Consumption and Violence

Sedlmaier, Alexander

Published by University of Michigan Press


For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/36842

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=1474909
Chapter 5

The Media: The Anti-Springer Campaign

“Journalism is about one thing: sales—news a commodity; information a consumer product. Whatever isn’t suitable for consumption is bound to make them sick.”
—Red Army Faction (1971)

The Red Spot Campaign in Hannover took place against the backdrop of a much-publicised debate over the student movement’s position on violence. After the attempt on Rudi Dutschke’s life on 11 April 1968, activists engaged in large-scale protest rallies and blockades against Springer publishing, which they blamed for inciting violence against the students and their leaders. This was the culmination of the anti-Springer campaign that the extraparliamentary opposition had initiated in 1967, formally inaugurating it in October of that year. Interpretations and accusations of violence were part and parcel of the confrontation long before the first windowpanes were smashed. A central point of contention emerged on the issue of whether violence against objects differed fundamentally from violence against people—as many protesters claimed—or whether the former was a mere precursor of the latter. In the aftermath of Easter 1968, the legal interpretation of violence during blockades again proved controversial, ultimately reinforcing the wide concept of violence that the Laepple verdict established. The militant campaign against Springer also challenged the apparent coincidence of interests between government and media tycoon.

1. “Das Konzept Stadtguerilla,” in Rote Armee Fraktion, ed. ID-Verlag, 43.
The anti-Springer campaign focused on a specific critique of a regime of provision: an alleged manipulative monopoly on information services. The consumers of Springer’s tinged news were seen as victims of manipulation and as pawns in upholding established power structures. This was sometimes alleged in rather crude terms but could also be embedded in an eloquent Habermasian critique of commercial journalism. Attacks targeted not only Springer’s right-wing political orientation but its papers’ swift denunciations of those who questioned the West German “economic miracle,” with its privileging of consumer and conformist values. The campaign foregrounded the idea that information was purchasable and marked a milestone in the tradition of left-wing media critiques. However, Springer used political boycotts in the media sector long before the protesters embraced this means of political communication, and anti-Springer activism experienced an important revival in the context of the peace movement of the early 1980s.

SDS against Springer

A precursor to the anti-Springer campaign occurred at the end of 1963 when a police patrol prevented Dieter Kunzelmann from painting a provocative slogan on the not-yet-finished Springer headquarters, a high-rise not coincidentally built right next to the Berlin Wall. The message was “Ulbricht’s KZ [concentration camp] and Springer’s BZ [tabloid paper]—both serve the same purpose.” The message was aimed at Springer’s vitriolic coverage of the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

In the late 1960s, another former member of Subversive Aktion became one of the trailblazers of the campaign undertaken by the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (SDS). In an interview with Der Spiegel, Dutschke described the “society of waste” as one of the main obstacles to the realisation of a “Garden of Eden” because “the excesses of consumption typical of profit- and authority-oriented social orders—wars . . . , armaments, useless administration and bureaucracy, underutilised industrial capacities, advertising—add up to a systematic destruction of capital.” In the same interview, he called for the “expropriation of Springer” and passive resistance to the delivery of

Springer newspapers. However, he clearly stated that he did not think much of throwing tomatoes, smoke bombs, or stones, tactics he considered “absurd” and “helpless.” He explicitly denied any need for “terrorist violence against people” in the developed countries but stated, “Violence is constituentes of authority and we need to respond to it with demonstrative and provocative counterviolence from our side.”

By the time of Herbert Marcuse’s visit to Berlin, Dutschke saw the campaign as a way to make visible another form of violence: that of the highly industrialised metropole against the Third World.

An important backdrop for this critical focus on Springer was Benno Ohnesorg’s shooting by a plainclothes police officer on 2 June 1967. Students saw their role in the protests—both against the state visit of Shah Reza Pahlavi and against Ohnesorg’s death—grossly misrepresented by Springer publications. At the Freie Universität Berlin, a committee was established to analyse the demagogic coverage, one example of which occurred when Bild reported on 3 June, “Until now there has only been terror to the east of the Berlin Wall. Yesterday malicious and stupid muddleheads attempted for the first time to carry terror to the free section of the city.” This was printed underneath a picture showing a bleeding police officer. Bild reported Ohnesorg’s death but failed to mention that he had been shot, let alone by a police officer, giving a skull fracture as the cause of death: “A young man . . . fell victim to riots that young hooligans had staged. . . . We have something against SA methods. Germans neither want a brown nor a red SA.”

The same issue reported on glamorous Empress Farah Pahlavi’s attendance at a fashion show, pairing that article with an advertisement touting that the Europa-Center “is where Berlin is shopping—this is where the world is meeting.” Springer’s Berlin tabloid, BZ, commented, “Anyone who produces terror must put up with hardship.” The article stressed that the rioting students lived off taxpayers’ money without having contributed to the remarkable postwar boom that had brought prosperity to West Germany. It emphatically declared that the city of Berlin belonged only to those who contributed to this feat, and not to those bound to disturb the harmony of the Wirtschaftswunder, which Springer journalists wanted to safeguard.

6. Ibid., 33.
7. Dutschke, “Zum Verhältnis.”
In September 1967, the SDS decided on an action programme against Springer. A central focus was “analysis and general education about the systematic destruction of societal riches via consumer terror, planned obsolescence, and development of unproductive industries.” When a number of opposition groups formally inaugurated the campaign in October, the issue of consumption still featured prominently. The campaign sought to address a “press structure geared towards private profit maximisation and consumer advertisement leaning towards concentration.” The campaign eventually was supported by Springer’s competitors, Gerd Bucerius and Rudolf Augstein, founders and part-owners of the influential weeklies Die Zeit and Der Spiegel, respectively.

The SDS agitated for a boycott of Springer, targeting the stall operated by the Springer-owned publisher Ullstein at the 1967 Frankfurt Book Fair, an effort that led to police involvement. An early success that generated media attention was a boycott resolution “against the monopoly of Axel Springer” signed by seventy-one members of the renowned literary association Gruppe 47 and seven major publishers. Protest was commodified with badges reading “Expropriate Springer,” twenty-one thousand of which were sold before the end of 1967. Long before the violent events of Easter 1968, the anti-Springer campaign was compared to terror—for example, in a defence of Springer published in the company’s Die Welt and written by Austrian American author and publisher Hans Habe, who denied Springer’s critics any intellectual merit and likened the student protesters to a “terror organisation that uses violence” to prevent the sale of newspapers.

13. Dahrendorf, Liberal und unabhängig, 188.
Broken Glass

Several weeks after these lines were printed, “direct action” against shop windows of *Berliner Morgenpost* branch offices first took place. The attacks occurred on the night of 1 February 1968 after a political event at the Technical University Berlin that included the screening of a film by Holger Meins and others that showed how to make Molotov cocktails and ended with a still of Springer’s headquarters. The attacks on the *Morgenpost* did not feature incendiary devices, but cobblestones were used. Dutschke and composer Hans Werner Henze apparently were among those throwing stones, although their involvement was not publicised at the time.

West Berlin’s minister of justice, Hans Günter Hoppe (FDP), commented on the broken glass: “These are fascist methods. It started once before in Germany with smashed shop windows.” *Bild* printed a cartoon that depicted an SDS member smashing a *Berliner Morgenpost* window in 1968 next to two storm troopers breaking the window of a Jewish shop in 1938. Accompanying commentary made generous use of the terms *terror* and *anarchist*. The analogy between seven smashed windows and the November pogrom clearly neglected obvious differences in the scope of the events and the power relations that produced them, but it was embraced well beyond Springer newspapers. Adolf Arndt, a prominent lawyer and a member of the Bundestag from the Social Democratic Party—wrote a letter to Axel Springer in which Arndt described how the recent incident reminded him of “Hitler’s brown SA pounding the shop windows of Jewish department stores to pieces.”

A spokesperson for the students countered, “If these arguments are true, then the Jews smashed the windows of the *Völkischer Beobachter* [the Nazi

---


The Springer press continued publishing references to the Nazi past, as when Bild asked, “What is done against those who, in flyers and meetings, request that other people’s property be taken away or even destroyed? . . . In the late 1920s, early 1930s, it started just like this. . . . The end was dictatorship, war, the destruction of Germany and Europe.” This commentary concluded by declaring that these developments were especially dangerous in West Berlin, “where nobody can distinguish who is a western demonstrator and who is an agitator sent across from the east.” The Nazi past had become a ubiquitous context for debates about the protests, with some commentators noting that such demonstrations would not have occurred under Hitler and calling for the forcible cutting of demonstrators’ hair or them to be thrown over the wall into East Berlin.

Helmut Gollwitzer, a professor of Protestant theology at the Freie Universität Berlin and a friend of Dutschke, and Jacob Taubes, a professor of Jewish studies there who had delivered his expertise on Kommune I’s department store arson flyers, warned against comparing student action with Nazi terror on the grounds that doing so prevented an evenhanded appraisal of the students’ concerns. However, the smashed Springer windows and the subsequent discourse on violence constituted a turning point in the anti-Springer campaign. Other prominent intellectuals started to withdraw their support. The Republikanischer Club, one of the intellectual centres of the extraparliamentary opposition and cosponsor of the anti-Springer campaign, condemned the smashing of windows as delegitimising the awareness campaign.

Jörg Huffschmid’s Habermasian critique of Springer

The chair of the Republikanischer Club, economist Jörg Huffschmid, an assistant professor at the Institute for Market Concentration Research of the Freie Universität Berlin, tried to integrate the critique of the Springer group into a wider theory of political economy. The notion of a depoliticised consumer society played a central role in this analysis: “The profit seeking of private enterprise in a late capitalist society can . . . only be realised through extensive

24. Siegfried, “‘Don’t Trust Anyone Older Than 30?,’” 743.
waste, which can only be obscured through the almost total manipulation of consumer society.”

Huffschmid drew on Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy’s Marxist work on monopoly capital, focusing on advertising, consumption, and mass culture as crucial components of the capitalist system. Like Ulrike Meinhof, Huffschmid was influenced by André Gorz, whom Huffschmid followed in assuming a large-scale economically driven “production of needs.” Consequently, the articulation of needs in the marketplace was no longer an expression of the subjective freedom of individuals but had become an expression of the dominance of an economically powerful minority. This argument was supposed to counter legitimisations of Springer’s economic success by virtue of the fact that it resulted from the purchasing decisions of millions of sovereign consumers. Axel Springer himself had resorted to a theory of consumer democracy: “Each day, each month, a kind of democratic vote happens at the newspaper kiosks and at the front doors in Germany about whether the readers want to buy these newspapers.”

The anti-Springer campaign doubted whether any fair—let alone democratic—competition existed in the news market given the dangers of market concentration and manipulation.

According to Huffschmid, advertising was vital to journalism, an issue that extended far beyond the anti-Springer campaign. The Bundestag had established two expert committees to examine media problems. The Michel Commission, named after its chair, Elmar Michel, a former assistant secretary of state at the Ministry of Economics, investigated charges of collusion between broadcasting and daily press. The Günther Commission, chaired by Eberhard Günther, president of the Federal Cartel Authority, was a fact-finding commission on press concentration. Huffschmid was drawing in part on the material published by these commissions.

The Federal Constitutional Court ruled in 1967 that freedom of the press protected the advertising sections of newspapers, pointing out advertisements were necessary for a paper’s economic independence. In addition, the judges

---

gave advertisements the same status as news. This decision had implications for the question of journalistic freedom vis-à-vis economic interests constituted by large-volume advertising. That newspapers depended on advertisement income, which again figured importantly in processes of economic concentration, had already been established by contemporary journalism studies. That this constellation was responsible for dying newspapers and a decrease in the diversity of opinions expressed was controversial. However, lower-circulation papers had difficulty competing with the big players, who were more attractive for advertisers. Huffschmid explained that only a small percentage of profits derived from the journalistic product, while most came from advertisements, on which capital was relying to realise its profits. According to Huffschmid, 81 percent of West Germany’s advertising expenditures went to magazines and newspapers, turning those periodicals into a hypercommodity responsible for the smooth flow of the commodity cycle.

In Huffschmid’s analysis, the rise of advertising since the eighteenth century had turned the “critical reader into a consumer, the society of ‘critically reflecting private people’ into a consumer society.” This contention drew heavily on Jürgen Habermas’s analysis of the pernicious effects of commercialisation on the public sphere. Habermas pointed out that the public sphere had become a platform for advertising during the nineteenth century. The chair of the Republikanischer Club paraphrased the Frankfurt social philosopher: “The private newspaper in a commercial society thus mutates from an organ of the critical public opinion of private individuals—especially against the authority of the state—into an organ of manipulating ‘public relations’ in the service of trade and industry vis-à-vis . . . the consumer.” Huffschmid assumed that consumption had a stabilising function in postwar West Germany and that it was manifested in the “permanent demand to consume that appears in different ways in both the editorial and advertising sections of the West German press.” Such an analysis applied not merely to Springer but to any press in a developed

32. See Reinhart Ricker, Anzeigenwesen und Pressefreiheit (Munich, 1973), 82. Huffschmid, like Habermas, was drawing on one of the founders of both journalism as an academic discipline and nonmarket economics: see Karl Bücher, Die Entstehung der Volkswirtschaft (1883), chapter 5, “Die Anfänge des Zeitungswesens.” For examples of companies using advertisement volume to pressure editorial staff, see Eicke, Werbelawine, 126–37.
35. Huffschmid, “Politische Ökonomie,” 70.
Consumption and Violence

economy. From this perspective, those disrupting the functioning of West Germany’s depoliticised consumer society were bound to appear as enemies of the Springer press: “This press consistently responds even to such groups appearing so harmless and apolitical as the Gammler [dropouts] with a vocabulary borrowed from fascist jargon . . . : an attitude such as that of the Gammler, who refuse the obligation to constantly work for new consumer goods, does indeed call into question the foundations of the existing order.”36 For Huffschmid, consumer society was a degenerate and manipulated society that was ready to accept the “mutual affirmation of ideology and business,” the latter selling its own interests as those of society as a whole.37

Easter 1968

Critiques of Springer’s tabloid journalism gained considerably more public impact with the assassination attempt on Dutschke. The SDS issued a manifesto that reinforced the issue of consumption: “Every critique is being deadened or presented as the man in the street’s sorrows for his own consumption.” The second in a list of five demands for a “democratic public” read, “Abolition of consumption propaganda, which is to be replaced by proper consumer information.”38 More publicity was generated when fourteen famous intellectuals signed a statement demanding a public debate about Springer’s market power and criticising the “alliance of unscrupulous mass-consumption journalism and revived nationalistic ideology.”39

Hands-on protest targeted the commodity side of the Springer empire. Its tangible production and distribution network provided ubiquitous points of protest and direct action—blockades of access roads and sabotage (setting delivery vans on fire) to prevent the delivery of the tabloid papers. Photographs of burning newspaper vans became iconic and served as proof of the demon-

36. Ibid., 71. Gammler were members of youth subcultures of the 1960s and 1970s who refused bourgeois values, especially the idea of an agreeable outward appearance and the benefits of gainful employment. See Gotthardt, Abkehr von der Wohlstandsgesellschaft; Siegfried, Time Is on My Side, 399–416. For examples of Springer tabloids denouncing members of youth and protest cultures in drastic terms, see Republikanischer Club, Springer enteignen?, 26–28.
The protests only delayed delivery, as police throughout Germany safeguarded the distribution of the papers. In this struggle, the issue of violence quickly took centre stage. Confrontations between protesters and police at Easter 1968 involved twenty-one thousand policemen across the Federal Republic. Two protesters were severely injured when delivery vans sped through a crowd, and a photojournalist and a student died as a result of the skirmishes in Munich, with police and demonstrators accusing each other of responsibility for the deaths. The countless confrontations between demonstrators and police were more intense and physical than most previous demonstrations, marking a new dimension in the protest movement’s tangible experience of violence. The extraparliamentary opposition—often displaying a devil-may-care faith in the righteousness of their cause—realised that the emergence of demonstration violence amounted to a criminalisation of their tactics. Two weeks after the Easter disturbances, Interior Minister Ernst Benda stated in a Bundestag debate that prosecutions had been initiated in 827 cases.

Numerous eyewitness accounts testified to the disproportionate use of police force. Der Spiegel reported that Huffschmid had been “torn away from the crowd without reason, dragged by the hair by several policemen to be kicked and beaten.” Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger called for “a strengthening of the means for protecting the state” against “militant leftist extremist powers, who have openly set about to destroy our parliamentary democratic order.” Kiesinger’s statement was delivered after large-scale protests had begun but before the two fatalities in Munich, and it seemed to corroborate the widespread fears of emergency laws. Many commentators on both sides tried to compare the events with those in the late years of the Weimar Republic or Nazi Germany. SDS members tried to legitimise stones thrown by demonstrators with reference to Springer’s structural violence: “A tendentious headline in Bild is more violence than a stone against the head of a policeman.” Bild alleged that an SDS member had suggested that “Berlin must burn like the slums

42. Görtemaker, Kleine Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 204.
in . . . American cities.” Ulrike Meinhof made a statement that subsequently was frequently repeated: “When fire is set to a lorry with Springer newspapers, that is arson. When all Springer cars burn, that is a political action.” Police accused her of using her car to blockade Springer. Protesters in Rome tried to show their solidarity with German students by attacking the offices of Porsche and Mercedes with Molotov cocktails.

**Violence against Things, Yes; against People, No**

Springer and SDS charged each other with instigating violence. The latter’s theoreticians came up with a fragile differentiation: “Violence against things, yes; against people, no.” This strategy was supported by Helmut Gollwitzer, who participated in a public debate in the main lecture theatre of Technische Universität Berlin. Many participants stressed that the attacks on Springer’s distribution network had a symbolic and demonstrative character. Ralf Dahrendorf thought they were less political than parliamentary debates on the question of press concentration and should therefore be discontinued, while former chair of the General Students’ Committee (AStA), Knut Nevermann, charged that the protesters had no concrete vision for the expropriation of Springer or, more broadly, for what an economic system based on the principles of “council democracy” should entail. Several panels discussed whether the use of violence was legitimate under certain conditions, a question that had the potential to split the extraparliamentary opposition, since some groups, especially those affiliated with the peace movement, thought that such methods would ultimately serve the opposing side. The Campaign for Democracy and Disarmament distanced itself: “It is of course counterproductive to throw stones into Springer’s show windows. This does not persuade anyone but provides Springer with ammunition.” Despite this criticism, the Berlin students’ union execu-

---


tive committees used the concept of counterviolence as well as notions of structural violence to legitimise the anti-Springer campaign. Violence against objects was appropriate as a last resort of communication and articulation of dissent when all other means had been exhausted, as a final reply against the authorities’ means of repression—that is, “truncheons and water cannons.” The rationale was to demonstrate that state violence would interfere with the articulation of any dissent outside the conventional channels: “Our violence against things, which are the means of Springer’s smear campaign and the means of the police, is counterviolence against the oppression to which everyone is subject and that only manifests itself against us in the streets.”

Defending the SDS strategy against critical questions from Spiegel reporters, the two chairs of the SDS, Karl Dietrich Wolff and his brother, Frank Wolff, made three points that recurred in left-wing justifications of violence against objects. They questioned the congruency of legitimacy and legality by pointing out that they disputed an authoritarian interpretation of legality, claiming a fundamental right of resistance against the brutal police force, which otherwise could simply batter demonstrators and prevent any political action outside established channels. Second, they criticised ill-directed violence such as “friendly fire”—that is, cobblestones thrown from the back of a crowd of demonstrators, hitting those in the front, or an individual who randomly slashed car tyres in a fight “against all owners of cars.” This was a reference to Michael “Bommi” Baumann, later among the founders of Movement 2 June, who had been arrested for vandalising cars over the Easter weekend. Third, they questioned the notion of nonviolence, pointing to court decisions that designated peaceful sit-in demonstrations as violence (cases following the Laepple verdict).

There were many dissenting voices. A statement from a conservative student organisation rejected any differentiation between violence against things and violence against people, arguing such a distinction would elevate violence to a means of politics and lead to a general acceptance of violence. Ten days after the Dutschke shooting, the conservative Deutsche Studenten-Union was...


founded on the platform of nonviolence, with Klaus Laepple as its chair. A commentary in Die Welt invoked the possibility of “anarchy,” referring to “a small group of anarchist-revolutionary terrorists” and declaring, “No one wants clashes between police and demonstrators, none of us want violence. For us, violence is never, ever a means of politics. Only the radical wing of an organisation of the extreme left wants violence to produce martyrs later on.” Although these two comments were rather different in tone, they again contain three basic points that both liberal and conservative critiques of provocative and symbolic violence would make: violence was not an integral part of any political system and consequently could be banned or blamed on criminal or extremist minorities; no fundamental differentiation between different forms or levels of violence existed; and theoretical arguments for violence would lead to actual violence.

Many commentators displayed a readiness to compare the events to Nazi terror or the Socialist Unity Party (SED) regime in the GDR: according to the author of one letter to the editors of Berliner Morgenpost, “Behind these activities the ‘SED’ is obviously emerging. . . . All these events are reminiscent of Kristallnacht. Back then the Jews were robbed of their property; today it is the Springer concern that is threatened.” In an expert opinion for the court proceedings against medical student Gerhard Paar, who was eventually sentenced to one year in prison for sedition and violation of the public peace during the blockade of a Springer print shop, psychologist Peter Brückner diagnosed a “pogrom atmosphere” in the early months of 1968, when angry crowds attacked students in a number of instances.

Oskar Negt, at the time assistant to Habermas, observed that anything that defied the normal or ran counter to the expectations created by everyday norms was perceived as terror, riot, and violence. Regardless of intention, any breaking of rules was “magnified to a human rights injury and to a system-threatening . . . relapse to barbarism, anarchism, and fascism. Already their
form of publicity turned the students into terrorists who could be fought with legitimate counterterror.” Negt argued that the spontaneous blockades of Springer newspapers marked the first time in postwar German history that society’s suppressed potential for violence had been repoliticised. And he went a step further, positing that an admission of violence constituted an admission of a deficit in legitimacy for any society. Those who even mentioned this latent potential for violence or tried to make it visible were then suspected originating this violence.

Introducing a typology of violence, Negt differentiated between the rarely occurring revolutionary or emancipatory violence and the preponderant and futile destruction of human beings and goods in imperialist wars. Alluding to Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Negt claimed that institutions that originally derived from revolutionary force but were no longer committed to it turned enlightenment into mass betrayal. Politicians and the public could easily talk about “nuclear death rates” or, like Chancellor Kiesinger, ally themselves with the violence of the National Socialist state while being utterly outraged about left-wing demonstrators who, like Baudrillard, slashed tyres. Consequently, Negt sought to elucidate the difference between progressive and reactionary violence. The destruction of a Vietnamese village by American soldiers could not reasonably be reduced to the same abstract denominator “act of violence” as “the burning and looting of American department stores by a minority held in the proletarian misery of the nineteenth century by economic force and racist terror while immediately and sensually experiencing the contradictions of ‘affluent society,’ discriminatory privileges and mindless waste.” From this perspective, French workers and students who damaged cars by using them to build barricades were “returning some human use value to commodities” that had “assumed a life of their own in becoming part of the reified violence [sachliche Gewalt] exercised over people.” Violence against things was thus not directed primarily at objects but at the reified social relations they embodied. The campaigns against Springer were similarly directed not at the person of a successful entrepreneur but at the reified vio-

60. Ibid., 168.
lence that a communications network of this size commanded. The violence of the students was thus the spontaneous and manifest expression of resistance against such power structures.63

Aftermath

A rather curious amalgamation of matters of consumption and political violence, corroborating at least some of Negt’s considerations, appeared in an apparently fabricated report on the front page of Springer’s most important tabloid, Bild, on the Tuesday after Easter 1968, exactly two weeks after the Frankfurt department store arson attacks. Under the headline “Furniture Shop Set on Fire,” the paper alleged that the SDS had committed an “attack on private property” against a furniture shop in the Ruhr city of Gladbeck. A large photograph showed the proprietor standing amid the debris of his burnt-out shop and holding an object on which someone had spray-painted the word Bild, which the caption explained was “a kind of symbol for the private property they hated.” This was seamlessly juxtaposed with information on the alleged “military precision” with which the Springer blockade had been planned. Further down, the article alleged that “free choice was no longer going to be a matter of the buyer of a newspaper but of the red student council.”64 However, the fire in the furniture shop had been an accident, and the incident bore no connection to the student protests, as another Springer newspaper, the Hamburger Abendblatt, reported a few days later in a very brief piece on the final page.65 On the Wednesday after Easter, Springer’s Berlin tabloid, BZ, headlined, “No-Protest Zone around the Ku[fürsten]damm: Heavy Economic Damage Due to the Constant Riots.” According to the brief article, the guild of the proprietors of restaurants and inns had made demands to this effect in talks with the West Berlin government.66

Trade unions kept their distance from the anti-Springer campaign, a marked contrast to their support for protests against fare increases. The latter

63. Ibid., 180–81.
seemed to attract a broad spectrum of oppositional groups that could identify with resisting higher living expenses. Laepple’s role is illuminating in this context. He believed that student leaders had duties resembling those of trade unionist leaders—that is, catering to the material needs of fellow students and keeping to the political confines of university reform.\footnote{67. “DSU: Ruf von rechts,” Der Spiegel 18 (29 April 1968): 74.} The anti-Springer campaign was more complicated: criticism was directed towards a regime of provision in which many of the radical protesters’ potential allies happily participated, and educating them about their “false” consumption proved difficult. Not only the debates about violence but also the lack of identification with an intellectual and abstract critique explain the trade unions’ reluctance to embrace the anti-Springer campaign. They emphasised that the protests would lead to loss of earnings and possibly jobs, an issue that had not arisen in connection with the transport companies.\footnote{68. “Studenten-Solidarisierung: Geschlossene Gesellschaft,” Der Spiegel 18 (29 April 1968): 68–70.}

In May 1968, only weeks after the assassination attempt on Dutschke, the Günther Commission declared that constitutionally guaranteed freedom of the press was threatened by the degree of control Axel Springer had achieved over the publishing industry. Springer preempted any official steps towards decartelisation by divesting itself of the journals Bravo, Eltern, Jasmin, Kicker, Das Neue Blatt, and Twen, none of which had been at the forefront of criticism.\footnote{69. “Springer-Verkauf: Um Gottes willen,” Der Spiegel 27 (1 July 1968): 52–59. See also Humphreys, Media and Media Policy, 99–101.}

After Easter 1968, Springer quickly ceased to be a major issue in the protest movement, largely because on 30 March, the national SDS announced that the anti-Springer campaign had failed.\footnote{70. Staadt, Voigt, and Wolle, Feind-Bild Springer, 146.} After the unexpected Easter flare-up, discourse shifted towards debates on the disputed emergency laws and issues of violence.\footnote{71. See Lönnendonker, Fichter, and Staadt, Hochschule im Umbruch, 5:69–88.} Countless supporters and observers distanced themselves from the campaign, signalling to SDS organisers that the Springer issue had failed to bring about the desired mobilisation of the masses. However, critical publications kept appearing. The final major collection of essays of the anti-Springer campaign was again initiated by the Republikanischer Club and was edited by Peter Brokmeier. This volume went beyond the criticism of monopoly concentration by focusing on the press as a whole as advertising that defined information as a commodity. Sociology student Heiner Schäfer contributed an article that built on Huffschmid’s approach in analysing how Springer journalism
sought to echo the consumer interests of the lower classes. Reader surveys elicited their alleged needs, while editorial articles pretended to acknowledge these interests and held out an “ethos of social mobility” to foster consumption. The “social climber” would continue to subscribe to this ethos even if “objectively social and material gratification did not . . . pay for his hard labour.”

Schäfer focused on the youth magazines *Bravo* and *Twen*, which Springer had already sold by the time the volume appeared. Drawing on reader surveys, Schäfer described how Springer saw *Twen* readers as “consumption pioneers” who “fulfil their rebellious behaviour in extravagant consumption,” thus resulting in the profit-driven creation of “false consciousness.”

### Origins of Political Boycotts in the Media Sector

The oft-voiced accusation that the anti-Springer campaign was connected to East German propaganda was not entirely far-fetched: East German writers had produced their own critical literature about the Springer trust. In 1963, a book by Franz Knipping (originally a doctoral dissertation) had described Springer as a dangerous propagandist for nuclear weapons. In 1966, Walter Ulbricht gave a speech at the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the SED in which he demanded that the Springer group stop its Cold War agitation. According to Ulbricht, Springer was one of many factors hindering a confederation of East and West Germany. He also mentioned the manipulation of West German workers by consumption and promised increased goods for East Ger-

---


73. On the idea of young rebels as pioneer consumers, see Sedlmaier and Malinowski, “‘1968’ as a Catalyst.”

74. See Kraushaar, Achtundsechzig, 158–60; Jürgs, Verleger, 255; Staadt, Voigt, and Wolle, Feind-Bild Springer, 43–75. It is problematic to assume an East German campaign or long-term strategy against Springer, as Staadt, Voigt, and Wolle tend to do. It rather seems to be a continuous monitoring—with occasional interventions—of one of the most important symbols of the competition between the two German states supplemented by propaganda journalism that caricatured capitalism, using Springer as an exemplary case.

man citizens. A five-part East German TV series, *Ich—Axel Cäsar Springer*, was meant to revive the issue of press concentration. However, records from the East German Ministry for State Security show that the Central Committee established a task group to support the existing West German anti-Springer campaign only in late October 1967. Some overlap in anti-Springer activities subsequently occurred, but student leaders were careful to preserve their independence. Springer, however, was always eager to demonstrate the existence of an East German anti-Springer campaign that had allegedly engendered protest in the West. The publishing house assembled meticulous documentation of the supposed path that anti-Springer slogans had taken from the SED anniversary commemoration to adoption by West German students and the liberal press. This collection of press clippings was regularly updated and was sent out to a number of business and political leaders in August 1967.

Ironically, Springer himself had unleashed charges of distortion of competition and monopoly in the early 1960s, when several publishers attempted to establish commercial television programming. At the time, Springer argued that the advertisement business of state-run broadcasting companies constituted undue competition for the advertisement business of private publishers. Springer headlines invoked “television terror” and “television dictatorship” in their reporting on public channels whose “television monopoly” allegedly disadvantaged the public. In December 1966, Axel Springer declared that only advertising guaranteed the “freedom and independence” of *Die Welt*. While his attempts to gain a foothold in broadcasting did not succeed—commercial television was not introduced in Germany until 1984—the debate about media concentration increasingly turned against Springer, though it did not challenge the economic roots of his commercial success.

Even more remarkable is the fact that the tactic of a politically motivated boycott flanked by economic pressure had been embraced by Springer long before any students resorted to this strategy. After the erection of the Berlin

Wall, Springer newspapers intensified their massive campaign against the regime in East Berlin. They had already stopped printing the GDR’s radio and television programme in 1960, and in a circular letter to newspaper wholesalers dated 2 September 1961, Springer threatened to stop doing business with them if they continued to distribute journals that printed the eastern TV schedules.83 The Hamburg communist weekly Blinkfüer obtained an injunction from the Hamburg Regional Court—later upheld by the Higher Regional Court—that forbade the Springer group from threatening wholesalers. Simultaneously, Blinkfüer filed a claim for damages resulting from Springer’s threats. The courts found Springer had flexed its economic muscle for political reasons and thus had unlawfully encroached on a business enterprise. Springer appealed to the Federal Court of Justice (BGH), which issued a ruling that was exceedingly advantageous for the publishing giant. The 1963 decision held that restraint of competition as enshrined in antitrust law did not apply because Springer’s publications and Blinkfüer appealed to different audiences. The BGH found that Springer had only pursued a civic concern—that is, an expression of opinion—rather than attempting to impose his will in commercial intercourse. Consequently, the judges found, Springer’s conduct was covered by freedom of opinion. This ruling immediately provoked criticism and a constitutional complaint, with its detractors urging the judges to take into account Springer’s economic power and the fact that freedom of opinion also applied to Blinkfüer. The decision was not announced until May 1969, by which time Springer newspapers had resumed printing the East German television programme, Blinkfüer had gone bankrupt, and the protesters had a concrete example of what Springer could do with its economic might protected by the law. The Constitutional Court reversed the BGH’s judgement, maintaining that although calls for boycott were indeed covered by freedom of expression, even among those with economic power, such calls were not protected by the law if they were accompanied by economic pressure, which, the judges decreed, was not conducive to the free competition of opinion.84

Such differences in legal opinion were an important backdrop to the anti-Springer campaign. As with the legal debates about blockading public transport, lower courts tended to be much more amenable to the protesters’ argu-

ments than did the appeals courts. Some lower courts acknowledged the blockades as demonstrations and thus as constitutionally protected forms of protest and found that “the call for state authority” must not be the last resort in the conflict with the students; instead, they urged a “democratically informed concept of order.”85 According to the Frankfurt District Court, the fact that the blockade of newspaper deliveries leaving a print shop affected the rights of a third party did not necessarily mean that the event was “nonpeaceful” in nature. The court pointed to the 1958 Lüth verdict, in which the Federal Constitutional Court had upheld the right of the director of the Hamburg government’s press office, Erich Lüth, to call for a boycott of Veit Harlan’s first post–World War II film. The film director, who had made several antisemitic films during the Nazi period—most notoriously Jud Süß—had been granted an injunction against Lüth in the lower courts. The Constitutional Court, however, had reinforced freedom of expression in what became a landmark decision, stressing the primacy of constitutional basic rights in all other realms of the law. In analogy to the Lüth decision, the Frankfurt judges of 1968 demanded that conflicting interests protected by the law be weighed against each other. The attempt to prevent the delivery of Bild for one day by means of a blockade that highlighted threats to freedom of information was an eminently public matter, to which the right of unhindered road traffic had to be subordinated. Accordingly, they judged the economic damage resulting from the prevention of delivery to be a limited interference with commercial activities—not unlike the effects of a strike—and thus considered it acceptable.86

Some jurists introduced the concept of “social adequacy” to the discussions about coercion by blockade to ascertain the “degree of unlawfulness” of an act of coercion. Hans Janknecht,87 at the time a member of the criminal law commission of the German Association of Judges and later the general state prosecutor in Bremen, considered it “still socially adequate if students, for lack of other options, fought against a press conglomerate’s long-lasting and targeted hate and smear campaign . . . by preventing the delivery of newspapers


for a day, blocking the gates of the print shop, or setting fire to delivery vans. If compensation between libel and personal injury is acceptable, damage to property opposite incitement of the people cannot be condemned as socially inadequate.” Janknecht not only invoked section 130 (Volksverhetzung) of the Criminal Code in favour of the student protesters but was even prepared to include burning delivery vans in the legal balancing act. For Janknecht, the dividing line between legal and illegal was that between demonstration of a cause and the factual enforcement of this cause. If the latter was the case, he considered it coercion.88

The Legal Interpretation of Violence during Blockades

The Easter 1968 Springer blockades produced a controversial sequel in civil law, posing the question of accountability for damage inflicted by demonstrations. The Springer group sued SDS members for compensation since most insurance policies excluded damage caused by riots and civil commotion.89 Horst Mahler and Günter Amendt were each sentenced to pay around seventy thousand deutsche marks. As in the Laepple case, the amount was determined by loss of earnings—in this instance, as a consequence of the delayed delivery of newspapers.

The BGH confirmed these rulings in May 1972, rejecting the defendants’ argument that they were exerting a right to resist. In Mahler’s case, the civil court of appeal transferred criminal terms such as abettor and instigator to civil law. The judges again extended the notion of violence to a remarkable degree, asserting that the “use of any kind of violence in the battle of political opinions was incompatible with the free democratic order of the Federal Republic. Thus the violence committed in the course of the demonstration does not even matter essentially because the gathering of people in front of the claimants’ premises associated with the demonstration already constituted an

89. See “Demonstrations-Schäden: Innere Unruhe,” Der Spiegel 18 (29 April 1968): 68. According to this article, German insurance policies generally excluded damage caused by riots and civil commotion, a practice that traced back to a Nazi order that declared such unrest nonexistent in Germany. While this somewhat simplifies a complicated development in insurance law, it is true that civil commotion insurance was discontinued by the Nazi authorities in 1934. However, this action did not create a legal obstacle to commercial insurance against damage by civil commotion. The Federal Insurance Supervisory Office visited the issue in response to the student protests in 1968 and upheld the conventional—but not categorical—exclusion of insurance liability in such cases because they were incalculable. See Karsten Friedrich, Der Rechtsbegriff der Versicherung und die Praxis des Versicherungsaufsichtsamts (Frankfurt, 1974), 90–91.
obstruction of the claimants’ business by violence of which the defendant . . . approved.” This approval made it irrelevant whether the defendant himself had caused the physical damage. This ruling reinforced the same basic interpretation as the Laepple verdict: obstructing or blockading something constituted violence. The BGH rejected all contrary rulings by courts of lower instance and similar opinions in the specialist literature in favour of limiting demonstrators’ right to blockade traffic or impede the delivery of newspapers. The judges stated explicitly that their ruling did not abridge the right to demonstrate by confronting the individual demonstrator with “unreasonable risks,” as the appeal had argued. The judges also assumed that the blockade ultimately amounted to “illegal censorship” of the press and that “permissibility of a limited use of violence” held “the danger of constantly increasing violence that would ultimately challenge the legal order as such.”

Heinz Düx, a judge on the Frankfurt Higher Regional Court, criticised the sentence against Mahler on the grounds that it “destroyed a livelihood” and was governed by the “political agenda of the administrators of justice, namely . . . hierarchically structured relations of power.” In this context, he did not consider the exertion of violence per se contrary to the law.

Mahler had neither thrown stones nor handled fire. He had been one of the first to enter Springer’s headquarters after the police cordon had been broken, for which he received a suspended criminal sentence of ten months plus the civil claim of seventy thousand deutsche marks. During the criminal case, Axel Springer was summoned as a witness and questioned by Mahler’s defence lawyer, Otto Schily. Mahler evaded his sentence by escaping to a military training camp in Jordan along with other members of the RAF. During the night of 7–8 March 1970, a few days after Springer’s first appearance in court, Molotov cocktails were hurled at the private home of Malte-Till Kogge, editor in chief of BZ, causing only minimal damage. The Sozialistische Büro in Offenbach raised the money for Amendt, who was accused of blockading a...
Springer print shop in Frankfurt. Throughout the following decade, authorities continued the legal practice of holding individual ringleaders responsible for the damage inflicted by large blockades and demonstrations and presenting them with claims for indemnification that were clearly beyond the financial reach of the average demonstrator. The strategy ended only in 1984, when the Federal Court of Justice stipulated that only demonstrators who had “actively” participated in “acts of violence” could be held accountable.

The question of culpability for violence during the anti-Springer campaign gained an additional dimension when part-time Kommune I member Peter Urbach was exposed as an agent of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutz). He had supplied Molotov cocktails that were used to set alight delivery vans at Springer’s Berlin headquarters as well as explosives and support in other contexts, although the extent of these activities has been disputed. His involvement raises interesting questions about the role of agents provocateurs in escalations of violence. Some observers have suggested that Urbach and possibly other still-unexposed secret service agents were responsible for the escalation of violence at the demonstrations. However, this explanation does not account for the development of simultaneous violent protests in multiple German cities. Writer and contemporary activist Peter-Paul Zahl saw the perpetuation of the Urbach story as a retrospective strategy of exculpation by former radical activist: “If one is a little bit honest and takes a look at the period between 2 June 67 and the summer of 68 . . . , then there really was the sort of thinking articulated by Meinhof: ‘From moral protest to armed resistance.'”

Contemporary comments and developments show that the differentiation between violence against things and violence against people was not suitable for dissociating oneself from violence. Quite the contrary, it identified objects—and thus the realm of consumption—as parts of much wider power structures that could be made visible by attacking these objects. This basic pattern for both concrete action and its theoretical legitimisation was developed further in various contexts over the coming decades.

Militants against Springer

In November 1969, agit 883 called Axel Springer an “exemplary fascist” who used a single act by an individual—in this case, the failed bomb attack against the West Berlin Jewish Community Centre on 9 November 1969—to criminalise and discredit the entire Left with the charge of violent antisemitism.\textsuperscript{99} The attack was highly controversial among the members of the radical left. While this commentary, although critical, tended to ignore the moral and political implications of an allegedly “anti-Zionist” attack on a German Jewish institution on the anniversary of the 1938 pogrom, it was right in pointing out that it had been a long-term rhetorical strategy of the Springer newspapers to equate the actions of student protesters with Nazi crimes. However, Agit 883 reciprocated in kind, thus continuing what had become a tradition in the heated exchange between protesters and Springer journalists: charging each other with fascism. The cover picture of Agit 883 showed an alarm clock at four minutes to twelve with the dial showing images of people whom the makers of the anarchist newspaper considered to be fascists: next to Axel Springer were the chief of staff of the Bundesluftwaffe, Johannes Steinhoff, who had been a fighter ace in World War II; and industrialist Friedrich Flick, who had been convicted of war crimes at the Nuremberg Trials and been sentenced to seven years in prison. The caption under this collage read, “The bomb continues to tick . . .”\textsuperscript{100}

Georg von Rauch, a founding member of the Tupamaros West-Berlin, also propagated the “destruction” of Springer in “Es lebe das Commando Schwarze Presse” (Long Live Operation Black Press), a document he wrote while imprisoned after beating up a journalist from the glossy magazine Quick (not a Springer publication, but similar in style). He embraced the “anarchist destruction” of the Springer conglomerate in conjunction with the “self-organisation of our black press.” He judged the SDS anti-Springer campaign ineffective since it merely involved analysis and political education. The revolutionary task was the “exemplary busting of a large corporation” like Springer using means that


\textsuperscript{100} Agit 883 41 (20 November 1969): 1. See Kraushaar, Bombe, 73–78. Kraushaar mistakenly attributes the cover to issue 42 of Agit 883. His interpretation is a bit one-sided as he emphasises the antisemitic components of the radical left-wing discourse on the failed bomb attack against the Jewish Community Centre but fails to acknowledge the Nazi past of some of the individuals Agit 883 was attacking. He thus misses the reciprocal character of the opposing accusations of fascism and the Radical Left’s rhetorical strategy of associating Springer with figures who had documented Nazi pasts.
would materially hurt it. At the same time, he wanted to build up channels of communication with Yasser Arafat’s Fatah and the Black Panthers.\textsuperscript{101}

In May 1972, the Red Armee Fraktion (RAF) bombed Springer’s Hamburg high-rise headquarters as part of its spring offensive. The attack on Springer was labelled Kommando 2. Juni and left thirty-six people injured, two of them severely. Despite the damage, which amounted to 336,000 deutsche marks, all of the Springer papers were published the following day, though some had reduced print runs.\textsuperscript{102} The statement of responsibility attempted to shift the blame by accusing Springer of failing to evacuate the premises after receiving a warning about the bomb. The statement did not mention issues of consumption but focused on what the RAF saw as Springer’s political agitation against communism, the Left, and Third World liberation movements, especially in Palestine.\textsuperscript{103} However, the RAF referred very explicitly to Springer in two earlier statements.

“The Urban Guerrilla Concept” mentioned Springer twelve times and Bild four times. It started out confronting left-wing “comrades” who denounced the RAF as “anarchist” and simultaneously distanced themselves from the terrorists. The RAF’s answer was curt: this notion of anarchism was no different from Springer journalism.\textsuperscript{104} When trying to explain their use of weapons in the freeing of Andreas Baader, the fugitive radicals wrestled with the “brutalised” image the Springer press painted of them.\textsuperscript{105} They praised the student movement for focusing on repression, with the “Springer campaign” as the first of six examples.\textsuperscript{106} The followers of Carlos Marighella and Mao Zedong


\textsuperscript{102} ID-Verlag, \textit{Rote Armee Fraktion}, 21; Kraushaar, “Kleinkrieg gegen einen Großverleger,” 2:1075–1116. Kraushaar’s article provides a lengthy account of various attacks on Springer premises. His use of the terms “war” and “bomb war” (\textit{Bombenkrieg}) to characterise the RAF attack is problematic. Kraushaar tends to avoid a close analysis of the RAF’s efforts to legitimise its bombings and thus misses the rather complicated interplay between different levels of discourse on violence that drove the process of escalation. Instead, he embraces a monocausal explanation of ideas that somehow inevitably led to terrorism.

\textsuperscript{103} Andreas Elter puts the RAF in the context of Islamic terrorism and diagnoses a “symbiosis” between RAF and Springer, which assured each other’s success. This leads to the question why Springer was so successful before the RAF and after its demise. Elter attempts to draw a direct link between symbolic and physical violence with reference to Holger Meins’s Molotov cocktail film, which does not do justice to a much more complex development. See Elter, \textit{Propaganda der Tat}, 103–6.

\textsuperscript{104} “Konzept Stadtguerilla,” 27.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 30.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 34–35.
claimed both the anti-Springer campaign and the Frankfurt squatters’ movement as direct precursors of their urban guerrilla concept, maintaining that it was “correct to link the distribution of socialist propaganda in factories with the act of preventing the distribution of Bild.” By recycling any awareness of the “perfidy of German life” into renewed perfidy, the Springer Corporation even appeared to be a successful competitor in the long-term project of unifying the working class. Together with public television channels and the Bayernkurier, the Springer Corporation featured as representative of a “fascist mode of exercising power.” The armed fighters of the RAF rejected the project of a left-wing counterpublic, which they considered to be too much in its infancy and at the mercy of an all-powerful opponent led by Springer: “There are no means of publication that are not controlled by capital, via advertising sales, as a result of the ambitions of the writers who want to write their way into the establishment, via the broadcasting councils, and via concentration on the press market. . . . Journalism is about one thing: sales—news a commodity; information a consumer product. Whatever isn’t suitable for consumption is bound to make them sick.”

A year later—about a month before the attack on Springer’s Hamburg headquarters—“Serve the People” made ample reference to the anti-Springer campaign, with the critical focus on information as consumption receding. Early in the document, the RAF denounced the critics who likened the group’s methods to ordinary crime as operating on the same level as “Bild and BZ.” Bild and the Second German Television channel (ZDF) were portrayed as turning information on poverty and misery into “fascism material” by criminalising the downtrodden. The analysis was more compact and subsumed the student movement after 1968 under broader attacks “against capitalist ownership,” which found a “point of friction in capitalist profiteering.” Anticapitalism now served as the key umbrella concept. The manifesto dedicated an entire page to “the Springer Press,” quoting approvingly from two unidentified and unreferenced passages from the 1968 anti-Springer campaign. The document

109. Ibid., 45.
110. Ibid., 43.
112. Ibid., 131.
113. Ibid., 132–33.
concluded that Springer forestalled the emergence of class consciousness by seemingly catering to the discontent of the masses, a strategy the RAF saw as analogous to that used by the Nazis in 1933. That Springer and Bild were “fascist” had become an unquestioned stereotype.\footnote{114}

In highlighting this attribute, the RAF found itself in good company, pointedly noting one fellow critic in particular: in January 1972, one of Germany’s foremost postwar writers, Heinrich Böll, had caused a political scandal by apparently siding with the RAF in the intellectual struggle against Springer. Writing in Der Spiegel, Böll sought to keep his critical distance from the ideas and methods of the militant rebels while putting their deeds into the perspective of German history and the principles of the rule of law. The RAF gleefully quoted the famous writer’s verdict on Springer’s journalistic treatment of the RAF’s December 1971 bank robbery during which a policeman had been killed: “This is no longer crypto-fascist . . . this is naked fascism. Incitement, lies, dreck. This form of demagoguery would not even be justified if the conjectures of the . . . police were to turn out true. . . . The headline ‘Baader-Meinhof Gang Continue to Murder’ is a call for lynch law.”\footnote{115}

Böll was not the first eminent writer to describe Springer as fascist. Günter Grass had already referred to “truly fascist methods” and “opinion terror” in September 1967, when Springer newspapers had published a forged letter in which writer Arnold Zweig had allegedly denounced the GDR.\footnote{116} Before the RAF’s major May 1972 offensive, Böll interpreted the group’s struggle as an attempt to alienate West Germans from their affluence: “I consider it psychologically hopeless to talk the petty bourgeoisie, workers, employees, civil servants . . . out of their relative affluence, given their frightful experience of two cases of complete inflation.” While he was perfectly right in this assessment of the vast majority of West Germans’ consumerist preferences, his criticism of people’s tendency to aim for an uncompromising and complete dissociation of the categories “criminal” and “political” is equally noteworthy.\footnote{117}

From then on, Böll was branded as a fellow traveller (Sympathisant) of the terrorists; the national television news service, Tagesschau, called him an “advocate of anarchist gangsters.”\footnote{118} In his defence, Böll blamed Springer journalism for its role in escalating violence during the student movement, cit-
ing the shootings of Ohnesorg and Dutschke. Böll continued his critical focus on Springer’s verbal violence in his 1974 novel, Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum oder: Wie Gewalt entstehen und wohin sie führen kann (The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum; or, How Violence Develops and Where It Can Lead). Böll was not the only prominent intellectual who sought to do some moral justice to the RAF despite condemning its use of violence. Journalist Sebastian Haffner was courageous enough to point out even after the RAF’s spring offensive that Springer journalism bore some responsibility for the escalation of violence: “No one has planted the seeds of violence as keenly as Springer journalism has.”

Till Meyer, a member of Movement 2 June, echoed Böll and Haffner. He saw Springer’s hate campaign against the student movement—“branding them as murderers, bandits, criminals par excellence”—at the root of much wider patterns of perception. He made this point while defending himself in court on charges of attempted murder for firing a shot shortly before his arrest. He asserted that killing a human being was absolutely contrary to all his political activism and convictions, which arose from a “humane value system”; however, the court and the Springer press met this value system—and, more broadly, any political motivation—with “total negation.”

Immediately after the May 1972 offensive, the RAF added another facet to its focus on Springer’s consumer journalism. Turning to the “comrades” in the K-Gruppen (avant-gardist small-scale communist organisations emanating from the dissolution of the SDS), they objected to the argument that the attack on Springer had not had the desired effect on workers, who already knew “that every day Bild was lying through its teeth.” The RAF countered by charging those comrades with a commodity approach to political communication: “To them the problem of communication [Vermittlung] presents itself like the Bild headline to the Springer journalist, as a problem of saleability and competition—the political content as a commodity, the masses as a market. . . . They consume what they pretend to fight.” The alternative to this consumption trap was armed resistance.

Consumption and Violence

The RAF’s applauding statement on the Black September organisation was the last time it extensively referred to Springer. This document used the enemy image of Springer in two respects: in the construction of an alleged fascist continuity, and in the context of recurring polemics against the New Left being taken in by Springer journalism. Hence they accused their erstwhile comrades—especially Oskar Negt—of opportunism, a petit bourgeois mentality, and, most important, loss of anti-imperialist consciousness. In the spirit of fascist continuity, the RAF strung together *Bild* headlines on German Olympic medals, the 1972 Munich Massacre, and an allusion to Goebbels’s famous speech on total war.

Although subsequent statements did not mention Springer so directly, the problem of media concentration remained high on the RAF’s anti-corporate agenda, as is demonstrated by a compilation of newspaper clippings and statistical data on West German media companies that the RAF prisoners kept in their files at Stuttgart’s Stammheim Prison.

Axel Springer, who had never been a Nazi but who employed several former high-ranking party members, was not personally targeted, although speculation about this possibility was rife, and he took ample safety precautions. He was heavily guarded at all times, and when travelling by car he was always escorted by at least two other vehicles. Paul Karl Schmidt, alias Paul Carell, whom Springer put in charge of his elaborate personal security, had been a high-ranking Nazi propagandist at Ribbentrop’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In August 1973, an arson attack on a stately guest house privately owned by Springer on the North Sea island of Sylt caused considerable damage but no injuries, and no culprit was ever identified. Seventeen months later, Axel Springer’s chalet in the Swiss Alps met a similar fate. In 2006, Swiss writer Daniel de Roulet confessed to having taken part in the arson in the mistaken belief that Springer had been a Nazi.

---

125. Ibid., 159.
126. Ibid., 167.
130. Ibid., 1109–10; Daniel de Roulet, *Ein Sonntag in den Bergen: Ein Bericht* (Zürich, 2006). Kraushaar makes a lot of this literary source: “Seine späte Beichte ermöglicht es, wohl besser als
Apart from these clandestine attacks on Springer’s properties, no major street protest activities emerged during the remainder of the 1970s. Springer, however, remained an archenemy of the radical Left. A flyer from the early squatters’ movement in Hamburg listed three main targets of political attack, with Springer preceding both the Hamburg government and the hated trade-union-owned housing society, Neue Heimat. More important for popularising critiques of the media mogul was undercover journalist Günter Wallraff, who worked as an editor for Bild for four months in 1977 and subsequently published three widely read book-length indictments of the dubious practices he encountered. In 1981, literary eminences Grass, Wolf Biermann, and Uwe Johnson joined an “Anti-Springer-Forum” that declared, “We don’t work for Springer newspapers.”

The Revival of Anti-Springer Activism in the Context of the Peace Movement

A blockade of Springer premises took place in October 1983 during large-scale protests across Europe against the implementation of the NATO double-track decision. An “action week” of the peace movement in Hamburg, including blockades of the American barracks at Bremerhaven, was supplemented by protesters blockading Springer’s Hamburg headquarters and the Rothfos coffee company. Action against the latter was not directly related to the issue of NATO weapons but sought to address “the blood in El Salvadorian coffee.”

The blockade of coffee deliveries remained a small-scale event without disturbances, but on 22 October, after a peace demonstration with several hundred thousand participants, an evening demonstration of several thousand organised by the Grüne-Alternative-Liste (GAL), Hamburg’s branch of the Green Party, in conjunction with some twenty smaller organisations, including autonomist

je zuvor Einblicke in die Anti-Springer-Psychologie eines Brandstifters zu bekommen.” However, he does not really reflect on the methodological problems posed by Roulet’s confession, which was written thirty years after the arson, which itself occurred almost three years after the RAF’s attack on Springer.

132. See Wallraff, Aufmacher; Wallraff, Zeugen der Anklage; Wallraff, BILD-Handbuch.
133. Seitenbecher, Deutschen “Cäsar” bezwingen, 100; Kruip, “Welt”-“Bild” des Axel Springer Verlags, 261.
groups, set out to prevent the delivery of the Sunday issue of Bild. During the confrontation between demonstrators and police, shop windows were smashed, barricades were built, and the police were attacked with cobblestones, bottles, incendiary devices, and iron bars. An office furniture store was looted, and private cars were set afire. The police cleared the way for the Sunday newspapers using water cannons, truncheons, and plainclothes officers mingling with the demonstrators. Both police and demonstrators suffered injuries. The Springer Company organised a cold buffet for police commanders.

Attacks inflicting some damage on the private homes of three Berliner Morgenpost journalists, including chief editor Johannes Otto, during the run-up to the Hamburg blockade remained isolated and did not figure prominently in the ensuing debates. A letter claiming responsibility for the attacks on the journalists’ homes invoked the concept of Gleichschaltung (forcible coordination in Nazi Germany) and lamented Springer’s political partiality in launching “character assassination, denunciation, and smear campaigns” against anything with even the remotest appearance of originating on the political left. These small-scale attacks on private homes resembled earlier Revolutionäre Zellen (RZ) campaigns. Another incident in November 1982 in which four young people set fire to newspaper delivery vans also attracted little media attention.

An analysis of the organisation of the 1983 blockade campaign reveals that memories of 1968 and especially the issue of violence figured prominently. The idea of including Springer in blockade activities originated with the German Communist Party (DKP), which then lamented that the GAL hijacked the concept, apparently to add variation to the protest forms of the peace movement and to revive the spirit of extraparliamentary protest. The DKP and the trade
unions subsequently kept their distance from the Springer blockade, as they had fifteen years earlier. The organisers of the ensuing Blockadeplenum (plenary meeting on blockades) foresaw violence chiefly in the context of the campaign against Springer. Blockading American barracks was seen as a clear-cut instance of civil resistance likely to encounter politically restrained police measures. However, the scenario of Easter 1968 and the expectation that police and the drivers of delivery vans would use extreme measures to break the blockade as a result of the “high economic significance of the newspaper deliveries,” led the protesters to aim for more moderate goals—that is, to retard rather than prevent delivery of the papers. Members of the organising committee and the competing wings of the GAL differed about whether to use improvised barricades and sabotage or a classic sit-in blockade “without damage to private property.” The issue of nonviolence emerged as a central bone of contention, highlighting a rift in the protest movement. Organisers agreed, however, that they wanted to prevent fatalities and avoid fire and occupation as means of protest.

The political goal was to highlight “ideological preparations for war.” From this perspective, Springer newspapers produced enemy images and engaged in warmongering (Kriegshetze). Moreover, they tried to discredit the peace movement as “Moscow’s fifth column” while glorifying various military campaigns around the world and the militarisation of domestic society via recruits’ swearing-in ceremonies or military flying displays: “Thus the real wars in the ‘Third World’—waged in the service of the moral concepts of the ‘Free West’ and the freedom of capital development—become everyday occurrences, delivered to your home.” The leftist newspaper taz printed a photo montage using Joe Rosenthal’s Pulitzer Prize–winning World War II photograph Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima with the American flag replaced by a copy of Bild. The appointment of Peter Boehnisch, editor in chief of Bild in 1968,
as spokesperson for the federal government demonstrated the close ties between Helmut Kohl’s government and Axel Springer. The revival of the anti-Springer campaign was supported by Wallraff, who called Springer’s newspapers “journalistic missile bases” and pointed out that more than three hundred thousand Germans had signed calls to boycott Springer.

In comparison with the original Springer blockade fifteen years earlier, press commentary on the more localised events in Hamburg was less shrill and sensational. Opinion was also less divided: the vast majority of observers seemed agreed in their outright condemnation of violence and in their support of the abstract principle of peace. An interesting political division emerged from discussions of violence at peace demonstrations. Those who were adamant that no use of any internal violence (other than by state authorities) could be tolerated were most inclined to consider the deployment of external military means of violence (that is, midrange nuclear missiles) a legitimate measure. Conversely, those who seemed most sceptical about the legitimacy of nuclear armament were more prone to consider the application of limited and directed violence—that is, forms of civil disobedience—as means of domestic political communication. This arrangement informed a prominent argument in strategies of legitimisation: “What is a blockade (or a stone) compared to an atomic bomb?” Opponents attempted to remove this stance from the political stage—for example, a CDU member of the Hamburg parliament declared that anyone engaging in civil disobedience “departed from the community of the democrats.”

Attempts to theorise violence did not figure prominently in the mainstream political discourse of the early 1980s. In fact, the actual motives of the militant protesters were often unclear, and they were now generically called Chaoten, a derogatory term deriving from “chaos” that might be translated as “lunatic fringe.” Issues of press concentration or the role of Springer publishing in consumer society featured little in the public debate. Some political controversy arose over the merger of the publishing houses Springer and Burda earlier that year, which the Cartel Authority had limited to Burda acquiring 24.9 percent of Springer’s limited liability capital, but this aspect seems not...

147. See, for example, “Perschau warnt vor der Gefahr von links,” Hamburger Abendblatt, 26 October 1983, 3.
to have had a major impact on protest activities, which were dominated by the politics of the peace movement. Overall, the second campaign was less intellectual than its precursor. Both anti-Springer campaigns enjoyed rather limited success in terms of direct impact on their foe and its commercial success. Despite some temporary declines in profits during the 1970s, Springer’s tabloids continued to dominate the market. When deeming these campaigns successful, oppositional groups praised the raising of awareness, which helped to mobilise protest movements and to provoke reactions by the authorities that could be turned against them politically, not least concerning the issue of violence.

The latter can be seen in the context of two overlapping points of controversy emerging in the aftermath of the 1983 Springer blockade. The first involved the GAL’s position on violence.\footnote{Welche Rolle spielte die GAL,” \textit{taz}, 7 January 1983, 4.} The party was blamed for the emergence of violence and in this respect found itself in a similar position as the SDS fifteen years earlier. However, the GAL faced a trickier situation, since its agenda was not openly revolutionary, like that of the SDS. Since June 1982, the GAL held eight seats in the Hamburg parliament, where the party’s loyalty to a peaceful political process was constantly questioned. Party leaders faced a difficult balancing act between trying to unite the protest movement, including militant and autonomist groups, and defending their democratic credentials against criticism from the established parties. The established parties also increasingly constructed the autonomists, generally seen as advocating violence, as politically taboo.\footnote{Pawelczyk legt jetzt Beweise auf den Tisch,” \textit{Hamburger Abendblatt}, 26 October 1983, 3; “Pawelczyk zur Springerblockade: Mit gebotener Härte,” \textit{taz-Hamburg}, 26 October 1983, 16.} In November 1983, Hamburg’s minister of the interior, Alfons Pawelczyk (SPD), explicitly presented the Greens with a demand that would come to haunt them: “To distance themselves from every form of violence. The monopoly on violence lies solely with the state.”\footnote{‘GAL soll sich von Gewalt distanzieren,’” \textit{Hamburger Abendblatt}, 24 November 1983, 7.}

Police and the domestic secret service (\textit{Verfassungsschutz}), which was increasingly concerned with political demonstrations, assumed that more than one thousand of the six thousand participants in the evening demonstration were “perpetrators of violence” (\textit{Gewalttäter}) and that four hundred of them had acted spontaneously, whilst the others had travelled to the event with the intention of inciting violence. Five protesters faced charges of severe violation of the public peace (\textit{schwerer Landfriedensbruch}), which could result in up to ten years in jail. The \textit{Hamburger Abendblatt} emphasised that these people did not have jobs but lived on state benefits. Since the GAL had officially registered the demonstration, the question of responsibility assumed not only political and moral dimensions but also a tangible legal dimension in terms of
liability for damage. The manager of the looted furniture store told the *Hamburger Abendblatt* that the business was considering sending a bill of fifteen thousand deutsche marks to the GAL to cover the damage; cleanup might add another eighty-five hundred deutsche marks to the total.\(^{153}\) A political demonstration was thus turned into a question of consumption—in this case, destruction—and its costs. The journal of the Kommunistischer Bund (KB), one of the most important K-Gruppen, which supported the GAL, ironically called the latter an “umbrella organisation for Hamburg’s looters.”\(^{154}\)

The second important debate—partly driven by the GAL as a counterofensive against these charges and perhaps to legitimise their role in the demonstration—involves the plainclothes police force. There were complaints about the brutality of these officers; because they were undercover, it was extremely difficult to control their conduct and to identify or prosecute them if they exceeded their authority. The KB argued that plainclothes police officers had acted with “terrorist brutality” in beating up demonstrators. The undercover officers were supposed to concentrate on demonstrators considered to be violent, giving them wide leeway in defining who met this criterion. The strategy also put pressure on protesters and critics to distance themselves from violent means and to acknowledge the state monopoly on violence.\(^{155}\) The GAL alleged in the Hamburg parliament that plainclothes officers had thrown stones, acting as agents provocateurs, and then beating up innocent demonstrators.\(^{156}\) The *Hamburger Abendblatt*, conversely, reported proudly that all of the officers were “trained in jiu-jitsu or karate. Many of them have the black master belt.”\(^{157}\)

To its critics, Springer appeared to be an ideological affirmation of affluence and of West Germany’s postwar “economic miracle.” Theoretical analysis sought to unmask tabloid journalism and its control of the advertisement market as a hypercommodity serving as a necessary lubricant of the capitalist system. The concrete protests—especially those at Easter 1968 after the assassination attempt on Dutschke—blamed Springer for inciting violence against the students and their leaders, focusing on newspapers as tangible commodities


and seeking to hobble their distribution network by blockading print shops and delivery vans. The critical emphasis on Konsumjournalismus (consumer journalism) was shared by prominent intellectuals such as Böll and Grass. Ultimately, the campaign neither seriously jeopardised its archenemy’s dominance of the newspaper market nor substantially changed tabloid journalism.

The notion of manipulation was central to the anti-Springer campaign and its critique of press concentration. Much recent scholarship has moved away from simple notions of manipulation concerning the products of so-called cultural industries. Scholars have argued that consumers should not be reduced to passive victims of manipulation, and many contemporary activists embraced ideas from Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” and later from the works of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies to establish the possibility of a politicised subversion of the cultural industries. While these intellectual developments probably diminished the attraction of manipulationist positions in the larger discourse of cultural politics on the left, they did not really lessen the pertinence of critiques of media concentration and its political repercussions. Critiques of Springer’s press empire emerged just as naturally as they did in the case of other press barons such as Hugenberg, Murdoch, and Berlusconi. The anti-Springer campaign went beyond crude manipulationism by embracing its own alternative or countercultural forms of media manipulation. An understanding of media manipulation as a communicative technique of favouring particular interests that can be used by any political persuasion will do more justice to the anti-Springer campaign’s origins in Springer’s manifest media manipulation (as, for example, in the Blinkfüier case) and in contemporary legal practice vis-à-vis boycotts and blockades.

More than any other issue of the student movement, the anti-Springer blockades made demands on legal scholars, lawyers’ associations, and courts, which had to take a stand on questions that were far more complicated and controversial than they sometimes seem in retrospective accounts that simply dismiss the protests as violent. Before the student protests, almost no jurisprudential literature dealt with the relation between offences inflicted by crowds and the basic rights of freedom of opinion and freedom of speech. Contemporary jurisprudential comments critical of the Laepple verdict’s wide concept of violence gradually influenced the legal opinions offered in commentaries, textbooks, and subsequent judgments. The interpretation of relevant norms like

---

Auflauf (section 116 StGB, the remaining together of a crowd after the authorities thrice bid it disperse), Landfriedensbruch (section 125 StGB, breach of the public peace), or Nötigung (section 240 StGB, coercion) posed dogmatic questions and necessitated a notable reformulation of the legal notion of violence.160 Consumer protest was so crucial to the controversial debates on how to treat new forms and ways of protest under existing criminal law because it touched on two potentially conflicting pillars of the law: the protection of private property and commerce, on the one hand, and the safeguarding of civil and political rights, on the other. Liberal-minded jurists considered the wording of the paragraphs Auflauf and Landfriedensbruch no longer timely in the context of the Basic Law—the Strafgesetzbuch, originated in 1870—for infringing too heavily on the right of assembly. While some merely wanted to change the scope of discretion, others believed that these norms ran counter to the Basic Law. Quite a few lawyers considered the protests to be new aspects of political life. In their opinion, criminal penalties would have to break new theoretical ground. New forms of protest such as sit-ins or blockades needed new legal categories. A number of lawyers considered the sit-in an exemplar of nonviolent resistance that should not under any circumstances be judged as Landfriedensbruch.161 In the long term, these dissenting opinions triggered a shift in legal conception that conceded a higher priority to freedom of assembly vis-à-vis state authority by no longer automatically assessing crowds and gatherings outside registered demonstrations as punishable threats to public life.162 However, from the late 1960s to the mid-1990s, the higher courts stuck to a more restrictive interpretation, often overruling courts of original jurisdiction.163 From this perspective, the BGH’s Laepple verdict was a compromise in that it assumed the mental violence of Nötigung while denying the physical violence of Landfriedensbruch.

160. See Andreas Roth, Kollektive Gewalt, 204–6; Drescher, Genese und Hintergründe.
162. Ibid., 169–70.
163. Ibid., 204.