wird immer offensichtlicher, also wie immer in großen Medien auch Leute fertiggemacht werden, Leute produziert werden, das ist alles letztlich Teil eines Machtspieles, das in mancher Sicht nicht unterscheidet zum DDR-Journalismus. Er hat nur andere Auswirkungen, hat andere Mechanismen, andere Strukturen, aber vieles läuft da nicht darauf hinaus [...], daß also Journalismus etwas mit Berufung zu tun hat.<sup>42</sup>

Such sentiments were expressed in Reiner Oschmann's article dealing with the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of *Neues Deutschland*:

ND wird sich auch künftig die Pressefreiheit nehmen zu sagen, woran es fehlt. Diese Zeitung kann das, weil sie - als eines der wenigen deutschen Blätter von Gewicht - nicht an der Leine medialer Großkonzerne hängt.<sup>43</sup>

At the same time, however, they are also aware of and appreciative of the things which have improved since 1989, such as their independence, the personal freedom they enjoy now, the freedom to make their own decisions as a paper, and at a very concrete level, the fact that they can interview people without knowing beforehand what would result from the interview.<sup>44</sup> The criticisms of the current press system need to be seen within the context of this more positive attitude. Without these freedoms and possibilities, *Neues Deutschland* would not be able to follow the path it has chosen. It has the capitalist system to thank for the opportunity to criticise that same system without fear of recriminations. Nevertheless this is rarely acknowledged. The paper appears in many ways to reserve the right to criticise as it pleases, but without recognising the antecedents to this change in opportunity.

In general, the attitude of the journalists at *Neues Deutschland* can perhaps be summarised using Robert Lohmann's words. He believes that the experiences which the journalists have had in the GDR are very difficult to deal with, but more importantly that they have a positive influence on the work of the journalists at *Neues Deutschland* now. He regards events in the GDR as providing a warning of what can happen, and believes that the lessons which the journalists have learned from this time have had a very positive impact on their work now, making them much more sensitive to potential problems and challenges of their profession:

Ich glaube, daß die Erfahrung, die wir mit dem DDR- und dem SED-Journalismus gemacht haben, daß sie eine sehr problematische Erfahrung

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Reiner Oschmann, "Wir sind 50", in *Neues Deutschland*, 23 April 1996, p1

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, *Neues Deutschland*

in vieler Hinsicht gewesen ist, auch ihre positiven Begleitumstände insofern hat, als diese Erfahrung dazu beitragen kann, heute sensibler, bewußter, mit Gefahren und Verlockungen des Berufes umzugehen. In diesem Sinne, glaube ich, war vieles, was wir in der DDR und im SED-Journalismus erlebt und zum Teil mitpraktiziert haben, eine heilsame Warnung, ein heilsamer Schock auch in mancher Hinsicht, um uns vor einer Wiederholung bestimmter Fehler heute zu bewahren und vor allem auch davor zu bewahren, zu schnell gegenüber Problemen und Personen ignorant und arrogant aufzutreten. Ich glaube, daß dieser Schock hilfreich dafür war, einfach empfindlicher zu werden in einem positiven Sinne, sensibler zu werden, und das ist eigentlich, was ziemlich gut ist, wie ich finde.<sup>45</sup>

There are also several concrete benefits which he sees as having resulted from the impact the GDR had on the journalists:

Ich finde, wir haben die Verpflichtung, aus dem, was wir erlebt haben, wirklich Schlußfolgerungen zu ziehen und kritischer und selbstkritischer mit uns und unserer Arbeit umzugehen, als wir das vorher gelebt haben, wobei man aufpassen muß, [...], daß man in diesem Bemühen, in diesem berechtigten und gerechtfertigten Bemühen um Differenziertheit, um Kritik und Selbstkritik nicht in Defätismus verfällt oder in Selbstverfleischung, weil es zeigt sich, daß in der heutigen Situation, in der heutigen Gesellschaft, diese Art Bereitschaft zur Offenheit, diese Bereitschaft, über das Erlebnis DDR und SED-Journalismus, über Opportunismus und alles, was es so gegeben hat, daß diese Bereitschaft zu einem vorurteilsfreien Gespräch in der Regel nicht honoriert wird, wo im Gegenteil [...] aus dem, der diese Offenheit praktiziert, einen Sündenbock [gemacht wird]. Die Gefahr ist sehr groß, trotzdem halte ich es grundsätzlich für richtig und wichtig, mindestens in einem ernsthaften Gespräch, sich um diese Offenheit zu bemühe und nicht von vornherein nur taktisch vorzugehen sozusagen. Das halte ich für wichtig eigentlich.<sup>46</sup>

As a result of the experiences Lohmann had in the GDR, he now feels a duty to apply the lessons which he learned during this time. This was identified as a common feature of the journalists at *Neues Deutschland*, who demonstrated in the interviews that a clear progression had been made in their thinking and in their actions. They are prepared to discuss critically their actions and attitudes in the GDR, but are at the same time anxious to avoid extremes. This means that they do not wish to make their accounts of their efforts to circumvent the SED's restrictions make them appear great heroes and heroines. But at the same time, they

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*

are aware of the danger of others overemphasising the extent of their compliance in the GDR and making them the target of unjustified criticism. This latter danger arises mainly from a preparedness to be honest with others, which can be turned to their disadvantage.<sup>47</sup>

While it is clear that the staff of *Neues Deutschland* have learned lessons from their GDR past and are now attempting to practise what is a new type of journalism for them, the same cannot be said of all the other papers in Eastern Germany.

## **Berliner Zeitung**

The challenges faced by the staff at the *Berliner Zeitung* are very different from those of *Neues Deutschland*. Whereas *Neues Deutschland* is owned by a political party with no real interest in interfering with the daily operation of the paper, the *Berliner Zeitung* is the property of Gruner + Jahr, a Western German publisher with a very real interest in the way the paper is run and a determination to ensure that these interests are realised.

Unlike *Neues Deutschland*, the *Berliner Zeitung* appears not to be subject to political interference. None of the journalists had experienced such interference since the *Wende*, but this type of interference has been replaced by very strong economic pressures, which are for the journalists as frustrating as the political pressures in the GDR. Robert Lohmann expressed his belief that these problems would exist at other newspapers, and appears to have been correct in his assessment:

Beides - das was an der SED praktiziert worden ist, und das, was es hier und heute mitunter versucht wird - [...] ist Ausdruck von eben solchen Begehrlichkeiten und von versuchter Einflußnahme. In diesem Sinne gibt es ganz allgemein gesagt Ähnlichkeiten. Ich glaube, nach eigenen Erfahrungen in Gesprächen mit anderen Kollegen sagen zu können, daß es noch größere Ähnlichkeiten in einer Reihe anderer Medieneinrichtungen, bürgerlichen Zeitungen, Rundfunk, Fernsehen gibt, wo die Liaison sozusagen zwischen dem jeweiligen Sender oder der jeweiligen Zeitung und dem Eigentümer, dem Verlag oder so, sich so ausdrücken, daß dort zum Teil offenbar sehr direkt, sehr kurz beschlossen direkte Wünsche übermittelt werden, die nicht mehr den Charakter eines Wunsches, sondern eigentlich den Charakter eines Befehls haben. Das ist nämlich einer der Gründe, weshalb sich manche ehemalige[n] Kolleginnen und Kollegen aus der DDR, der jetzt also in einem bürgerlich geführten Medienkonzern womöglich arbeitet, sich erinnert fühlen an die Situation

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid

in SED-Zeit, und weshalb manche Kollegen sagen, es ist eigentlich wie zu SED-Zeiten, nur mit anderen Mitteln, aber im Grunde gibt es auch heute sehr direkte, sehr unverblümete Interventionsversuche, Einmischungsversuche, um eine bestimmte Linie zu sichern in einer Zeitung oder in einer anderen journalistischen Einrichtung.<sup>48</sup>

Although many of Lohmann's views will be confirmed, it would not be true to say that the problems are the same for all the departments of the *Berliner Zeitung*. In order to paint a fair picture of the current position of the journalists at this paper, the areas of financial reporting and the *Ratgeber* section will be looked at separately from the others, as there are clear differences between these two departments and the rest of the paper.

### *Financial reporting and Ratgeber section*

#### Economic pressure

The two areas where the influence from outside sources is felt most strongly are economic reporting and in the *Ratgeber* section, and in both cases, there is a strong connection with advertising and financial concerns. Although the influences originate outside the paper, they are also reflected in the internal instructions issued by individuals and departments within the newspaper.

Within the *Wirtschaftsressort*, the interference from other firms is very overt and very strong. The main problem lies in these firms' perceived connection between their advertising in the paper and the level and nature of reporting about their firm:

Für uns in der Wirtschaftsredaktion spielt sich der Konflikt so eher ab zwischen Anzeigenkunden und redaktioneller Arbeit, und da gibt es für mich schon Konflikte, wenn eben Anzeigenkunden hier anrufen bei der Berliner Zeitung und meinen, die Berichterstattung über irgendeine Eröffnung von einem Laden ist zu kurz gekommen und sie bezahlen so viele Anzeigen für diese Zeitung, dann wird eben von der Verlagsseite durchgedrückt, daß ein Redakteur aus der Wirtschaftsredaktion noch mal dahin gehen muß und noch mal darüber schreiben, damit der Anzeigenkunde zufriedengestellt wird, und das finde ich überhaupt nicht in Ordnung, daß also über die Anzeigenkunden so viel Einfluß genommen wird, es hat zugenommen, ich meine, um so weniger Anzeigenkunden es gibt, das Geschäft läuft schlecht, dann tut man einiges

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid

dafür, das finde ich irgendwie Verrat am Leser.<sup>49</sup>

The ability of the advertisers to have their wishes followed depends in part on the relative strength of the paper and the advertiser. Where there is a lot of advertising available, the paper is more easily able to resist any attempts at interference, as it has a good chance of replacing the lost advertising from another source, but when, as is the case as in the summer of 1996<sup>50</sup>, the quantity of advertising is low, the paper finds itself needing to cooperate more and more in order to retain the advertising of a company. Related to this is the ability of the editor to make a stand on behalf of the paper, which is also partly dependent on the financial state of the paper at the time:

Dann hängt's eben davon ab, wie es der Zeitung geht. Wenn [die] Zeitung gerade gut in der Auflage ist und wirtschaftlich sehr ertragreich ist, dann kann der Chefredakteur dann auch sagen, nee, also in diesem Falle finde ich, das geht zu weit, aus inhaltlichen Gründen das wollen wir nicht. Wenn die Auflage aber gerade bröckelt und der Chefredakteur schwach auf der Brust ist, weil er [...] irgendwie nicht so stark dasteht, verliert man das.<sup>51</sup>

In addition, the paper's susceptibility to such pressures is also dependent on the importance of a financial profit. For papers such as the *Berliner Zeitung*, where the primary motive for operating the paper is to make a profit, advertisers are able to capitalise on this. By way of contrast, *Neues Deutschland* is in a stronger position in this respect, as it has less interest in making a profit than in pursuing other goals.

The final influence on the paper's susceptibility to such pressure from advertisers concerns its relative position in the market. In Berlin, there are several large newspapers competing for advertising income, and advertisers have no problems in placing their adverts. As a result, any threat to remove advertising from a paper could easily be realised, and each newspaper faces this possibility when it does something which displeases an advertiser. The importance of this factor of market strength will be examined in more detail in a comparison between the *Berliner Zeitung* and the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*.

The concrete nature of the influence on the paper takes two main forms. Firstly, there is the

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Paulina Scheer, *Berliner Zeitung*

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Katja Buchwald, *Berliner Zeitung*



example seen above of reporters having to write favourable articles about advertisers, and being instructed to return to the advertiser in some situations where they are not happy with the coverage. Secondly, there is the more subtle form of interference whereby firms have advertisements printed which are hard to distinguish from the journalists' own texts in their form and layout:

Ein anderer Konflikt [...] ist, daß man Anzeigenteile nicht deutlich als solche ausweist, also das man ein Layout nimmt, das ein bissle nach redaktioneller Seite aussieht, und das sind lauter PR-Texte, es hat die Anmutung einer normalen Seite, ist aber tatsächlich eine Anzeige.<sup>52</sup>

Scheer herself had two main objections to such activities. Firstly, she considers these techniques to be a "Verrat am Leser", or a "Betrug am Leser, also richtiger Betrug". She found it

ziemlich unakzeptabel, aber das Geldverdienen geht hier vor. Und das ist für mich der größte Konflikt aller, daß eigentlich der Profit, der auch mit dieser Zeitung gemacht wird, meines Erachtens höher steht, ja logisch, weil in diesem System höher stehen muß, als [...] irgendeine Ethik des Journalismus.<sup>53</sup>

Such financial requirements of the press were unknown in the GDR, and as such, there was not a conflict between money and ethics. The journalists view this new conflict as being an inherent part of the capitalist system, as the function of companies is to make money. It is not therefore surprising that the economics coverage of a newspaper is significantly affected by this development. But similar problems with interference have also been seen in the area of the *Ratgeber* section of the paper, as was explained by Katja Buchwald:

Bei Kleinanzeigenkunden kann man's leicht abschmettern und ablehnen, wenn es ein großer, wichtiger Anzeigenkunde ist, der eben durch das Anzeigengeschäft oder durch den Verlagsdirektor sehr ans Herz gelegt wird, hat man wenig Chancen, da muß man's machen, also auch wenn's bitter ist, aber wir haben uns daran gewöhnt.<sup>54</sup>

Just as was seen above, money is the determining factor in these cases, and Buchwald commented on the relationship between money and press freedom:

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with Paulina Scheer, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Katja Buchwald, Berliner Zeitung

Es gibt da schon Einschränkungen, also man kann da in einer Beilage, die sich mit Bauen und Wohnen [...] befaßt, schlecht einen kritisierenden Artikel über [...] schlechte, anbieterüberbeuerte Waren oder so bringen, wenn die gleichen Herrschaften annoncieren in der Beilage. Da ist die Pressefreiheit am Geld beendet, also früher war sie durch die politische Einflußnahme beendet, heute ist sie durch ökonomische Zwecke beendet, an bestimmten Kunden.<sup>55</sup>

This comparison between the earlier political considerations of the GDR and the financial considerations today is one which will be examined in greater detail at a later point.

The journalists reported that they always try to examine these attempts in the light of their own professional criteria. Consequently, it is possible that they will conclude that an article is worth writing, irrespective of the fact that a firm initially requests it be written. Buchwald remarked that

wenn's redaktionell sinnvoll ist, diesen Termin zu besetzen, dann diskutiert man ja nicht, dann hat man es sich schon selber überlegt, also wenn ein großer Anzeigekunde ein riesenneues Möbelcenter am Rande der Stadt eröffnet, gerade in der Zeit, in der wir eine Beilage machen, dann kann ich doch darüber berichten, es ist für die Gemeinde dort ein Ereignis, die Kunden müssen informiert werden, wie sie dahin kommen, was es dort zu kaufen gibt. Dann habe ich damit kein Problem, dann gehe ich auch dahin. Wenn ich aber dieses journalistisch nicht verwerten kann, weil es entweder nicht neu ist oder weil ich's vor wenigen Tagen schon hatte in einem anderen Zusammenhang und sehe jetzt eine einfache Wiederholung, wenn ich einfach andere wichtigere Dinge habe, die ich gerne unterbringen möchte auf der Seite, und mich dann dagegen wehre, und dann aber die Anweisung kommt aus dem Verlagsbereich, nein, also trotzdem, es muß.<sup>56</sup>

Although Buchwald attempts to look at the proposed story from the point of view of its journalistic value, there are limitations to the application of this method. Just as in the GDR the views of the journalists were of secondary importance to the SED's requirements, so now, the views of the journalists as to the value of an article in itself are secondary to the requirements of the paper's editor or owners, who appear to place more value on the potential impact on the paper's income than on its integrity. When the journalists do not consider that an article is worth writing or printing but the editor or owner does, the journalists see little choice but to comply.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

Similarities with the operation of the press in the GDR are also seen in the way in which the advertisers actually operate. When dealing directly with the individual journalists does not produce the desired outcome, they invariably contact those in more senior positions in the paper, who then send instructions back down the chain of command to the actual journalists. They are then obliged to write the required article - "dann geht derjenige, wenn er bei mir nicht durchkommt, zum Chefredakteur".<sup>57</sup>

This method of operation is very similar to the way in which the SED operated in the GDR. Instead of giving the individual journalists instructions as to what was expected of them, the *Chefredakteure* were all summoned to a meeting, the current "guidelines" were explained to them, and they were then responsible for the actual implementation. This way of dealing with the papers also seems to reflect the individual journalists' personal dislike for cooperating with such requests.

The two journalists commenting on this issue both found such expectations unacceptable. This was in part a result of the sharp contrast which they saw between the GDR and the subsequent year of journalistic freedom, and later between this year and the interference which returned, albeit from a different source. They had believed that they had escaped such influences, and that their freedom would persist. The realisation that this was not the case caused them great emotional stress:

Am Anfang hat's mich fürchterlich aufgeregt, also ich habe [...] richtig [...] darunter gelitten, und fand's ungerecht, und es hat mich genauso gekränkt, weil's auch eine Enttäuschung war, wir hatten ja ein Jahr lang, als wir niemandem hörten, oder wir hörten noch der Partei, aber die hat sich nicht mehr darum gekümmert, also hatten wir ein Jahr herrlicher Anarchie und Freiheit, da haben wir *wirklich* Presse gemacht, wie wir sie uns dachten, [...] und daran hatte man sich natürlich gewöhnt, und plötzlich nachdem eine Anzeigenabteilung installiert wurde, war ein richtiger Verlagskopf wieder mit Leuten, die aus dem Westen herkamen und die dieses ganze Verlagsmanagement, was wir ja nicht hatten und nicht kannten, aufgebaut hatten, die wir auch brauchten, also die Leute machen ihre Arbeit ja gut, [...] aber als sie hier anfangen, sich dann wieder so doch für meine Begriffe massiv, also in meine redaktionellen Belange einmischten [...], bei mir ging's los, da war ich dann doch schon sehr enttäuscht, weil ich eigentlich glaubte, wirklich dieser Einflußnahme entronnen zu sein, die man aus DDR-Zeiten kannte, und daß sie hier jetzt anders motiviert war, daß jetzt einfach das Geld, das finde ich nicht

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid

sympathischer als vorgespilte politische Beweggründe, also ist mir eigentlich schnuppe, wer mich da beeinflusst, das finde ich beides lästig, ähnlich lästig, und da war doch ein bißchen Enttäuschung, ich war sehr sehr wütend.<sup>58</sup>

The journalists accept that the new structure of the paper including advertising departments and financial consultants is necessary in the new capitalist press system, but do not accept the overlap of the areas of advertising and reporting. Again, this is similar to the journalists' personal commitment to socialism in the GDR, where they were nevertheless unhappy about the way in which their work and ability were misused for political purposes. Now they find that their work and talent are misused for financial gain.

### **Internal influences**

Because of the clear chain of influence between the advertisers, the senior newspaper staff and the actual journalists, it is useful to examine what part internal interference plays in the work of the journalists in the department dealing with financial reporting and the *Ratgeber* section.

As has already been seen, the wishes of the advertisers are often channelled through the paper's senior staff. The editor-in-chief is often involved in dictating the journalists' behaviour, and his involvement can be very direct:

Das ist schon ziemlich konkret. [...] Und es ist sehr schwer, sich dagegen zu wehren. Das Totschlagargument kommt, davon leben wir doch alle. Das ist das Totschlagargument, und ist Ende der Durchsage, es ist Ihr Arbeitsplatz.<sup>59</sup>

These comments are entirely supported by the experiences of Katja Buchwald, who said that the requests (Buchwald preferred the word "Bitten" to "Anweisungen") come

aus dem Verlagsbereich. Sie sind manchmal sehr konkret. Sie sind manchmal richtig massive Aufforderungen, diesen Termin zu besetzen und darüber zu berichten, weil das ist ein wichtiger Anzeigenkunde.<sup>60</sup>

The possibility always remains for the individual journalists to refuse to cooperate with the

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Paulina Scheer, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Katja Buchwald, Berliner Zeitung

instructions (or requests) from the editor if it is felt that the proposed article has little journalistic value. However, Paulina Scheer, commenting on the ability of the journalists to disobey such instructions from the editor, said that

dann gibt's beim zweiten Mal eine Abmahnung. [...] Wir haben einen neuen Chefredakteur, und der geht mit diesem Instrument sehr großzügig um. [...] Also, man würde es schon spüren.<sup>61</sup>

Although the current editor-in-chief is from the West and new to the paper, Scheer did not consider that the previous editor, who was from the East, was any better as far as his influence on the journalists is concerned - "der konnte sehr stark Einfluß nehmen [...], sogar noch stärker und direkter".<sup>62</sup>

### Comparison with the GDR

Some of the similarities with the experiences in the GDR have already been mentioned. There are also a number of differences between the way in which advertisers can influence the paper's behaviour now and the way in which the SED could intervene in the paper's operations in the GDR. As far as the similarities are concerned,

ich finde, das wird immer ähnlicher. [...] Also, die Medienpolitik in der DDR war so ausgerichtet, positive Darstellung des Lebens, so, und das war ja der Auftrag, den alle Redaktionen hatten, Kritik und Negatives kamen nicht vor. Vor wenigen Wochen kam mein Chef aus der Sitzung und sagte, der Chefredakteur wünscht sich mehr positive Darstellung auf der Wirtschaftsseite, so, und da ist mir fast der Unterkiefer nach unten gefallen - "er wünscht sich positive Darstellung" - das ist schon für mich so völlig aberwitzig, ich erfülle hier nicht die Wünsche des Chefredakteurs, was er lesen will, ich meine [...], wir sind in einer Wirtschaftskrise, wir haben hohe Arbeitslosigkeit, und momentan kommen die negativen Schlagzeilen und ich kann das Abbild nicht verfälschen von dem, also ich muß ja glaubwürdig sein, ich muß ja ein ethisches Ziel [haben], aber man muß ja die Wirklichkeit abbilden, und ich kann also keine Wünsche des Chefredakteurs nach positiven Berichten als solches erfüllen, wenn das Leben anders ist.<sup>63</sup>

The similarity between these two cases is very clear, and exactly this issue of positive reporting was commented upon by a photographer who had been instructed to take more

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with Paulina Scheer, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

pictures of people smiling and enjoying themselves, something which he had been asked to do in the GDR as well, in order to create the impression that the citizens were all happy and contented. The photographer was very concerned about his own position at the paper. He was unhappy with his working conditions because of the extent of interference which he had encountered. Of all those interviewed, he was the only one who insisted that his real name not be used because he feared the consequences of his comments being attributed to him and reaching his superiors. This is very similar to the conditions in the GDR, where critical comments had to be voiced sparingly and only in fora where there was no doubt as to the views of the others present. There are also more general similarities between the two periods of time in that

immer Einfluß genommen wird von außen. Also die Vision, daß der Journalist frei und unabhängig ist, die stimmt offenbar in keinem System, er ist immer begleitet von Zwängen, wie gesagt, bei uns waren sie damals ideologisch [...], heute sagt man offen, daß es das Geld ist, daß man den Kunden braucht, also wird es letztlich für die Zeitung [...] so gehüpft wie gesprungen, [...] die Ursachen sind andere, die Gründe, aber die Sache ist die gleiche, der Journalist wird auf einen Weg geschoben, von dem der Besitzer, damals war die Partei der Eigentümer der Zeitung, heute ist Gruner+Jahr, also die haben ihre Interessen, und wem du gehörst, letztendlich dessen Sicht [...] mußt du sehen.<sup>64</sup>

The comparison between the GDR and the present-day situation in the press shows clearly that there are certain clear similarities between the two systems. In both cases, there is an outside source of influence and interference which is more concerned about its own self-interest than the integrity of reporting, so important to the journalists. In addition, these external bodies are both willing and able to impose their will on the paper and its staff. However, the motivation is different. In the GDR, it was ideological, and financial considerations were not relevant, whereas now, the motivating force is money and potential profit, with ideological concerns very much in the background. Interestingly, these motivations for interference are also the reason for the existence of the paper in both systems. In the GDR, it was to be an ideological instrument, Lenin's collective propagandist, agitator and organiser, and in the capitalist model, the paper exists to make a profit for its owners. Other considerations are always secondary to these primary concerns, and media ethics and integrity fall under this category of secondary factors in both systems. Because the

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with Katja Buchwald, Berliner Zeitung

journalists had a period of freedom from these non-journalistic concerns, they felt very strongly the contrast between this freedom and the restrictions which are imposed by any formal ownership and control structure, and see the two situations as being very similar in principle.

Perhaps the most worrying similarity is when journalists are forced to do something which conflicts with their conscience. This latter danger has already been seen at the post-*Wende* *Berliner Zeitung*, albeit rarely:

Gegen das Gewissen geht's selten, also daß die Auseinandersetzungen so hart sind, daß man also gegen seine Überzeugung einen Artikel ins Blatt heben [...] muß, ist selten, also dreimal oder so. Insofern ist mein Spielraum schon noch sehr groß [...]. Aber es kommt eben vor.<sup>65</sup>

However, just as in the GDR the problems of conscience diminished with time and experience, so this phenomenon is clearly being repeated, as is seen in the development of the journalists' reaction to their new working conditions.

### *The journalists' response to the new conditions*

The comments regarding the personal response of the journalists to the new conditions at the *Berliner Zeitung* are very reminiscent of those regarding their work in the GDR:

Nun habe ich mich mittlerweile daran gewöhnt, aber am Anfang hat's mich fürchterlich aufgeregt, also ich habe [...] richtig [...] darunter gelitten, und fand's ungerecht und es hat mich genauso gekränkt, weil's auch eine Enttäuschung war. [...]. Mittlerweile habe ich mich daran gewöhnt und [...] es kommt ein Ansinnen, ich höre mir das an, ich überlege mir, ist das zumutbar, ist es machbar, wenn ich der Meinung bin, ja, da können wir's irgendwie machen, ohne das Gesicht zu verlieren, dann mache ich's, und wenn ich der Meinung bin, nee, ich kann's nicht, dann argumentiere ich, nenne meine Argumente, versuche, mich bei der Chefredaktion durchzusetzen, und mal kriege ich recht, mal kriege ich nicht recht, also ich nehme es jetzt sehr viel ruhiger und sachlicher einfach, sie gehört jetzt mit zum Arbeitsalltag, daran habe ich mich gewöhnt.<sup>66</sup>

Buchwald seems to demonstrate a similar development to that seen in the journalists during the GDR era. To begin with, she found the interference totally unacceptable and appeared

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

to be applying the lessons she had learned from her GDR experiences. She saw the similarity in purpose behind the SED's and the new owners' actions, and found both equally wrong. But with time, she appears to have begun to lose the anger she initially felt, and instead began to rationalise her own acquiescent behaviour. Instead of making a stand, she has come to the point where she will examine a case and present her arguments, but if these are rejected by the editor, she will go no further. As was seen in GDR times, she is happy once again to win some cases, but by and large, she has grown accustomed to the interference and lack of freedom in her work. On the one level, of course, this could be construed as simply a part of the constant need for compromise in all areas of life, but on another level, it draws attention to the falling-off of the level of awareness about the similarities with the GDR and the consequent application of the lessons from the GDR experience. To begin with, the comparison of the GDR with the year or so of total freedom meant that when this was challenged, there was a strong internal reaction. But in time, this reaction was dampened as the journalists grew used to the new situation.

As in the GDR, the journalists' possibilities for resistance are, however, limited by other factors. Again, the foremost consideration is that of personal survival. The paper's owners are quite within their rights to fire any journalist who is, in their opinion, going too far in their criticism. Referring to the possibility of writing something about the problems the journalists now face because of outside interference, Paulina Scheer stated that "dann werde ich fristlos gekündigt. Also das müßte ich dann in Kauf nehmen, ist nun klar".<sup>67</sup>

The experiences of these two departments is, however, not typical of the entire newspaper. Katja Buchwald herself noted that the situation was very much more extreme than in the area of political coverage, for example:

Ich merk's aber besonders stark im Servicebereich, weil da viele Anzeigen dranhängen, Reiseanzeigen, Autoanzeigen, und so weiter, ich glaube schon, daß Politikredakteure nicht so reden, also die Anzeigenabteilung hat auf den Politikteil, auf die ersten Seiten keinen Einfluß, also das habe ich noch nicht gehört, das hätte sich zu mir 'rumgesprochen. Das betrifft jetzt wirklich meine Spezifik mit diesem Ratgeber, weil so viele Anzeigen dranhängen, also ich bin, glaube ich, diejenige, die neben dem Lokalchef, der das auch kennt [...] ich glaube, wir sind die beiden Bereiche, in denen es am stärksten ist, die anderen, glaube ich nicht, also Politik auf alle Fälle

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with Paulina Scheer, Berliner Zeitung



nicht, und das ist schon anders als früher, weil da ging's vor allem um die Politik.<sup>68</sup>

### *Other departments*

#### **External influences**

The contrast to the financial reporting and the *Ratgeber* section is shown clearly by the comments made by other journalists on their experiences of outside interference in their work:

Habe ich nicht erlebt, kann ich nicht sagen.<sup>69</sup>

Diese Einflußnahme gibt es jetzt [...] nicht in die politische Ebene und die Ausrichtung und die Berichterstattung also wirklich [...] relevanten und für die Zeitung wichtigen Gebiete. Also da haben wir bisher keine Einflußnahme gespürt.<sup>70</sup>

Nee, überhaupt nicht. Also, das ist auch, was ich sehr schätze an der neuen Zeit, und ich meine, man hört natürlich immer, auch von anderen Redaktionen, daß es da immer Einfluß gibt, auf verschiedene Meinungen und Kommentare und so. Ich habe das hier bisher noch nicht erlebt, und es ist wirklich eine ganz neue Erfahrung.<sup>71</sup>

At the same time, as Gärtner's comments indicate, there is an awareness that interference is experienced by other departments. This appears to be common knowledge among the journalists:

Es gibt Ärgernisse, die eigentlich, aber auf einer ganz kleinen Ebene, also nicht auf dem großen politischen Feld sich sozusagen abspielen, es sind Dinge, wenn Anzeigenkunden, sagen wir mal besonders gute Anzeigenkunden, den Wunsch haben, daß man also - ein Beispiel auf lokaler Ebene, der Kaufhof hat hier am Hauptbahnhof ein neues Kaufhaus eröffnet, also umgebaut, modernisiert, alles neu, und da haben die Anzeigen geschaltet, und haben sich gewünscht, daß redaktionell sozusagen drum herum reichlich berichtet wird. Haben wir gemacht, gibt immer Ärger, weil alle Kollegen sind sauer, wenn sie es machen müssen, aber es wird dann gemacht.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Katja Buchwald, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Theodor Ehrich, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Brigitte Fischer, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Alfred Gärtner, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Brigitte Fischer, Berliner Zeitung

Im Grunde genommen gibt's ja diese Interessenkollision zwischen Anzeigen und Redaktion, zwischen Verlag und Redaktion, die gibt's tagtäglich.<sup>73</sup>

Frank Grünewald has experienced similar attempts at intervention to those already seen, but there is an important difference in his area of reporting, in that he appears to have been able to resist the attempts. It should, however, be noted, that the example of this which he cites does not relate to his time at the *Berliner Zeitung*, and as such, is not indicative of the situation at this paper. Nevertheless, it does serve to demonstrate that other papers appear to be both willing and able to resist these attempts:

Wir werden da, glaube ich schon, als Zeitung auch geknebelt, von der wirtschaftlichen Seite, also die steht letztendlich über, ich habe es oft erlebt, daß man dann also sagt, wir machen dann und dann ein sogenanntes Verlagsthema, mit Anzeigen, und ihr müßt den Rest umfüllen, redaktionell möglichst dazu passend, also passend heißt auch eventuell auch wohlwollend, also ich habe das mal eben nicht wohlwollend gemacht, sondern habe also mit dem Chef der Handwerkskammer [...] ein Interview gemacht und über die Probleme gesprochen, aber das ging auch, man hat mir nur gesagt, das soll passend zu diesen Anzeigen [sein]. Habe auch keinen Ärger bekommen, muß ich mal dazu sagen, aber es könnte ganz leicht passieren.<sup>74</sup>

Grünewald's last proviso is significant - although in this particular case, he did not experience any negative reaction, he seemed to think that this is not necessarily the norm in such situations.

### **Internal influences**

Although the picture painted by these other journalists concerning outside influences is much more hopeful, they appear to be subject to pressures from within the paper similar to their colleagues reporting on financial issues and giving advice to the readers. However, there are different degrees of intervention which are mentioned, several of which should not be regarded as being undesirable. In this area, there are significant differences between departments again, and accordingly, the various departments about which information was obtained will be examined individually. It should, however, be stressed that here again, the conclusions are based only on the experiences of one individual, and those of other

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<sup>73</sup> Interview with Frank Grünewald, *Berliner Zeitung*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*

colleagues within the same department may be different. Nevertheless, as far as intervention in the journalists' work is concerned, it seems reasonable to assume that while the concrete experiences of the journalists will differ, the basic situation in a given department will be equally well reflected by any of the journalists working in that area.

### *Police reporting*

Amongst those reporting on incidents involving the police, there appears to be a significant level of intervention by the editor:

Es passiert in ganz starkem Maße, daß ich also mal ein paar Themen habe machen müssen, die mich jetzt persönlich gar nicht interessieren und die ich aber trotzdem machen muß, oder ich habe mein Thema zwar ausgesucht, aber dann kommt, "das ist wichtiger, ist drängender", und kriege dann richtig auch Zettel oder Meldungen, "bitte kümmere dich drum" oder "mach was draus", auf alle Fälle, das ist auf der Tagesordnung.<sup>75</sup>

This is very similar to the experiences of journalists in the financial department and *Ratgeber* section, and Grünewald also finds this situation "nicht gut".<sup>76</sup> However, he does see some room for protest, albeit within clear boundaries. On the one hand, he is aware of the danger of too much protest, a danger which is in part connected to the weak position of journalists in Eastern Germany. Many of them are unemployed, which means that newspapers can be sure of finding someone else to fill a position left vacant by another journalist leaving the paper for whatever reason:

Es ist auch nicht so ratsam, öfter als dreimal im halben Jahr massiv dagegen vorzugehen [...]. Bei der gegenwärtigen Situation ist es nicht so ratsam, da den Robin Hood zu spielen.<sup>77</sup>

Grünewald also sees an element of duty in his unwillingness to offer too much resistance to the interference he has experienced - "ist meine Pflicht, Arbeitsvertrag". As was seen in the case of the journalists' reasons for complying with the SED's media policies, there is then a mixture of practical and value-related reasons for a basic compliance with the editor's requests.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid

<sup>76</sup> Ibid

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

On the other hand, Grünewald does not say that he goes along quietly with what he is asked to do. Although he believes that the response to a greater degree of resistance would be “du kannst auch was anderes machen, [...] wenn’s dir nicht paßt”<sup>78</sup>, he is still prepared to defend his position when he feels that something is wrong:

Ich gehöre noch zu denen, die sich noch wehren, muß ich noch sagen, [...] verbal eigentlich nur, also, daß sie mir da nicht gefallen, daß ich konkret meine Meinung dazu sage, und also öffentlich Protest, also auch vor anderen, nicht bloß unter vier Augen, heute auch in der Sitzung.<sup>79</sup>

Such a situation would not have been practical in the GDR, and in this respect, his verbal criticism in public is a positive move forward from the days of the GDR, where even verbal criticism had to be confined to small groups of trusted colleagues. Likewise, his ability to voice his criticism is also an improvement on the experiences of his colleagues in the first two departments looked at. Unfortunately, Grünewald is less optimistic about the future for journalists such as himself who are attempting to follow certain standards which on occasions may conflict with the financial interests of the newspaper. While he says that

ich bin natürlich nicht so naiv zu glauben, [...] alleine mit dem Verkaufspreis einer Zeitung eine Zeitung erhalten zu können, das habe ich auch mal wieder studiert, daß eine Zeitung eine zweifache Funktion hat, einmal Meinungsbildung und hin und her, also das, was eigentlich eine Zeitung ausmacht, und im zweiten Fall einfach eine Ware ist, die sich verkaufen muß<sup>80</sup>

he also fears

daß es schwerer wird für Leute [...] wie für mich, die es ehrlich meinen, die es ernsthaft machen, die aber trotzdem Journalist genug sind, sofort die gute Geschichte zu spüren.<sup>81</sup>

### ***Reportagen***

The situation with the *Reportagen* department is very different again as far as internal intervention is concerned. The department editor has a great deal of autonomy over the production of his side of the paper, page three, and has the responsibility for the production

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> Ibid

and correction of any articles which are written within his department:

Also, bei uns existiert eine Grundsituation, die so heißt, daß die Ressortchefs für die Arbeit in den Ressorts [...] allein verantwortlich sind, also das ist nicht so, daß irgendjemand über [sie] sitzt, [...] und die Arbeit sozusagen kontrolliert, also wenn eine Seite Drei, wenn man das ganz konkret sagt, wenn eine Seite Drei heute in der Zeitung ist, dann ist sie gestern abend um 17 Uhr [...] geschrieben, also verabschiedet worden, produziert worden, hergestellt worden, und danach liest das keiner mehr, also danach sitzt nicht irgendjemand da und guckt jetzt, ob alles richtig ist oder ob das eine richtige Tendenz ist oder sonst was, so passiert das nicht, [...] also insofern redet innerhalb der Redaktion zunächst mal keiner *direkt* rein.<sup>82</sup>

Ehrich compared the position within the *Reportagen* department with another possibility which would involve the editor much more directly in the internal departmental decision-making:

Es gibt ja auch ein anderes Modell, es gibt verschiedene Modelle, es gibt auch das Modell, daß da noch ein Chefredakteur oder ein stellvertretender Chefredakteur das alles nochmal liest und prüft oder so, also das gibt's nicht.<sup>83</sup>

The only involvement of the newspaper editor was seen to be a positive one. He might make suggestions of possible topics, but Ehrich was quite happy with such indirect involvement in the department's activities:

Das passiert, klar, das passiert, der Chefredakteur hat schon ab und zu eine Vorstellung, was auf der Seite Drei steht, nicht oft, aber ab und zu schon, und das ist dann nicht so, daß man sagt, das ist voller Blödsinn, mache ich auf keinen Fall, sondern in aller Regel sind das ja dann [...] vernünftige Vorstellungen.<sup>84</sup>

Ehrich believes that it is important for the paper to maintain this cooperative relationship between the editor and the departments, with an exchange of ideas and opinions, as this is the way to ensure a wide spectrum of views is presented in the paper, which in turn will ensure the viability of the newspaper:

Die [...] Frage ist eine Frage, die etwa lautet, welche Position hat man

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with Theodor Ehrich, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>83</sup> Ibid

<sup>84</sup> Ibid

eigentlich, welche Position würde man für sich formulieren? Eher eine konservative Position, oder eher eine linksliberale, oder irgendetwas dazwischen? Das ist eine Sache, die relativ schwierig ist, weil eine Zeitung, die sich als eine Massenzeitung verkaufen will, ist eigentlich ganz sinnvoll, daß sie verschiedene Positionen zuläßt, innerhalb der Zeitung.<sup>85</sup>

In addition, the nature of the work of his department means that there is little which could be influenced:

Ich mache nicht Meinungsjournalismus hier, wir schreiben hier keine Kommentare, sondern wir machen Reportage, und Reportage schildert Verhältnisse, und jede Schilderung von Verhältnisse ist zugelassen, wenn sie stimmt, wenn sie wahr ist, das ist erst mal keine Frage.<sup>86</sup>

There is little in the articles which could be changed to present a different picture or cast a different light on a story. Certain facts could be brought to the fore and others left out of the article, but it would be impossible for anyone other than the actual writer of the article to be familiar with all the information behind each article to be able to change its slant accordingly. The only real option open to anyone would be to determine what articles are written, and what areas covered. The most important aspect of the relationship between the editor of the *Berliner Zeitung* and the *Reportagen* department is the very lack of negative intervention, and the constructive nature of the interaction which takes place.

### *Political coverage*

The journalists dealing with political reporting said very little about intervention from within the newspaper, but this seems to be because there was none. Brigitte Fischer, for example, commented that "ein Auftragswerk, wo jemand gegen seinen Willen irgendetwas verfassen mußte, kann mich nicht erinnern"<sup>87</sup>, and this experience seems typical of the new situation in the press market in Eastern Germany, where for most papers, political reporting is not subject to outside interference.

### *Lessons learned from the GDR*

There is no doubt that as with the journalists from *Neues Deutschland*, the journalists

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid

<sup>86</sup> Ibid

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Brigitte Fischer, *Berliner Zeitung*

working for the *Berliner Zeitung* have learned many lessons from their experiences in the GDR. The reaction of those subject to interference in their work shows that they had become very sensitive to any such attempts after experiencing the sharp contrast between the GDR and the total freedom of the year after the *Wende*. However, what is both disappointing and worrying is the extent to which the restriction of the journalists's freedom by the SED has been replaced by the restrictions imposed by the paper's owners and editors. The reaction of those most affected, as typified by Paulina Scheer and Katja Buchwald, is very reminiscent of the way in which the journalists in the GDR resigned themselves to the infraction of their professional freedom. Remarks such as "was soll ich machen?" (Scheer) and "nun habe ich mich mittlerweile daran gewöhnt" (Buchwald) could easily have been referring to their experiences in the GDR.

On the other hand, Frank Grünewald shows a greater resolve to act upon the lessons he has learned from the GDR. Although he recognises that there are clear limits to his ability to protest, he is nevertheless prepared to voice publicly his unhappiness at what is sometimes expected of him. However, his rather pessimistic view of the future for journalists such as himself would tend to suggest that the situation for journalists in general will deteriorate in the coming years as those prepared to resist interference are gradually replaced by others who will be more cooperative. With the current employment market containing a large number of qualified and skilled journalists without work, there will be no shortage of replacements for many years to come.

On a more positive note, it appears that the problems of interference are limited to certain clearly defined sources and departments. Aside from the financial department, *Ratgeber* section and the area of police reporting, there does not seem to be a problem with outside interference or internal influences, and the relationship between management and journalists appears to be a harmonious one. This is, however, less the result of lessons learned from the GDR than the effect of a lack of interest on the part of the paper's editor or owners in interfering with the normal operation of these departments. How the journalists in these other departments would react to attempted interference in their work is unclear, but there is little reason to suppose that their response would be significantly different from those who have already experienced the problems.

One last comment by Brigitte Fischer serves to support Robert Lohmann's observations

about the similarities between the two eras of the GDR and Eastern Germany, and the lessons which have been learned by the Eastern German journalists, as well as the dangers which they have recognised in the GDR. She concludes that the excesses of the GDR would no longer be possible in Eastern Germany, as the Eastern Germans have learned a lot more from their past than many others believe to be the case. In addition, as the framework within which the *Berliner Zeitung* now operates is very different, a repetition of the mistakes of the GDR would no longer be possible:

Ich glaube, daß diese Erfahrungen [der beiden Leben der Ostdeutschen], die wir haben - von vielen Osis auch - einfach zu geringgeschätzt werden, weil es gibt Dinge, die wiederholen sich, es gibt Dinge, die laufen unter anderen politischen Vorzeichen und auch in den anderen gesellschaftlichen Umständen, aber es sind letztendlich immer Menschen, die agieren, und dadurch gibt es also viele Ähnlichkeiten, und es gibt auch Machtstrukturen, die einen sind diktatorisch, die anderen sind demokratisch, aber Macht hat immer, ob demokratisch kontrolliert oder diktatorisch, bestimmte Funktionsmechanismen, und die erkennt man überall wieder. Die sind auch hier da, sie haben nur den unwahrscheinlichen Vorteil, oder dieses System hat den unwahrscheinlichen Vorteil, daß diese Machtstrukturen und ihre Mechanismen einer demokratischen Kontrolle unterliegen, und dazu gehören wir auch, solche Institutionen wie die Medien letztendlich. Und nicht zum unwesentlichen Teil gehören die dazu. Und dadurch sind die Auswüchse, die zu DDR-Zeiten möglich waren, in bestimmten Punkten so einfach nicht denkbar. Die Öffentlichkeit, die besteht, und die da ist, verhindert das einfach.<sup>88</sup>

## **Berliner Kurier**

Because of the limited cooperation which the *Berliner Kurier* offered, it is hard to come to any specific conclusions as to the problems the paper faced after the *Wende*. However, the comments of the two journalists interviewed there appear to confirm the conclusions reached about the lack of interference in political coverage at the *Berliner Zeitung*. For example, Michael Schneider, who provides political coverage, said that he had never experienced any outside interference in his work. However, he had one experience of a critical article about a senior politician resulting in a less cordial relationship with that politician's press department:

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid



Dann ist man nicht mehr so ganz so gut und gern gesehen da, aber so rum, daß tatsächlich einer direkt hat einwirken wollen, das ist nicht passiert, hier wirklich nicht. Das war im Osten schlimmer, das ist ganz ohne Zweifel im Osten schlimmer gewesen, gar keine Frage.<sup>89</sup>

Although Schneider claims to have had no real problems with outside intervention from advertisers, he is nevertheless of the opinion that were such intervention to arise, it would be better to comply with the request being made, as this would be in the best interests of the paper as a whole. It is interesting to look at his reasoning, as much of it is very typical of the explanations of the journalists about their compliance with their orders in the GDR with which they were not in agreement:

Gefallen würde mir das nicht, ist ja keine Frage, aber es ist immer so eine Frage, also, ich denke, daß man dabei das Gesamtziel der Zeitung nicht zu sehr in die Ecke drängen darf. [...] Berichterstattung ist ja nicht nur die darüber, daß nun ein Konzern diese oder jene Sauerei veranstaltet hat, sondern Berichterstattung ist ja eben auch die, wie laufen die politischen Geschichten in dieser Stadt. [...] All dieses Umfeld würde ich *nicht* dadurch gefährden, daß ich unbedacht eine überspitzte Kritik irgendwo übe, wenn tatsächlich die die Existenz der Zeitung gefährden würde. Das Leben ist ein Kompromiß, und das ist bei einer Zeitung genau das gleiche Problem. Selbstverständlich würde ich lieber sofort, was ich weiß, sofort ins Blatt heben, ist ja keine Frage, und natürlich ist das ein Widerspruch zwischen dieser Auffassung und der Auffassung, an das weitere Umfeld der Zeitung zu denken und natürlich auch an die Arbeitsplätze, die daran hängen. Aber ich denke, man tut sich keine Gefallen, wenn man mit dem Kopf durch die Wand geht in diesem Fall und dadurch die Leute um ein Medium und sich selber um den Arbeitsplatz bringt, bloß um diese eine Neuigkeit in die Zeitung zu heben.<sup>90</sup>

This attitude is reminiscent of the pragmatic view many journalists took in the GDR, regarding the more general goals and aims of the paper as being of more value than a short-term win against a certain order. Just as Lohmann was prepared to withdraw his protest paper when he believed that it had served its purpose, and considered that to have gone any further would have endangered the reform momentum, so Schneider believes that it is better to suppress an article which is very critical of a firm or organisation than to endanger the future of the paper by printing it, although his personal instinct would be to print it anyway. Also, as with Lohmann and his protest paper, there are also personal considerations at play.

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<sup>89</sup> Interview with Michael Schneider, Berliner Kurier

<sup>90</sup> Ibid

Lohmann cited personal fear of the consequences, and Schneider mentions his concern about keeping his job.

Schneider's comments on the lack of serious intervention from outside sources is confirmed by Barbara Hanke. From what these two *Berliner Kurier* journalists said, it appears that the paper has little problem with this type of pressure. Again, Hanke does not believe that there is a danger to the paper arising from the financial requirements of running the paper, but she does think that there is pressure on the paper to maintain its circulation. Although she personally is not put under such immediate pressure, it does come down to her through her departmental editor if, for example, she does not pick up on a promising story which other papers have covered - "der Druck ist schon da, die besten Geschichten aufzuspüren".<sup>91</sup> This pressure is undoubtedly stronger at a tabloid paper such as the *Berliner Kurier*, which relies on street sales to maintain its circulation and therefore has constantly to offer stories with an immediate impact and appeal to potential readers.

As far as internal influence is concerned, Schneider goes further than any of the *Berliner Zeitung* staff in praising his editor for the support which he receives when he writes an article which is critical of a certain policy. For example, when he wrote an article which was critical of Israel's actions, although some people called him to say that in their opinion he should not have written what he did, not only did this not bother him, but his editor supported his actions. This support is also present whenever Schneider attempts to protect a source and is put under pressure to reveal it.<sup>92</sup>

Although it is not possible to draw conclusions from the interviews with the *Berliner Kurier* journalists, as the sample interviewed was too small, the data from the two journalists there can be complemented by some comments about the nature of tabloid papers in Eastern Germany which Albert Köhler made. Although he now works for the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, he was previously employed by the *Leipziger Morgenpost*, which has since closed down. His experiences at this tabloid paper provide some useful insights about the nature of such papers and the different criteria which apply there.

The level of interference at the *Leipziger Morgenpost* was significant, and Köhler noted that

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<sup>91</sup> Interview with Barbara Hanke, *Berliner Kurier*

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Michael Schneider, *Berliner Kurier*

he had had an article changed by his superior after it had been written. This was a practice seen in the GDR.<sup>93</sup> Köhler believed that in such situations, it might be possible to object, but that such objections, which were only oral and never written, did not achieve much. There was an element of improvement on the GDR era, in so far as it was technically possible to object without fearing the consequences. But the end result achieved was the same, namely that the article was changed against the wishes of the journalist who had written it. After this experience, Köhler left the newspaper. His actual reason for doing so was that he had by then received a job offer from Berlin, but he felt that he would have left the *Morgenpost* anyway because he was unhappy with the working conditions and expectations which were placed upon him. This, too, is different from in the GDR, where it was not only very hard for an individual to change papers, as the journalists were assigned to their posts, but also hard for a journalist to persuade a paper to let him go.<sup>94</sup> Köhler's specific objections to working at the *Morgenpost* are significant in terms of the conflicts which he experienced with his own standards, such as the importance of truthful reporting:

Da wurde viel stärker versucht, Sachverhalte je nachdem nach Interessenlage in irgendeine andere Richtung zu gewichten, also da wurde nicht mehr so wahrheitsgemäß berichtet, also es war noch ein wahrheitsgemäßer Ausgangspunkt, aber dann wie es berichtet wurde, wurde es immer verzerrt, und das ist bei Boulevardzeitungen ohnehin fast immer der Fall.<sup>95</sup>

Köhler noted that although there were other tabloid newspapers where such tactics were not used, such as the Munich *Abendzeitung*, such problems as this one with the application of certain journalistic values were common at the *Morgenpost*.

As well as these specific problems which Köhler experienced, he also found a difference in the fundamental criteria which the *Morgenpost* used which were different or more extreme than at other newspapers:

Vor allem das Kriterium der Auflage, egal mit welchen Mitteln. Und natürlich wurde [...] jeder kleinere Unfall oder jede kleinere Kriminalgeschichte auch ziemlich groß dargestellt, also im Lokalbereich. Und dann wurde natürlich versucht, Lokalpolitik zu betreiben, Leute gegeneinander auszuspielen, und das ist bei der LVZ nicht so, [...] bei der

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with Albert Köhler, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Frank Grünwald, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Albert Köhler, Leipziger Volkszeitung

Morgenpost war das generell so, also daß immer dramatisiert wurde und da, wo es eigentlich nicht angebracht war.<sup>96</sup>

Tabloid newspapers exist by covering the most dramatic, if not the most important stories, and by going further in their search for sensation than other newspapers. The editor of the *Berliner Kurier* demonstrated this factor as well when he stated that “Eindringen in die Privatsphäre, davon leben Kaufzeitungen”<sup>97</sup>, and this is supported by the examples which Köhler gave from the *Morgenpost*. However, from the interviewees from the *Berliner Kurier*, there was no indication of these problems, and they have had no negative experiences with the specific areas looked at.

### Leipziger Volkszeitung

In contrast to the three Berlin newspapers looked at, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* has a monopoly within its home area of circulation, with the usual exception of the *Bild-Zeitung*, which, however, is not a comparable paper in terms of its form, layout, or type of journalism. In Berlin, it was apparent that the economic viability of commercially-orientated newspapers played a large part in the susceptibility of the *Berliner Zeitung* to outside interference from advertisers, as these advertisers had other outlets for their advertising, and could realise their threat to take their business elsewhere. In Leipzig, however, this was not an option for local or regional advertisers, a factor which is clearly influential in the paper’s experiences with and attitude towards such interference. As such, the findings of this study throw a new light on the traditional discussion about the dangers of newspaper monopolies, and show that in some cases monopolies can work in the interests of the realisation of press freedom.

In terms of internal interference, the situation at the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* is different from any of the papers looked at already, and it becomes clear that an important factor in this area is the personal attitude of the editor involved. This was also a feature of GDR journalism, where the degree of freedom the journalists enjoyed depended in part on the views of the paper’s editor. All the above factors will be explored in more detail.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Wieland Sandmann, Chefredakteur, Berliner Kurier

### *General interest in ethics*

A wide range of interest in the role of principles and values in journalism was exhibited by the respondents in this study, with some people showing both a keen interest and a good knowledge of the kinds of issues involved, others having less interest and less awareness of the relevance of ethics to their work, and some with virtually no interest in these questions. Several factors appeared to determine their level of interest in the ethics of journalism. Some of the staff see ethics as having no real relevance for the particular type of work they do, as their duties are primarily administrative rather than having to do with actually researching and writing stories. Nevertheless, this in itself does not appear to correlate with their general interest in ethics or their view of the importance of such considerations. An interest in ethics appears largely to be a matter of personal interest. For example, two senior staff with mainly administrative duties at the paper gave completely different answers when questioned as to their interest in media ethics. One said that he was “weniger” interested in this field<sup>98</sup>, whereas his colleague stated that “Journalismus und Ethik und so was halte ich für sehr wichtig”.<sup>99</sup> A general interest in ethics does not, however, appear to have much bearing on the way in which the journalists viewed concrete situations which held ethical components. This seems to be a result of the fact that for most journalists

vieles ist ja so Selbstverständnis, also mit vielen Dingen, wenn man sich einmal auf die geeinigt hat und wenn die alle dann klar sind, dann sind die zwar sicherlich interessant, aber wenig zur Debatte stehend, nicht zur Diskussion stehend, dann muß man sich mit ihnen also auch nicht so beschäftigen.<sup>100</sup>

For the majority of journalists, ethics operates in the background, and not something which is constantly on their mind. This means that the theoretical interest in ethical questions is largely divorced from the journalists' actual actions and application of ethical values. This would account for the difference between the theoretical interest and practical application of ethics identified. Much of what the journalists do is an instinctive reaction. They do not necessarily associate their behaviour with any theoretical concepts, but instead make their decisions based more on their experience and their own existing sense of what is correct and

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<sup>98</sup> Interview with Peter Heym, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Arnulf Ernst, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Andreas Klein, Leipziger Volkszeitung

what should not be done. Much of their decision making was done at the subconscious level, rather than on the basis of logical reasoning.

Decisions involving such personal decisions are made by each journalist individually, rather than on the basis of any newspaper policy handed down to them or discussion with the senior staff:

Zunächst gibt es hier so ein Selbstverständnis des einzelnen. Und in der journalistischen Arbeit bei der Recherche und so weiter ist ja der Journalist in der konkreten Sache dann jeweils, wo dann so ein Konflikt auftauchen könnte, zunächst mal auf sich selbst gestellt. Und ich denke, da wird er also nicht an irgendwelchen Entscheidungen von oben, irgendwelchen Leitungsentscheidungen orientieren, sondern erstmal doch an seiner eigenen Grundorientierung. Also ich denke, [...] wenn es jetzt also zum Beispiel darum ginge, bestimmte Informationen völlig illegal zu beschaffen, darüber haben wir hier im Hause nie diskutiert oder so, da ist mir völlig klar, daß ich das nicht machen würde.<sup>101</sup>

This new ability to make their own decisions compares favourably with their time working in the GDR. There, their own views and opinions were very much subject to the decisions of those in the party leadership and newspaper editorial positions, who ensured that all the articles which were printed in the paper were read and corrected if necessary. Now, the journalists do not have to orientate themselves around decisions made above their heads, but have the freedom to make their own decisions, a freedom which then means that they have the responsibility for what is published under their name, and for the methods they use in creating their articles. This process is in some measure their response to interference.

### *External interference*

#### **Economic pressure**

As is to be expected, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* is subject to the same type of attempts to influence its reporting as the *Berliner Zeitung*. The first of the differences between the papers is seen in the way in which the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* staff view this danger. Commenting on the occurrence of such attempts at interference, Peter Heym commented that he had experienced

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<sup>101</sup> Interview with Andreas Klein, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

Kleinigkeiten, daß Wirtschaftsforen versucht haben, weil sie eine Anzeige geschaltet haben, in den Textteil zu kommen, aber da sind wir als Zeitung zu groß, also das sind Dinge, wo eine kleine Zeitung vielleicht angreifbar ist, aber wo wir als sehr große Zeitung gar nicht auch in der [...] Lage sind, dem in irgendeiner Weise nachzugeben.<sup>102</sup>

Heym also observed that it is “bedauerlich” if someone ceases advertising in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, the advertising department is annoyed, and the newspaper’s balance sheet does not look as healthy as before, but that there are no further repercussions.<sup>103</sup> However, it is less the size of the paper which allows it to be able to resist any attempts at pressure from advertisers than the alternatives available to the advertisers. Comparing the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* with the *Berliner Zeitung*, the main difference is seen not in the absolute size of circulation, but in the market share each paper has, although the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*’s circulation is larger.<sup>104</sup> In Berlin, the *Berliner Zeitung* has the *Berliner Morgenpost* and *Der Tagesspiegel* as serious competitors, and its market share is much smaller than that of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. Of course, there are other newspapers available in Leipzig, but none of these offer local and regional coverage comparable to the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. Because of this, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* cannot be pressured by the threat of the loss of advertising to the same extent as the *Berliner Zeitung*, as for an advertiser to carry out the threat would mean having no comparable advertising in the whole area rather than merely switching to another paper. This switch is also not something which would be undertaken lightly in Berlin either, as the papers each have a different readership from a different area of Berlin, and such factors are very important to the impact and success of advertisement. The *Berliner Zeitung* is still predominantly read in the East, and the other two in the West, although all three papers hope to become the dominant paper for the whole of the city. Although the *Berliner Zeitung* is the largest subscription newspaper in Berlin (the *Morgenpost* had a circulation of 201,401 in the first quarter of 1993, the *Tagesspiegel* 127,265 and the *Berliner Zeitung* 263,768<sup>105</sup>), its market share among these three main competitors is still under 45%, whereas the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* has essentially a 100% market share.

Heym’s comments on his own experiences of external interference were reinforced by those

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<sup>102</sup> Interview with Peter Heym, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>104</sup> Meyn (1996), p75

<sup>105</sup> Held/Simeon (1994), p107

of his colleagues. In the case of financial reporting, there are the same kinds of attempts as were seen with the *Berliner Zeitung*, although the examples are somewhat different. What the interviews at the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* provided was more information on the way in which the journalists view these cases, and why they react in the way they do. Looking at the area of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* most affected, financial reporting, some familiar themes are seen:

Es gibt auch Varianten, [...] die uns überhaupt nicht schmecken, und wo wir auch sehr allergisch reagieren, wenn Firmenvertreter anrufen und sagen, wir sind ja gute Anzeigenkunden bei Ihnen, da sind wir sehr allergisch. Weil [das] in der Regel dann heißt, wir wollen mal was Gutes über unseren Betrieb in der Zeitung lesen, so, und das machen wir in der Regel nicht, so, das könnte die konkrete Person meistens da nicht so richtig begreifen, warum wir da so reagieren, aber es ist eben die eindeutige Trennung Anzeige und Redaktion, das geht auch nicht anders.<sup>106</sup>

From Meyn's comments, it appears that the firms believe that they have the right to have their say in any coverage of their firm in the paper when they have placed advertisements, but the paper does not comply with requests made on this basis. Naturally, as with the other papers, there are situations where a firm comes with a legitimate request, and in such cases, their suggestions are judged according to their inherent value, rather than with one eye on the advertising factor:

Es kann natürlich sein, jemand eröffnet seine Rede am Telefon mit dieser Bemerkung hier, guter Anzeigekunde, und hat wirklich was Gutes zu bieten, so, eine Neuheit, oder eine neue Unternehmensstruktur und was weiß ich, oder eine neue Niederlassung hier oder ein besonderes Engagement in Sachsen als Unternehmen, na gut, dann ist es aber unabhängig von der Anzeige ein Thema für uns.<sup>107</sup>

This attitude is the same as has already been seen at the other newspapers. Instead of having to bow to pressure from outside sources as in the GDR, the journalists are now able to determine for themselves, using their own professional criteria, what they will write about and how they will do so.

In addition to advertising firms, other companies often show a keen interest in the research

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Udo Meyn, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*



the journalists are conducting into some aspect of their affairs, and may attempt to intervene in this process and influence the direction the coverage takes:

Es hat auch schon Fälle gegeben, wo wir bei der Recherche waren und jemand anrief und meinte, wir sollten dazu bitte jetzt mal nichts schreiben, das hat's auch schon gegeben, aber da entscheidet man in der Regel nicht danach, was die konkrete Person will, sondern da verhält man sich genauso wie mit dem Gesprächspartner, den man sich selber ausgewählt hat, und fragt, wieso dürfen wir dazu nichts schreiben, was meinen Sie denn, warum denn nicht und so weiter, so, und dann wird einfach anhand der Gesamtargumente, die man von den selbstgesuchten Gesprächspartnern und von den Anrufern, der also, oder vorbeikommt, der also von sich aus sagt, er möchte, denkt, daß wir da nichts schreiben sollten, das wird dann abgewogen entsprechend dieser Kriterien dann auch bewertet und dann eben entschieden.<sup>108</sup>

Meyn does not treat a firm any differently from anyone else who has a request to make of the paper, and attempts to apply the same journalistic criteria to these situations. He uses rational arguments to clarify whether the firm has a legitimate point, and to present his own views on the issue in the hope that they will both find an acceptable solution. In the end, however, his decision will be based on what he thinks is the correct course of action.

The third type of interference Meyn has experienced at the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* from outside firms are complaints about articles which have been published and which the firm believes do not represent their position fairly. In practice, this means that the firm believes that it has received unjustifiably negative coverage:

Es hat aber auch von Unternehmen schon im nachhinein, wenn dann die Beiträge veröffentlicht waren, Reaktionen gegeben, ja, das stimme ja alles gar nicht, was wir da geschrieben hatten, und es bezog sich nur auf die Überschrift, die aber sachlich richtig war, zum Beispiel Unternehmen hatte im vergangenen Jahr Verlust gemacht. So, und da war, "naja, aber in dem Pressegespräch, zu dem das Unternehmen eingeladen hatte, haben wir doch gesagt, daß es jetzt langsam wieder aufwärts geht, und wieso steht dann nur ausgerechnet in der großen dicken Überschrift drin, wir haben Verluste, wir müßten doch eigentlich so...", also das sind in der Regel Dinge, die an uns herangetragen werden, wo das Unternehmen nicht gut genug dargestellt wird, so, solche Dinge gibt es schon.<sup>109</sup>

Again, this variant is not one which causes Meyn any great difficulty, as he believes that such

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid

<sup>109</sup> Ibid

matters can be dealt with by using reasoned argument. The firms are in no position to force the paper to change its reporting, and when the article has been published, the firm only has legal recourse if stated facts are incorrect. An additional area involving firms is when the journalists are faced with the dilemma of whether to report about firms which are on the edge of economic viability. They sense a dichotomy in their responsibility both to pass information on and to consider the interests of the individuals involved in such cases.

### *The responsibility of journalists*

The journalists have no desire to use the facts at their disposal to discredit a firm, and are also concerned to ensure that their reporting does not cause a firm unnecessary damage where no illegal or questionable trading has taken place. This is particularly important in Eastern Germany, where many firms are constantly fighting for their survival. The paper is anxious to cooperate in not publishing information which could result in the closure of a firm and the consequent loss of jobs:

Zum Beispiel, wenn wir über Firmen schreiben, bei denen vielleicht der Konkurs kurz bevorsteht, so, was mache ich dann - schreibe ich nur darüber und löse eigentlich den Konkurs erst aus, oder sage ich gut, ich weiß das, wenn es soweit ist, schreibe ich darüber? [...] Wenn man's einschätzen kann, daß im Prinzip der Konkurs schon angemeldet ist, dann kann man natürlich darüber schreiben, aber von der Tendenz her, sollte man, glaube ich - da gibt's auch ein bißchen Verantwortung, glaube ich, gegenüber der Region, [...] da nicht noch mit aller Macht draufschlagen, daß es sofort den Bach runtergeht. Aber das ist immer kompliziert in solchen Fällen, wo man also zwar die Information hat, nur ist die Frage, das ist eine sachliche Information, schreibt man die, oder schreibt man die nicht? Das ist immer so eine Gratwanderung bei solchen Dingen, wo es um Unternehmen geht, gerade weil hier nach der Wende so viel kaputtgegangen ist an Unternehmen, das ist vielleicht das Hauptthema, wo man so diskutiert im Ressort, wie verhalten wir uns jetzt?<sup>110</sup>

This problem is a very real one in Eastern Germany. On the one hand, as Meyn says, "in der Regel schreiben wir darüber, weil wir ja die Information [...] haben"<sup>111</sup>, but on the other hand, the journalists feel a responsibility towards their region to work towards the best interests of those living there, which sometimes means that they have to weigh up the value of the news in an article with its potential impact in the lives of others. What Meyn appreciates about his

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid

<sup>111</sup> Ibid

current working conditions is the ability to be at the same time fair and critical. In the GDR, the journalists were expected to paint a bright picture of the GDR and its form of socialism, whereas now, they can be realistic; praise where praise is due, and criticise where criticism is warranted. Interestingly, however, there are still people who appear to prefer the old style of positive reporting for themselves, although they are quick to distance themselves from any suggestion that they may be harking back to the GDR style of operating. Something similar was seen in the area of political coverage at *Neues Deutschland*, but here it has been experienced in reporting on financial and business issues:

Das ist eigentlich das Gute jetzt an der Situation, das von vornherein man nicht nur bloß auf Positives gucken soll, sondern eben die ganze Entwicklung kritisch begleitet ganz einfach. Wobei [...] wir auch mitunter während der Recherche von Leuten hören, also was wir da wieder geschrieben hätten, und wir sollten doch nicht immer so draufhauen, und wir sollten doch eher auch mal das Positive sehen, also habe ich auch von CDU-Politikern gehört, die also meinen, man müßte eben mehr das Positive sehen und wie's vorangeht und so weiter, und da passiert es, da habe ich auch schon mal gesagt, "wissen Sie, das erinnert mich so ein bißchen an die DDR-Zeit, da war auch immer nur das Positive", "na so war das doch nicht gemeint", also wie gesagt, in der täglichen Diskussion ist das unterschwellig immer mit dabei.<sup>112</sup>

The second area most affected by outside influences is local reporting, as was earlier suggested by Katja Buchwald at the *Berliner Zeitung*, as well as by Thorsten Winkler at the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* - "Das erlebt man im Lokalen sowieso noch mehr als jetzt vielleicht in der Politik".<sup>113</sup> Winkler commented on the reason for this:

Clinton zu kritisieren ist kein Problem, weil da ruft niemand an, aber hier irgendeinen Amtsleiter kritisieren, da haben Sie sofort die Reaktion, ist doch ganz klar, und [...] Anrufe, die muß man dann aushalten. Also wer kritisiert wird, meldet sich sowieso dann meist, das ist klar.<sup>114</sup>

The nearer to home the subject is, the more interest there tends to be in the case, and the more interest those affected have in being portrayed in a favourable light. President Clinton is about as concerned about an article about him in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* as the mayor of Leipzig is about an article in the *Washington Post*, but both would take a great deal more

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Thorsten Winkler, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

<sup>114</sup> Ibid

interest in an article in a paper closer to home. It is therefore to be expected that those dealing in local reporting will be publishing articles which arouse local interest and a reaction from their readers and local figures. Winkler noticed also that in the case of a perceived mistake in judgement as to what should be printed, there was an immediate reaction - "bei einem Fehlgriff kriegt man auch sofort Reaktion, auch die Leute rufen hier an".<sup>115</sup>

The nature of the reaction from those mentioned in an article varies quite substantially. The simplest and most direct form is the telephone call registering a complaint, the form seen at the other newspapers already. But Winkler has noticed that if there is a large company involved, there are also other options used which are more subtle, such as the head of a firm having an informal chat with the editor of the paper, who then investigates what the journalist is working on. However, it should be made clear that this is not something Winkler has experienced at the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, and it is not something he expects to happen:

Ich hab's nie erlebt, daß ich dann gestoppt worden bin, daß jemand gesagt hätte, stopp, das machen wir nicht.<sup>116</sup>

Rather, Winkler has found the editor to be very supportive of his work, and that he can have amicable discussions with him. His editor is interested in what he is working on, but does not attempt to stop him dealing with any issues:

Hier im Haus ist der Umgang immer fair, also es gibt die Rückfrage auch, [...] aber wenn's man dann ordentlich begründen kann, [...] dann ist da nie jemand gewesen, auch kein Chefredakteur gewesen, der gesagt hat, Recherche einstellen, machen wir nicht.<sup>117</sup>

This relationship between editor and staff is very much like that between the editor of the *Berliner Zeitung* and the *Reportagen* department, but the important difference is that in this case, the department concerned is subject to external attempts at interference, but is supported by the editor. At the *Berliner Zeitung*, where there was a high degree of external interference, the editor was perceived by the journalists as being more of an adversary than a colleague, and in this respect, the experiences of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* are much more positive.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid

<sup>116</sup> Ibid

<sup>117</sup> Ibid

At the *Berliner Zeitung*, there were no cases of political influence mentioned. By contrast, several journalists working at the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* mentioned just such experiences which they had had; a situation similar to the that at *Neues Deutschland*.

### **Political pressure**

One feature which was very noticeable at the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* was the way in which the journalists rarely distinguished between the sources of interference. For example, Anthon Dörr's comments about his experience of outside influences were very general and tended to group all such attempts together:

Immer, wenn Sie irgendwo recherchieren, wo geahnt wird, daß es eine Negativdarstellung wird, werden Sie immer erleben, daß Leute versuchen, in irgendeiner Art und Weise das zu verhindern, in der Regel machen sie das durch Anrufe, ob sie sich dann nennen oder nicht, aber sie weisen in ihrer Art darauf hin, daß es nicht günstig wäre, es zu veröffentlichen.<sup>118</sup>

This is reflected in the similar attitude the journalists had towards politically and financially motivated influences. In general, these attempts are not regarded as being a serious attempt to compromise the journalists' freedom to act as they see fit. Indeed, one journalist denied that there are any outside influences initially, but subsequently recalled cases of politicians calling the newspaper. This recollection was thrown in almost as an afterthought rather than as an actual example of what was regarded as "real" interference:

Nee. [...] Also in der Politik eigentlich nicht. Natürlich kommen immer Leute, rufen jeden Tag Leute an, Parlamentarier und Abgeordnete aus Sachsen, und sicher würden sie ganz gern reden mit einem Interviewer, das ist einfach normal, und es ist aber jetzt nicht so, daß versucht wird, Redakteure irgendwie zu beeinflussen.<sup>119</sup>

Köhler's reaction to these calls is the same as has been seen in relation to firms calling and requesting that something be covered - if the story is worth printing in its own right, then he will consider it, but not because he is being asked to do so:

Wenn sich das Thema irgendwann anbietet, kann man's machen, aber nicht irgendwie auf Zuruf oder auf Beeinflussung. [...] Es muß einen Anlaß geben, sage ich mal so, dann läßt sich darüber reden, aber nicht so

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<sup>118</sup> Interview with Anthon Dörr, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Albert Köhler, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

also ohne Anlaß.<sup>120</sup>

Köhler's attitude to such calls is similar to that of his colleagues who have to deal with comparable attempts:

Das passiert, daß Parteipolitiker hier anrufen und eben sich beschweren, daß sie nicht genügend zu Wort kommen. [...] Also, ich muß sagen, da lasse ich mich eigentlich überhaupt nicht beeinflussen, weil also mir geht's um die Sache, hat derjenige was zu sagen, ist das wichtig für die Leser, dann kommt's rein, oder es kommt eben nicht rein, also das [...] nehme ich zur Kenntnis, aber es sind auch keine massiven Versuche oder irgendwie Bedrohungen, eher so, naja, also wir sind nun lange nicht in Ihrer Zeitung vertreten gewesen, und wie wär's dann mal, nehmen Sie uns denn weniger zur Kenntnis oder so, und da ist dann die erste Frage, was haben Sie dann zu sagen, ist das dann wirklich wichtig, und ist das dann was Neues, also bloß um Kopf oder eine Partei in die Zeitung zu bringen reicht nicht.<sup>121</sup>

The observation that politicians are keen to have as much (positive) exposure in the media as possible was also made by a journalist at *Neues Deutschland*, the only real difference being that it is primarily PDS politicians who wish to appear in *Neues Deutschland*. Remarking upon this desire of politicians for public exposure, Franz Becher noted that,

das sind Leute, die, was weiß ich, wieder ein Mandat für den Bundestag haben wollen und natürlich bestrebt sind, möglichst groß zu erscheinen, das sind andere Gruppierungen, manchmal auch zum Beispiel Kommunistische Plattform, die Wert darauf legt, ihre Materialien unterzubringen, mit möglichst großem Umfang.<sup>122</sup>

In this respect, politicians seem to behave similarly regardless of the nature of their political convictions, and the newspapers also behave similarly, judging each case on its own merits and not allowing themselves to be pushed or cajoled into doing anything.

As was seen in Thorsten Winkler's examples of the various ways in which firms can exert influence on a paper, politicians have also found different methods of doing the same without it being so apparent. The first alternative identified was the simple, direct demand or request, but this is often ineffective because of its lack of subtlety:

Es gäbe [...] die plumpe Methode, wo jemand anruft oder sich meldet und

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Annemarie Müller, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Franz Becher, Neues Deutschland

sagt, also ich erwarte, daß das und das nicht mehr passiert, oder daß die und die so auch geschrieben wird, kann ich mich kaum daran erinnern, daß so was passiert, weil das hat eigentlich keinen Erfolg, weil das greift ja die journalistische Ehre an und fordert ja eigentlich genau das Gegenteil zu tun, also aus Trotzreaktion.<sup>123</sup>

It is significant that Klein mentions the journalists' honour as a factor in refusing the request. In the GDR, journalists' honour could not combat the political instructions which they received, but in the new Germany, the journalists are able to follow their professional scruples and refuse to comply with such requests which have no inherent journalistic value. There tends to be an immediate and strong reaction against the request, in part due to the fact that the journalists are reminded of similar experiences in the GDR where they were frustrated by their inability to make a choice for themselves.

Other, more subtle methods are harder to deal with so decisively:

Es gibt natürlich Leute, die das geschickter machen und die einen so anrufen und sagen, also das war ganz toll, und das hat mir gefallen [...], das ist ja eine Form der Beeinflussung, die auch da ist, und gegen die kann man sich wesentlich schwerer zu Wehr setzen. Wobei ich denke, daß also der Journalist - und damit habe ich bisher keine Schwierigkeiten gehabt, mit solchen [...] Funktionsträgern, [...] das kann [...] Kommunalpolitiker oder Politiker höherrangig sein - daß man zu dem immer versuchen sollte, [...] Abstand zu halten.<sup>124</sup>

A fact which comes across very strongly from the journalists of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* is that they are prepared to consider any request on its own merits, neither discarding all such requests on principle, nor bowing to pressure applied to them. In this respect, they show that they have learned clear lessons from their earlier experiences in the GDR, and that these lessons are ones which they are able to apply. They have not gone so far in the other direction as to reject all requests without considering them, but instead apply the more balanced approach of being prepared to make their decisions based upon what their journalistic instincts tell them. In this respect, they show similar principles in their work to the other papers. The main difference is that they are able to apply these principles more fully than the journalists at the *Berliner Zeitung*, and are more like those at *Neues Deutschland* in this respect. But the reasons for the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* and *Neues*

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<sup>123</sup> Interview with Andreas Klein, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*

*Deutschland* being able to deal so decisively with such interference attempts could hardly be farther apart. *Neues Deutschland* is so small and has such a weak financial base that it has little to lose by standing its ground, whereas the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* is so large and dominant in its market that it has no need to bow to others' wishes. Another difference is seen in the interest which advertisers have in the two papers - the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* is a much more appealing medium for advertisers, and as such, its ability to resist attempts at interference is much more significant than *Neues Deutschland's*, as the latter is not subject to this type of economic pressure to nearly the same extent.

### *Internal interference*

The journalists of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* demonstrate a journalistically mature attitude towards attempted interference from outside sources, and it appears that an important factor in their ability to do so stems from the nature of their relationship with their editor. The structure of the paper is such that the departmental editors have a lot more influence over the finished product than is the case in many Western German papers, and the daily *Redaktionskonferenz* provides them with the opportunity to discuss their plans directly with the paper's editor, rather than having to go through a deputy editor<sup>125</sup>. All the journalists interviewed were very positive about their experiences with their editor and several mentioned the fact that they felt able to discuss any differences of opinion with him and allow the better argumentation to determine the decision. At the same time, they accept that the editor does have the responsibility for the paper and that his position gives him the right to determine what should or should not be printed:

Der Chefredakteur ist der Chefredakteur, und wenn der Chefredakteur sagt, diese oder jene Sache ist nicht in Ordnung, dann muß man sich entweder dem fügen, oder man muß mit ihm das Gespräch darüber suchen, und vielleicht kann man ihn also noch umstimmen, das kann ja auch sein.<sup>126</sup>

Wenn der [Chefredakteur] dann, das kann schon sein, daß der sagt, [...] jetzt haben wir zweimal SPD gehabt, also kommt das runter, oder das Thema, das finde ich nicht interessant, also nehmen wir das runter, muß ich mich dem fügen. Oder ich habe eben die besseren Argumente, und der läßt sich überzeugen, also passiert das eine wie das andere, völlig

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<sup>125</sup> Interview with Peter Heym, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Andreas Klein, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*



normal.<sup>127</sup>

Annemarie Müller explained in addition that she does not have the final decision as to what is printed. Instead, she makes suggestions as to what she believes would be appropriate, and these suggestions are then accepted or rejected by the person responsible for the paper on that day, with the proviso that she can always attempt to persuade either of them to change his decision.

The individual journalists appear to enjoy a large degree of freedom in terms of what they write about, and can largely concentrate on those things which interest them personally:

Alles, was wir glauben, das wichtig ist, in die Zeitung zu bringen, das können wir im wesentlichen machen, so, natürlich haben wir wichtige inhaltliche Linien oder wichtige Projekte [...] mit der Chefredaktion abgesprochen, aber bislang ist mir kein Fall bewußt, daß da große Widerstände aufgetreten sind, im Gegenteil, also da sind wir, was Themenfinden anbetrifft, auch völlig frei, da können wir machen, was wir wollen.<sup>128</sup>

The journalists were also adamant that they would not write anything against their conscience if such a situation were to arise:

Nein, das würde ich auch nicht machen. Ich würde zum Beispiel *nie* einen Kommentar schreiben, im Sinne der völligen Abtreibungsgegner oder so, da würde ich sagen, also bitte schön, wenn das jemand schreiben soll, dann muß das jemand anders machen, ich kann das nicht. Dafür bin ich zu liberal.<sup>129</sup>

Of course, it is one thing to say that they would refuse to write the article and another to do so when actually confronted by the situation. But it seems fair to assume that this would be a perfectly reasonable possibility given the productive and co-operative relationship which appears to exist between the editor and the other staff.

### *Lessons learned from the GDR*

Some of the reasons for the current position of the journalists which has been examined lie clearly in their experiences in the GDR, and were explicitly mentioned on several occasions.

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<sup>127</sup> Interview with Annemarie Müller, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Udo Meyn, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>129</sup> Interview with Annemarie Müller, Leipziger Volkszeitung

In the case of intervention from the editor,

daß einer gesagt hat, das schreibst du, das schreibst du nicht, [...] das gibt's nicht, weil ich denke, aus der Erfahrung heraus, auch der Wende-Jahre, wie wichtig es ist, sich einen eigenen Standpunkt zu erarbeiten und Meinung zu vertreten, das sollte man sich schon als wichtigstes auf die eigene Fahne schreiben, daß man selber versucht, seine Meinung durchzuboxen und sich nicht beeinflussen läßt, jetzt von dem, was der Chef zum Beispiel versucht zu diktieren, ich meine, das ist eine Aufgabe der Presse. Das gibt es nicht, das muß ich, kann ich auch mit gutem Gewissen behaupten.<sup>130</sup>

The paper as a whole seems to have learned from its past that such direct intervention is simply not acceptable in the operation of a serious newspaper. The relationship between the editor, the departmental editors and the large body of journalists is one with which the journalists feel very comfortable and unthreatened. The editor is very willing to listen to their side of any story, and is clearly supportive of their work. In addition, the paper is anxious to meet the needs of its readers. Indeed, a large survey of its readers was conducted in 1996 to determine which parts of the newspaper they liked and why, and what could be improved upon. This is an interesting development for a paper which has such a strong economic base, covering a large section of the Eastern German population, and especially for one with a near-monopoly in its home area. Hermann Meyn cited two frequent developments when a newspaper achieves a monopoly, namely that

Sie können

- ihre publizistische Leistung verringern, ohne daß der unzufriedene Leser die Möglichkeit hat, zur Konkurrenz abzuspringen,
- ihre Informations- und Kontrollfunktion vernachlässigen, ohne daß es der Leser merkt.<sup>131</sup>

However, in the case of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, the paper seems to be doing the opposite of this. It is paying particular attention to the wishes of its readers concerning its coverage, and not using its ability to go its own way and force the readers to go along this path. In addition, its very strength allows it to resist any attempts from outside groups to influence its reporting and to judge any attempts using purely journalistic criteria. This freedom which the paper enjoys to act independently of other interest groups is something which its

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<sup>130</sup> Interview with Anthon Dörr, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

<sup>131</sup> Meyn (1996), p67

journalists value highly, and is something which has resulted from the negative experiences they had in this area in the GDR:

Hier ist man unabhängiger, also hier können wir als Ressort sagen, wenn jemand also mit dieser Variante kommt hier, Anzeige und jetzt muß was Gutes, sagen wir nee, nun gerade nicht, sage ich jetzt, also da entscheiden wir, wie wir wollen, und das ist vielleicht der Unterschied. Zu DDR-Zeiten war nichts eine eigene Entscheidung der Redaktion im Prinzip. [...] Was die Themen anbetraf, [...] da konnte keine Redaktion anders entscheiden, das war vorgegeben, gut, man konnte es einmal anders entscheiden, aber dann waren eben personelle Konsequenzen damit verbunden, das ist klar. Insofern ist [...] hier eigentlich ein Hineinregieren in die Grundlinien oder inhaltlichen Linien dessen, was wir ins Blatt drucken, gibt's nicht, so wie das zu DDR-Zeiten der Fall war.<sup>132</sup>

This lack of successful interference in the journalists' work is very comprehensive. They are not pressured into anything by external or internal sources, and are clearly very keen that this should remain the case.

## **Freie Presse and Freie Presse-Freiberger Zeitung**

In many ways, the *Freie Presse* is in a similar position to the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* in terms of market position. In terms of absolute size, it has a larger circulation than the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* (in 1993, 510,600 as opposed to 387,700<sup>133</sup>), having in fact the largest circulation of any paper in Eastern Germany<sup>134</sup>, which is achieved in part through its many local editions, such as the *Freiberger Zeitung*. In order to be able to examine the experiences of its staff, journalists working on two editions of the paper were interviewed. Three were involved in the production of the main section of the paper, and four worked in Freiberg on the local portion, which is then printed alongside the main part and distributed in the Freiberg area.

### *Interest in ethics*

There was a general interest in the field of media ethics among the journalists. Only one was somewhat ambivalent, as he felt that such questions were not relevant to sports coverage.

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<sup>132</sup> Interview with Udo Meyn, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

<sup>133</sup> Pürer/Raabe (1994), p458

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*

The other journalists were also able to provide information about how they viewed ethics in relation to their own work. For Daniel Richter, ethics are important because of the potential influence of the media on others:

Man hat doch einen bestimmten Anspruch, oder eine bestimmte Verpflichtung als Journalist, weil man auch mit dem, was man schreibt, oder mit dem, was man den Lesern vorsetzt, ja doch der Meinungsbildung beiträgt.<sup>135</sup>

This responsibility which Richter feels is directed towards the reader, and means for him “für den Leser da zu sein”.<sup>136</sup> This view is typical of many other journalists who see ethics as a fundamental principle which underpins all other considerations. Others, such as Reinhart Grobe, also see ethics in terms of their duty as journalists, but go further in detailing what this involves:

Unter wissenschaftlicher Ethik verstehe ich in erster Linie, dem Leser Informationen zu bieten, die in allen Richtungen abgeklopft sind, sprich: sie stimmen, keine Falschinformationen, ob wissentlich oder unwissentlich [...]. Zweitens, [...] die Neuigkeit ist für mich eine Frage der Ethik, daß ich also nicht Sachen, die vor drei Tagen geschehen sind, dem Leser versuche, als Neuigkeit zu verkaufen. [...] Ich glaube auch, daß es zur journalistischen Ethik gehört, dem Leser Lebenshilfe zu geben. [...] Also Wahrheit, zeitungsgemäß aktuell sein, handhabbar sein für den Leser.<sup>137</sup>

The importance of the reader to the journalists of the *Freie Presse* is clear in these comments. Grobe’s ideas were echoed by Antje Schneider at the *Freiberger Zeitung*, who defined ethics as follows:

Ganz simpel ausgedrückt, Sauberkeit in jedem Text, zum einen von der journalistischen Sauberkeit her, was ich mir eigentlich immer auf die Fahne geschrieben habe, ich will Menschen nicht belügen. Und mein Auftrag ist, ehrlich zu schreiben, ehrlich zu arbeiten, [...] gewissenhaft zu schreiben, aber kritisch. Und journalistische Ethik sollte sich - egal, ob das eine Nachricht ist, oder ob das eine große Reportage ist [...] - sie sollte sich durch alle Bereiche ziehen.<sup>138</sup>

The comments so far have been related to the journalists’ work, but there are also other

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<sup>135</sup> Interview with Daniel Richter, *Freie Presse*

<sup>136</sup> Ibid

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Reinhart Grobe, *Freie Presse*

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Antje Schneider, *Freie Presse-Freiberger Zeitung*

aspects to their ethical principles which are more general, but which can also be applied to their work. For example,

Ich würde mich zum Beispiel hüten, Unfallfoto auf der Eins zu veröffentlichen [...], also das ist für mich eine Frage der rein menschlichen Ethik. [...] Das hat vielleicht weniger was mit der Presseethik oder journalistischer Ethik zu tun, sondern einfach mit rein menschlichen Überlegungen.<sup>139</sup>

Again, this view was seen at the *Freiberger Zeitung* as well. Natalie Haller commented firstly on her perception of the importance of ethics for the work of a journalist, and noted the connection between her work and her everyday life:

Ich kann nicht mein Gewissen vor der Tür abgeben, das geht nicht. Also für mich geht das nicht, ich frage mich manchmal, wie andere das machen. [...] Für mich ist Gewissen, was ich nicht nur bei der Arbeit habe, auch sonst. Weil ich es sonst habe, habe ich's auch bei der Arbeit, glaube ich.<sup>140</sup>

The journalists are also aware of the increased relevance of ethics for their work since 1989, because of the increased responsibility they have for their own work. Hermann Peters, for example, thought that journalists should follow the few basic principles which are laid down in writing, but that the rest of the decisions should be made individually, based upon personal convictions and principles, but subject to constraints from the newspaper management:

Es gibt ein paar Grundsätze, die im Pressekodex enthalten sind, die man primär befolgen sollte, und alles andere, denke ich, ist eine Sache der Moral des jeweiligen Verlegers, also Tendenz, Redaktionsstatut, so es eines gibt, und den Rest muß man mit sich selbst ausmachen, kann ich damit leben, kann ich das verantworten, wenn ich das mache, weil die Entscheidungsspielräume sind erheblich größer geworden jetzt, da muß man einfach darüber nachdenken.<sup>141</sup>

### *Ethical work-related problems since the Wende*

As with the other newspapers examined, the experiences of the journalists have been varied, and their exposure to certain issues has largely depended on the area they work in. What is very clear is the firm stand the newspaper's editor takes with respect to outside influences

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<sup>139</sup> Interview with Reinhart Grobe, Freie Presse

<sup>140</sup> Interview with Natalie Haller, Freie Presse-Freiberger Zeitung

<sup>141</sup> Interview with Hermann Peters, Freie Presse

on the staff, reflected also in the attitude of the journalists themselves:

At the *Freie Presse*, cases of external sources attempting to interfere with the journalists' work were cited, but the journalists have not regarded these attempts as serious threats to their freedom and have always felt that the editor is behind them in their resistance to any such interference. In the *Ratgeber* section, there have been cases of

PR-Agenturen, [...] die dann versuchen, für ihre persönlichen Interessen, ihre Produkte Werbung zu machen, über die Strecke der Redaktion, aber da ist bei uns [...] eine sehr starke Trennung, auch von der Chefredaktion, also Produktwerbung findet nicht statt, und ich lasse mich auch nicht unter Druck setzen.<sup>142</sup>

The only real influence on Richter's work in the *Ratgeber* section is the interests of his readers. Journalists working in this area have to be sure to be listening to what the readers want advice on, made clear to them by letters and telephone calls. However, as the purpose of this part of the paper is to provide the readers with the information they need and want, this constitutes a positive approach. The journalists are responding appropriately to comments and responses from the readership and making more informed and relevant decisions in the subsequently.

Coverage of domestic affairs is also not negatively affected by outside influence. The main source of such influence is the readership, but this is regarded as harmless. One journalist, Reinhart Grobe, remarked on the total absence of worrying interference in his work from any sources:

Da weiß ich genau, daß die Leitung dieses Hauses hinter mir steht. Es gibt weder durch Politiker noch durch die Leitung dieses Hauses, durch den Besitzer oder durch den Verlagsleiter oder durch die Chefredaktion irgendwelche Vorgaben, um bestimmte Meinungen zu unterdrücken [...], gibt's nicht. Es gibt auch aus meiner Sicht keinerlei Vorgaben, bestimmte Parteien oder bestimmte Gruppierungen innerhalb des politischen Spektrums zu bevorzugen.<sup>143</sup>

Grobe's last comment about political parties can be seen as a comparison with his experiences in the GDR, where he did have to promote the interests of one party, the SED. Having remained at the *Freie Presse* during the period of change, he is in a good position to

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<sup>142</sup> Interview with Daniel Richter, *Freie Presse*

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Reinhart Grobe, *Freie Presse*

compare the two types of journalism, and it is clear from his comments that the *Freie Presse* has managed to assert its independence from outside influences. As has already been seen, the papers often go much further in the opposite direction as a result of their experiences in the GDR, and are particularly sensitive to any cases where their integrity might be called into question. An example of this was given by Grobe, commenting on a case which had promoted discussion in the editorial conference that day. In the *Freie Presse* on 11 October 1996, an article about a restaurant was published as part of a series on restaurants in the area. The principle behind these articles was that journalists from the newspaper would eat as normal guests at these restaurants and then write an article based on their experience for publication. In some cases, this had led to the paper being taken to court as the restaurants thought the criticism was unfair, but the newspaper had refused to back down, pointing out for example that if the food was cold, this was a simple statement of fact and could not really be disputed. In the specific case which Grobe mentioned, an article was considered to have gone too far in the other direction, and to have been more like an advertisement for the restaurant. He considered that a smaller article with less photos would have served the purpose, and applied the principle of the paper to this case, which is that “wir versuchen, den Bereich der Werbung aus der Zeitung sehr bewußt herauszuhalten”.<sup>144</sup> Although the article was not written with any intention of advertising the restaurant unduly, the editorial meeting agreed that it had gone too far in that direction, an example of the care with which the paper handles such cases.

Although these two areas of the paper are relatively unaffected by external influences, in another area, local reporting, a significant amount of attempted interference from without the paper was identified, as was also the case at the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. As has already been seen with other papers, this interference came mainly from firms:

Es gibt immer wieder den Fall, zum Beispiel bei Firmen oder so. Ich war da eine ganze Weile im Lokaljournalismus, da hatten wir dieses Problem mit irgendwelchen Firmen, es gibt immer wieder das Problem mit irgendwelchen Vereinen, selbst mit einzelnen Bürgern, die versuchen so, das könnt ihr doch nicht machen, und das ist doch eigentlich alles ganz anders.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid

<sup>145</sup> Interview with Hermann Peters, *Freie Presse*

Peters gave an excellent example of the way in which some firms leaped in after the *Wende* and tried to get the newspapers on their side in order to increase their own success rate. Twenty or thirty insurance companies opened up in Chemnitz within a very short space of time, and held champagne receptions for the journalists in order to attempt to get favourable coverage for themselves, and

es gab immer so in der Wendezeit diese netten kleinen Werbegeschenke hier, wo Versicherungen gekommen sind oder so was, da haben wir auch sehr schnell höllisch aufgepaßt, daß wir uns nicht abhängig machen lassen, das ging dann schnell.<sup>146</sup>

The journalists at that time realised very quickly what the intentions of these firms were, and made sure that they did not become involved in any questionable activities themselves, but similar problems still exist for the paper, and the journalists have needed to maintain constant vigilance to ensure their professional integrity is not compromised.

Peters believes that in many situations it is only the determination of the paper's editor which ensures that the journalists can remain independent in their reporting when firms try to use their advertising as leverage:

Und die andere Geschichte mit der Wirtschaft, sehe ich auch Gefahr, sehe ich Gefahr durch diesen umkämpften Anzeigenmarkt, ich habe auch persönlich gehabt, daß Leute kommen und sagen, wir haben bei Ihnen eine große Anzeige geschaltet, und so was, [...] daß damit versucht wurde, kritische Untersuchungen zu unterbinden. Und da kann man dann nur auf die Souveranität der Chefredaktion vertrauen, die sagt, [...] mach's trotzdem.<sup>147</sup>

Although Peters is very happy with the way in which the paper is run and believes that he currently has a great deal of freedom in his work, he is also aware that every paper has its own limits as to what is acceptable, and that one day he may overstep his limit and get into trouble. However, this has not happened to date, and Peters feels comfortable with his present position and with the freedom the paper gives him in his work:

Der Rahmen zum Beispiel, grob gegeben durch die Tendenz, die ein Zeitungshaus hat, den kann ich auch nicht überschreiten. Bis jetzt bin ich daran offensichtlich noch nicht angekommen, an die Wand. [...] Aber es

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid

<sup>147</sup> Ibid



ist vieles möglich.<sup>148</sup>

At the *Freiberger Zeitung*, the situation is very similar. The paper is itself a local paper. The same problems have arisen as have been seen in the local departments of the larger papers. Again, as with the main *Freie Presse*, the journalists receive support from their editor, although there was one case where the paper gave in to the demands of an organisation to print a *Gegendarstellung*, which the journalist concerned did not feel was appropriate. In addition, the organisation concerned used the opportunity to exceed its right to correct factually incorrect material in an article.<sup>149</sup>

The journalists' position is strengthened by the discussion which takes place prior to publication of articles. The journalist concerned then knows that his or her colleagues will support the decision to publish and that the editor will back them up as well:

Ich muß sagen, da habe ich hier in der Redaktion auch Rückenhalt, weil wir sprechen über solche Dinge, wir sprechen auch, welches Ziel hat der Kommentar, weil das ist leichter für mich dann, auch die Meinung von den anderen, [...] zu wissen, du liegst hier richtig, oder du liegst hier falsch, das ist kein Vorurteil, das Urteil stellt sich für andere auch so dar. Und wenn ich der Meinung bin, dann kann ich's kommentieren.<sup>150</sup>

These discussions also contributed to a reduction in the pressure on a journalist from within the paper, and no cases of journalists being negatively influenced were cited.

The same problems with firms have been seen at the *Freiberger Zeitung* as at other papers. Similarly too, the paper applies journalistic criteria to each case and is not influenced by the mere factor of advertising. For example, Antje Schneide explains clearly the legal position of the paper to an advertiser, so that there is no possibility of the advertiser mistakenly believing that a story is being covered because of advertising in the paper. To act otherwise would be "unehrlich, den Leuten gegenüber".<sup>151</sup>

Although Schneider is comfortable with the current position, she fears that it may worsen in the future because of the economic pressure on newspapers:

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Natalie Haller, *Freie Presse-Freiberger Zeitung*

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Antje Schneider, *Freie Presse-Freiberger Zeitung*

<sup>151</sup> Ibid

Wir spüren den ökonomischen Druck zwar mitunter, aber momentan glaube ich noch nicht so, daß er die Arbeit beeinflußt, aber ich glaube, das wird steigen.<sup>152</sup>

At both newspapers, the journalists were happy with their relationship with the editor, and had not experienced any intervention in their work. At the *Freiberger Zeitung*, there was a clear sense of solidarity among the journalists, who often referred to “wir” at the paper, rather than distinguishing between their own views and those of their colleagues. The frequent discussions which take place at the paper about their work have undoubtedly contributed to this positive outcome.

### **Basis of decisions**

Some of the difficulties which the journalists have faced in the years since the *Wende* have been identified. The next step is to examine the way in which they apply their values and standards to other concrete situations in which there are wide differences of opinion among journalists about the acceptability of certain methods of information gathering. In addition, two cases of the need for ethical decisions to be made will be looked at. In the first case, the use of photographs will be examined, and in the second, the treatment of documents dealing with individuals’ association with the *Stasi* will be looked at. This last part of the analysis will demonstrate the values the journalists apply when making less clear-cut decisions in their work.

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid

## CHAPTER TEN

### Ethical issues of the media

In order to examine journalists' thinking in areas involving ethical decisions, several specific scenarios were put to them which involved disputed methods of information gathering. The journalists then gave their response as to how they viewed these methods and the reasons they had for holding such views. The specific cases discussed were as follows:

Als Journalist geheime Regierungsunterlagen benutzen.

Sich in ihren Beiträgen auf Quellen berufen, die sie dem Publikum nicht nennen.

Sich als Mitarbeiter in einem Betrieb oder einer Organisation betätigen, um an interne Informationen zu kommen.

Vorgabe einer anderen Meinung oder Einstellung, um einem Informanten Vertrauen einzuflößen.

Sich als eine andere Person ausgeben.

Private Papiere, wie Briefe oder Fotos von jemandem veröffentlichen, ohne dessen Zustimmung.

Informanten unter Druck setzen.

Questions were based on the earlier study by Schneider, Schönbach and Stürzebecher<sup>1</sup>, which had used these same questions to a much larger sample of both Eastern and Western German journalists. Building on their work, it was possible to select from the ten examples they had used seven which represented a cross-section of overall acceptance among the journalists. In the actual interviews, the number of scenarios discussed depended on the time constraint, but in all cases, at least one example was selected from the group with a high level of acceptance (taken to be over 70%), one where there were clear differences in opinion (25-45%), and one where there was little acceptance of the method (10% and less). The exact percentages were less important than the relative level of acceptance, as no method found more than 74% acceptance among the Eastern German journalists, and in this respect, the

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<sup>1</sup> Schneider et al (1994)

decision made as to cut-off points was made on the basis of the relative response to the situations cited. The results of this earlier survey are as follows:

Acceptance of method:	Journalists in Western Germany	Journalists in Eastern Germany	
	% finding justified	Living in GDR before 1989 % finding justified	Living in FRG before 1989 % finding justified
wenn Journalisten sich in ihren Beiträgen auf Quellen berufen, die sie dem Publikum nicht nennen	71	74	79
geheime Regierungsunterlagen zu benutzen	75	65	94
sich als Mitarbeiter in einem Betrieb/ einer Organisation betätigen, um an interne Informationen zu kommen	46	43	54
Vorgabe einer anderen Meinung/ Einstellung, um einem Informanten Vertrauen einzuflößen	39	23	55
sich als eine andere Person auszugeben	28	27	34
versteckte Mikrofone und Kameras einzusetzen	22	25	31
sich durch Geldzuwendungen vertrauliche Unterlagen zu beschaffen	28	15	31
wenn Journalisten private Papiere, wie Briefe/Fotos von jemandem veröffentlichen ohne dessen Zustimmung	10	4	11
Informanten unter Druck zu setzen	6	3	13
dem Informanten die Geheimhaltung der Informationen zusagen, aber nicht einhalten	3	1	4

Source: Schneider et al (1994), p219

The same scenarios were also used in Köcher's 1985 study of German and British journalists and their motivation and attitudes. The questions were designed by the *Institut für*

*Demoskopie Allensbach*, under the direction of Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann.<sup>2</sup> In this study, as well as the one by Schneider et al, the researchers were seeking one of only two responses, typified by Köcher's introductory question to her fieldwork: "Welche der folgenden Methoden halten Sie für vertretbar und welche billigen Sie auf keinen Fall?"<sup>3</sup>, whereas the present study sought to add depth to this existing quantitative data. What was sought was information about the reasons for the answers given by Eastern German journalists, and the results of the interviews carried out show that some scenarios received similar reactions from most journalists and others a wide range of responses with little overlap. As such, this study gives valuable information about the principles which the journalists apply to such (hypothetical) situations. It shows the extent to which existing themes seen from the material dealing with their experiences in the GDR are very relevant to their current work, and as such, the way in which these experiences affect their work today. Before examining the concrete cases, some general principles and attitudes of the journalists will be looked at, to provide a context and framework within which to analyse their responses to the scenarios discussed.

In analysing the journalists' responses, there is a danger of accepting too readily the statements which they make about the working practices they find acceptable. In the GDR, they showed that what they would in theory have liked to have done did not always correspond to their actual actions. At the present time, they have views on how far they would be prepared to go in obtaining information, but due to their lack of experience with these methods, it is impossible to say what they would do in the actual situations discussed. However, although this problem exists, what was sought was more an indication of the values they apply in thinking about such situations than a commitment from them as to whether they would engage in the activities in question. This is partly why black and white answers were not sought. Some of the limiting factors on their freedom to act as they wish have been seen in the last chapter, and would in practice influence the actual decisions made. What this chapter attempts to show is the way in which the journalists think about such decisions. It does not claim to show the way the journalists would act in actual situations.

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<sup>2</sup> Köcher (1985), pp 144-5, 166-7

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p144

## General attitudes and principles

### *Objectives in using information and material*

In describing their attitude to the methods of information gathering discussed in the interviews, the journalists identified several questions they would have to pose in a concrete situation. The first of these questions would be that the journalist would have to think about his objective in using the information obtained:

da müßte man dann sicherlich für meine Begriffe schon abwägen, welcher Art die Informationen sind, die ich da habe, was dann daraus folgt, wenn ich die veröffentliche, also [...] würde ich mir schon versuchen [...] zu prüfen, welche Wirkung erziele ich mit der Veröffentlichung von solchen Dingen? Kann ich das verantworten, oder kann ich das nicht verantworten?<sup>4</sup>

The journalists were very concerned about the true purpose of publishing any such information. Were they were seeking to promote their own self-interest, or was the public good really foremost in their minds?

Ist es Selbstzweck, damit ich eine tolle Story habe, oder ist es wichtig, daß es in die Öffentlichkeit kommt?<sup>5</sup>

### *Sensation and sensationalism*

It was important to probe for understanding of motivation since a possibility exists that these methods of obtaining information might be used in order to create a sensation for the paper and thus increase its circulation. In general, this motivation was, however, rejected by the journalists as not being consistent with the nature of their newspaper. They regarded their newspaper as being too "serious" to resort to such methods:

Das ist auch eine Art Journalismus, die wir eigentlich auch hier, die also unser Unternehmen eigentlich auch nicht pflegt, also, wir gelten als sogenannte seriöse Zeitung [...], und es ist also doch ein Unterschied zu einer Boulevardzeitung dann, also das ist ganz klar.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Brigitte Fischer, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Thorsten Winkler, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Samuel Först, Freiburger Zeitung

Circulation, as has been shown, is crucial for tabloid papers. However, circulation and profit were not regarded by the journalists interviewed as being sufficient reason for looking for sensation where there is none:

Ich bin eher ein Gegner von Sensationsmache. Wenn das Ziel nur ist, Auflage zu machen und einen Skandal zu provozieren, der eigentlich keiner ist, dann finde ich es nicht legitim.<sup>7</sup>

Having rejected these goals, the journalists identified other areas where the newspaper did want to gain a reputation. *Neues Deutschland* has no interest in creating sensation for its own sake, seeing its own strengths elsewhere. Typical of this attitude were the following comments:

Es läuft immer wieder auf den Charakter dieser Zeitung hinaus. [...] Es geht uns im Prinzip nie um Sensationshascherei, da gibt's viele andere, die das machen und die davon leben, das ist auch nicht die Stärke unserer Zeitung, dadurch wird's auch nicht akzeptiert von dem Leser, und das ist einfach die Widerspiegelung der Situation in diesem Lande von dem linken Standpunkt her, die man ja nun nicht so erkundet, also [...] stehen wir [...] ziemlich einmalig da irgendwie, und das ist eigentlich auch unser Trumpf, mit dem wir arbeiten können und der uns Gewinne bringt, und nicht irgendwelche Sensationsgeschichten irgendwie.<sup>8</sup>

Closely allied to this is their belief that a policy of sensationalism would not actually benefit the paper in the long run, as this would not be in accordance with its general philosophy, a view which is shared by the journalists at other papers:

Ich glaube, daß eine Abonnementzeitung [...] erstens auf diesem Wege die Auflage nicht steigern kann, also mit einer einfachen Sensation, weil diese Sensation müßte sich dann sehr regelmäßig bieten, um immer sozusagen eine bestimmte Marktposition, die sie vielleicht kurzfristig erreicht hat, zu halten. Ich glaube, das ist der falsche Weg, so kann man diese Position nicht halten.<sup>9</sup>

These considerations of Ehrich's are of a practical nature - the paper is unlikely to be able to increase its circulation by occasionally offering a sensational story. But Ehrich also looked at the question of sensationalism from a purely ethical point of view. In doing so, he rejected the idea that profit is the most important thing for a newspaper, and noted the distinction

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Katja Buchwald, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Franz Becher, Neues Deutschland

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Theodor Ehrich, Berliner Zeitung

between the basic journalistic nature of a paper and its financial requirements. He believes that offering a quality product can lead to economic success, but that it is important that journalistic criteria are not confused with financial ones:

Zweitens glaube ich, daß es aus ethischen Gründen, aus all diesen Gründen, die wir besprochen haben, aus dieser ethischen Sicht, politischer Sicht, gesellschaftlicher Sicht, das klingt jetzt vielleicht paradox, ja, aber nicht die Aufgabe der Zeitung ist, sich zu verkaufen am Markt. Denn die Aufgabe der Zeitung, sich zu verkaufen, besteht aus wirtschaftlicher Sicht, aber nicht aus journalistischer und gesellschaftlicher, ethischer Sicht. Dann muß man darüber nachdenken, wie man die wirtschaftliche Konnektion schafft, um sich finanziell zu behaupten [...], das ist schon klar, aber das ist nur bedingt eine journalistische Frage nach meiner Meinung.<sup>10</sup>

While Ehrich accepts the necessity for a newspaper to have a solid financial base, he does not believe that the relationship between the financial and journalistic sides of a newspaper needs to be antagonistic. It is possible to find a way for journalistic criteria not to be compromised by a philosophy of sensationalism while at the same time allowing for the paper to ensure its financial viability, and Ehrich believes, as indeed several other journalists also indicated, that this is the way their particular newspaper should be going. They also believe that this is the policy of the paper, which places little value on sensation for the sake of sensation. At the same time, this does not of course preclude an interest in stories which are in themselves a sensation because of their actual content. Such an attitude was contrasted by Frank Grünewald with the exaggeration and sensationalism of some media:

Ich mache nie was um Sensation willen. Ich finde, eine Sensation ist ohnehin schon eine Sensation durch sich. Man kann was aufputschen, dagegen bin ich, nur Sensation, die eine Sensation *ist*, die finde ich total spannend, also Weltrekordversuch. [...] Da brauche ich nichts dazu zu erfinden [...]. Schlimm wird es nur, wenn im Grunde genommen gewisse Sachen, die eigentlich so normal sind, die jeder Journalist machen würde, wenn er Gelegenheit hätte, wenn die dann so hochgeputzt werden, nur um dem Politiker jetzt eins auszuwischen [...], da steckt aber gar nicht Substanz dahinter.<sup>11</sup>

The reasoning here is reminiscent of the way in which attempts at interference are regarded. The story is judged on its merits, rather than on its potential for sensation. If the story is

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Frank Grünewald, Berliner Zeitung



considered to be interesting or sensational because of its actual content, it will be published; if it is attractive merely because of its potential to attract readers by the sheer impact of an allegation which is largely unfounded, it will not. Thus, journalistic criteria are again the ones being applied here.

### *Consequences of publishing*

When confronted by situations in which they are unsure about the use of less conventional methods of obtaining information, another question which the journalists ask is what would be the consequences of using such information? This is a factor in their decision not only as to whether such information should be used, but also whether it should be acquired in the first place:

Man muß es immer von dem Standpunkt betrachten, was will ich? Was will ich? Was kann ich mit 'ner Veröffentlichung bewirken, oder was könnte passieren, wenn das Ganze nicht an die Öffentlichkeit kommt?<sup>12</sup>

An important part of this is that nobody should be hurt by the publication of the information, and that the motivation behind publishing is acceptable:

Ich würde es nicht aus Übermut machen, sondern es müßte streng an der Aufklärungsabsicht orientiert sein, und es dürfte niemand Schaden zufügen.<sup>13</sup>

Again, the motivation has to be right. There has to be a serious intent behind using the information and publishing a story, again determined by journalistic criteria, and in deciding whether the consequences of publishing are justified by the content of the story. It appears that in fact the question of the consequences of using the information can be more important for some journalists than the actual source of the information or the way in which it is obtained. Anthon Dörr, for example, said that

ich denke, die Frage darf nicht sein, woher ich die Quelle bekomme, oder welche Quelle ich benutze, die Frage muß sein, was will ich mit meiner Veröffentlichung erreichen? Das muß im Vordergrund stehen, die Quelle ist dann relativ egal. Ich weiß nicht, ob ich das absolut [...] beantworten kann, aber im Vordergrund muß immer stehen, was kann diese Information bewirken, ist es wichtig, daß ich mit dieser Information an die

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Anthon Dörr, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Gertrud Krause, Leipziger Volkszeitung

Öffentlichkeit gehe? Der Ansatzpunkt ist ein völlig anderer aus meiner Sicht, nicht die Frage, *darf* ich etwas benutzen, oder darf ich es nicht benutzen, sondern die Frage ist halt, was bewirkt eine Veröffentlichung, beziehungsweise was bewirkt eine Nicht-Veröffentlichung?<sup>14</sup>

While Dörr goes further than his colleagues, he does demonstrate that there are very different ways of looking at the issues involved. For some people, their response is largely principle-orientated: they look at the decision in the light of the principles which they hold. For others, however, the legitimacy of the methods of gathering information is determined by more practical considerations, such as the consequences of obtaining and publishing the information. However, even these more practical motivations can be seen to have a base in a set of values. From Dörr's comments, it is apparent that in his judgement, the wider implications of a person's actions need to be considered when making decisions, rather than merely the immediate question of whether an action is in itself right or wrong.

The journalists' specific responses can now be examined in the light of these more general observations, and the way in which their views vary can be analysed in order to demonstrate how they go about making principle-based decisions.

### **Scenario One: Secret government documents**

The level of acceptance of the use of government documents among the journalists interviewed was consistent with the findings of Schneider et al. There were several reasons for this method generally being considered legitimate, as well as a number of conditions which were placed on the use of the documents.

#### *Perception of governments*

Firstly, the journalists held the view that the government tends to reveal only what it feels is necessary, and that there are often times where other information ought to be passed on which is not necessarily in the best interests of members of the government. This is irrespective of the system of government or the specific country involved:

Das finde ich grundsätzlich OK, ja, auf alle Fälle, weil alle Regierungen dazu neigen, wie ich glaube, egal ob es im Osten oder im Westen, links oder rechts ist, der geschätzten Bevölkerung nur das zuzumuten, was die

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Anthon Dörr, Leipziger Volkszeitung

Regierung für richtig und wichtig hält, und das ist nicht immer das, was wirklich wichtig ist und die Wahrheit ist vor allem.<sup>15</sup>

This negative image of government was a common view among the journalists who showed a general lack of trust of any government, believing that a lot of what governments kept secret stems from a simple desire to make their own lives easier:

Es gibt eine unsägliche Praxis innerhalb der Politik, die Dinge geheim zu halten, aus einem ganz einfachen Grunde, um sich Politik leicht zu machen. Also die Frage wäre, ob das überhaupt Politik ist, natürlich ist es Politik, aber nicht das Politikverständnis, was ich habe. Mein Verständnis ist natürlich, die Dinge so transparent wie möglich zu machen, um den Leuten genau diesen Zugang zur Gesellschaft zu öffnen, von der wir vorher gesprochen haben, teilhaben zu lassen an gesellschaftlicher Entscheidung. Der ganze Grund, warum es überhaupt Medien gibt, ist ja eigentlich der, daß die Politik seit Hunderten von Jahren genau in dieser Frage versagt. Warum auch immer, war es Bequemlichkeit am Schluß, aus natürlich irgendwo am Schluß machtrelevanten Fragestellungen, weil das muß Politik aushalten, da bin ich natürlich hundertprozentig der Meinung, das muß alles veröffentlicht werden.<sup>16</sup>

Such thoughts are clearly related to the journalists' experiences in the GDR, where they were exposed to the government's capacity to release only the information it wished to see published. The journalists' suspicious view of the operation of government current thinking on the subject of government is quite understandable. Their experience of the GDR had shown them the way in which governments can misuse their power, and there had been little to suggest that the Federal government was totally open in its dealings with the public and with the media.

Ehrich sees it as a part of the media's task to make public information which would otherwise remain unknown, but which is important to enable citizens to play a part in decision-making. His assumption that the information involved is something inherently negative from the point of view of the government was a very common view among the journalists. The instinctive reaction of the journalists was that the documents they obtained would contain some information about government activities which were in some way negative:

Natürlich habe ich bei dem Begriff "geheime Regierungsunterlagen"

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Theodor Ehrich, Berliner Zeitung

natürlich automatisch an irgendwelche Schweinereien gedacht, [...] also das hat sich jetzt bei mir sofort gekoppelt mit einem wirklich unmoralischen Vorgehen oder Vorgang.<sup>17</sup>

This assumption is a natural one, given the cases which have arisen of such documents finding their way to the media in many countries. In general, where these suspicions are seen to be justified, the journalists would be prepared to use and publish the information:

Da hätte ich überhaupt keine Skrupel, muß ich mal sagen, weil ein Großteil der als geheim eingestuften Regierungsunterlagen zur Verschleierung von irgendwelchen Machtmechanismen dienen, die es also verdient haben, auch an die Öffentlichkeit gebracht zu werden.<sup>18</sup>

### *National or public interest*

Part of the journalists' reasons for their willingness to use secret government papers is their belief that doing so serves the public interest, although not necessarily that of the government. Andreas Klein's comments show well the connection well between the assumption that something wrong is taking place in government circles, a perceived journalistic duty to bring this to light, and the reasoning that to do so is in the national interest:

Wenn es sich natürlich um geheime Regierungsunterlagen handelt, die deutlich werden lassen, daß es irgendwelche Mißstände gibt, die bisher in der Regierung bekannt sind, die aber von der Regierung unter den Teppich gekehrt werden, oder wenn es sogar bestimmte Dinge wären, die deutlich machen würden, die Regierung plant irgendwelche Sachen, die unmoralisch sind, dann würde ich den journalistischen Auftrag darin sehen, das aufzudecken, weil es ja eigentlich im menschlichen und nationalen Interesse ist, diese Dinge aufzudecken, und dann halte ich auch für moralisch gerechtfertigt, das auch zu tun, also dann ist dieses moralische Interesse wichtiger.<sup>19</sup>

In deciding whether the documents should be made public, a further factor would be considered by the journalists. As expected, consistent with their views on so many other aspects of influence, they would also base their decision in this case on the actual content and importance of the material. Likewise, consistent with the journalists' views on the question

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, Neues Deutschland

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Alfred Gärtner, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Andreas Klein, Leipziger Volkszeitung

of sensationalism are their comments on the importance of examining the content of the government papers and making a decision based on the importance of the information in a wider context. “Importance” means, then, importance for the country, for the population’s future, and not primarily for the newspaper or its circulation figures:

Wenn es schwerwiegende Sachen sind, die auch wichtig sind für Demokratie, Entwicklung und so weiter sind, und sie kommen, was allerdings bei uns sehr unwahrscheinlich ist in unserer Zeitung, dann sollte man es schon nehmen, bloß es muß entsprechend schwerwiegend sein, also würden mich nicht irgendwie versuchen irgendwelche Skandale oder Nebensächlichkeiten, nur um das Interesse an der Zeitung zu wecken oder so, das nicht.<sup>20</sup>

### *Limitations*

There are, of course, also limitations to the journalists’ willingness to use secret government papers in their work. Becher pointed out an important practical one, namely that the newspaper would be unlikely to receive the papers in the first place. Some newspapers are more likely recipients of any such papers than others. *Neues Deutschland* is unlikely to be a candidate because it does not operate in the mainstream of the media, although on the other hand, its position to the left of the political spectrum could in some situations make such a happening more possible as it would have no reservations about publishing genuine information which casts the government in a bad light. Its size in terms of circulation, however, means that it would only be able to reach a small proportion of the German population, although other media would later take up the story. *Neues Deutschland* is simply not available in large enough quantities outside of Berlin and the new *Länder*, whereas other papers, such as the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* are available throughout Germany. Likewise, small local papers such as the *Freiberger Zeitung* are also unlikely to be sent any such documents. By way of example, Natalie Haller’s immediate response to the scenario was “ich arbeite in Freiberg!”<sup>21</sup>, and her comment was typical of most of the journalists for whom this was a very hypothetical case and not a situation they were likely to face.

Aside from this practical limitation, the journalists also cited some fundamental restrictions with which they would qualify their general acceptance of such a method of information

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Franz Becher, *Neues Deutschland*

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Natalie Haller, *Freiberger Zeitung*

gathering. In cases of national security and state secrets, the journalists would not use the documents they had in their possession:

Außerhalb des Bereiches Staatsgeheimnis, was dann für das Land sicherheitsrelevante Fragestellung ist, wo wirklich die Sicherheit eines Landes zur Disposition steht, außerhalb dieses Bereiches gibt es für mich keine Unterlage, die es wert wäre, als geheim bezeichnet zu werden.<sup>22</sup>

However, there was also a degree of scepticism as to the use of the terms “state secret” and “national security”, and the journalists are often prepared to use their own judgement as to whether something should be classed as either of these possibilities, or to consult with others when they are unsure:

Es gibt natürlich Punkte, das würde ich dann auch nicht alleine entscheiden, da würde ich mir dann also auch entsprechende Leute suchen, mit denen ich berate, auch hier in der Zeitung, wenn es also Unterlagen sind, die wirklich die Nationalsicherheit gefährden, ich meine aber jetzt auch *wirklich* die Nationalsicherheit.<sup>23</sup>

Allied to the question of national security are also certain legal consequences of publishing secret government papers. If the documents really deal with issues of national security, the journalists involved in publishing them would most likely be prosecuted, as in the case of the *Spiegel-Affäre*. However, such considerations are very much secondary in the minds of the journalists, who regard the possibility of the publication of the documents leading to the country's interests being damaged as more important than their own fate in such a case:

Wenn es sich darum handelt, daß man Dinge veröffentlicht, wo die Veröffentlichung letzten Endes dazu führt, daß bestimmte gemeinsame staatliche Interessen schwer beschädigt werden, dann denke ich, *kann* man so was nicht machen. Also wenn ich jetzt nun zufälligerweise in die Hand bekäme genaue Informationen über die Aufrüstung der Bundeswehr an irgendeiner Stelle, dann würde ich - erst mal bringt es nichts, und zweitens würde ich also einen schweren nationalen Schaden hervorrufen. Abgesehen davon, daß man sich strafbar macht, wenn man so was macht, [...] da denke ich, daß man das aus einem nationalen Interesse heraus nicht machen kann.<sup>24</sup>

In general, then, the journalists are prepared to use secret government documents if their

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Theodor Ehrich, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Alfred Gärtner, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Arnulf Ernst, Leipziger Volkszeitung

content relates to activities which are not in accordance with the stated policy of the government, or which are illegal or morally questionable. The objective in publishing has to be the public interest in the information rather than any self-interest or considerations of the likely benefit for the paper. This response is motivated by a distrust of government and the way in which it operates in its own best interests rather than always in the interest of the country, as well as the perceived duty of journalism to bring to light such matters and provide information not readily available. At the same time, where genuine matters of national security are involved, the journalists would not publish the information if they felt that the country's interests would be damaged by such a course of action.

### *Change in attitude since the GDR era*

A question which arises from this specific scenario is why the journalists now claim to be so willing to challenge the government when they had been so compliant in the GDR. Only Henry Wiedemann commented on this fundamental change in attitude, probably as it was a question with which he had had to deal himself after losing his job after 1989 and having to examine his past behaviour. Wiedemann was very aware of the accusation which could be directed towards the journalists who had worked in the GDR because of the apparent sudden change in their attitudes:

Das ist ja dieser Punkt, der auch immer als kritische Frage an DDR-Journalisten bleibt, daß sie sich jetzt auf eine Courage und auf eine Zivilcourage berufen. [...] Das hat zu tun mit [...] einer Selbstfesselung in der DDR, auch mit einem opportunistischen Verhalten, dessen Grundlage natürlich ein anderes Verständnis von Regierung und Staat war in der DDR, empfand ich mich als Journalist immer als ein gewisser Teil nicht der Regierung, aber als doch ein Teil der Machtausübung, das heißt also Regierung und Staat, Partei, Journalismus, das war sozusagen irgendwo eine Einheit, das heißt also, immer wenn die Regierung angegriffen wurde, fühlte auch ich mich angegriffen.<sup>25</sup>

Wiedemann returns to the ideas which were examined in the chapter dealing specifically with the reasons for the journalists' compliance with the government in the GDR, and to the

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, Neues Deutschland

concepts of opportunism and his own identification with the power-base of the GDR. He does not believe that the difference which is seen has had to do with a change in values. Rather he feels that the reasons for the changes have more to do with the increased opportunities to challenge the government which the journalists currently have, the chance to apply the principles which they always held but could not always apply. The differences in the behaviour in these two periods are, according to him, essentially practical in nature, as opposed to being based on the journalists' values:

das ist aber nicht etwas, wo ich jetzt sagen würde, das habe ich mir aufgrund irgendwelchen charakterlichen oder couragierten Auftretens erworben, sondern das ist einfach, daß [...] ich diese Mittel nun nutzen kann.<sup>26</sup>

This view seems consistent with the journalists' general view that their values have not changed significantly, but that the change in their behaviour has to do with the new freedom to make their own decisions with less fear of the consequences. The decisions to be made are in many ways the same ones as in the GDR, such as what relationship the media have with the state apparatus, but now the journalists are independent from the state and can make these decisions themselves.

## **Scenario Two: Using unnamed sources in articles**

The possibility of using information in articles without naming the source also received a high level of acceptance among the journalists. This is consistent with the results of Schneider et al.

### *Normal and exceptional procedure*

Despite the general acceptance of this method, it was not one which the journalists felt should become a standard procedure. Instead, the source should be given wherever possible. This view was most prevalent among journalists at *Neues Deutschland*, who felt particularly strongly that sources should only be omitted where it was imperative to do so:

Im Regelfall neige ich dazu, hier zu sagen, man solle die Quellen nennen, im Regelfall.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, *Neues Deutschland*



In Einzelfällen sicher. [...] Generell nicht. Aber es gibt einfach Leute, die Verfolgung zu befürchten haben, und Abschiebung, [...] da kann es schon mal vorkommen, [...] aber das ist eigentlich die Ausnahme.<sup>28</sup>

However, Lohmann qualified his response by pointing out that there are situations where exceptions have to be made based on the specific circumstances of the situation:

Ich glaube aber, man muß realistisch sein und anerkennen, daß es Ausnahmesituationen geben kann, wo man zum Schutz der Quelle und im Interesse der Substanz, die aus dieser Quelle kommt, auch die Möglichkeit haben muß, ohne direkte Quellennennung, die Substanz, die in der Quelle steckt, transportieren und zum Zwecke der Information für die Leserschaft einsetzen zu können.<sup>29</sup>

The journalists at the other newspapers showed less reluctance to making use of this possibility than those at *Neues Deutschland*. However, in almost all cases, the clearest situation where the journalists felt that omitting sources is legitimate was where there is a need to protect their source from possible repercussions which could arise if he or she were mentioned by name. The following quotations give an idea of the uniformity of response among the journalists from all the papers to this scenario:

Ja, das ist normal, daß man Quellen nicht nennt wegen des Quellenschutzes.<sup>30</sup>

Es empfiehlt sich nicht in jedem Falle, daß man die Quelle nennt. Weil derjenige, [...] der mir vielleicht das eine oder andere gesagt hat, als Quelle nicht genannt werden will, denn wenn er genannt wird, könnte es sein, daß er personelle Probleme kriegt, also persönliche Schwierigkeiten, und da muß man natürlich dann auch Rücksicht nehmen, ist klar, also insofern kann man das durchaus machen.<sup>31</sup>

[Das würde ich machen,] wenn es [...] Quellen gibt, die zu schützen sind, und der Journalismus wäre ohne die Quelle viel langweiliger, also selbst wir machen das, eine relativ normale, seriöse Zeitung.<sup>32</sup>

Das [...] würde ich in so einem Fall verschweigen, wenn es wirklich brisant ist, also wenn es eine Gefahr für den Mitarbeiter darstellen könnte,

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Franz Becher, Neues Deutschland

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Paulina Scheer, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Udo Meyn, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Hermann Peters, Freie Presse

zum Beispiel seinen Arbeitsplatz zu verlieren.<sup>33</sup>

Although the option of not naming sources was widely acceptable, there were again conditions placed on its application. Many journalists stated that were they to omit the name of a source, they would at the same time state quite clearly that they did have the source's name, but that they had decided not to publish it:

Zumindest schreiben wir dann, daß die Quelle mit Namen der Redaktion bekannt ist, wenn der nicht genannt werden will.<sup>34</sup>

In der Situation kann man durchaus schreiben "Wie ein gut Informierter" oder einen Namen, und schreiben dann, der ist geändert oder so [...], also das ist schon machbar.<sup>35</sup>

Dann würde ich eine Angabe machen, daß die Quelle der Redaktion vorliegt. Daß man weiß, aha, ich kann mit der darüber reden oder so, ob ich sie preisgebe, ist eine andere Frage, aber ich würde eine Beziehung - genauso wie ich das mache, wenn ich über Leute schreibe, die ihre Namen nicht nennen wollen. Dann schreibe ich nie "Namen geändert", dann schreibe ich "Name liegt der Redaktion vor". Dann wissen die Leute zumindestens, aha, die weiß das.<sup>36</sup>

### *Credibility*

While the general opinion was that this was perfectly acceptable, there were a small number of journalists who stated that they found this alternative questionable in serious journalism. The reason for this appears to be that they associated a lack of named source with the real lack of a source at all:

Ich denke, es wirkt manchmal auch unglaubwürdig, wenn man einfach schreibt, "wie wir aus gut erfahrenen Kreisen erfahren haben", weil da kann ich auch einfach etwas erfinden.<sup>37</sup>

Sachen, die nicht belegt sind, bilde ich mir ein, sind zum größten Teil [...] ausgedacht.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Natalie Haller, Freiburger Zeitung

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Beate Liebnitz, Neues Deutschland

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Andreas Klein, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Antje Schneider, Freiburger Zeitung

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Natalie Haller, Freiburger Zeitung

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Barbara Hanke, Berliner Kurier

This concern was also shared by those who nevertheless thought that in some situations it is acceptable to omit the source's name. They, too, were concerned about the credibility of a paper and of the journalist concerned when sources were not given. In part, this concern stemmed from the potential for inventing sources to increase the impact of an article. This brand of journalism was totally rejected by the journalists concerned as not being consistent with their type of paper, but one which would be more suited to the style of a tabloid newspaper:

Also, ich finde, das gehört einfach zu meinem Stand, sonst wird man da irgendwie Boulevardblatt, was eine Minute [...] irgendwas [...] behauptet, und das nicht beweist.<sup>39</sup>

Vom Prinzip her vertrete ich die Meinung, daß eine Zeitung wie unsere, eine seriöse Tageszeitung, ihre Quelle auch nennen muß.<sup>40</sup>

An additional consideration is that naming sources is also regarded by some as being simply more convincing and more effective than using phrases such as "ein gut Informierter":

Wenn es irgendwie geht, würde ich so offen wie möglich spielen, nicht nur, weil es überzeugender ist, sondern auch, weil es mehr Wirkung hat, das würde in jedem Falle vorziehen, klar, also so offen wie möglich.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, there is also an element of pride involved for some journalists, who believe that naming their sources is a matter of personal honour: it provides a guarantee that the source exists and that the journalist is a trustworthy person:

Als Journalist hätte ich dann den Ehrgeiz, den Lesern die Zuversicht zu vermitteln, daß ich, der Schreiber, selber eine zuverlässige Person bin, daß sie sich darauf verlassen können, daß ich das abgecheckt habe, und ich garantiere, also würde ich so nicht schreiben, aber so einen Eindruck müßte man, wenn man formuliert, vermitteln können, ich, der Schreiber, garantiere mit meiner Ehre, mit meinem Namen, daß das so stimmt.<sup>42</sup>

### *Reliability of source*

Whatever the decision the journalists make about naming their sources, the reliability of their

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Beate Liebnitz, Neues Deutschland

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Peter Heym, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Gertrud Krause, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Walter Hoff, Neues Deutschland

sources is always a fundamental consideration. Questions of how to deal with the source's name are a secondary issue. Without the element of reliability, it becomes irrelevant whether or not the source is named, as the information would not be used in the paper in the first place:

Das ist auch vom Grundsatz her nicht unsere Art, es kann da Ausnahmen geben, aber da müssen wir zumindest der Quelle hundertprozentig sicher sein, also wir müssen wissen, daß dahinter ein seriöser Informant steckt, und es kann unter gewissen Umständen mal die Ausnahme geben, dann muß man aber auch im Beitrag zum Ausdruck bringen, daß man die Quelle kennt und aus bestimmten Gründen nicht nennen darf.<sup>43</sup>

It is important to the journalists that the readers know that there is a genuine source for the information being given, and that the information is not concocted in order to make an impact:

Es muß echt eine Quelle sein, sonst wären wir wieder bei den Problemen, man schreibt irgendwas in die Zeitung, was nicht stimmt. Ja, das hängt einfach damit zusammen, daß man dem Leser auch deutlich macht, ich habe hier Quellen, ich schreibe nicht irgendwas, sondern das bezieht sich auf ganz konkrete Fakten und Quellen, die ich habe, aber es empfiehlt sich nicht in jedem Falle, daß man die Quelle nennt.<sup>44</sup>

Because of this, the journalist himself has to be sure that the information he is receiving is accurate and reliable. This reliability could be strengthened by not relying solely on one source:

Ich würde aber Skrupel haben, wenn ich nur eine Quelle hätte. Eine Quelle, die ich nicht nennen darf, da würde ich mich weiter absichern wollen, ob's vielleicht nicht noch andere Quellen gibt. Also nur auf eine Quelle vertrauen, da hätte ich durchaus Bedenken.<sup>45</sup>

The actual method of confirming the information would depend on what possibilities existed in the specific case in question:

Selbstverständlich prüft man ja auch, ob das alles richtig ist, was die dann einem mitteilen, es ist ja nicht so, als ob das ungeprüft übernommen

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Peter Heym, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Udo Meyn, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Reinhart Grobe, Freie Presse

wird.<sup>46</sup>

Ich würde auch in jedem Falle zu dieser unbekanntem Quelle die offiziellen Quelle befragen wollen.<sup>47</sup>

### *Protection of information*

Where the source is deemed to be reliable, and to be providing useful information, the journalists are also conscious of the need to protect the source because of the potential which exists for the information to be obtained by other media, thus robbing them of its exclusivity. Robert Lohmann put the protection of the source and of the information which this source is providing side by side in his comments on the need to protect his sources:

Es kann Ausnahmesituationen geben, wo man zum Schutz der Quelle und im Interesse der Substanz, die aus dieser Quelle kommt, auch die Möglichkeit haben muß, ohne direkte Quellennennung, die Substanz, die in der Quelle steckt, transportieren und zum Zwecke der Information für die Leserschaft einsetzen zu können.<sup>48</sup>

A source is of more use if it can be used to provide information on more than just one occasion, and as such, it is important that the identity of particularly useful sources be kept secret in order to protect future information. While naming the source would increase the credibility of the information, it would have the disadvantage of allowing others access and possibly jeopardising the future flow of information. Theodor Ehrich expressed similar sentiments when discussing the way in which he views his sources and he refers explicitly to the element of journalistic competition which can be involved:

Dieser Zweifelsfall kann ein Element von journalistischem Konkurrenzkampf sein, also ich muß meine Quellen, die ich habe, schützen gegen den Zugriff der Konkurrenz auf diese Quelle.<sup>49</sup>

Although these considerations play a part in the decision to keep a source anonymous, they are in general only secondary to the desire to protect the source for his own good rather than because of any self interest. To achieve such ends, the journalists have found in practice that

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Alfred Gärtner, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Reinhart Grobe, Freie Presse

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Theodor Ehrich, Berliner Zeitung

it is generally quite acceptable to refer to the fact that they do have a reliable source - whose reliability they have already ascertained - but that they have chosen not to mention the source by name.

### **Scenario Three: Working undercover in a firm or organisation**

#### *Practical considerations.*

Among those who found working undercover to be acceptable, the principal reason for this view was that it was considered to be often the only method of obtaining the information being sought. Henry Wiedemann took this view, looking at the circumstances in society which he believes can make undercover work legitimate:

Das halte ich für sehr legitim, [...] weil bestimmte Strukturen und bestimmte Mechanismen schon gar nicht mehr ohne eine solche Methode aufgedeckt werden können, weil ich glaube, auch heute inzwischen sozusagen sind die Schutzmechanismen in dieser Gesellschaft so stark, daß es da also schon Vorkehrungen gibt, daß man nicht zu sehr sich reinschauen läßt in die Geheimnisse [...], also insofern ist da der Journalist Opfer seines eigenen Berufes, weil ich glaube, durch die Arbeit von Öffentlichkeit und durch die Arbeit von Medien [...] weiß man natürlich, was passiert, wenn der Journalist kommt, und man schützt sich dann gegen die Öffentlichkeit, und es reicht dann eben nicht mehr zu sagen, ich bin Journalist, und sofort gehen dann Schoppen dicht, sondern muß man eben dann wirklich investigativ, und muß sozusagen illegal sich da hinein manövrieren. Das ist eine Reaktion der Gesellschaft, oder des Konzerns, auf die investigative Arbeit von Medien, denn sonst würden sie also sozusagen nicht sich so verbergen, und nicht solche Methoden notwendig machen. Also die halte für legitim.<sup>50</sup>

Katja Buchwald echoed Wiedemann's comments, but also noted that this method should only be used in order to pursue a legitimate purpose, one of the fundamental considerations already looked at:

Da habe ich erstmal Sympathie, also wenn man's in der Art und Weise wie der Wallraff einsetzt, finde ich's in Ordnung. [...] Jede Firma vermittelt nach außen hin ein Bild von sich, [...] was überhaupt nicht dem entspricht, was im Inneren abgeht, und damit werden massiv Leute getäuscht, Kunden, zum Beispiel. [...] Wenn man so was damit aufdecken will, finde

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, Neues Deutschland

ich's legitim.<sup>51</sup>

Buchwald's reference to Günter Wallraff was a typical association in the minds of the journalists, many of whom made similar reference to him. Although some noted that the type of undercover work Wallraff was involved in would not be possible for a daily newspaper with its very different deadlines and schedules, there was one clear similarity between the two cases which came through in the journalists' remarks. As has already been seen in the case of government documents, the journalists' general assumption was that the material being sought would involve some undesirable activity which should be revealed, as was the case with Wallraff's work:

Doch, halte ich für ein Mittel, was man einsetzen kann. Gerade, um bestimmten Schweinereien auf die Spur zu kommen.<sup>52</sup>

Amongst those who rejected this method, there were a variety of reasons for their reaction. At the purely practical level, there was in some cases a distinction made between an ethical acceptance of the method and the personal ability to use it. These people believed that the method was in fact perfectly acceptable in principle, but that they themselves would not feel comfortable in the situation or would not feel that they would be able to carry out the work successfully, as this would conflict with some of their other personal values:

[Wallraff] hat es damals gemacht, und ich muß sagen, ich halte es auch mal für wichtig, ich persönlich bin nicht der Typ dafür, weil ich eigentlich ein ehrlicher Typ bin.<sup>53</sup>

Das ist jetzt eigentlich auch nur eine persönliche Sache, ich bin eher ein Journalist, der mit Menschen offen umgeht, mir liegt das einfach nicht, das ist jetzt meine persönliche Sache, ich weiß, daß es Leute gibt, die es machen, und es ist manchmal sehr notwendig, daß so was gemacht wird. [...] Ich persönlich könnte es nicht, weil ich einfach nicht in der Lage bin, anderen Leuten irgendwas vorzugaukeln, mir ihr Vertrauen zu erschleichen sozusagen, das geht nicht, das kann ich nicht, für solche Arbeiten falle ich aus.<sup>54</sup>

In contrast to life in the GDR, the journalists are now able to look to their own values in

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Katja Buchwald, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Paulina Scheer, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Frank Grünwald, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Brigitte Fischer, Berliner Zeitung

deciding whether they wish to become involved in such activities, and have a choice in declining to use methods with which they do not personally feel comfortable. In this respect, they now enjoy a much greater degree of freedom to follow their own consciences than was the case in the GDR. This was also one of the very few times where the journalists made a clear distinction between what they regarded as professionally legitimate and what they felt was acceptable for themselves in light of their own principles and values. Normally, they discussed their professional standards in terms of their personal principles and did not make this distinction. There is clearly room here for further work to investigate where the differences lie in this respect and which set of values predominate in the various situations.

Another purely practical consideration involved with the possibility of undercover work has already been mentioned. The papers are often not in a position to be able to spare so much time to be able to engage in such a long investigation, which means that aside from all moral and ethical considerations, this method is unlikely to be used by daily newspapers:

Bei unserer Arbeitsstruktur ist es nicht machbar, ich glaube, der Aufwand lohnt sich für eine Tageszeitung nicht, das mag vielleicht für Illustrierte oder [...] für ein politisches Magazin, die haben ja ohnehin ganz andere Arbeitsbedingungen, andere Arbeitsmöglichkeiten. [...] Die Zeit haben wir gar nicht und die Möglichkeit, das ist auch [...] nicht die Aufgabe einer Tageszeitung.<sup>55</sup>

### *Ethical considerations*

Although these practical considerations exist and are important in the overall context of the ability of a newspaper to select or sanction certain methods of obtaining information, the journalists also cited several ethical or moral problems with this possibility. The most important of these related to the element of deception which is involved in undercover work. Typical of such reservations the journalists had were the following comments:

Ich glaube, ich würde irgendwann an mein Gewissen stoßen und sagen, mein Gott, du belügst die ganzen Leute.<sup>56</sup>

Der Gesprächspartner will ja ein gewisses Vertrauen mir gegenüber haben,

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<sup>55</sup> Interview with Frank Grünewald, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Antje Schneider, Freiburger Zeitung



und dann kann ich nicht damit anfangen, indem ich ihm irgendetwas vorgaukele, das ist so ein bißchen mein Problem dabei.<sup>57</sup>

Ich glaube, daß mir als Journalisten die Aufgabe auferlegt worden ist, mit dem Partner fair umzugehen, mit jedem Partner.<sup>58</sup>

Such comments reflect at least in part the attitude of the journalists in the GDR era, who were always keen to ensure that the ordinary people they were dealing with were treated fairly and with honesty on their part. Much of this can be traced back to the journalists' perspective of looking at issues from the point of view of their respect for the individual and his or her autonomy: their views have in some ways less to do with their work than with their comments on human relationships in general and their own desire to be treated with respect. This idea was expressed concretely by one or two journalists, such as Natalie Haller, who considered that participating in such undercover work would mean that,

ich belüge die Leute. Und genau das will ich ja, daß sie das mit mir nicht tun.<sup>59</sup>

In many instances involving interaction with other individuals, the journalists look at the issue from the point of view of how they would feel if the roles were reversed, and base their decision on this. This attitude will become clearer in responses made to the next few scenarios, where the level of interaction with real people increases all the time. In the preceding case of government documents, people were less central to the decision, but in the case of not citing sources, the well being of the source was paramount in the decision whether or not to name him or her as again, actual people were directly involved.

The importance of the way in which the possibility of working undercover was regarded needs to be examined. Those who looked at the question from the point of view of what the firm - as a non-human entity - was engaged in saw the information which could be obtained as being most important, whereas those who thought about the practical requirements of such work saw it in terms of the way in which they would have to deceive the firm - as a collection of human beings. This seems to account for the differences in response to the situation. The viewpoint which the journalists take determines their attitude to the situation. All of them

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Udo Meyn, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Reinhart Grobe, Freie Presse

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Natalie Haller, Freiburger Zeitung

seem to have similar values, but the values which lead to the final decision are determined by the way in which they perceive what the work would involve. The general applicability of these concepts will be seen when looking at the other scenarios discussed.

### **Scenario Four: Pretending to have a certain opinion in order to gain someone's trust**

The general consensus among the journalists was that giving opinions which were not their true views in order to gain another's trust is not a legitimate method of gathering information. Although a small number of them recognised that this method can in some situations generate more information than other tools, most had a moral objection based on their understanding of the concept of truth and honesty.

#### *Deception and trust*

The principal objection to this method was that it involved deception of another person. This objection is seen as valid regardless of who the other person is, although a very small number of journalists believed that if that person was engaged in morally questionable activities, an exception could perhaps be made. Generally, however, this method was rejected irrespective of the details of the situation. The journalists see themselves as being in a relationship of trust with those with whom they are talking, and they rely on a sense of mutual trust in their work:

Ich denke, da muß man schon, weil der Informant bringt mir ja Vertrauen entgegen, und dann muß ich ihm auch das Vertrauen entgegenbringen und ihm deutlich machen, so ist meine Meinung.<sup>60</sup>

The importance of trust in the journalists' professional relationship with others is reinforced by Antje Schneider, for whom the possibility of voicing a false opinion is far from hypothetical. She questions whether she can rely on the accuracy of the information she is *receiving* if the information she is *giving* is not true:

Das ist ein schwieriges Problem, mit dem wir immer wieder konfrontiert werden. Nee, ich würde mich dann eher mit meiner Meinung zurückhalten, nee, nee, also eine falsche Meinung vorgeben, das würde ich

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Thorsten Winkler, Leipziger Volkszeitung

nicht machen, ich würde eher die Meinung nicht sagen und würde versuchen, über Fragen aus meinem Partner seine Meinung herauszubringen. Aber dieses [...] Schleichen, nee, *weiß ich, ob der zu mir ehrlich ist, wenn ich das so mache?* Das ist eine Frage, die ich mir immer wieder stelle.<sup>61</sup>

An important element in the moral objection is the *deliberateness* with which the other person would be deceived by the journalist:

Wenn es zielgerichtet, wissentlich, und mit Vorsatz angewendet wird, um den Gegenüber in die Irre zu führen und ihn aus der Reserve zu locken, dann ist das nicht OK meiner Meinung nach, und insofern lehne ich es ab.<sup>62</sup>

### *The nature of human relationships*

A second important consideration is the context within which the journalists see this scenario. For some, the method is seen more in terms of its validity as a basis for any human relationship, and because they reject any such relationship based upon deception, they would not condone the kind of deceit involved in this professional setting. One comparison was with family relationships, and the importance of their basis:

Zu seinen Mitmenschen sollte man immer eine gewisse Aufrichtigkeit haben, und letztlich liebt man ja doch menschliche Kontakte daheim, und da ist dann die Unaufrichtigkeit. Da habe ich dann immer Unbehagen, also ich persönlich. Wenn ich die nicht hätte, wäre ich sicherlich auch in die Politik gegangen.<sup>63</sup>

Robert Lohmann, on the other hand, looked at this scenario in terms of human nature and its needs and preferences:

Das ist auf keinen Fall kosher, auf keinen Fall in Ordnung. Ich glaube aber, daß man hier der menschlichen Natur doch ein bißchen Rechnung tragen muß und anerkennen muß, daß es Situationen eigentlich permanent gibt, in den zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen, es ist gar nichts Journalismus-Spezifisches von vornherein, glaube ich, Situationen gibt, in denen eine Art Sich-Aufeinandereinstellen, ein gegenseitiges Sich-Konditionieren bis zu einem gewissen Grade stattfindet, und das äußert sich unter anderem auch darin, daß ich hierin ein gewisses

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with Antje Schneider, Freiberger Zeitung, emphasis added

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Walter Hoff, Neues Deutschland

Harmoniebedürfnis, sage ich jetzt mal so, äußern kann, die Frage ist hier nur die Grenze, wie weit geht man damit.<sup>64</sup>

That the moral objection is a fundamental one is also shown by the lack of exceptions cited. As in other scenarios discussed, where the journalists took a certain standpoint in principle, they were aware of and accepting of the existence of certain legitimate exceptions. In the two cases involving the possibility of giving a false opinion where a journalist did give an example of an exception, they in both cases noted that the information would have to be extremely important in order to justify the exception.

Peter Heym also compared this method with his experiences in the GDR and noted that the possibility of being honest both as a journalist and as a newspaper often did not exist in the GDR. Commenting on the reasons for his rejection of this method of information gathering, he said that his reasons are

vor allem die Glaubwürdigkeit. [...] Sowohl die Glaubwürdigkeit persönlich als Journalist wie auch als Zeitung insgesamt. Das war ja der größte Mangel zu DDR-Zeiten, daß halt durch diese Art der politisch gesteuerten Berichterstattung die Medien dann nicht glaubwürdig waren, und man hat bewußt versucht, dem Leser trotzdem eine Glaubwürdigkeit in den Bereichen zu vermitteln beziehungsweise zu geben, indem man dort auch wirklich sauber gearbeitet hat.<sup>65</sup>

His attitude towards this scenario is very much influenced by his earlier experiences in the GDR. Because the media had lacked credibility in the GDR, Heym is now concerned that nothing be done to reduce the credibility which has been built up since 1989. He believes that this method of obtaining information would have a damaging effect on the reputation of the profession in general, and that it should therefore be rejected. Since journalists now have the opportunity to decide for themselves which journalistic methods they wish to employ, and which they find acceptable, it is within their power to act according to their own consciences in a way hitherto not possible.

### *Practical considerations*

As well as these principal moral objections just looked at, the journalists also mentioned

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with Robert Lohmann, Neues Deutschland

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Peter Heym, Leipziger Volkszeitung

some more practical difficulties which would be involved in the use of this method of obtaining information.

Some journalists felt that the method of giving a different opinion from their true one was ineffective compared to provoking their interview partner by giving their own opinion when it was very different from that of their interviewee. In addition, they also believed that simply withholding their own views is more effective than pretending to agree:

Das kommt ja viel öfter vor, daß man versucht bei einem Interview [...], ihn etwas zu provozieren, dann ist also der umgekehrte Fall, [...] das ist ja eigentlich auch viel effektiver journalistisch.<sup>66</sup>

Ich würde noch die elegantere Methode wählen, die eigene Position verschweigen und sozusagen versuchen, ihn herauszulocken, indem ich meine eigene Position verschweige, daß ich also nicht noch den Schritt gehen muß, so zu tun, als wenn ich in seiner Position bin. [...] Das ist natürlich die angenehmste Methode, also [...] das Verschweigen der eigenen Position [...] halte ich erst mal für ein durchaus legitimes Mittel, um journalistisch etwas zu erreichen.<sup>67</sup>

A similar situation to this was the possibility of pretending to be another person, and the responses to this scenario were very similar. Because it soon became clear that the reasons for the general rejection of this method were very similar and the journalists often merely referred back to their earlier answer, this scenario was not discussed with many journalists. The question of honesty featured clearly in the journalists' responses, and the link to a general respect for the individual was also seen.

### **Scenario Five: Using private papers without the owner's permission**

This particular method of obtaining information was rejected by almost all the journalists. Only one gave a response which was in any measure positive, and even then, she made the use of the papers dependent very much on the real importance of them for the public interest. Much more common was the absolute rejection of using such private papers in all situations. The reasons for this rejection were again partly practical and partly moral and ethical.

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Andreas Klein, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Henry Wiedemann, Neues Deutschland

### *Legal consequences*

On the practical level, the journalists were very aware of the legal implications which the use of private papers could have for their paper:

Das machen wir grundsätzlich nicht. Das Presserecht ist sowieso das komplizierteste Recht, wie man weiß, dann kann man auch fürchterlich bezahlen dafür, schon deshalb müssen wir uns wahnsinning schützen.<sup>68</sup>

However, this consideration was generally seen in the wider context of the question of whether the use of private papers is in itself legitimate or not:

Das gehört sich nicht, muß ich jetzt so sagen, nein, daß kann man nicht. Wahrscheinlich könnte er mich da sogar verklagen dann, also ich glaube, das geht einfach nicht.<sup>69</sup>

### *Respect for the private sphere*

The journalists based their rejection of this method of obtaining information largely on one single value, which was their respect for the private or intimate sphere. Whereas they were largely happy to use secret government documents, as these related to public activities, they would not use private papers as these do not relate to public matters or behaviours. Where the papers do have a bearing on the public activities of a person, the journalists would possibly consider the use of the papers, but only those parts which related to these activities, and they would leave out any private passages:

Auf jeden Fall [...] lehne ich das erstmal ab, da auch in private Dinge mit irgendwelchen geschäftlichen oder politischen Sachen da zu vermengen, und auch so eine Sache zu veröffentlichen, es sei denn natürlich, wenn es Briefe sind, die den Inhalt meines Artikels stützen, aber da würde ich auch die privaten Passagen [...] weglassen, weil das keinen interessiert.<sup>70</sup>

However, this was the only other exception to the general unwillingness to use private papers under any circumstances. Nevertheless, this scenario does serve to demonstrate the distinction made between professional and private matters, which was part of the basis of the journalists' respect for the individual's private sphere:

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Beate Liebnitz, Neues Deutschland

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Thorsten Winkler, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Alfred Gärtner, Berliner Zeitung

Also, ich mache auch einen starken Unterschied zwischen privat und dienstlich sozusagen. Also [...] in eine Firma, die vielleicht dubiose Geschäfte macht, einzudringen, halte ich für normal, aber ich finde es nicht in Ordnung, in die Privatsphäre zu schnüffeln.<sup>71</sup>

A common reaction to this scenario was a simple rejection of this method, without further expansion or explanation. A typical response came from Arnulf Ernst, who said that,

ich finde ganz einfach, "die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar", bestimmte Sachen - auch wenn man gern sagt, die Journalisten oder die Medien sind die vierte Gewalt im Staat, das mag alles sein, aber irgendwo ist Schluß, meine ich zumindest, irgendwo ist Schluß, und da guckt man nicht durch fremde Schlüssellöcher.<sup>72</sup>

Others, however, gave useful insights into their reasoning. Amongst these journalists, the most common rationale given was that the journalists themselves would not want others to use their private papers without their permission, and they would therefore not do this to anyone else:

Also es gibt einen Schutz der Privatsphäre und der Persönlichkeit und [...] private Sachen, das ist für mich eine moralische Frage. Ich möchte das doch auch nicht haben, daß bei mir jemand rumkramt und meine privaten Sachen an die Öffentlichkeit bringt.<sup>73</sup>

Ein Brief ist etwas Intimes. Ich hätte das auch an das nächste schwarze Brett nageln können, wenn es die Allgemeinheit bestimmt sehen möchte. Ich möchte auch nicht, daß in meiner Korrespondenz rumgeschnüffelt wird, welchen Inhalts auch immer.<sup>74</sup>

Dazu achte ich einfach die Privatsphäre von anderen Leuten. [...] Weil ich auch möchte, daß man es bei mir macht.<sup>75</sup>

Ich würde das von mir selber nicht wollen.<sup>76</sup>

In the journalists' reaction to this scenario, the "Golden Rule" of doing unto others as you want them to do unto you is very clear. As with the reaction to the question of giving a false

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with Katja Buchwald, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Arnulf Ernst, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Annemarie Müller, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Reinhart Grobe, Freie Presse

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Natalie Haller, Freiberger Zeitung

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Samuel Först, Freiberger Zeitung

opinion and pretending to be someone else, this response can be traced back to the importance of the wider principle of respect for the individual and his autonomy to the journalists. Here, however, rather than there being an issue of honesty or trust involved, the journalists are identifying with the individual concerned and looking at the question from the point of view of how they would personally feel about such behaviour by others. They feel that it is important to give those about whom they are writing the chance to defend themselves, and regard this as being an important part of the serious journalism which they attempt to practise. This connection was made explicitly by Katja Buchwald, who commented as follows:

wir haben manchmal so diese Ethikdiskussion, ich bin auch an der Journalistenschule in der Jury, die so Studentenanwälter damit aussucht, und ich stelle denen gerne die Fangfrage, nicht Fangfrage, einfach die Entscheidung, die haben wir ja oft gehabt, man hat eine Stasiakte, wo jemand der IM-Tätigkeit [...] vorgeworfen bekommt, und ich recherchiere ringsrum, und es stimmt alles, also alle können mir das bestätigen, und ich habe die Akte hier besorgt von Gauck oder auf dem schwarzen Markt, und schaffe es aber nicht, den Mann, den es betrifft, zu fragen, weil der entweder nicht zu Hause ist oder sich verleugnen läßt, oder ich kriege ihn nicht, um seine Stellungnahme dazu zu kriegen, und der Platz in der Redaktion ist aber schon bestimmt, also ich habe schon den Aufmacher, weil es ist eine öffentliche Person, eine interessante wichtige Person, das wäre also auch spannend, der Aufmacher ist freigeschlagen, und mein Text muß da jetzt reinlaufen, aber ich schaffe es nicht, den Mann noch dazu zu befragen - drucke ich die Geschichte, oder melde ich sie ab bei meinem Chef? Und also, da antworten sehr viele, wenn ich mir absolut sicher bin, daß es stimmt, drucke ich's oder so. Und da bin ich total dagegen, also ich finde, man muß dem Betroffenen die Chance geben, dazu selber Stellung zu nehmen und sich selber dazu zu äußern, und ich finde, da muß man eben Mut haben, und sagen, nee, die Geschichte ist mir jetzt noch nicht dicht genug, und ich möchte gerne noch einen Tag warten oder zwei, und dann den Ärger, den so was in der Redaktion auslöst, in Kauf nehmen, also ich finde schon, daß man fair bleiben muß, daß man die Dinge auch vorlegen muß.<sup>77</sup>

Her attitude was typical of the attitude of many journalists, who felt that a part of their desire to be fair and to be conscientious in their work involved hearing both sides of the story. By using private papers without consulting the owner, or using them despite the owner's objections, they would be acting contrary to their stated intent to report fairly. A part of this attitude undoubtedly results from the experiences of the GDR. Then, the journalists were not

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with Katja Buchwald, Berliner Zeitung



always able to present both sides of a story, particularly where there was a clear official position which had to be defended, and they are now keen to ensure that a story is not one-sided, but that comprehensive information is provided for the readers. Buchwald's example of not publishing an article until the person involved has had the chance to respond and present their side of the story is very appropriate in this context. The journalists appear to be prepared to sacrifice short term impact in order to ensure accuracy and fairness.

### **Scenario Six: Putting informants under pressure**

The acceptability of putting informants under pressure was also one which was generally rejected by the journalists. Instead of this option, the journalists preferred to discuss an informant's hesitation or refusal to cooperate and seek to find an amicable solution:

Ich würde versuchen, ihn so lange also zu überzeugen und zu beweisen, daß ich das ernst meine, daß es mir also nicht um die Sensation geht, oder so was, daß es mir also um die Information geht und vielleicht sogar in seinem Interesse [wäre], wenn es an die Öffentlichkeit geht.<sup>78</sup>

At the basis of such a discussion would be an attempt to ascertain the specific problems the informant had, or simply to resolve any concerns the informant might have:

Unter Druck würde ich nicht setzen, aber wenn mir jemand etwas vorenthält, also mir zu Erkennen gibt, er weiß mehr, als er mir sagt, dann würde ich schon sagen, wenn Sie schon mehr wissen, warum sagen Sie es mir nicht. So, da würde ich versuchen, mit ihm darüber zu sprechen und nach reellen Gründen suchen und die möglicherweise ausräumen, daß er mir also doch die Information gibt, so, wenn nicht, also unter Druck setzen, [...] also das ist nicht mein Ding.<sup>79</sup>

Part of this process would be to allow the informant the opportunity in the end either to cooperate or to decline to do so, otherwise the process would be tantamount to putting him or her under pressure. By genuinely giving the person a way out, this can be avoided:

Wenn ich jetzt eine Information *brauche* und ich sage, OK, ich weiß davon, das und das und das, dann ist dem Menschen immer noch überlassen, redet er mit mir drüber oder nicht. Also einen Ausweg muß ich demjenigen schon lassen.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with Frank Grünwald, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Udo Meyn, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Antje Schneider, Freie Presse

Putting people under pressure is regarded by some as being inconsistent with the ethos of the newspapers, another common theme in the journalists' thinking:

Es läuft immer wieder auf diesen Charakter dieser Zeitung hinaus, es bringt uns auch nichts.<sup>81</sup>

Others perceived this method as being a form of blackmail, and therefore to be rejected, while still others cited the purely short-term effect of such pressure, the danger of misuse, the damage to the reputation of the paper, and the impossibility of putting someone under effective pressure if they have nothing to hide. There was no one single reason which could be seen as forming the basis of the journalists' views, other than the fact that they would always prefer simply to discuss the issue with the person involved. This preference stems perhaps from their own desire to be taken seriously and treated as an equal by their colleagues and editor. Just as they are appreciative of their editor listening to their views and respecting their experience and ability, so they feel it to be important to do the same with those from whom they want something. This is another clear example of the journalists' application of the Golden Rule to their work.

As has been seen with earlier scenarios, this comes down to the importance of having respect for others and the role of this principle in the journalists' work. It can also be seen in a wider context of journalistic practice. This broader setting provides for a linking together of the ideas and concepts brought up by the journalists when considering the various methods of obtaining information which have just been examined.

### **Overall acceptable journalistic practice**

In all the scenarios looked at, the journalists were attempting to ensure that an accurate picture was portrayed of the issues involved, while also respecting fundamental human values. Responses to the illustrative cases can be explained in terms of these more overarching considerations, thereby demonstrating that the journalists' reasoning is consistent throughout.

In the case of the government documents, the journalists see these as providing information which is normally missing from a story, the part of the picture which is usually hidden. To

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with Franz Becher, Neues Deutschland

publish this information is in principle the correct thing to do. By so doing, the journalists increase the accuracy of the story, without compromising respect for the individual since no individuals solely engaged in legitimate activities stand to lose from the publication of the information.

When it comes to withholding sources of information, the journalists believe that they should normally cite their sources. This adds to the credibility of their work and is a part of the total package of information they are providing. However, in some cases, the value of the information could be greater than the need to name its source, and they are prepared to keep their informant anonymous in order to ensure that the essential information from that source is included. Including the information without the source adds a part of the picture which would otherwise be missing, but which is at the same time available to the journalist. Where there is a potential conflict between the objectives of accuracy and comprehensive reporting and the preservation of respect for the individual, the journalists have found a generally acceptable compromise to be the use of selected information, but they reported that they often also seek to verify the accuracy and reliability of the information from other sources.

The question of working undercover produced a mixed response, the differences being largely attributable to the different perspectives from which the possibility is viewed. For those who see the firm as an entity with information which should be made public, this is an acceptable method to employ, as it contributes to the overall picture in much the same way as the inclusion of information from government documents. For these journalists, it is only fair to include the information which the firm is seeking to keep out of the public domain because of the expected public reaction. On the other hand, for those who look at the scenario from the point of view of the individual and see the deception involved, this method is not acceptable, for similar reasons as were given for rejecting the giving of a false opinion or pretending to be somebody else. This type of journalism is not "fair" as it treats others very differently from the way in which the journalists themselves would like to be treated, thereby ignoring the Golden Rule. The journalists do not wish to use information which has been obtained dishonestly, and for them, such methods which involve using other people for the sole purpose of gaining information are not acceptable.

Informants are not put under pressure because this is also not something which the journalists wish to be done to them. The value of the information which could be obtained by so doing

cannot justify the compromise of the respect for an individual and his or her autonomy which would of necessity be involved in exerting such pressure. Because the journalists value the respect which others have for them, they seek to show respect for those with whom they work. The value of the information which could be obtained is not as important as the principle of participating only in accurate, fair and humane (*menschlich*) journalism.

The application to their work of these values of accurate and comprehensive reporting and of respect for others was also demonstrated by the examples of other ethical dilemmas which the journalists have faced since 1989, and which were mentioned in the course of interviewing. This spontaneous information about real situations reinforced the hypothetical scenarios which had been discussed earlier in the interviews.

### ***Stasi files***

Alfred Gärtner discussed his experiences of working with *Stasi* files after 1989, and the issues which he had to consider in his work in this field. Many of the principles which have already been seen in the previous scenarios are also at stake in this area, and their practical application in very real situations can be shown. The main questions which arose related to the files concerning the *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter (IM)*. The importance which the journalists attach to giving both sides of a story has already been seen, and this was also crucial to Gärtner's work with *IM*-files. In one instance he was writing an article about an *IM*, and Gärtner spoke with this person as well as with those upon whom he was alleged to have spied. He believes that this is the only way such an issue can be dealt with fairly, and that it is always vital to give the alleged *IM* the opportunity to give his side of the story, which in this case included the pressure the *IM* had been under to cooperate. In another instance, the file contained information about a baby which the *IM*'s wife had had by somebody else, but he did not include this in his article or mention to the *IM* that he had found this information, as it had nothing to do with the real story. This is an excellent example of the way in which the individual's private life is kept separate from his working activities. Gärtner expressed this as follows:

Ich denke mal, daß ich bei aller kritischer Begleitung oder Beobachtung eines Menschen, einer bestimmten Situation, die Achtung haben muß vor bestimmten Bereichen seines Lebens, die geschützt werden müssen, auch vor der Öffentlichkeit geschützt, vor dem öffentlichen Interesse geschützt werden müssen, weil man kann nicht so einen Menschen völlig entblößen

vor allen, also ich habe vor jedem eigentlich irgendwo eine gewisse Achtung und einen gewissen Respekt, der mir bis zu einem gewissen Punkt nur gehen läßt bei ihm. Deswegen ist es auch so, daß ich, wenn ich jetzt konkret über einen schreibe, der in Stasi-Akten auftaucht, auch als einer, der also aktiv mitgearbeitet hat, daß ich dann meistens auch mit dem darüber spreche, versuche zu sprechen, auch versuche, eben seine Darstellung hereinzubringen.<sup>82</sup>

It is this respect for other people which was seen earlier to be an integral part of the principles of journalism which the Eastern German journalists are attempting to follow. Gärtner's desire to work in this manner has, inevitably, led to problems with his conscience, as he is aware of the impact which even the fairest and most thorough piece of work about *Stasi* activities can have on the life of another person:

Man kommt oft zu dem Punkt, wenn man recherchiert hat, und man hat da also jemand eingekreist, der irgendwie also Dreck am Steck oder irgendwas gemacht hat, dann weiß man, wenn du das jetzt schreibst, gefährdest du seine Existenz, seine berufliche Existenz, vielleicht auch seine physische Existenz, wenn er sich danach umbringt.<sup>83</sup>

In such situations, the question then arises whether the seriousness of the material and evidence justifies publishing the article as it is, or if it could and should be toned down somewhat, or even left unpublished:

Da muß man dann überlegen, ob man es macht oder nicht, man muß es abwägen, ob es wirklich so schlimm ist, was er gemacht hat, daß man es auch veröffentlichen sollte, oder ob man die Sache abschwächt, [...] nicht ganz so scharf macht.<sup>84</sup>

These difficulties appear to be common to those who have had to work with such sensitive material. Brigitte Fischer, for example, also noted that when she had been involved in working with *Stasi* files,

das sind ja immer die Dinge, wo wirklich eine menschliche Existenz in gewisser Weise dranhängen kann, und da habe ich dann schon manchmal einen Beitrag nach Hause genommen und habe mir den drei- oder viermal durchgelesen und habe mit dem Kollegen dann mal darüber gesprochen, habe an einzelnen Stellen dann manchmal umformulieren lassen.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with Alfred Gärtner, Berliner Zeitung

<sup>83</sup> Ibid

<sup>84</sup> Ibid

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Brigitte Fischer, Berliner Zeitung

Such comments support the impression that the journalists are actively seeking to put the principles of journalism which they hold into practice. The problems which then arise for the journalists personally are the natural consequence of the inability of any person to satisfy fully the various aims where these are mutually inconsistent. In addition, it is also the case that the consequences of publishing an article can never be known until after the event. Even the best article can have unforeseen results which subsequently cause a journalist to question the decision to publish the article in the first place.

### **The use of photographs**

The other main area of difficulty for the journalists concerns the use of photographs in the newspaper. The problems stem from the decision which has to be made as to how much to show in a photograph. On the one hand, the photograph should contain the necessary information for the reader to gain something from its inclusion. On the other hand, the journalists do not wish to show so much that they upset their readers unnecessarily, as in the case of photographs of accidents, for example. Albert Köhler commented on the mixed feelings he has when making this decision:

Natürlich hat man immer selber Skrupeln, und die Betroffenen sind immer sehr erregt, aber es ist schon so, daß die Leser dazu erst hingucken also, und wenn man es in vertretbarem Maße macht, dann geht das, aber es ist schwierig, da das Maß zu finden.<sup>86</sup>

Another situation which he had experienced at the *Leipziger Morgenpost* was also mentioned by Köhler:

Es war auch nicht meine Geschichte, aber es war in unserem Blatt damals, war ein Fußballpräsident von der Bundesliga vor allem, der also im Rotlichtmilieu verwickelt war, und da wurde dann entschieden, daß die Fotos gedruckt werden, das waren dann sehr freizügige Fotos, aber das war nicht meine Entscheidung, also ich hatte nur sagen können, ich will's, oder ich will's nicht, aber danach hat sich niemand gerichtet.<sup>87</sup>

In Köhler's experiences at the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, the photographs in question have usually been agency ones, where a selection of photos is received, and the decision then has to be made as to which one should be selected for the front page:

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with Albert Köhler, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*

Es gibt diese moralischen Werte oder diese ethischen Werte, aber da geht es immer mehr oder so weniger um Fotos aus der Weltpolitik, also jetzt nicht unbedingt hier vor Ort, von Leipzig, sondern ich sage mal, Anschlag in Tel Aviv auf einen Bus, und dann kommen dreißig Fotos von den Agenturen, von AP, Reuters und sonst und dann mehr oder weniger detailliert, zerfetzte Menschenkörper oder so, und dann ist die Frage, welches Foto nimmt man für die Titelseite? Nimmt man eins, wo es ganz naturalistisch aussieht, nimmt man eins, wo weniger Blut zu sehen ist, aber dafür die Tragik des Geschehens nicht so zu sehen?<sup>88</sup>

Because of the sensitivity of this question, many people are involved in the decision making, although responsibility for the final decision remains with the editor-in-chief:

Das entscheidet letztendlich der Chefredakteur oder der jeweilige Blattmacher. [...] Da werden verschiedene Meinungen zusammengetragen, [...] vom Ressortleiter und auch von den Redakteuren, die dann am Tage da sind. Und wenn dann, denke ich, drei oder vier sagen, das können wir nicht machen, dann läßt sich auch mal ein Chefredakteur umstimmen. [...] Entscheiden tut letzten Endes natürlich er, aber das ist nicht so, also bei der LVZ zumindest, daß es jetzt ganz despotisch irgendwie geschieht, sondern immer so eine gegenseitige Absprache.<sup>89</sup>

Köhler's experiences are somewhat different from those of Thorsten Winkler, although both work for the same newspaper. Winkler has found that whereas the readers do not necessarily react strongly to powerful or emotive photographs from Bosnia for example, there is always an immediate reaction when the photographs are thought to be too explicit and are from the local area.<sup>90</sup> By contrast, Köhler found that photographs from abroad has a greater impact on the readers than those from local events. However, the two journalists work in very different areas at the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, and their different experiences appear to be due to this fact. Covering local stories, Winkler is likely to be more aware of the readers' reaction to photographs dealing with local stories, and as such perceive these stories as being those which produce the clearest reaction.

What is certainly clear, however, is that the use of photographs is perceived as a very sensitive area within a newspaper. Winkler commented on the way in which he makes the decisions which fall to him:

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid

<sup>89</sup> Ibid

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Thorsten Winkler, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

Da gibt's ja ein ganzes Gerüst von Entscheidungshilfen, [...] der gesunde Menschenverstand ist sicher dabei, dann ist das theoretische Gerüst, daß man natürlich auch ein paar presserechtliche Dinge weiß und auch weiß, wie weit kann man gehen, wo sind die Spielräume, und dann natürlich auch die Zeitung als solche, also welches Profil hat diese Zeitung, an welchen Leserkreis wendet sie sich, [...] was ist ihr Stil? Also da sind auch so ein paar ungeschriebene Regeln.<sup>91</sup>

The issue of photographs is another excellent example of the way in which the various principles which have been seen in relative isolation come together in a concrete case. For some journalists, the character of the newspaper is the overriding consideration in making ethical decisions.<sup>92</sup> For others, the application of the principle of respect for others is the most important<sup>93</sup>, and still others cite the *Grundgesetz*'s Article 1: "Die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar".<sup>94</sup> In general, however, there is usually a combination of more than one of these considerations. In this way, the decision-making is more flexible and more adaptable to individual situations and circumstances, a fact which is reflected in the journalists' unwillingness to give absolute answers to the scenarios discussed. As Winkler's comments suggest, there is always an element of common sense involved in making decisions, but there are also the legal implications of decisions, and the nature and character of the newspaper to consider, as well as the nature of the current and targeted readers. All of these factors determine to some extent the way in which the paper will make its decisions. At the same time, however, the decisions are always made by individuals and not inanimate entities. A newspaper itself cannot act - it is the composite body of people who produce it who make the decisions. These individual journalists are seeking to uphold principles in their work which they regard as being central to their work. It is precisely because they have these various principles that they have consciously to make certain decisions. It is not always clear what course of action would be most consistent with their overall desire to report fairly, accurately and comprehensively, and it is this fact which often leads to the complexities involved in making such decisions.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid

<sup>92</sup> For example Franz Becher, Neues Deutschland

<sup>93</sup> For example Anthon Dörr, Leipziger Volkszeitung

<sup>94</sup> All the journalists at the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* mentioned Article 1 of the *Grundgesetz* in various contexts, but there was no indication as to why this should be the case other than the mention of it in their contracts as being a fundamental principle of the newspaper.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Conclusions

Perhaps the most apparent theme of this work has been the complexity of the issues examined. In each area looked at, a myriad of different motivating factors emerged. Each journalist demonstrated a unique combination of these factors which guided his or her actions in all the situations and circumstances explored. Although journalists shared some similarities in terms of their motivations and thinking, no two expressed the same set of reasons for their behaviour either in the GDR or now. The insights into these differences and the diversity in reasons and thinking have been an important part of this work.

Despite this, common themes have emerged. The experiences of working as journalists in the GDR have guided the subsequent behaviour of the journalists, although this has by no means led to a uniformity of attitude towards their current situation. In order to understand this present position, however, it is vital to look first at the journalists' behaviour in the GDR.

In the GDR, the journalists experienced many different influences on their work and on their own behaviour. On the one hand, they were in many ways in a privileged position in the GDR. They had opportunities which other members of that society would seldom experience, such as the possibility for some of travel to Western countries, and they were paid more than most others in the GDR. They were aware of the reality of political and economic events in the GDR, even if they were often unable to write about them. In addition, they were able to pursue a career which, despite all its restrictions, gave them pleasure and a degree of satisfaction. On the other hand, however, they were equally aware of the political necessity which the SED saw in controlling the information which was passed on to the majority of the GDR citizens. They were both subject to this political pressure and part of the overall structure which made it possible. Here, too, the complexity of the situation is seen. Many acknowledged the fact that they were aware of their political function in the GDR, and that they found this acceptable or even, in some cases, desirable. But at the same time, all experienced frustration and anger at the degree of political control which they themselves were subject to, although the degree of this frustration varied greatly, and was

dependent on such factors as upbringing and general political conviction. An important factor to be borne in mind here is the nature of the GDR state. It was the norm for political needs to dominate areas which were ideologically significant. Seen in practical terms, the journalists saw little option other than to comply. Their own future and careers depended on this compliance, but this was not the end of the matter. In addition, their children would most likely be disadvantaged in the future, and the impact of any serious or sustained defiance could even affect close friends. The journalists did look for ways of circumventing the restrictions and limitations they encountered, but these attempts were kept within well defined borders. All seem to have been aware of how far it was possible to go at any one time, and although they sought to expand these possibilities, in reality, they achieved little, and are very conscious of this. As several noted, compared with the events of the *Wende*, what they did was minimal. But the journalists were also not badgered into such a position of relative acceptance of the existing order. They had not entered the profession totally oblivious as to what would be expected of them as journalists. Although many cited a desire to travel or simply to write as an important motivator in choosing to become a journalist, their own choice to become a journalist was nowhere near enough to ensure that they would succeed in this ambition. They also had to be committed to the principles of socialism before they could hope to become journalists. The complex selection procedure shows the importance of this existing commitment, which had to be demonstrated by evidence of the active promotion of socialism in some way, rather than merely by paying lip-service to the importance of socialism in the GDR. There had, in other words, to be a clear affinity with the goals of socialism *before* the prospective journalists would be allowed to commence their professional training.

Nevertheless, although this clearly limits the extent to which it is fair to say that the journalists were victims of an unwelcome and oppressive system, it should not be forgotten that they did have personal problems with certain aspects of the work they were called upon to perform. Although they had experienced early on in their careers the way in which their own initially high ideals and goals could be frustrated by the political apparatus, this did not mean that actually confronting these problems in their full-time profession was any easier to accept. They still felt bitter and angry about many of the stories they had to write or facts they had to print, but these feelings were more those of their earlier years at a newspaper. In time, they found their own escape routes and ways of dealing with the situation. For some,

this took the form of actively seeking to work in departments where they knew the restrictions were not so keenly felt. This was an example of the much-cited *Nischengesellschaft*. Another form of this was the tendency by some to seek personal fulfilment in areas outside of their work. In using these possibilities, the journalists were seeking almost to create an alternative world of their own into which they could escape, a niche in which they at least felt they were removed from the reality of living in the GDR. But even with these escape valves, the political pressures often became too strong. However, the journalists noticed that in time, they became used to the reality of their job. Their consciences began to trouble them less and less, and their inner censorship, the *Schere im Kopf*, began to operate. In this way, rather than being subject to the political powers in the GDR, they began to become a part of that political power. They were no longer always following instructions, but were instead anticipating those instructions before they even came, and were thinking in a similar fashion to their superiors. Thus, as they progressed in their careers, they became the people who were influencing the way in which decisions were made in the newspapers. Even though they still continued to seek ways of reducing the inner struggle with some of the things they were asked to do, they became desensitised to much of what they were called upon to do, and this factor made it much easier for them to continue in their jobs. Continuing to pursue their initial goals and ideas would have excluded the possibility of continuing to work in the GDR press, and vice versa. The journalists had to choose, and those interviewed had clearly chosen to stay in the profession and deal with the consequences.

The journalists did not attempt to excuse their behaviour in the GDR, which they know is often the subject of criticism. Nor did they attempt to portray themselves as heroes in an oppressive system. They were simply trying to explain the reasons behind their thinking at the time. Certainly, many claim that they would act differently if placed in similar circumstances now, although the validity of these, and other claims about their work at the present time, cannot be tested empirically. While there are clear discrepancies between the principles which they claim to have held and the actions which these principles apparently led them to, at the same time, they do appear to have been attempting to follow a set of principles in their work. Faced with restrictions which were hard to evade, they found that they could still apply some of those principles which they felt protected other individuals. It is a paradox that it was these principles, such as their unwillingness to jeopardise the

futures of those close to them, which led to them coming to accept a way of working which stopped them applying other principles which they would equally have liked to be able to realise. For example, they wanted to tell the truth, but truth was what the SED decreed it to be. Their choice to follow some principles and sacrifice others was made in the light of the reality of their position, but was still a choice which they made. They could equally have chosen to tell what they regarded the truth to be and face the consequences. It is not the place of this study to make a judgement as to which course of action would have been preferable, as that answer depends so much on the views of any person attempting to draw such conclusions, and the situation in which the journalists were living at the time. It is impossible for those who have never experienced such a system as that of the GDR to comprehend fully how that system can have such a profound effect on a person's way of thinking and behaving. What this study does, however, show, is the complexity of the different considerations which were at play in making these decisions, and the way in which the journalists went about doing so. It provides insights and sometimes merely glimpses into the type of considerations which the journalists had to bear in mind and which guided their actions.

With the *Wende* and the events of 1989, the old working conditions and the old restrictions changed in a very short period of time. New freedoms were found both privately and professionally. Travel was now possible, Western goods could be purchased, and freedom of the media was held up as a guiding principle of the new order. These were not merely words, but reality for the journalists. They found themselves in a position to be able to make their own decisions free from threats of reprisals, and were able to move away from their old ways of thinking. Their consciences were reawakened, and they seemed to feel a new sense of journalistic purpose in their work. This was aided by external factors, and in some ways, just as external forces had contributed to the way in which they had worked in the GDR, so again were external influences important in their move to a new type of press freedom. The impetus did not necessarily come from within the journalists, but they appeared willing to take up the challenge of forming a new media system. They reacted strongly against attempts at interference in their work from both external and internal sources, and were able to succeed in these attempts because of the new, temporary, economic structure of the newspapers. The papers were subject to nobody's control. They had declared their independence from the political parties which had controlled them for so long, but they were at the same time

receiving subsidies which meant that they were not economically reliant on any other groups or organisations. This degree of independence was unknown for the journalists from the GDR.

However, this period of freedom was short lived. A combination of factors led to the ownership of the Eastern press changing hands, and the press became a profit-making tool for its new owners. Whereas previously political necessity had dictated the working conditions of the journalists, now it was economic necessity which provided the framework for the journalists' work. But just as before, the journalists could choose to some extent how they would react to the new conditions.

To begin with, the journalists seemed to react in a similar fashion to their early years in the GDR press. They were frustrated and angry at the limitations imposed upon them, just as they had been to begin with in the GDR. But now, as then, many have largely come to terms with this new way of working. Whereas their consciences were reawakened in the post-*Wende* year, they soon became dulled again as the new restrictions placed upon them became normal and expected. Perhaps the greatest difference between the present time and the GDR is the degree to which the journalists are now able to choose how to react to the unwelcome interference. Some appear to have taken their own personal lessons from their GDR experiences to heart to a greater degree than others. They are prepared to actively oppose interference, whereas others accept it as an unfortunate side-effect of the new system. But yet again, the possibilities of taking positive action are dependent in part on outside factors. Journalists at *Neues Deutschland*, for example, feel that they have learned a lot from the GDR, particularly as they played such a central role in the media at that time. But their ability to apply these lessons stems also from the fact that they do not face the same type of economic pressure as a paper such as the *Berliner Zeitung*. Although political pressures continue, they are much less significant than in the GDR, and can be dismissed with relative ease. There is an awareness among the journalists of the opportunities which the Western media system afford them which were simply not practically possible in the GDR, and none of the journalists would wish for a return to the conditions of the GDR.

All the information about the journalists' thinking and behaviour came from them directly. In such circumstances, it has to be considered how accurate their perception of what they did, and why they did it, is. However, the facts of the way in which the journalists in general

behaved are well documented elsewhere. What was more important for this study was to understand the way in which the journalists thought about their work and what they were doing. What emerged from this information was details of some of the paradoxes which were seen in their behaviour, such as their professed frustrations at some of the working conditions in the GDR and their willingness at the same time to cooperate with the system which produced those same conditions. It was this type of insight which was sought, rather than mere factual information. For this reason, the subjective nature of the journalists' comments were so important to this study. They allowed their thinking processes to be examined and compared, both in the GDR and at the present time.

In many ways, there are significant similarities between the journalists' reaction to their situation in the GDR and their current situation. In both cases, they began by reacting strongly against the situation which they faced. They found both the political and the economic pressures which were brought to bear frustrating. However, in both cases, they accepted that to some extent, both the political basis and the economic basis of the press were understandable. In the GDR, their commitment to socialism led them to accept that the press should perform a political function. They disagreed, however, with the way in which this was implemented. At the present time, they agree that the newspapers for which they work need to make profits in order to survive. But they disagree with some of the ways in which these profits are secured.

In both situations, the journalists also have a number of principles which they hold to be important. These principles can, however, not always be applied in their work. In the early stages of each period of working in the two systems, this causes problems of conscience for the journalists as they feel forced to compromise their principles. However, in time, the journalists' consciences grow accustomed to the new demands of their job. They become desensitised with time in both cases. The common theme is not the external source of the personal problems the journalists faced, but the way in which they dealt with these problems. Although they claim to have learned lessons from the GDR, the way in which they apply these lessons varies tremendously. Some have found it possible to pursue the new goals they have set themselves, but these are also the journalists who appear to have had least contact with the new pressures on their work which have arisen since 1989. How they would react if they, too, worked for a newspaper where economic pressures are an everyday reality, is unknown.

In the end, it is individuals who determine how external forces will affect them. The source of pressures on a person's conscience and principles will vary, but it is always that person who has to decide how to react to them. In this, the journalists whose experiences have been looked at are no different from anyone else.

Surely there are lessons for everyone in what has been seen about human nature under such differing circumstances. But as these lessons are based upon personal experiences, they will inevitably be personal and unique lessons.

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