Communist Press in Western Germany

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PROBABLY THE EASIEST writing job in Western Germany is for one of the 16 Communist newspapers. For a newspaperman who could bring himself to accept the principles of the Communist Party, the assignment would be easy: "Look for examples where you can claim people are being oppressed. If they are suffering injustice, that's even better. Especially try to find evidence that the 'bosses' or the Western Allies are the oppressors."

The prospective candidate for such work could forget most of what he already knew about writing news stories. He would be expected to introduce violent editorial opinion into the simplest item. He would not be called to account for the accuracy of his facts. He would be expected to make the broadest allegations, including libelous ones, against groups, persons or institutions. He must know how to overestimate attendance at a Communist rally by several hundred percent and minimize the attendance at anti-Communist gatherings. He must see support for Communist aims where no support exists. And he should end the majority of his stories with two or three of the dozen slogans which are currently emphasized in Soviet propaganda.

He must know how to threaten Soviet conquest while pleading for peace, and characterize aggression as "self-defense." He must profess that Western economies are cataclysming to ruin while Soviet and satellite economies march upward and onward; that Marshall Plan aid means exploitation; that Military Assistance constitutes dumping; that the North Atlantic Pact is aggressive; and that the Cominform is a benevolent association.

Atomic bomb testing beyond the Urals constitutes "the moving of mountains for a gigantic and peaceful irrigation project," and the "progressive" brothers of yesterday become the "Tito-Fascists" of tomorrow's edition. The Communist journalist writes on. The assignment is easy, and the writer has time to concentrate on developing his style.

The 16 NEWSPAPERS which require such talents comprise a tightly knit chain extending from one end of the German Federal Republic to the other. The network is headed by the Freies Volk, of Dusseldorf. It is the central organ of the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Communist Party of Germany, or KPD), and party functionaries throughout west Germany are expected to read it in addition to the KPD newspaper of their locality.

The newspapers are:

**British Zone**
- Freies Volk (Free People), Duesseldorf.
- Die Wahrheit (The Truth), Hanover.
- Hamburger Volkszeitung (Hamburg People's Paper), Hamburg.
- Volksstimme (People's Voice), Cologne.
- Neue Volkszeitung (New People's Paper), Dortmund.
- VolksEcho (People's Echo), Detmold.
- Norddeutsches Echo (North-German Echo), Kiel.

**French Zone**
- Unser Tag (Our Day), (printed in Mannheim), Offenburg.
- Neues Leben (New Life), (printed in Mannheim), Ludwigshafen.
- Unsere Stimme (Our Voice), Schwenneningen.

**US Zone**
- Suedbayerische Volkszeitung (South Bavarian People's Paper), Munich.
- Nordbayerische Volkszeitung (North Bavarian People's Paper), Nuremburg-Fuerth.
- Sozialistische Volkszeitung (Socialist People's Paper), Frankfurt.
- Badisches VolksEcho (People's Echo of Baden), Mannheim.
- Volksstimme (People's Voice), Stuttgart.
- Tribune der Demokratie (Tribune of Democracy), Bremen-Bremervaren.

These 16 papers follow a unified policy dictated by the directives of the KPD. Their editors are the leading party functionaries of the locality, many of whom hold important positions without salary as one of their regular party duties. Their readers are party members, actual and prospective, and the curious (who buy occasional copies at newsstands).

It is impossible for any of these readers to distinguish between the newspapers and the Communist Party, for each paper is considered an arm of the party by the KPD itself. The KPD owns, staffs and produces all of its newspapers, and owns all but a few of the presses which print them.

THE IMPORTANCE which the KPD attaches to its newspapers stems not only from their usefulness in keeping the rank and file abreast of the latest ramifications of the party line. Prior to currency reform in June 1948...
the KPD “information sheets” were able to supply the party with a steady and appreciated income. The “information sheets,” which were made to look as much like political party newspapers as the regulations would allow, were then operating under conditions where paper was strictly rationed and subject to price control for the entire publishing industry. They were materially assisted by shipments of precious paper from outside Communist sources.

The regulations which hindered publication of political party newspapers were ended in the late summer of 1949. The KPD “information sheets” developed into tabloid-sized newspapers. As quickly as possible their frequency of publication was increased from once a week to three times weekly, and then, in many cases, to daily. With newsprint no longer rationed, there was less advantage to be gained in receiving paper shipments from the Soviet Zone.

Also printing costs were higher than before currency reform, and the KPD was losing political ground rapidly. Popular support for the KPD had melted away since the peak days of 1946-1948, and paying customers for the party’s publications generally melted away with it. During the past year Soviet actions and the party line itself in West Germany have shown many Germans that Communism and the best interests of Germany had nothing in common.

Today, party printing presses, originally purchased in Western Germany from party funds or shipped in from the Soviet Zone, are operating at a severe loss. KPD headquarters has ordered that strenuous efforts be made to cut costs, boost circulation and increase advertising in order to lessen or eliminate the heavy deficits. At the same time the KPD looks eastward to its source of ultimate support for material help.

BECAUSE COST FACTORS, circulation methods, advertising departments and outside support of KPD newspapers are wholly unlike those of other papers, it is most profitable to examine them as keys to the KPD’s system of operations.

Salaries of responsible editors are partial or non-existent, since leading party functionaries have editorial responsibilities in addition to their other duties. Reporters and others on the staffs also have dual functions, such as making available classified reports to KPD headquarters, for transmission via Berlin to upper Communist echelons outside the Federal Republic. By utilizing every paid, and unpaid, party worker in every capacity he can fill, the KPD can hardly expect to reduce over-all costs beyond the bare minimum it has already reached.

In recent months, seeking contributions for press facilities, the party has even called for and helped contributions which were made by returned prisoners of war from money they received after their belated return from captivity in the USSR. This would indicate that the barrel is being vigorously scraped for contributions from party members and sympathizers.

KPD newspapers are continually pressing for increased circulation. Canvassers are unpaid. Party members or sympathizers are expected to solicit on the job and on their own time. As support for the KPD has melted away, there have also been continuing circulation drives to keep old subscribers from canceling or changing over to one of the “bourgeois” newspapers. Party members in good standing are required to subscribe as a matter of course. The impression that KPD members collectively own their newspaper is probably fairly general since most of them have been paying out subscription money for it, campaigning for it, and seeking new subscribers for it since days when it was an “information sheet.”

IN THE ADVERTISING department, bona fide party members are the solicitors. The work calls for specialized talents. Advertising solicitors must convince representatives of shops and firms that it is profitable in business or in other ways to contribute to the KPD. The current drive for increased advertising is an integral part of the Communist campaign of threats which is being waged overtly and covertly in Western Germany. Those who advertise in KPD newspapers roughly break down into five categories.

First and most numerous are those who want to exploit the market represented by the KPD membership. In view of the current internal propaganda against “objectivism” (which includes the sin of reading any newspaper not following the Communist line) these advertisers are partially correct in assuming they cannot reach KPD readers through any other medium.

Secondly, there are, of course, advertisements placed by men who are themselves party members or followers; and thirdly, some are placed by firms which feel the expenditure may assist their efforts to sell in the East.

Fourth, there is the contributor who allegedly is motivated by the desire to have factory equipment stay in good working order, and avoid the possibility of entirely unexpected machinery “failures.” Such incentives appear to have been particularly persuasive in areas where the KPD is strongest within the factory groups or within the company’s labor force in general.

The fifth type of advertiser is the reputable firm which has given in to a combination of cajoling and long-range threats by “solicitors.” They are told they should play it safe in case Communist aggression from the East should conquer Germany and elevate the KPD to power. Such firms report that KPD “solicitors” make heavy-handed references to the possibility of a Soviet-inspired move into Germany, even while soliciting advertisements for a newspaper which for months has been piously avowing its desire for peace and the outlawing of the atom bomb (but not the outlawing of naked aggression). The central party organ, Freies Volk, recently came out with a special supplement prominently featuring advertisements by most of the important Ruhr steel and coal companies.

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It is further indicated that there are firms which contract for advertisements they know will never appear; the money is directly deposited in the party’s coffers.

IN ADDITION TO COST cutting, circulation drives and the “soliciting” of advertisements, the KPD press-and-party can receive outside support when it can show it has exhausted all other means. Local deficits have been helped out through bulk shipments of fine porcelain, optical equipment, textiles and other products from Soviet-seized enterprises and “people’s-own enterprises,” for sale within the Federal Republic by KPD fronts. KPD members are further assisted by periodic bulk shipments of National Front propaganda, which arrives from the Soviet Zone in box-car lots (variously listed on the manifests as upholstery material, typewriters, etc.). The KPD pressures its members to buy the material for 10 to 30 pfennigs per item and to sell also to anybody else who will buy. Receipts cushion the deficit of the party and of the KPD press.

The question is inevitably raised, “How effective is the Communist press?” The answer must be qualified. Its circulation and readership is not considered significant. Its organization is more cohesive than that of any other affiliation of newspapers in Western Germany. Its voice is disproportionately loud for its size, and has the advantage of speaking for the most ruthlessly disciplined political group in the area. Its principal danger to the Federal Republic and to the Western Allies lies in the unscrupulousness of the party which it represents and helps to weld.

Like a matched chorus the KPD chain has sung each new line composed for it in Berlin and beyond. The line is becoming bellicose, more strident, increasingly libelous with each Kremlin move and with each propaganda directive.

THERE ARE FEW LIMITATIONS on the freedom of the press in Western Germany, but the Communist press has overstepped them all. In addition to generally well-conceived German legislation, the KPD press, like other newspapers, is subject to High Commission regulations which have been administered with intentional forbearance. These regulations contain prohibitions against encouraging sabotage, insurrection or subversion to the prejudice of the Allied Forces, and Law No. 5 provides penalties against enterprises or persons who act in a manner “affecting or likely to affect prejudicially the prestige or security of the Allied Forces.”

On a number of occasions between September 1949 and August 1950 the High Commission has suspended individual Communist enterprises (newspapers) for periods of one or two weeks at a time. In most cases the regular subscribers of the suspended paper have received a sister-paper in its place for as long as the suspension was in effect. In two instances the replacement paper was printed at the same party-owned press as the paper which had been suspended. In a British Zone case where a Hanover Communist paper and its press were closed down during a court trial of the responsible party officials, the suspended paper was replaced within two days by another having the same format, same subscribers and much of the same staff, but bearing a new masthead. Until the trial ended, printing was done at a sister-press in nearby Hamburg.

Following every suspension, the remaining newspapers in the KPD chain have tended toward repeating the offense which brought on the original action, and have campaigned against the injustice which the suspension-action allegedly represented.

Between the Hanover case in November 1949 and Aug. 3, 1950, no occupation authority has exerted its power to take suspense-action against a printing plant. The Allied High Commission has sought, as a matter of principle, to avoid the harsher measures at its disposal. The organizational pattern of the KPD press, its effective evasive tactics and its heightening tone of vilification have brought it under closest scrutiny. One Allied observer has summed up the situation in stating “The Communist press cannot be permitted to occupy a position which is above the law or outside the law.” The non-Communist press, both independent and political party, is and has been judged under the letter of the law.

THAT THE HIGH COMMISSIONERS have devoted personal attention to the foregoing problem is shown in the announcement made public after their meeting on July 13. It states that the High Commissioners “examined a report on the activities of the Communist press in Germany, particularly with respect to the publication of material in violation of Allied High Commission Law No. 5,” and that “they agreed... to deal with such violations including, if necessary, the suspension of the operations of printing plants involved.”

Such action was taken Aug. 3 when the Allied High Commission through the US state commissioner for Hesse ordered the three-month suspension of the Frankfurt KPD daily, Sozialistische Volkszeitung. German police were also ordered to lock up the KPD-owned printing plant in Frankfurt to prevent any evasion of the order.

The Sozialistische Volkszeitung had carried on Aug. 3 specific items apparently calculated to test the High Commissioners’ decision of July 13. Its editorial sought also to misrepresent the tenor and intent of conversations between Allied state commissioners and KPD leaders of their respective areas on the limits beyond which the KPD and its press could not go.

The editorial and accompanying items, besides warping the conversations in characteristic Communist manner, impugned the motives and recent actions of the Allied High Commission and of its state commissioners.

Similar action had been taken against nine other newspapers and their publishing houses by Aug. 16. These were the Communist organs published at Dusseldorf, Hanover, Hamburg, Cologne, Dortmund and Detmold, in the British Zone; Ludwigsafen, in the French Zone; and Mannheim and Stuttgart, in the US Zone.