

Der Stürmer in the work of Randall Bytwerk and the evolution of the german press: Antisemitism and nazi propaganda (1920 and 1930)

Pedro Maia Martins

Universidade do Minho, Instituto de Ciências Sociais,

Departamento de Ciências da Comunicação

pedro_am_martins@hotmail.co.uk

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6347-9985>

O jornal Der Stürmer na obra de Randall Bytwerk e a evolução da imprensa alemã: Antissemitismo e propaganda nazi (1920 e 1930)

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Abstract:

Der Stürmer was the most famous of all the newspapers connected to the National Socialist Party. With its frequent use of image and its resorting to scandalous and antisemitic themes, this periodical evolved from a weekly regional paper to one of the most popular newspapers in the entire German territory. However, its characterization cannot be reduced to its anti-Jewish content and its graphic component. By using the work of Randall Bytwerk about that newspaper and the work of other authors about Nazi propaganda, it is also possible to frame *Der Stürmer* as part of the propaganda system of Nazi Germany, albeit as a sui generis example, and as part of the general trends of the German press in the beginning of the Twentieth century, specifically the cooptation of the local press by partisan political forces, preference for popular content, like scandals or other sensationalistic subjects instead of politics, the lack of legal liability of newspaper editors for the articles written in their media, and the inefficacy of governmental control in the Weimar Republic.

Keywords: *Der Stürmer*; Julius Streicher; Nazi propaganda; antisemitism; Weimar Republic.

Resumo:

O *Der Stürmer* foi o mais célebre de todos os jornais ligados ao Partido Nacional-Socialista. Com um uso frequente da imagem e o recurso a matérias escandalosas e antissemitas, este periódico passou de um semanário regional a um dos jornais mais lidos em toda a Alemanha. Contudo, a caracterização dessa publicação não se cinge ao antissemitismo e à aposta no conteúdo imagético. Com o recurso à obra de Randall Bytwerk sobre esse jornal e ao trabalho de outros autores sobre a propaganda nacional-socialista, é possível também enquadrar o *Der Stürmer* no sistema de propaganda da Alemanha nazi, embora como exemplo sui generis, e nas tendências gerais da imprensa alemã do início do século XX, especificamente a cooptação da imprensa local pelas forças partidárias, a preferência por conteúdos mais populares, como os escândalos e outros conteúdos sensacionalistas, em vez de conteúdos políticos, a desresponsabilização legal dos editores dos jornais e a ineficácia da censura governamental na República de Weimar.

Palavras-chave: *Der Stürmer*; Julius Streicher; propaganda nazi; antissemitismo; República de Weimar

Introduction

Der Stürmer was the most famous of all the newspapers connected to the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP¹). Described by Louis Leo Snyder as "an example of journalism at its worst", the illustrated paper of Julius Streicher would rise to become a quintessential example of Nazi propaganda, especially when it comes to antisemitism (Snyder, 1995, p. 339). One cannot deny how much the Weimar Republic² was a fertile ground for publications linked to political movements, including the NSDAP media. However, sheets like "*Der Angriff, Die Flamme*"³ (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 81), or "the *Völkischer Beobachter*"⁴ (Snyder, 1995, p. 362) fell short of the weekly newspaper from Nuremberg. Through its steady usage of images and its appealing language

and themes, *Der Stürmer* ended up becoming one the most popular periodicals in the entire German territory.

The analysis of papers like *Der Stürmer* becomes a matter of single importance in our era, described by David M. Ricci as "the Age of Populism" (Ricci, 2020, p. 1). Many voices tried to create parallels between the 1920's and 1930's and the second decade of the twentieth-first century⁵. In face of a mediatic landscape shaken by post-truth and disinformation, often through the usage of hate speech, one is led to study other instances when propaganda was employed for authoritarian purposes. This paper is an attempt to understand one of those instances, in order to permit future recognitions of its similarities with the disinformation of this day and age.

With the help of the Randall Bytwerk's *Julius Streicher: Nazi Editor of the Notorious Anti-semitic Newspaper*

Der Stürmer (2001) and the works of various other authors about Nazi propaganda and the German press from the period of the Weimar Republic, this paper will analyze the historical context of Julius Streicher's newspaper and its main characteristics during its 22 years of existence, while framing it also as part of the propaganda system of Nazi Germany, albeit as a *sui generis* example, and as a part of the general trends of the German press in the beginning of the Twentieth century, specifically the cooptation of the local press by partisan political forces, preference for popular content, like scandals or other sensationalistic subjects instead of politics, the lack of legal liability of newspaper editors for the articles written in their media, and the inefficacy of governmental control in the Weimar Republic..

Historical context

31st of July of 1919 marked the beginning of a new period in the History of Germany. In a reunion in the city of Weimar, the National Constituent Assembly approved the

1 In German, "*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche ArbeiterPartei*".

2 This is the term used when referring to the political regime that existed in Germany from the end of the First World War and the resultant fall of the imperial German monarchy, in 1918, to the establishment of the Nazi regime in 1933 (Snyder, 1995).

3 In English, "The Attack" and "The Flame", respectively.

4 In English, "National Observer".

5 Two examples of those voices are Jonathan Freedland, with his article on *The Guardian*, "The 1930s were humanity's darkest, bloodiest hour. Are you paying attention", or James McDougall's essay on *The Conversation*, named "This isn't the 1930s, but there are political similarities".

adoption of the constitution of the first German republican regime (Snyder, 1995). Known henceforth by the name of the burg where its Basic Law was ratified, the Weimar Republic “lasted from 1918 to 1933” (Snyder, 1995, p. 376). Described by Louis Leo Snyder as “a regime that was unwanted and unloved from its first days”, this post-war German republic⁶ would live in a constant climate of “political confusion and economic difficulties” (Snyder, 1995, pp. 376-377). Unsurprisingly, this “case study in political frustration” (Snyder, 1995, p. 376) would become a fertile ground for political extremism. In that field, no movement would be as successful as the NSDAP, led by an Austrian migrant who had served in the German army: Adolf Hitler. The National socialists ended up “taking full advantage of the chaotic situation” of the new republic, rising to power in the 30th of January of 1933 (Snyder, 1995, p. 376).

During this period of fifteen years, the German press would flourish,

particularly in the case of papers with links to political movements.

The newspaper

Beginnings

The beginnings of the “fierce and filthy rag” that Randall L. Bytwerk called “the most infamous newspaper in history” (2001, p. 51) were in 1923. However, there is no consensus between the authors when it comes to the exact date of its birth: according to Dennis E. Showalter, the first copy of *Der Stürmer* was published on the 20th of April (1982, p. 29), but Bytwerk points to the publication of its first issue “in early May”⁷ (2001, p. 52). When an internal dispute for the control of the Nuremberg nucleus of the NSDAP led Julius Streicher’s political opponents to charge him with “being a liar, a coward and with mistreating his wife”, (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 51), the future Gauleiter of Franconia

decided to answer those accusations by founding a newspaper. With the goal of “storming the red fortress”⁸ (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 51), Streicher decided to name his periodical “*Der Stürmer*”⁹, with the subtitle of “Special Paper on the Fight for Truth” (Figure 1).

Although the majority of the first issue’s content was targeted at “Streicher’s local party enemies”¹⁰ (Showalter, 1982, p. 29), its last lines already comprised the anti-Semitism that would become *Der Stürmer*’s trademark¹¹: “«As long as the Jew is in the German household, we will be Jewish slaves. Therefore, he must go. Who? The Jew!»”. These attacks would increase by the fourth issue onwards (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 52).

6 Born after the end of the First World War, in 1918.

7 One must consider that the day and month of publication of the first issue are not printed on its sheet. Only the year of 1923 is shown (fig. 1).

8 According to Randall Bytwerk, this story “is most likely an afterthought”, created when the *medium* was already in circulation (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 51).

9 The usage “of names suggesting action and forcefulness” was typical of newspapers with connections to the NSDAP (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 51).

10 After all, its title was “Streicher’s response to the Slanderer’s and Traitors”.

11 Its motto from 1925 to 1945 was “The Jews are our misfortune” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 121).

Figure 1. The Frontpage of Der Stürmer's first issue
Source: Bytwerk (2001, p. 79)



One trait would remain constant, despite all the changes this newspaper would face through “the 22 years of its publishing” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 63): Julius Streicher “retained control” of the totality of its content, despite “the large staff” under his leadership (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 56). Similarly to many other propagandistic sheets, the *medium* in analysis is indissociable from the *persona* of its founder. Streicher himself confirmed that fact, “as he would proudly say that ‘Julius Streicher and *Der Stürmer* are one and the same’” (Bytwerk, 2001 p. 51).

Subsequent editions

The expansion of the antisemitic content was not the only change faced

by Streicher's newspaper. In its beginnings, *Der Stürmer* only had “four small pages” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 52), with two columns of text, no illustrations and few advertisements (Figure 1). From 1925 onwards, the number of pages would increase to sixteen, “more advertising was carried, and the pages were now tabloid size¹²” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 52). On the 50th issue of December 1925, shown on figure 2, one can notice three columns, with an illustration occupying the majority of two of them.

Nonetheless, in stylistic terms, Streicher kept the “the style of

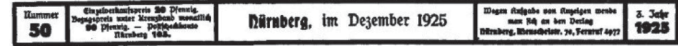
popular journalism” pioneered by his first paper, the *Deutscher Sozialist*¹³, with the goal of “providing short articles in simple language that explained to a popular audience the intricacies of politics and economics” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 9). Streicher boasted about his capacity of speaking the language of the masses¹⁴, with simple arguments. That affirmation

13 *Deutscher Sozialist* was the official newspaper of the German Socialist Party, of which Streicher was a member before he adhered to the NDSAP. According to Dennis Showalter, “the paper's initial editorial line was a mixture of socialism and antisemitism. Streicher, however, argued that «socialism» could mean anything and everything in *völkisch* circles” (Showalter, 1982, p. 27).

14 This style of journalism resembled the way he tried to portray himself, as “a man of the people, easy to understand and to identify with” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 49).

12 “Tabloid” refers to the size of the pages of newspapers, its dimensions being 280 by 430 millimeters on the metric system or 11 by 17 inches on the non-metric system.

Source: Bytwerk (2001, p. 80)



**Der Giro-Zentrale Merkmal
wieder im Amt**



Unsere Reichsregierung ist wieder einmal zurückgefallen. Wir sind ungerath, nur jetzt dran! Die Schaffung der „Nationen“ soll die ganze nächste Woche in Vorschlag stehen. Das kann wieder ein ständiges Wiederholen sein. Vielleicht hat es ja doch seine Bedeutung. Man läßt die „Nationen“ einfach stehen. Nur daß sich nicht die, sondern jener colonialpolitische Kasten, Rhodess geht nun schon einmal und der soll alles wahrhaft. Die Zeitungen aber bringen den Vorschlag nicht. Was den Gang der „Nationen“ betrifft, so ist die Entscheidung nicht größer, als die der Vorschläge. Man braucht den ganzen Tag aufzu-

Die Millionen sind kaputt. — Die Stellung
ist gerettet.

Dr. Werfel war aber nicht nur für die Vermittlung der päpstlichen Gelehrten, sondern auch für richtige Vernehmung derselben in der Sizilientrale verantwortlich. Denn er war dort Vorsitzend.

Dadurch erlitt die Stadt Rürnberg einen Verlust von mehreren Millionen Geldmark.

Dieser Verlust muß selbstverständlich wieder gedeckt werden. Erhielt nun den verantwortlichen Finanzverwalter zum Ersatz des Schadens heranzuziehen, so kam es zu einem Streit, welcher durch den Reichsgerichtshof in Leipzig entschieden wurde.

Die Nürnberger Bürgerchaft aber, auf der dieses Geld beauftragt war, zahlte zu derselben Zeit für jeden Krent vierzig bis sechsundsiebzig Schilling.

Aus dem Inhalt:

Jährliche Selbstmordepidemie

Überfüllung der nürnderger Synagogen
Genosse Matt
An die Adresse des
Evangelischen Gemeindeblattes
Der jüdische Gerichtsvollzieher

15 As Randall Bytwerk explains, “from its first issue, *Der Stürmer* was directed to that lowest common denominator that Hitler thought the proper target of propaganda” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 55).

(Bytwerk, 2001, p. 172).

p. 56). He had realized “the value

19 A newspaper affiliated with the Social-Democratic Party (Bytwerk, 2001).

Figure 3. Four stereotypical faces of a Jewish family, on *Der Stürmer*'s 7th issue of 1934

Source: Bytwerk (2001, p. 86)



until December of 1925, when his illustrations first appeared on the frontpage of *Der Stürmer* (Showalter, 1982, pp. 59-60). His collaboration with the national socialist periodical began after he was sent to cover a trial between Streicher and Hermann Luppe, the mayor of Nuremberg²⁰. Fips had instructions to draw the Nazi propagandist, “but instead drew Luppe and a prominent Jewish citizen of Nuremberg involve in the trial” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 56).

As the only regular caricaturist of *Der Stürmer* until 1945, Philip Ruprecht was known for having drawn thousands of anti-Jewish caricatures, as exemplified by figures 3 to 6. Despite the changes of style over his career, the characteristics of the Jew present in his pictures remained unaltered: “Fips’ Jew was short, fat, ugly, unshaven, drooling, sexually perverted, bent-nosed and with piglike eyes”, functioning as “a visual embodiment of the message of the *Stürmer*’s articles” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 56).

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Circulation and readers

Despite its beginnings as a local periodical from the city of Nuremberg, *Der Stürmer* ended up reaching the readers of the entire German territory²¹, which made it “one of the most widely circulated papers in Germany” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 1). In the 1930’s, the only newspaper “read from front to cover by Adolf Hitler” was selling 25 thousand copies per week²² (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 33). However, the readership of *Der Stürmer* was bigger than suggested by its circulation figures. There were “thousands of display cases built by loyal

21 Randall Bytwerk alludes to the change of its motto, from “«a Nuremberg weekly in the struggle for truth»” to “«a German weekly in the struggle for truth»” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 53).

22 When Hitler and the NSDAP rose to power in 1934, “*Der Stürmer* was already one of the most popular Nazi publications”, with its 42nd edition reaching a circulation of 113800 copies per week (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 57). The hiring of the professional publisher Max Amman, “the man who published Hitler’s, *Mein Kampf*, led to its expansion to a nationwide circulation” (Bridges, 1997, p. 58), with its sales reaching 486 thousand weekly copies in 1935 (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 57).

20 Streicher had been sued for libel by the Luppe.

Figure 4. A Jewish doctor leering at a female patient, from Der Stürmer's 17th issue of 1935
Source: Bytwerk (2001, p. 94)



Figure 5. A Jewish man sexually harassing a girl, on Der Stürmer's 53rd issue of 1925
Source: Bytwerk (2001, p. 96)



Figure 6: The frontpage of the special issue of May 1934, accusing the Jewish community of kidnaping and murdering gentile children. Its headline reads: “Jewish Murder Plan against Gentile Humanity Revealed”
Source: Bytwerk (1998)



readers throughout Germany, built in areas where many people passed by, that displayed each week’s issue”²³ (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 58).

But other the *Führer* himself, who were the readers of this *medium*? Although read equally by both men and women and by people of all ages²⁴ (Bytwerk, 2001), that’s where the generality of *Der Stürmer*’s readership

ended. The majority of its journalistic consumers were inhabitants of rural areas (Bytwerk, 2001) or members of the urban middle class, the so called *Mittelstand*²⁵ (Showalter, 1982). Surprisingly, many of its earliest readers were Jewish, which led Julius Streicher to affirm that “Jews had given him valuable financial support by purchasing the paper” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 54).

The last five years

When Adolf Hitler took power, in 1933, Julius Streicher’s newspaper “was already one of the most popular Nazi publications” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 57). Sales kept growing, reaching a quantity of 473 thousand newspapers per week in 1938. These circumstances created the conditions for maintaining a team “with more than three hundred people”²⁶ (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 60). Even the attacks by some members of the NSDAP’s

²³ According to Bytwerk, “a journalism handbook published during the Nazi era claimed that such display cases were to be found everywhere in Germany” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 58).

²⁴ According to Bytwerk, “the sexual material of *Der Stürmer* naturally made it interesting to young people” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 53).

²⁵ This term specifically applied to German middle-class individuals who were the owners of small to medium sized companies. The demoralization that resulted from the defeat in the First World War and the economic inflation of the 1920’s made this group heavily susceptible to Nazi propaganda.

²⁶ Strangely, Randall L. Bytwerk highlights the presence of the author of “some particularly dreadful articles: Jonas Wolk”, better known under his pen name “Fritz Brand”, who was as much of a Jew as *Der Stürmer*’s archetypal targets (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 60).

leadership were incapable of shaking this *medium's* foundations (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 60).

Yet, the success of *Der Stürmer* would face a reversal from 1940 onwards. Its circulation dropped sharply, as a result of “wartime paper shortages²⁷” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 63). However, the biggest reason for its decline laid on the absence of its main target: the Jews had disappeared from everyday life in Germany. Most Jews who had not emigrated “had been removed to the East, where they were annihilated in growing numbers” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 63). Despite resorting to “the alleged crimes committed by Jews in foreign countries” in order to fill the antisemitic vacuum (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 135), the truth was that without the presence of the Hebrew community, there was no element of immediate threat, resulting in “large numbers of Germans losing whatever interest they had had in the Jewish Question” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 63). By changing from the scandal sheet that had made it notorious to a mere journal

of international affairs, *Der Stürmer* soon dropped to “under two hundred thousand copies per week” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 63). With the increase of paper shortages in 1944, the newspaper was reduced from its high of sixteen pages to the mere four of its beginnings (Bytwerk, 2001).

In February of 1945, the last edition of *Der Stürmer* was published, “denouncing the invading Allies as tools of the international Jewish conspiracy” (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 63). But being the German public “weary of a war that had no prospects of success” (Bytwerk, 2005, p. 54), its circulation was very limited.

General tendencies of the German Press in the beginning of the twentieth century

Despite the temptation to see *Der Stürmer* as something unique to the political context of the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, in reality, this newspaper “was a reflection of several general trends in the history of the German press in the modern era” (Showalter, 1982, p. 49). Those

tendencies were: the cooptation of the local press by partisan political forces, preference for popular content, like scandals or other sensationalistic subjects instead of politics, the lack of legal liability of newspaper editors for the articles written in their *media*, and the inefficacy of governmental control in the Weimar Republic.

Cooptation of the local press by partisan political forces

German party press emerged “between 1871 and 1914²⁸”, when the German territory was under the rule of the imperial regime (Showalter, 1982, p. 50). Although “no German newspaper in any era had ever been entirely free of political influence²⁹”, one could see the changes in the German press of the nineteenth century, from sheets that “had been part of the domestic machinery of

27 The Second World War had started two years before, in 1938 (Snyder, 1995, p. xi).

28 Those years correspond to the foundation of the German Empire and the beginning of the First World War.

29 One must not forget that Dennis E. Showalter wrote this passage of his work in 1982. It doesn't necessarily correspond to the German journalism of this day and age.

the state to an increasing number of papers founded by or affiliated with specific political parties”, such as “*Kreuzzeitung*³⁰ of the Conservative Party or *Vorwärts*³¹ of the Social Democratic Party” (Showalter, 1982, p. 50). According to Modris Eksteins, the liberal *Berliner Tageblatt*³², founded in 1872, was the first German newspaper with a political alignment³³ (1975, p. 17).

The last decades of the nineteenth century would be a time of structural and geographic changes for the German news industry. In addition to the periodicals centered on Berlin, the capital of the new imperial state, a variety of new local and regional sheets emerged. A combination of “expansion of literacy, improvement

of communications and increased disposable income” made the publication of local newspapers “potentially profitable and satisfying” (Showalter, 1982, pp. 49-50). The economic success and aesthetical acceptability of this new sheets were the result of “a combination of a careful eye for local and regional news, careful use of wire service items and filler material³⁴ and a personal editorial touch with a bit of flair” (Showalter, 1982, p. 50). Nonetheless, “the deepening of party rivalries” at a local level and the financial difficulties faced by these newspapers³⁵ led them to “abandon their initial above-the-battle position

and commit themselves to a party or to a party line³⁶” (Showalter, 1982, p. 50).

The Generalanzeiger and the Boulevardblatten: popular content and the battle for advertising

The flourishing of the party press occurred simultaneously with “the founding and purchase of newspapers by businessmen, not for the purpose of expressing ideas, but to make money” (Showalter, 1982, p. 50). As Modris Eksteins affirms, “one prominent feature in the development of the German press in the nineteenth century was its commercialization”, publishers having discovered “that a newspaper could be a marketable item

30 In english, “Cross-Paper” or “Paper of the Cross”.

31 In english, “Forwards”.

32 In english, “Berliner Daily Sheet”.

33 Eksteins clarifies that “this newspaper at start was entirely a commercial and by no means a political venture”. However, “its founder, Rudolf Mosse was both a Jew and a self-made man who in his business life had to do battle against the conservative mentality, which made him naturally inclined towards progressive liberalism” (Eksteins, 1975, p. 17).

34 In order to fill the gaps on its pages.

35 Small papers were “particularly susceptible to any virus present in the economy” (Eksteins, 1975, p. 74). During the First World War, the local press suffered both shortages of paper and manpower. The economic inflation of the 1920’s worsened this situation leading to “the soaring of the price of newsprint and postal charges; wages had to be increased and the tax on advertising became repressive” (Eksteins, 1975, p. 75). In the end, economic hardships led to the cooptation of the provincial press by political forces. As Dennis E. Showalter mentioned, “as production costs and competition increased, direct subsidies from a political party or advertising from its members could help balance accounts” (Showalter, 1982, p. 50).

36 According to Modris Eksteins, this commitment tended to happen in one of three ways: either papers would “surrender their editorial independence and take to relying on syndicated columns from press agencies”, which resulted in a reflection of the political tone and the party allegiance of the news or press agency of choice; or they would “claim to renounce its political bias”, which actually meant “a swing to the right”; or they would “slip into financial dependence on big business and heavy industry, giving up their editorial autonomy” (Eksteins, 1975, p. 75).

like any other piece of merchandise” (Eksteins, 1975, p. 14). This German variant of western penny press was called *Generalanzeiger*³⁷. Some of the characteristics of these newspapers would be the hallmark of *Der Stürmer* during the Weimar Republic. They catered to the tastes of the mass reading public, “emphasizing human-interest stories and giving considerable space to local news” (Eksteins, 1975, p. 14). But Eksteins adds that, “above all, they depended on extensive advertising to keep the subscription rates low”, which led them “to try to avoid an obvious political bias, in order not to alienate possible buyers and advertisers³⁸” (Eksteins, 1975, p. 14). Nearly half of the newspapers founded between 1871 and 1914 belonged to this category.

The circulation of *Generalanzeiger* tripled in the two decades before the First World War. By 1918, “almost two hundred German papers carried the word *Anzeiger* somewhere in their title” (Showalter, 1982, p. 51). One example of this kind of sheet, despite not using the word “*Anzeiger*” in its name, was the greatest rival of *Der Stürmer* on the *media* arena of Nuremberg: the *Fränkische Tagespost*. Fips’ former workplace had established its reputation as “the most-read Socialist paper in south Germany”, but it reached the top of readership by “downplaying Marxist rhetoric in favor of local news and offering entertainment instead of the mighty articles on the nature of the dialectic so popular in other Socialist journals” (Showalter, 1982, p. 51).

In the beginning of twentieth century, another kind of popular newspaper would appear, showing even more similarities with Streicher’s posterior paper: the *Boulevardblatt*³⁹. Patterned on the yellow press of Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, the *Boulevardblatten* “were meant for the

The circulation of Generalanzeiger tripled in the two decades before the First World War. By 1918, “almost two hundred German papers carried the word Anzeiger somewhere in their title” (Showalter, 1982, p. 51).

37 In English, “General Indicators”.

38 The supposed lack of political commitment by the *Generalanzeiger* did not always come into fruition. According to Eksteins, “political neutrality was the ideal, but in practice many of these newspapers eventually drifted into specific political attachments” (Eksteins, 1975, p. 14). When they had to take a stand, “they supported what their editors considered to be the mainstream views of the largest possible number of readers” (Showalter, 1982, p. 51).

39 In english, “Boulevard Sheet”.

hurried reader interested in catching the latest headlines or in preparing for an evening entertainment” (Eksteins, 1975, p. 15). These sheets had “a declamatory, didactic, omniscient and simple prose, and an abundance of pictures” (Eksteins, 1975, p. 15). And just like the *Generalanzeiger*, their major source of revenue was advertising.

One must not ignore the constant criticism directed to these two journalistic categories. Both activists and intellectuals disapproved of this new German journalism. However, the major reason for this animosity was not the sensationalistic content, but the advertisements⁴⁰. The detractors of the *Generalanzeiger* and the *Boulevardblatten* “saw the introduction of advertisements into what had always been regarded as a product of the intellect as a prostitution of the press”. Moreover, they believed “the influence of big-capital interests was corrupting these *media*”, leading to

a decline of its standards and to a destruction of its intellectual vitality and its sense of responsibility. In addition, German newspapers “were not only supposed to inform but to instruct as well”. Yet, given the political fragmentation in the Weimar Republic, “education by means of the press often amounted to political indoctrination” (Eksteins, 1975, p. 15).

The Association of German Newspaper Publishers and its exploitation of freedom of press

In 1894, German journalists decided to create a professional organization to represent its interests as a class and consolidate their deontological norms and news values: the Association of German Newspaper Publishers (VDZ⁴¹) (Tworek, 2019, p. 34). Despite its concerns being mostly technical⁴², the members of the VDZ also cared

about sustaining and extending freedom of the press. Two issues within the scope of the press freedom cause would prove useful for Streicher and the staff of *Der Stürmer* during the period of the Weimar Republic: “the denial of the right to hold the responsible editor of a paper legally liable for its content” and “the fight against the use of malicious mischief paragraph of the German penal code” (Showalter, 1982, p. 52).

Nonetheless, Dennis E. Showalter explains:

The VDZ was hardly an organization primarily devoted to protecting the freedom of the gutter press. Particularly after 1918, the Verein recognized the problem of what it called «driftwood»: the increasing number of papers that stood apart from the essential goals of the Verein and, perhaps more importantly, drew readers from more respectable sheets by an emphasis on sex and scandal. Protests against such papers, however, tended to remain more formal than concrete. Thus, a century-long battle for the rights

40 According to Modris Eksteins, “such complaints were not limited to Germany: Northcliffe, Hearst and Millaud all stirred immense controversy with their innovations in their respective countries” (Eksteins, 1975, p. 15).

41 In German, “Verein Deutscher Zeitungsverleger”.

42 According to Dennis E. Showalter, the major concerns of the VDZ were “wage scales, unionization and the price of newsprint” (Showalter, 1982, p. 51).

of the press created an environment where *Der Stürmer* could take advantage not only of legal rights, but of a prevailing attitude that an injury to one paper was an injury to all (Showalter, 1982, p. 52).

The denial of the right to hold the responsible editor of a paper legally liable for its content

The VDZ argued that the practice of holding the responsible editor of a paper legally liable for its content “reflected ignorance of how modern newspapers functioned” (Showalter, 1982, p. 51). According to the position of this association, “a journal with a national circulation could not operate under the threat of legal action by offended readers in remote provincial villages” (Showalter, 1982, p. 51). Similarly, the VDZ did not approve of universal accountability of the press, viewing it as “an effort to limit press freedom by a form of cat-and-mouse harassment, exhausting a journal’s funds in successive trials of the same case” (Showalter, 1982, pp. 51-52).

The fight against the use of malicious mischief paragraph of the German penal code

According to the *Verein*’s attorneys, malicious mischief was “a vague charge, the kind of catchall used by careless or incompetent prosecutors who could not make a solid case against particular sections or issues of a journal, but who nevertheless wished to present a case in court” (Showalter, 1982, p. 52). The *Reichsgericht*⁴³ would confirm this position in 1902, “sharply restricting the use of this charge in cases involving newspapers” (Showalter, 1982, p. 52).

The ineffectiveness of governmental censorship

The outbreak of the First World War would lead to “governmental regulations of the newspaper industry⁴⁴” (Showalter, 1982, p. 52), which

would be continued by the republican regime. In theory, the government of the Republic of Weimar and its journalists were in full agreement. After all, the 118th article of its constitution announced that “every German has the right to express his opinion freely in word, writing, print, picture or in any other manner”, adding that there was “no censorship”. However, there was another sentence between “every German has the right” and “to

“*Bürgerfriede*” or “Fortress Truce” at the outbreak of the First World War. The government of Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg ended up extending it to the press. Despite “the huge demand for news in time of war that caused the circulation figures of newspapers to soar”, the ruling elite of the German Empire did not hesitate on trying to control their *media* (Eksteins, 1975, pp. 28-29). In the words of Leopold Ullstein, founder of the *Berliner Morgenpost*, there was “a state of siege on truth”. According to Modris Eksteins, this German imperial censorship “eliminated any information of demoralizing nature, from reversals on the war fronts, to train collisions, industrial accidents, strikes and food shortages” (Eksteins, 1975, p. 29). Virtually, the result of “filtering”, i.e. censoring, the news before its publication was the uniformization of journalistic content. But “the uniformity of will and determination among the nation desired by officialdom and the nationalists was not produced”, eroding instead the credibility of the ruling elite, since “newspapers invoked distrust” of all their actions (Eksteins, 1975, p. 29).

43 The German Supreme Court during the period of the German Empire and the Republic of Weimar.

44 German political and social actors had established a kind of social truce called

express his opinion freely”: “within the bounds of the general laws”. According to Modris Eksteins, these legal frames included “penal laws, police ordinances and regulations on trade and business” (Eksteins, 1975, p. 70). Moreover, the *Reichpräsident*⁴⁵ could extinguish the operability of this article, through the emergency powers granted by article 48th. As Eksteins adds “if opinions expressed in public threatened, directly or indirectly, the security of the state and its citizens, their dissemination could be suppressed” (Eksteins, 1975, p. 70).

Since this legal framework did not have the *Generalanzeiger* or the *Boulevardblatten* as its main targets, its effects fell on the group it was aimed at: the party press. Unsurprisingly, the result was “a cat and mouse game between partisan journalists and the government” (Showalter, 1982, p. 53). And in its early years, the Republic of Weimar was a fertile ground for these politicized newspapers. As a young republican regime,

its political atmosphere was full of “permissiveness and controversy” (Showalter, 1982, p. 52). But as the years went by, its governments found themselves “seeking to establish stability and legitimacy simultaneously”, and party newspapers were an obstacle to the achievement of those goals (Showalter, 1982, p. 53).

Moderate party newspapers were not the only targets of this censorship. After all, the Weimar Republic was also a fertile ground for *media* from radical political movements like *Der Stürmer*. In the words of Dennis E. Showalter, “*Völkisch* and veterans’ groups, radical factions of every kind, advocates of political reform through such social changes as free love and nudism – all had their own tabloid mouthpieces” (Showalter, 1982, pp. 52-53).

Showalter also alludes to some data about the results of these regulations: in the last months of 1922 alone, the German government issued fifty-two orders suspending publication, and between 1923 and 1925, “the annual average was between thirty and forty” (Showalter, 1982, p. 53). In the case, specifically, of

Der Stürmer, Cyril Levitt notes that between 1923 and 1933, the newspaper from Nuremberg “was either confiscated or taken to court thirty-six times⁴⁶” (Levitt, 1993, p. 33).

Those suspensions would decrease heavily in the late 1920’s: in 1927, only four newspapers were suspended and in the election year of 1928 there were only seven bannings (Showalter, 1982). This decline of censorship resulted more from the reaction of the affected editors than from any kind of growing consolidation of the republican regime: when a newspaper was banned and its presses were shut down, its editors saw the riding out of its ban as the best solution⁴⁷. The German party press of

45 *Reichpräsident* was the title of the German head of state during the period of the Republic of Weimar.

46 The first time of all was the day after the Beer Hall Putsch or Munich Putsch, the failed *coup d’état*, organized by the NSDAP on the 8th and 9th days of November of 1923. Streicher’s newspaper was shut down for several months, until its resurrection in 1924 (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 52).

47 Creating a new publication wouldn’t be a viable option. As Showalter asserts, “any new sheet appearing from the same editorial offices was an easy target for charges of attempting to evade the law”. Besides, economic considerations discouraged the creation of new papers: “neither reader loyalties nor advertising revenues could be transferred easily” (Showalter, 1982, p. 53).

the 1920's tended to ride out the bans and then "resume publication with a clarion call for increased freedom of press⁴⁸" (Showalter, 1982, p. 53). Moreover, the call for a decrease of the state control of the press received support from the Judiciary: prosecutors and judges didn't want to risk being seen as tyrants or enemies of Germany's intellectual freedom⁴⁹. They viewed press freedom as an issue as important as it was at the time of the Weimar Republic's foundation. Dennis E. Showalter summarizes the result these reactions had: "under such conditions, any laws under which political newspapers could be regulated were well on their way to becoming dead letters" (Showalter, 1982, p. 53).

48 As Showalter shows, "the affected journals were hardly inclined to modify their editorial policies in the face of a few days or weeks suspension; on the contrary, they tended to use the fact of being banned as proof of their role in frontline of the struggle against the Weimar system" (Showalter, 1982, p. 53).

49 In Showalter's words, "Prosecutors and judges were reluctant to risk being pilloried by prestigious and respectable papers as would-be tyrants and enemies of Germany's intellectual freedom merely to secure meaningless judgements against fringe journals" (Showalter, 1982, p. 53).

***Der Stürmer* as an element of Nazi propaganda**

Bruce Lannes Smith describes the concept of "propaganda" as "the more or less systematic effort to manipulate other people's beliefs, attitudes, or actions by means of symbols", including words, gestures, pictures and so forth (Smith, 2021, s/p). The antisemitic content published systematically in *Der Stürmer* matches this nomenclature, but one must consider the *sui generis* character of this publication in the field of Nazi propaganda⁵⁰.

As Dennis Showalter emphasizes, "National Socialist press was something of a contradiction in terms", because "from the beginning, the Nazis deemphasized the role of printed propaganda in forming public opinion" (Showalter, 1982, p. 54). Although Josef Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda of the Nazi regime, "understood the need to reach people

50 Dennis E. Showalter emphasizes that, "the general press climate in the Weimar Republic was more favorable for any given Nazi newspaper than the circumstances in the internal party itself" (Showalter, 1982, p. 55). It was a fact Streicher himself and *Der Stürmer* were not very popular among the leadership of the NSDAP, except for Adolf Hitler.

at the interpersonal level" (Bytwerk, 2010, pp. 93-94), the work of his employees was mostly made of oral propaganda, both through "public meetings of the NSDAP" (Bytwerk, 2005, p. 37), and through the system of party speakers⁵¹ (Bytwerk, 2005, p. 45). Later, the list of means used in the Nazi propaganda system grew to include visual propaganda too, both in the form of movies as in the form of posters (Bytwerk, 2010).

It is true that Adolf Hitler advocated "the need for a special king of newspapers" that would "expose local and national dangers day after day, week after week, year after year, heedless of the consequences", working "not as primary means of conversion, but rather as a mean of continuing political education" (Showalter, 1982, p. 54). Nonetheless, as the Nazi leader himself wrote in his *Mein Kampf*⁵², "the picture, in all its forms, including the film, has better prospects" of reaching its target than a text, existing "less need

51 I.e., party orators, who would spread word of mouth propaganda through the German territory.

52 In English, "My Struggle".

of elaborating the appeal to the intelligence.” (Hitler, 1939, p. 365). With its frequent use of photographs and of Fips’ caricatures, *Der Stürmer* ended up perfectly fitting the matrix of propaganda proposed by the *Führer*.

Anti-Semitism in nazi propaganda

In his *opus*, *Bending Spines: The Propagandas of Nazi Germany and the German Democratic Republic*, Randall L. Bytwerk points to antisemitism as “the most crucial element to Nazism as a system”. As this North American scholar explains, “the Jew”, always referred in its singular form “*Jude*” as if it was a unified whole, was seen as “the embodiment of evil, the antipole to the Aryan German” (Bytwerk, 2004, p. 26). And since it was necessary to justify the attempt to exterminate them, the members of the NSDAP introduced in their propaganda “the claims of defense against Jewish plans to destroy Germany and its population” (Bytwerk, 2005, p. 37). Once more, as a piece of the national socialist propaganda machinery, *Der Stürmer* was no exception to

this rule, antisemitic content being predominant in its articles. Streicher’s newspaper “regularly called for the destruction of the Jews, even concluding texts with direct calls for extermination” (Bytwerk, 2005, p. 49)

Nonetheless, as it was said above, both in the case of *Der Stürmer* as in all the other Nazi propaganda papers, the main goal “was not conversion, but rather continuing political education” (Showalter, 1982, p. 54). By looking into Randall L. Bytwerk’s analysis of the confidential reports of the Security Service of the SS⁵³ on public morale until 1943, one can realize that, in reality, Nazi Jew-hating propaganda was not converting the German people, whose response “was more indifference than internalization” (Bytwerk, 2005, p. 53). Their antisemitism wasn’t gone, but it was far less passionate. That indifference mostly resulted from the constant flood of the anti-jewish images and texts during the war (Bytwerk, 2005).

53 In german “*Schutzstaffel*” or “Protection Squadron”. It consisted of a paramilitary organization working as a political police force, “dedicated to maintaining the principles of National-Socialism” (Snyder, 1995, pp. 329-330).

Another author, David Bankier, reinforces this idea, affirming that “the more Goebbels raised the Jewish Question, the more the public manifested fatigue” (Bankier, 1992, p. 152). Applying this information to the present study, one must remember one the core accusations against the editor of *Der Stürmer*, Julius Streicher: “establishing an attitude of indifference toward Jews without which the Holocaust could not have occurred.”⁵⁴ (Bytwerk, 2001, p. vii).

Conclusion

Post-truth and fake news have grabbed most of attention of *media* audiences in these last years. Despite the temptation to see disinformation as a phenomenon that is exclusive to this day and age, the truth is very different: the dissemination of false information has also occurred during a large part of the twentieth century. The dissatisfaction with the climate

54 As Randall L. Bytwerk himself remembers, “Streicher and his like did not persuade all or even most Germans to hate Jews.”, being mostly responsible for the indifference created by their propaganda (Bytwerk, 2001, p. vii).

of political and economic instability in the Weimar Republic turned the German *media* of 1920's and the 1930's into a fertile ground for the dissemination of antisemitic propaganda⁵⁵. *Der Stürmer*'s articles and its success in terms of circulation showed how easy it was for Nazi propaganda to disseminate, especially through the use of pictures and photographs, so favorable to propaganda⁵⁶, and through simple and inflammatory language.

It is also true that Streicher and other Nazi propagandists didn't persuade the German audience into the

hatred of Jews, but they created the climate of indifference necessary for the antisemitic policies of the national socialist to thrive without opposition. And indifference wouldn't have been possible without the constant showing of anti-Jewish imagery. In the twentieth-first century, when the news *media* broadcasts or publishes the same event constantly for several consecutive days, maybe it wouldn't be such a bad idea to look into the 1920's and 1930's and the effects of Nazi propaganda, in order to understand the possible effects of communication fatigue on an audience.

Yet, there is always a tendency, when studying subjects related to the Nazi regime, of referring to memory as an immunizing element for the current generations: individuals from the Twentieth-first century know the result of the disinformation from the 1920's and 1930's, which makes the repetition of something like the Holocaust impossible. Nonetheless, one must remember what Randall L. Bytwerk said in the end of one of his works, about the belief in immunity to disinformation and propaganda: "It was also the conviction many readers

of *Der Stürmer* held." (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 196). In reality, we're no more immune to intolerance than the inhabitants of 1920's and 1930's Germany were. In similar social, economic, and political circumstances, History might repeat itself.

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55 Through an anachronical analysis of the content of *Der Stürmer*, one may categorize this newspaper as an example of "mal-information" defined by Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan as "information, that is based on reality, but used to inflict harm on a person, organization or country", being associated to hate speech (Derakhshan & Wardle, 2018, p. 46). Besides the information aimed at denigrating the image of Jewish community, there was also a deliberated practice from the editor, Streicher, of ignoring information that could be favorable towards Jews (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 47), something closer to the category of "disinformation", i.e., "information that is false, and the person who is disseminating it knows it is false." (Derakhshan & Wardle, 2018, p. 46).

56 Thanks to its potentially wider reach that was mentioned above.

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