Baschwitz’s second book aimed at a larger audience was to be about the freedom of the press, and *The newspaper through the ages*. Although it was nominally a history covering the entire western world, it more specifically reflected his experiences, feelings, and views about the role of the press in the unstable Weimar Republic between the end of the First World War and Hitler’s coming to power. During those days, many thought that controlling of one or more major daily newspapers would also bring control over large swaths of public opinion and thus a receptive electorate. Baschwitz was in a good position to observe this power play, in which governments and parties, banks and conglomerates, tried to capture audiences – and then turn them into electorates.

**Wider historical context: The Weimar Republic**

The war marked the end of an era, and the end of all four great Central and East European empires: Germany and Austria-Hungary, of course, but also Tsarist Russia and Ottoman Turkey. Each of these empires had been led by more-or-less authoritarian hereditary rulers, whose legitimacy had long been accepted without question, both at home or abroad. By contrast, the end of the war marked the further consolidation of the Atlantic empires: colonial Britain and France, of lesser countries along the coast, as well as the newly emerging informal empire of the United States.

Just before the armistice of 11 November 1918, the German chancellor had removed the Emperor, thus creating a de facto Republic. The seat of the head of state was temporarily transferred from the militaristic Prussian Potsdam of the *Kaiser* (next to Berlin) to the quiet Thuringian Weimar ‘of Goethe and Schiller’ – a reference to the other, more ‘humanistic’ side of German civilization. Meanwhile, mutinies and revolts broke out all around.

The day after the opening of the fateful Versailles conference, there were elections for a constitutional assembly in Germany. The social-democratic SPD got 37.9 percent of the vote; its former left wing, USPD (which subsequently evolved into a communist party) got another 7.6 percent. The Catholic centre party got almost 19.7 percent, the secular left liberal DDP 18.6 percent, and the right liberal DVP only 4.4 percent. The national
conservative DNVP got only 10.3 percent at this point. After a purely left-progressive government soon failed, the Weimar Republic was governed by varying coalitions with some kind of liberal support.

Liberals (like the aforementioned sociologist Max Weber) played a key role in the writing of the Weimar constitution. Before the war, Baschwitz had sympathized with the progressive left-liberal party. In the chaos after the war, however, he instead felt gradually more attracted to the more conservative right-liberal party (of Gustav Stresemann and others). But the quick succession of Weimar crises ultimately killed Baschwitz’s cherished liberalism entirely.

It took several months – perhaps more than a year – for the disastrous consequences of the Versailles Treaty of 28 June 1919 to sink in, for both German politicians and the general public. The empire had faded by then, and the republic was blamed for the catastrophe. The new reality soon began to destabilize the fragile Weimar Republic, and continued to do so in successive stages.

Workers in Berlin, Munich, and elsewhere had already tried to stage revolutions and declare Soviet-type regimes, but these were soon put down by bloody repression. Former army leaders like Ludendorff in turn claimed that the ‘almost victorious’ army had been ‘stabbed in the back’ by the capitulationist Weimar politicians and businessmen on the home front – particularly the Jews. Veterans in Berlin, Munich, and elsewhere tried to stage coups, but failed. There were regular street battles between left and right-wing militias; top statesmen were assassinated. There were a total of 376 political murders, and these largely went unpunished.

The first half of the 1920s were presided over by the Catholic social-democrat Friedrich Ebert; the second half by the Prussian Junker (and former army leader) Paul von Hindenburg. The allies had initially demanded the latter’s extradition as a ‘war criminal’ along with the Kaiser, but many Germans persisted in venerating him as a ‘war hero’ instead. The longer the chaos lasted, the more there was a broadening call for a ‘true’ leader and a ‘strong’ regime.

Being used to single power-holders at the top of clearly vertical organizations, people found it hard to accommodate to the new, more diffuse horizontal structures. In political psychology, this became known as the struggle for a Vaterlose Gesellschaft, a society without a father figure, who could provide the symbolic and psychological illusion of cohesion. Many longed for a charismatic leader.1

1 At the time, Freud and a range of Freudians published a number of tentative essays and books on these matters. More in my article ‘The killing of the father’, Political psychology, Vol. 5
Hamburg at the time of Baschwitz’s return

With the end of the war and the empire, Baschwitz was recalled from Rotterdam to Hamburg in late January of 1919. As a foreign correspondent, he had worked alone. He returned to the editorial staff of the newspaper, but also to the once-great main seaport of giant Germany, which was now in clear decline. The British naval blockade, which was maintained for another half year, contributed to widespread unemployment, poverty, and even starvation – which was painfully visible everywhere. Food scarcity, food tampering and food riots were a recurring phenomenon.

Baschwitz knew that since the second year of the war, bread had been rationed. Thereafter, it had gradually been replaced by an unsavoury dark Kriegsbrot, or war bread. During the next winter, potatoes were gradually replaced by Kohlrüben, or turnips. Meat consumption dropped by half, as did that of milk, fats, and other proteins, as well as the average calorie intake. Emaciated women, children, and elders gradually became more vulnerable to disease.

The tuberculosis rate doubled. Dysentery, scurvy, rickets, and hunger oedema became widespread and were highly visible. The influenza epidemic at the end of the war had hit Germany particularly hard: Berlin alone had reported 1,700 victims on a single day in the weeks preceding the armistice. Vitality and productivity dropped sharply. Suicides went up – often of adult mothers with small children they were unable to feed.²

Studies showed that the brain and mental development of youngsters became impaired. Adults lost their faith in national and international justice. In a famous but contested study, a well-known American psychoanalyst later noted that these were the childhood years of the later Hitler Jugend – the Führer’s ‘youth movement’. He mentioned ‘the prolonged absence of the parents, the return of the father in defeat, extreme hunger and privation, and a national defeat in war, which meant the loss of the prevailing political authority and left no viable replacement with which to identify’.³

Yet at this point in time, there was still hope for the rapid amelioration of these problems and a better future. In Hamburg, the first post-war elections in the spring of 1919 brought a clear majority of no less than 50.5 percent of the vote to the social democratic party SPD, with another 8.1 percent

² Numbers and details f.i. in Vincent.
³ Loewenberg. More in Vincent, p. 150, 156 a.o.
to its former left-wing USPD. So – to the horror of Baschwitz and other liberals – the total was close to sixty percent for ‘The Reds’.

**Hunger and food riots**

A few days before the signing of the Versailles treaty, which would finally begin to lead to some relief, there was a revolutionary explosion in Hamburg of the type that was to be the focus of Baschwitz’s later book *Du und die Masse* (*You and the mass*). It came to be known as the *Sülze-unruhen* (the unrest about brawn or ‘headcheese’: various minor and less attractive pieces of meat in a jelly).

One producer had recommended this product for its ‘great nutritional value’ and ‘delicate taste’. But when a barrel fell from a cart and burst, bystanders were appalled by the unseemly sight of the yellowish decaying mush. They broke into the workshop and reportedly found hints that rats, cats, and dogs had been included in the mix. Apart from the manufacturer, the protesters also blamed a lack of oversight by the old and the new authorities.4

In his later book on mobs and riots, *Du und die Masse*, Baschwitz described this scene:

A group of excited people gained access to a small butchery in the city centre and maltreated the owner and some of his personnel. Because they had supposedly put repulsive ingredients in [the food] – these were the days of surrogates for many food products. A procession of no more than thirty or forty persons – mostly loudmouth youngsters – moved through the business district for hours on end.

They dragged along a cart with an elderly man, whom they constantly threatened and maltreated. A sign hung around his neck said that he was the foreman of the shop in question. No one acted to protect him: neither the police, nor people from the crowds that continued to stream through the streets. They witnessed the scene with partially fearful and partially indifferent looks, before taking up their own affairs again.

In other words, the bystanders were reticent to get involved.

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When the several small groups found out that they could enter offices, houses, and public buildings with impunity, and bark harsh orders, this whole activity crystallized into a plan to occupy the City Hall – the seat of the government that steadily warned against such ‘one-sided actions’.

The defenders of the City Hall, two platoons of Bahrenfelder volunteers, soon saw themselves in the same situation as that upon the storming of the Bastille [in 1789 revolutionary Paris]. They, too, only had provisions for one day. The attackers had armed themselves with rifles, which members of the useless ‘civil guard’ had allowed them to take away without resistance.

Meanwhile life just went on around them, Baschwitz repeated:

There was a coming and going of curious people, the turning up and leaving of armed men. Some fired from behind the rungs of the spectators. For fear of causing a bloodbath among the crowd of onlookers, the defenders felt held to frustrating prudence. Other attackers fired with ordinary and machine guns from the windows and skylights of neighbouring houses.

But in the end, it was all a futile exercise, Baschwitz wrote:

The hours-long shooting match could not really harm the defenders, who were well-trained militarily. But they did not need to count on reinforcements or other outside help. In the end, they entered into negotiations about an armistice, let themselves be disarmed – half taken by surprise – and subsequently marched off in formation. On their way, a number of them were maltreated, wounded, or killed in the streets crawling with people. Most retreated to safety. So the new power-holders of the city-state of Hamburg ruled within the ‘stormed’ City Hall.

However, the situation was reversed after only a week, Baschwitz added. On 1 July, the front page of his own Hamburger Fremdenblatt had a headline across the front page about the entry of troops into the city. Similar leftist uprisings, street-fights, right-wing coups, and assassinations recurred throughout the country during the first few years of the Weimar regime – and the restoration of republican order always seemed to be merely provisional. This was the dire situation of the exhausted nation to which Baschwitz had returned.5

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5 The elaborate scene description is taken from three lively pages in his Du und die Masse: slightly condensed and translated literally from the second Dutch edition, p. 105-107. It is not
Baschwitz’s marriage and family

What about his personal life? Kurt Baschwitz had officially been baptized at 29: after the war had already started, but before he left for Rotterdam. The Evangelical Lutheran church was the major protestant denomination in Germany. It is not entirely clear whether this step was related to the dating of Erna Luise Erika Thiessen-Temmel and some kind of informal betrothal, or whether those only happened upon his return from Rotterdam. She was a minor actress, pianist, and concert singer from Berlin.6

His papers still have an envelope with a number of silly doggerel verses or little poems he wrote for, and gave to, Erika during these years. Or even three different variations on the same theme, like that of the ‘green vase’ – in which the flowers that he brought home for her every now and then landed.

Sieh Erika, mein Blumenstrauß/ Schaut schüchtern aus dem Väschen aus/ So lieblich ist es fast wie Du/ Und winkt Dir tausend Wünsche zu.

(‘See, Erika, my flower bouquet/ Timidly looks from the little vase/ Almost as lovely as you/ And signals a thousand greetings.’)

They did not have time for a long courtship. So they married on 25 September 1919, eight months after his return from Rotterdam, in a church ceremony in Hamburg. According to one expert, such ‘mixed’ marriages had become very common. Some 60 percent of marriages in Hamburg and 44 percent in Berlin reportedly took place between ethnic Jews and ‘Aryans’.7

entirely clear here whether Baschwitz was himself present at part of the events, spoke to eyewitnesses, or used written reports from his own and other newspapers. It is clear, however, that it was one of the few contemporary mob scenes that directly helped inspire his later pivotal book.

6 There may have been some kind of informal betrothal. His eldest daughter Gisela said (in the long JHM video interview to which we will return, approximately at minute 10 a.f.), that he was baptized ‘because he wanted to marry in church’. His later release form from the Westerbork transit camp (to which we will also return) even said that he had not only been baptized in 1915, but had actually married in that year.

7 According to a study by Dutch eugenics expert Marianne van Herwerden, quoted in an article by Dutch physical anthropologist Machteld Roede, herself the author of a book on the question of race. NRC De Week, 3 August 2015.
These were, no doubt, among the happiest years of his life. For her first birthday with him, on 11 April 1920, he wrote: ‘I cannot give you (bank) notes, just a few poems – what else can a writer-man do?’ One poem said:

‘Ich danke ihr für das halbe Jahr/
Das für uns beide so glücklich war/
Und das uns als Ausblick fürs fernere Leben/
Die Hoffnung der schönsten Zukunft geben’.

(‘Thank you for the half year/
That was so happy for us both/
And as a perspective on the rest of life/
Makes us hope for a wonderful future.’)
They had three children in quick succession. The eldest son, Horst, was born in 1920; the eldest girl, Gisela, was born in 1922; the youngest girl, Rotraut, was born in 1923. Unfortunately, all three grew up during the years in which the Nazis gradually came to power and during the subsequent crisis and war. Each was affected by these dramatic events and their consequences at different stages of their development, and developed different and sometimes conflicting personalities. I will return to their stories.

One family picture shows Erika as a young mother, seated, with her son almost cheek-to-cheek. The eldest daughter is serious, and looking up to her elder brother. The youngest daughter is distracted, a bow in her hair. Most of what we know about the everyday personal life of Kurt and his family comes from the middle child, Gisela. Through a concurrence of circumstances, to which I will return, she later also became a ‘noteworthy’ person for the larger world. She thus gave a number of interviews in her later life. At the age of 73, she even gave an almost three-hour long, videotaped one, from which I will frequently quote.

She said her father had once told her he believed in God, but not ‘in the way that children do’. Religion did not play a major role at home, not even for their mother. The eldest two children received a Christian education, but according to Gisela this was only so that they would be admitted into an ‘ordinary’ (by which she apparently meant Christian) school. They started the day with prayers there, she said, were told great stories from the bible, and all of the Baschwitz children got good grades. They were an ordinary, middle class German family.

Fall-out from Versailles: The hyper-inflation of 1922-3

The earlier optimism over the end of the war and the change of regime had long faded. To support his young family, Baschwitz and a colleague tried to earn some extra money by offering their services as ‘cramming’ coaches for students at the newly founded Hamburg University.8

Meanwhile, the government had not been able to find the billions of gold marks for the war reparations that had been imposed on it. As soon as it had marginally fallen behind on a minor delivery of telephone poles, France and Belgium resumed hostilities, striking at the key mining-and-industry

8 Newspaper announcement, also reproduced in Ebels-Dolanová, opposite p. 51.
areas across the border – further adding to the general sense of frustration and anger.

France and Belgium invaded and unilaterally occupied the Ruhr area; the Allies had already given the other adjacent areas an exceptional status. The Weimar regime initially tried to solve this problem by printing extra money – which of course made it rapidly lose value. In the spring of 1923 it already cost 21 thousand marks to buy a single dollar; by autumn of the same year this had risen to the astronomical sum of 4.2 trillion.9

Of course, this translated into a dire social situation, including for the young Baschwitz family. One overview sums up: ‘The middle classes lost all their savings in the inflation, but the government could not afford any compensation. Pay in the civil service was reduced to way below the pre-war levels. The vast majority of the pensioners were ruined’.

Labour was heavily affected as well:

9 Herein lies the origin of the German obsession with controlling inflation, revived time and again thereafter, and persisting to this very day – in recent times even affecting the European Union, European Bank, and Euro policies.
The ranks of the unemployed swelled alarmingly. Average real wages fell to a mere seventy percent of pre-war levels. Malnourishment and illness continued to be widespread under the early Weimar regime. Therefore, the state was totally discredited in the eyes of those millions who had patriotically bought war bonds and other government paper. The republicans had first stabbed the country in the back, then robbed the little man of his savings. This was fertile soil in which radical political movements could readily take root.  

This was the dire situation that was reflected in the tone of Baschwitz’s first real book for a larger public. As we have already seen, Kurt had spent the years immediately after his return to Germany reworking his observations about the war and the unjust peace into a book about the dynamics of war propaganda and enemy images: *Der Massenwahn*. Apparently, his discussion resonated with the general atmosphere of disappointed patriotism that had spread through the entire country; it was soon sold out and had to be reprinted that same year.

The first two editions of *Der Massenwahn* carried a somewhat grand personal dedication:

The battle ranks of men have been broken. Now the women stand in the midst of the struggle, like in prehistoric days. The war after the war hits caring mothers, the most impacted group, in a form that entirely wears them down. Their unsung silent everyday heroism defends the survival of the German home, and saves the spiritual values over the years that defence fails the German homeland. This book is dedicated to one in the army of companions-in-distress, never failing in loyalty and courage – Erika.  

**Leaving Hamburg, amidst early warnings from Munich**

The unexpected success of this first book may have contributed to Baschwitz’s decision to leave Hamburg, which seemed to be fading from its former promise, as the Allies had confiscated much of the German fleet and imposed restrictions on its rebuilding.

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11 Quoted here from the first page of the second 1923 edition.
The actual move, with three very young children in tow, must have been burdensome, particularly for his wife. But she may also have looked forward to resume her artistic career, by returning to Berlin. For both, it would be a step up the ladder to move to the resurging nation’s capital. So Baschwitz took leave of his paper after fifteen years, on friendly terms.

His boss Broschek wrote a nice letter of recommendation to a later employer, hailing Baschwitz’s empathy and quick understanding, his good manners and easy cooperation. A week before the end of his contract, Baschwitz in turn addressed two of his trademark tongue-in-cheek doggerel verses to his colleagues. One, of 12 lines, was for ‘the high editors’ about the ongoing feuilleton (or soap opera) of ‘high politics’; another, of 14 lines, was for those lower in the pecking order, ‘below the line’. It was time to embark on the next phase of their life.12

But dark clouds were gathering. In the wake of the war, followed by a steady succession of economic, social, and political crises, anti-Semitism had begun to rise again. Its prime focus was Jews’ supposed ethnicity; religion played only a secondary role. A rabbi recommended a 1924 brochure by Baschwitz’s thesis supervisor on anti-Semitism to the public. It discussed the social history of the phenomenon, and concluded it would probably fade away as Jews gradually assimilated and would no longer be seen as quintessential ‘Others’.13

There was a general feeling that the country’s parties and unions and associations would prove able to contain the dark forces of the crowds. But in his later book on mass psychology, Du und die Masse, Baschwitz himself wrote:

The theoretical claims, which had always taught that one had to put one’s hope in the organized masses which kept their common sense, fell silent – when the suddenly swelling rush to the Hitler movement in meetings and on the streets became noticeable. Here one saw an organization with a disciplined structure, that openly and emphatically swore off logical consultation and systematically encouraged the wild passions of the masses.

12 The Broschek testimony is in a file with another recommendation letter for his later job at the Zeitungs-Verlag, along with other official papers and diplomas. These are in a special file among the last batch of personal and confidential papers that his biographer Vera Ebels-Dolanová got from his youngest daughter – but only later. They were added to the Baschwitz archives in the Amsterdam University special collections in 2015. The doggerel verses are also reproduced in Ebels’ master’s thesis, opposite pages 76–77.

13 Brentano.
Baschwitz continued: ‘It emerged in peacetime, after the immediate consequences of war and revolution had been overcome, it apparently grew as a result of mass propaganda, which conceded with unprecedented candour and indifference its correspondence with the darkest theories of the first mass psychologists – primarily those of [the earlier Frenchman] Le Bon’.  

A roving reporter for the liberal Amsterdam newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* – which Baschwitz later came to favour – warned in turn: ‘I recently heard Hitler. For three full hours I heard him say things of which only a very small percentage sounded sympathetic to me. Yet I was not bored for a moment. And rarely have I seen a crowd of a thousand so spellbound by an orator, and react so well – just like the little man on the stage wanted’.

The journalist warned whoever loathed Hitler’s theories ‘that this young guy is a verbal wizard and a mass psychologist of a very exceptional quality – and that such people can do more with crowds than all politicians writing thick and scientific books taken together’.  

Yet, after U.S. banker Charles Dawes engineered temporary American loans, the situation had seemed to quiet down somewhat around the mid-twenties.

**A Weimar press torn between ideology and finance**

In contrast to Great Britain and France, Germany had long lacked national unity and a truly national capital. In the half-century since the formation of the Empire, however, both had grown at double speed. Since the Prussian capital had become the German capital, greater Berlin had quickly swelled to well over four million inhabitants, suddenly making it one of the very largest of the European metropolises.

Berlin harboured the old elites alongside the new rich, blue collar workers alongside the unemployed – a proletariat receptive to revolutionary ideas. But it also had classical and avant-garde art museums, as well as many brand new cinemas and musical theatres. Some called it a *Spree-Athen* (Athens on the Spree river), others a *Fassaden-Babel* (a Babylon of façades). One

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14 *Du und die Masse*, quoted from the second edition, Part I, Chapter 4 (p. 35-36 in the second Dutch edition). It was later shown that large parts of *Mein Kampf* were in fact paraphrases of Le Bon (Stein).

of Baschwitz’s many roles at his new newspaper, the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, was as a reviewer of books, theatre, and movies, so he had landed right in the heart of things.\textsuperscript{16}

Berlin had soon become the country’s media centre par excellence. According to one estimate, around the mid-1920s some 3,000 newspapers (mostly smaller regional ones) were published throughout the country. The Foreign Ministry listed 66 of these as of some importance. At the same time, some 30 newspapers were published in the national capital itself and another 30 minor ones in its outskirts – with a sum total of 3 million copies daily for the agglomeration as a whole.

But many of the smaller regional newspapers gradually linked up with national media groups, whose headquarters were also in the national capital. Berlin was home to three major newspaper publisher groups. The largest, Ullstein, was considered one of the main pillars of the Weimar regime. A second, Mosse, also had Jewish owners. Another giant was Scherl, owned by the industrialist Alfred Hugenberg, who at the same time was also head of the national-conservative DNVP party.\textsuperscript{17}

At first, the press environment was clearly a Weltanschauung or Gesinnungspresse: a worldview or ideological press. This meant that most papers had open affinities with one party or another; editors and journalists were supposed to toe the line in their articles. But over the course of the 1920s, some fundamental transformations took place – as Berhard Fulda convincingly demonstrated in his 2009 dissertation on the subject. Things changed slowly and seemingly superficially, so few fathomed the profound political implications they would ultimately have.

As newspapers experienced financial difficulties, industrialists and bankers began to systematically buy into them. Yet co-ownership did not always mean they had a direct influence on editors and readers, let alone acquire solid voting blocks for election time. This was particularly true as modern tabloids gained importance – putting more emphasis on entertainment and gossip, with more illustrations and pictures.

By the end of the decade, Fulda claims, these tabloids had already conquered 80 percent of the entire newspaper market in Berlin. In theory, they still promoted the same party lines as before; but in practice, readers no longer cared. They no longer identified with them, and instead began to follow their own intuitions and instincts on voting days. That is to say:

\begin{itemize}
  \item [17] Fulda, p. 12, 14, 17, 21.
\end{itemize}
they began to float and become volatile. The ‘new’ party of the Nazis was the first and foremost to profit from this.

**The D.A.Z.: a German Times?**

Within this press field, Baschwitz’s new Berlin newspaper *D.A.Z.* was a special case. He himself later related how a consortium of Hamburg owners of its forerunner, the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, had long put it at the disposal of the imperial government – to the extent that the government could even appoint its chief editor – in exchange for lucrative state orders. This gained it the nickname of the *Kanzlerblatt*, the chancellors’ (or Prime Minister’s) paper.

At the end of the First World War, the now ‘national’ paper *N.D.A.Z.* was seized by red revolutionaries, who re-baptized it *Die Internationale*. It opened with glowing front-page headlines: ‘Workers! Soldiers! Comrades! Brothers!’ and ‘Let’s get to work!’ But this lasted only for a day. (The historic copy is still among Baschwitz’s papers).

Baschwitz wrote: ‘But [in] late 1918, the paper was liberated from all such official and non-official bonds’, as it was renamed *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*. As property of the active publisher Reimar Hobbing, and after the sudden death of the major industrialist Hugo Stinnes, it evolved into a paper that acquired a place among the most prominent German newspapers. The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* meant to speak for ‘the national interest’, although rather from a centre-right than from a centre-left perspective. Stinnes had been made a right-liberal DVP deputy and had played a major role in promoting talks and deals between employers and unions.

Baschwitz explained:

When the industrialist Hugo Stinnes provided the means for a reorganization of the Berlin *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* after the [First] World War, he motivated this by pointing out that the German press lacked a *Times*. In other countries, too, one finds this label time and again, whenever someone tries to express that a newspaper is more attached to quality than to the quantity of its readers. In other words, that it is less attached to being read by as many people as possible, than by those who have the highest intellectual demands, and exert a decisive influence in politics. Of course, not all newspapers aspiring to this have reached their goal.
With this in mind, the newspaper now actively pursued a truly national distribution – first by overnight train delivery, then through simultaneous editions. Baschwitz wrote:

The telegraph connections, and the hiring of one’s own lines, had long made it possible to print one and the same newspaper in different places at the same time. As long as Stinnes could provide the needed funds under the Weimar Republic, the Berlin Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung could print a South-German edition in Frankfurt that corresponded word-for-word [with the Berlin edition], and distribute it from there.

That was a relatively new phenomenon.18

Baschwitz’s own political evolution

In view of the crises of the 1920s, both the newspaper and Baschwitz himself gradually drifted more to the right. This can be gleaned from a large number of his own articles and comments. Ebels produced a 40-page ‘close reading’ analysis of them for her master’s thesis, as well as an elaborate 40-page article list (not included in its published version, but deposited with it at the Baschwitz archives).

Of course one should be wary of a ‘perspectivistic’ slant, and not interpret Baschwitz’s intentions at the time through the lens of later events – the breakthrough of Nazism, anti-Semitism, the Second World War, etc. He remained a steadfast believer in democracy and rule of law, but occasionally went along with arguments that sometimes look dubious in hindsight.19

On the one hand, in line with the earlier and later editions of his book Der Massenwahn, and in line with mainstream politics at the time, he continued to blame most of the country’s ills on the Allies, their propaganda concerning Germany’s exclusive war guilt, the huge reparations, enemy images, and a widespread ‘Germanophobia’ abroad in general.

According to Baschwitz at that time, this was all on the part of France, and to a lesser extent on the U.K. and the U.S. – although he welcomed any kind of rapprochement and lessening of Germany’s burden. He did not yet give many signs of having thoroughly re-evaluated his earlier positions on Germany’s role or the question of war atrocities in Belgium and elsewhere. On the other hand,

18 De krant door alle tijden, 2nd ed., p. 182, 110, 236, respectively.
19 Ebels-Dolanová, chapter 3, particularly p. 75-134. Also see Anschlag, p. 19-28.
he always advocated preserving internal ‘unity’ in the country, as well as a sense of purpose and strength. Let us briefly review his positions concerning the various ideological currents and themes of these days.

Like so many with a similar background, Baschwitz was an anti-communist first. The Russian Revolution and the various revolution attempts in Germany and elsewhere in Europe, inspired his disgust and mistrust. So did the ‘independent’ USPD, the radical left-wing split-off from the social-democrat SPD, which later evolved into the communist KPD.

He even pleaded for the censoring and banning of the movie *Potemkin* by the Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein because it glorified revolution. Anarchism and terrorism likewise inspired his disgust and mistrust: rather than showing sympathy for people like the notorious American anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, he wrote, one should show sympathy for the victims of their attacks.

Social-democrats shared a number of Red illusions, he said. On occasion, many had been ‘fellow-travellers’ with the communists. They often railed against the wrong targets. Pacifists railed against ‘militarism’, but Germany’s problem was that it was powerless against the unjust Ruhr invasions, as it had been almost completely disarmed. Would-be proletarians railed against the *bourgeois*, he added, but the educated middle classes were the backbone of society. Leftists also railed against fascism, long before it posed a substantial threat. All of this was a distraction from the real problems, he felt.

At one point, Baschwitz even proposed founding a *Liga der anständigen Menschen* (league of decent citizens), who would swear allegiance to the state and to the constitution.20 He also felt that Weimar parliamentary intrigue and party politics were often unconstructive and merely divisive. Mud-slinging and smear campaigns against individual leaders, for example, sometimes resulted in their assassination (from Matthias Erzberger to Walther Rathenau).21

By contrast, political corruption should be exposed, as in the scandals around the Barmat brothers and the SPD, or later around the Sklarek brothers and all political parties – even if there was a whiff of anti-Semitism around these outrages. According to Baschwitz, leaders and states should

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20 On 14 August 1927. Compare with the last sentence of his book *Du und die Masse*, used as a motto for the present study.
21 It had fallen upon the Centre (Catholic) party politician Erzberger to sign the armistice, which was heavily contested. Rathenau originally was an engineer and then boss of the Allgemeine Electricitäts Gesellschaft AEG appliances corporation, then a DDP (left-liberal) politician, and ultimately a Minister of Foreign Affairs, who realized a contested rapprochement with the Soviet Union. Both were killed by the right-wing terrorist group ‘Organisation Consul’.
be strong (as Frederick the Great, Bismarck, and Prussia had been), albeit within the framework of a modern democracy. Even dictators like Lenin and Mussolini had apparently learned this from history.

Baschwitz’s attitude toward national conservatism and the emerging new right were sometimes ambivalent. I have already noted that he may have felt guilty about having been declared unfit for military service, and about having spent the latter part of the war in the relative comfort of the neutral Netherlands. He thus expressed some understanding for the feelings of soldiers who invoked the ‘eternal brotherhood’ born in the trenches, and for the frustrations of veterans in civilian life and thus about their organizations occasionally derailing.22

But, as I said earlier, one must guard against reading such statements through the prism of (what was then still in) the future. It was only in subsequent years that things really began to turn sour. The sudden return of the debt crisis from late 1929, and the renewed massive unemployment and widespread poverty, provided a unique opportunity for the Nazis to seduce large numbers of voters. Baschwitz himself was, of course, never in the least tempted by National Socialism, and spoke out against it. It ran against all of his gut intuitions about violent intimidation and naïve visions.

From D.A.Z. to D.N.N.

Meanwhile, the ambition to build Baschwitz’s rather small D.A.Z. into a key player in the centre of the Weimar media landscape increasingly proved to be a very costly affair. Its industrialist owner Stinnes had bought it and then merged it with other papers: such as the Tägliche Rundschau. Claiming that this had boosted circulation, he increased the advertising rates. But later this turned out to have been largely based on a bluff.

In 1929-31, the newspaper needed subsidies of around four million Reichsmarks per year. Interest groups hoped that this might procure them a foothold, both among the staff and its policies, and the readers and their votes. Baschwitz’s own ‘exemplary’ D.A.Z. thus ultimately became a paradigmatic illustration of how power plays behind the scenes risk undermining the ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ stance of a newspaper. This then became one

of the major questions that inspired his later book *De krant door alle tijden (The newspaper through the ages)*.

Fulda writes (p. 43):

The fate of the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* was a manifestation of this belief in the political power of the classical press: Stinnes purchased it in 1920 to secure industrialist influence; after his death it was secretly bought up by [a bank consortium for] the Prussian government in 1925; less than a year later it was taken over by the Reich government on [the right-liberal leader] Stresemann’s initiative, before being sold again when the affair came to light. [However,] none of the owners achieved any noticeable advantage.

Among those who bought a small part of the press at this point of time was industrialist Alfred Hugenberg, a major national conservative leader. In spite of the huge success of the papers of his own Scherl group, however, his right-wing DNVP party was to increasingly lose electoral support, and then grow closer to Adolph Hitler’s upstart Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei or NSDAP. The new editor-in-chief Fritz Klein increasingly considered the *D.A.Z.* to be ‘his’ paper. In these circumstances, Baschwitz probably began to feel ill-at-ease there.

Baschwitz had been considered an expert on urban affairs (because of his dissertation), and on mass politics, the war debt, and international relations (because of his first book). Over the course of 1928, he produced a weekly overview of foreign affairs, and become one of the major editorial writers. His boss later recommended him as a ‘collaborator with many-sided interests, a friendly nature and pleasant manners’. He also praised ‘his gift to treat even difficult problems in a form that is generally understandable, and to show larger connections using his comprehensive historical knowledge’.

And yet, at the very end of that same year, their ways parted. Baschwitz later emphasized that he had come to, and worked at, the *D.A.Z.* during the era of Gustav Stresemann: the leader of the right-liberal DVP party, who had been instrumental in resuming a constructive dialogue with the Entente nations – first briefly as a chancellor, then as a moderate minister of foreign affairs (1923–29), that is to say until his death. But the *D.A.Z.*

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23 Recommendation letter of Fritz Klein to Kurt Baschwitz’ next employer, the Zeitungs-Verlag. In a file with ‘Documents’, added to the Baschwitz archives in 2015.

24 Letter to the Dutch ‘Press Purge’ commission, 16 April 1947. See the later relevant chapter 11.
now began to grow closer to the DNVP national conservatives, and to veer further to the right.

It is not entirely clear whether Baschwitz already knew that he was a good candidate for an interesting vacancy that would soon open at the Zeitungs-Verlag. But for the first four months of 1929 there was a brief interlude in which he wrote for the Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten or D.N.N., in the capital of Saxony: 200 kilometres away from Berlin, but with a good rail connection. Such newspapers retained their own character, and exerted local influence. But they had also gradually begun to create links among themselves, to form larger press groups that would be more efficient and carry more weight.

Baschwitz wrote:

Dr. Wolfgang Huck had an interest in a number of such newspapers, and people talked of the Huck conglomerate. Yet the ties were rather loose, and the chiefs of the various newspapers had considerable freedom. The Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten, which belonged to the Huck conglomerate, for instance, in every way bore the stamp put on it by Professor Julius Ferdinand Wolf, who had been its publisher and chief editor for many years. The paper, which had been founded in 1893, reached a circulation of 130,000 copies in 1931.25

Baschwitz published a number of routine articles on various subjects for the D.N.N. A remarkable one was titled ‘Die Hölle auf Erde’ ('The hell on earth') about the new weapons systems under development that went even further than those employed during World War One: more and better planes, submarines, tanks, gases. The horrors of a future war would be a special challenge to statesmen, he wrote.

But maybe he was also happy to disengage from directly writing about the increasingly contorted everyday politics from 1929 onwards, and to largely limit himself to the special subject of press affairs, when he was finally hired by the Zeitungs-Verlag.

**Editor-in-chief at the Zeitungs-Verlag**

By this time, Baschwitz had become a well-known journalist, a good candidate for some chief editor position, and had influential sponsors. In 1929, his former chief at the Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung was elected chairman of

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25 De krant door alle tijden, p. 255.
the influential Berlin Press Association. His former chief at the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt* had been on the board of the prestigious ‘Verein Deutscher Zeitungsverleger’, the national association of newspaper publishers, for some 15 years. His former chief at the *Dresdner Neuesten Nachrichten* became its first vice-chairman at this point in time. So he had great introductions there.26

Every Saturday, the newspaper publishers’ association published the *Zeitungs-Verlag*. It was a medium-format subscription magazine of some twenty pages for routine issues, but was not for sale at the newsstands. It carried articles on all aspects of the newspaper trade, as well as a wide variety of larger and smaller ads that ranged from printing machines to journalistic personnel.

For his master’s thesis, Anschlag created an elaborate reconstruction of Baschwitz’s role here. The magazine had kept the same chief editor throughout the 1920s, but he was meant to stop at the end of the decade. So the first chairman of the association and his director started looking for a possible successor. Baschwitz’s former employers sent enthusiastic recommendation letters for him (which are still in his archives). On 1 July 1929 he was first hired for a three-month trial period, and then kept to further learn the ropes under his predecessor. In a sense, it was a dream job: it allowed him to retreat from current affairs journalism, become more aloof, and focus on larger press issues.

Publishers, the association, and the magazine were now supporting the further emergence of the new science of *Zeitungswissenschaft* or ‘newspaper studies’ at various universities. For instance, the Friedrich Wilhelm University in the capital Berlin had just founded a special institute and appointed an extraordinary professor for the field.

In mid-1928, the publishers, the association, and the magazine had held their annual meeting in Berlin, and that is possibly where Baschwitz had gotten better acquainted with them. In mid-1929, the same meeting was held in Heidelberg, and that was where Baschwitz was then hired as the new chief editor. Here, too, the university institute played a great role: the theme of the meeting was explicitly, ‘Newspapers and science’.

In his new job, Baschwitz supervised the everyday editorial process and wrote his own lead articles. But from the start, he also advocated more attention for readership and audience studies. He also wrote book reviews – such as a mixed one on the fourth volume of Otto Groth’s monumental new overview work *Die Zeitung*, subtitled ‘a system for newspaper studies’. He called it an

impressive piece of work, but said that unfortunately it was primarily an accumulation of source materials, with little or no personal vision.27

Contributions from other academic disciplines

Baschwitz also became responsible for organizing annual meetings around a well-defined theme, as well as the voluminous special issue of the magazine that usually accompanied them. For the first meeting prepared by him (in the spring of 1930 in Bochum) the subject became: ‘The reader and his newspaper – About the psychology of the newspaper reader’.

This subject was introduced by Baschwitz himself, who wrote the following about newspaper audiences: ‘The market square in the city would not have enough room for the tens of thousands of readers of a [single] newspaper, even with just a medium-range circulation [...] The chief of the newspaper must deal with this invisible mass – with its feelings and thoughts, with its needs and demands’.

He continued:

If press people would have had to wait until the psychologists and sociologists had taught them how to fathom the mental impulses of the reader mass and to treat it accordingly, then there would have been no single newspaper with a successful distribution today. No: first there was practice and only now comes the theory that tries to distil a scientific explanation out of the accumulated practical experiences.28

Note the key observation here. The postulation that a media audience was an ‘invisible mass’, subject to some of the same processes and dynamics as a visible mass or crowd gathered in a market square. Mass psychology and press studies were thus twin disciplines in his mind, studying similar phenomena. This was also an early plea for more empirical study. Baschwitz’s introduction was immediately followed by an invited lecture about market and readership research, given by a major German professor in applied and experimental psychology.29

29 Walther Moede from Berlin, who published the first volume of his Lehrbuch der Psychotechnik that same year.
Over the subsequent years, Baschwitz continued to promote reflection about the place of the newspaper and its readers within society from a variety of angles— for instance, social linguistics. For the mid-1931 meeting in Vienna, the theme became: ‘The larger language areas and their press’. Think of the German, French, and English language areas, and the reach of their earlier war propaganda. Of course all of these questions had profound implications for European and world power politics: of the recent past, the present, and the near future.

One strangely chauvinist contribution came from the new Berlin correspondent of the liberal Amsterdam _Algemeen Handelsblad_, who Baschwitz got to know at this point. The correspondent claimed that the Dutchman was the most thorough newspaper-reader in the entire world. He supposedly spent ‘hours at home in the evening, captivated by his newspaper. And for whom his paper could not be elaborate, thorough, trustworthy, and multi-faceted enough’. The correspondent also spoke about the role of the larger Dutch language area in Europe (including Belgian Flanders), in Asia (‘Dutch’ Indonesia), and in Africa (the Boer settlers in the South). The name of the correspondent in question was Max Blokzijl, who will return in this story.30

On all such occasions, Baschwitz steadfastly pleaded for an interdisciplinary approach to the new newspaper science. So he also participated in the Seventh German Sociologists’ Conference of autumn 1930, which was entirely devoted to ‘Press and public opinion’. This conference featured the elder sociology pioneer Ferdinand Tönnies, author of a fundamental study on the ‘Critique of public opinion’. At the First German Sociologists’ Conference, twenty years earlier, sociology pioneer Max Weber had in turn already presented a paper on ‘the newspaper business’. In his own contribution, Baschwitz expressed doubts about the vagueness of terms like ‘mass’, ‘public opinion’, and even ‘paper’, and pleaded for developing a more precise vocabulary.31

So not only did the early newspaper scientists seek support from the slightly more established sciences of man and society like psychology and sociology, history and political science; conversely, these disciplines also recognized the importance of the press and its readers, studies of audiences

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30 First as one of those who recommended Baschwitz to Amsterdam University; but later also as the prime National Socialist voice in the occupied Netherlands, affecting censorship and propaganda. The 1931 quote from the special issue of the _Zeitungs-Verlag_ (1 June 1931) was reproduced in the first (pre-war) edition of Baschwitz’s _De krant door alle tijden_, but scrapped from the second (post-war) edition for this reason.

and of public opinion. Baschwitz favoured a press science that did not only focus on formal newspaper institutions, on their visible buildings and papers, but on the informal collective subjectivity linked to them, the invisible mass. This is reflected in the 4P themes of his successive books: on propaganda and enemy images, on press censorship and freedom of expression, on politics and mass movements, and on persecution and hate campaigns. This focus on the evolution of collective subjectivity formed the basis of his unique lifelong approach.

**Baschwitz’s talks and lectures**

Apart from his writing skills, Baschwitz had meanwhile also tried to develop his speaking skills. He had begun to give public lectures, which were announced as science-based but easily understandable for a lay audience. They were not always minor affairs. Sometimes they were given in a concert building, announced through newspaper ads, and demanded entry fees of 1 or 4 or more Marks – with a rebate for students.

The themes of the talks were often spin-offs from his journalistic endeavours or his books. Upon the publication of the first editions of *Der Massenwahn*, for instance, he had spoken about ‘Mass delusions and the Art of politics’ in the main hall of a major Hamburg event building, which was named after the founder of the education society, Johann Carl Daniel Curio. A press review by local colleagues praised the ambitious initiative, the highly interested audience, and their lively applause.32

Soon after Baschwitz had settled in the capital, an even more ambitious and highly topical series of three major presentations took place in the Berlin Philharmonic, concerning *Der Redner* (‘The Orator’). He and a colleague presented analyses and comments about rhetoric and its effects on the mass. These talks were illustrated by having well-known actors deliver major historical speeches. There were three instalments presented on three separate evenings. The first was about ‘Revolt and revolution’, with speeches from Danton and Robespierre, to Lenin and Kerensky, and also Bismarck and Mussolini. The room was full, and the event received glowing reviews.33

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33 From 13 November 1925 onwards. See, for instance, the elaborate review in the *Berliner Börsenblatt* stock market newspaper, 14 November 1925. Also see a typescript and other materials in file 156 of the Baschwitz archives.
The second instalment was about the theme of ‘War and peace’, and the third was about ‘Delusions of witchcraft and hatred between peoples’. Note that these were the days when Hitler began to attract growing attention for his apparently engaging speaking style, which rendered his audiences spellbound. The proceeds of the three evenings contributed to a special national fund that had recently been set up to help the ailing Zeppelin company realize its ambitious project of building the giant LZ-127 airship, which was meant to replace some of the passenger steamships plying the Atlantic.34

The new audiovisual media

Another major innovation of those same days also fascinated Baschwitz: radio. He had often written about it in the D.A.Z. In the eyes of contemporaries it was a somewhat mysterious but remarkably effective new communication medium. Soon, Germany had three to four million registered sets. Most middle class homes had one. Later, the Nazis gave priority to producing cheap Volksempfänger versions, so as to be able to reach more workers as well. Radio brought its own attractive new formats, from music to plays, and later even live sports.

The new public broadcasting organization Deutsche Welle had a powerful central emitter in Königs Wusterhausen near Berlin, but was relayed by peripheral stations elsewhere. It also broadcast abroad, for instance in Austria. Baschwitz soon agreed to give individual lectures of half an hour on his main subjects, and even consecutive series of three at one-week intervals.

The earliest series dealt with Die Kunst der Massenführung (the art of leading masses) and similar familiar themes: a highly topical theme, in view of the rise of Nazism. A digital search led me to their precise dates and time slots in various programme guides; copies of some typescripts are still in the Baschwitz archives.

Yet primarily Baschwitz was and remained a newspaperman. Written and printed texts are linear, discursive, and tend to support the elaboration of rational arguments’ pros and cons. But the spoken word can become much more personal, express feelings and moods in more contagious ways, sometimes even provoke grand collective emotions.

34 Its first transatlantic trip took place in 1928, its first round-the-world trip in 1933. But a Zeppelin filled with highly inflammable gas burst into flames near New York in 1937, largely sealing its fate. On the eve of the Second World War, Germany then became the first to build passenger planes with more than 100 seats.
Hitler and his propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels soon woke up to the extraordinary powers of the new audio-visual media: not only radio, but also film. By 1929, some fourteen million Germans per week were watching a movie in the already five thousand cinemas throughout the country. The Nazis saw a further great opportunity to stir their hearts and minds.35

Within only a few years time, the Nazis would even begin to experiment with television, by broadcasting the Nuremberger Parteitage to offices and Fernsehstuben (television cafes) in the capital Berlin. With regard to film, they promoted the production of propaganda documentaries like Leni Riefenstahl’s *Die Triumph des Willens* about those same mega-events, and about the Olympics. They also promoted dramatic feature films rewriting the history of earlier historical epochs and made at the Babelsberg studios, such as *Friedrich der Grosse* (the national idol). Media-wise, this opened up an entirely new realm.

The unravelling of the Baschwitz couple

After their move to Berlin, Baschwitz’s wife apparently tried to revive her career, under the artist name Erika Bronów. Kurt even noted her program ‘Kunstreise im Urwald’ (‘Artistic voyage in the Jungle’) in the D.A.Z.36 I have been unable to find more details on her performances. It is clear, however, that they gradually began to drift apart.

By the early 1930s, their marriage was a decade old and had lost its sparkle. His work brought him to receptions, premieres, and conferences – also often staying over in other towns. He was approaching the latter half of his forties. This time of one’s life is often marked by what German psychoanalysts later labelled a *Torschlusspanik*: a panic over the closing of the door – to new romantic and erotic experiences, to some kind of rejuvenation. Compare the somewhat related notion of a ‘midlife crisis’.

Much later, after Baschwitz’s death, Ebels interviewed his youngest daughter for her master’s thesis, including about his earlier personal history. In about the year 1932, Ebels writes, ‘His marriage disintegrated. Kurt Baschwitz felt a great lack of spiritual connection to his wife; the lack of any kind of connection whatsoever increasingly weighed on her, too. He was often away from home’.35

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35 Radio set and cinema visitor numbers: various estimates quoted in Boterman, p. 388. Anschlag (p. 154-155) also provides a list of Baschwitz’s radio talks.
36 5 June 1927.
She added:

Next to his work – first at the Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, then at the Zeitungs-Verlag – the lectures, articles, and reviews took much time. At home, he mostly sat in his study, to read and write. [His wife] Erika Temmel-Thiessen, who had been used to a creative, adventurous, active, and enterprising life, was socially isolated. After her marriage and the birth of three children in quick succession, her career as an actress and concert singer came to an end.

Ebels continued:

In spite of his frequent physical absences, however, Kurt Baschwitz was certainly not emotionally absent for his children. He compensated the absence during weekends with common excursions, reading and talking to them, listening to music [together]. He was also the one who gave them sexual information, who was open to their problems.

In her isolated situation, his wife could often not handle three very active and enterprising children. But everyday care, for her children and husband, fell on her – even if there was domestic help. There is a family anecdote dating from these years, that Kurt Baschwitz was very surprised he was not able to make drinkable coffee by pouring hot water over un-ground beans in a cup.37

Finally, a break-up was approaching. Whereas the first editions of his book Der Massenwahn had been dedicated to his bride Erika, the completely rewritten 1932 edition was suddenly devoted to his mother Hedwig instead.

There are also indications in a number of personal letters from those days. One is apparently a June 1931 letter from another woman to Erika, announcing that she would break off her own relationship with Kurt. Another is a September 1932 letter of Kurt to Erika saying, ‘Let me free’, with reference to yet another woman.38

37 She ascribes this information to the youngest daughter, but also spoke to Baschwitz’s (much later) second wife, Ilse Scholz. Ebels, p. 143.
38 Notary list of possessions and papers, established after Baschwitz’s death. Among the personal belongings kept by his youngest daughter, later given to Ebels, and still later added to the personal papers in the Baschwitz archives, kept in the ‘special collections’ of the university library.
The next month, Erika officially started divorce proceedings. The divorce was formally pronounced in February 1933. The next month, Baschwitz fled to Amsterdam, alone. A Dutch notary later reconfirmed the divorce there.39

Return of the economic crisis and the surge of the Nazis

The eldest daughter later said that the family was better off than most people. They were relatively well to do and lived among the city’s elite in the fancy Berlin suburb of Charlottenburg, with its green parks and the summer residence of the Prussian kings.

The family [of Hitler’s propaganda man] Goebbels with their four kids also lived there. One could meet them in the streets. We were warned to go out of our way to avoid them. Like children who are warned against the bogeyman, equivalent to the devil [...] But at one point a former maid visited us. She was very nice, I was fond of her. She recounted merrily, that they [her family] had all become Nazis.

This horrified the Baschwitzes.40

There had been a profound shock. The Wall Street crash of late October 1929 had made the Americans recall their short-term loans from early 1930 onwards, which had previously kept the German economy afloat. The economic crisis thus returned with a vengeance, with unemployment shooting up to the unprecedented and unequalled level of thirty percent. Successive governments seemed powerless. This made the Weimar political centre soon melt, and drove voters to the far left and the far right. Hindenburg and his advisers then invoked the special emergency clauses of the Weimar constitution to gradually turn the majority-rule parliamentary republic into a minority-rule authoritarian presidential republic.41

Baschwitz’s boss, the chairman of the association of newspaper publishers, thus wrote in the 1931 New Year issue of the Zeitungs-Verlag: ‘We have

39 The divorce was pronounced in their Berlin suburb of Charlottenburg, to become effective on 18 April 1933. It was reconfirmed in a Dutch notary declaration of 15 May 1933. (According to papers in the same batch that Ebels later added to the Baschwitz archives).
40 First parts of the almost three-hour video interview with Baschwitz’s eldest daughter Gisela/Isa, available in the Amsterdam Jewish Historical Museum, abbreviated as JHM from here.
41 One recent elaborate overview of the political implosion was the 3x40 minutes television documentary Geheimnisse der Weimarer Republik by Uli Weis, broadcast on the ZDF Info channel on 9 July 2016.
long known – or at least could know – that after the seeming flourish of 1927 and 1928 there was a threat of [renewed] harsh distress and dark worries. Things have gotten even worse than we were to expect and fear’. Baschwitz in turn wrote:

In just a few years, the population of Germany had experienced how riches, savings, interest claims had simply been swept from the earth in the whirl of inflation. On top of that, it now saw the chances for work and bread disappear. It suffered more from unemployment than other peoples, most of all [because of] the fear of a new, unstoppable slide into Nothingness. The curve of votes cast for the National Socialists closely followed the curve of unemployment.

And then: ‘It was not the intimidation by his heavies that opened the road to the chancellorship for Hitler. But the impression made by his large faction in the Reichstag, by the millions of votes voluntarily cast for him – who scorned parliamentarianism’. Baschwitz saw the beginning of the end come nearer. His eldest daughter remembered: ‘He talked a lot about politics [at home …] He was a journalist, he knew more than other people – first at the D.A.Z., then at the Z.V.’. She reminisced about her father’s reactions: ‘He was politically very involved, and highly emotional about what was going on. He never talked about Hitler, but about Der Feldwebel [“The Sergeant” – meant condescendingly]. She continued:

He had read Mein Kampf [My struggle – Hitler’s notorious memoir and program, with its second part completed in 1928], and had understood that one needed to take it seriously. ‘That man will drag along the entire arms industry’, he said. It did not mean that much to me as a small child, but I heard dad’s warnings on the radio. He felt that foreign countries had muzzled Germany so much with the Versailles Treaty, that a man like Hitler could rise.

42 Dr. Heinrich Krumbhaar, Zeitungs-Verlag, 3 January 1931.
43 Du und die Masse, second edition, Part II, Chapter 13, p. 162 and 159, respectively, in the second Dutch edition.
Hitler to power

Hitler’s party had had only 2.4 percent of the vote before the new economic crisis hit. This number skyrocketed to 18.5 percent after the crisis returned with a vengeance, and then further doubled to 37.8 percent in the mid-1932 elections. Some initially dismissed this as an exceptional event, a freak outcome. But in new late-1932 elections, the Nazis lost only a few percentage points. Their emergence was also accompanied by a rising campaign of terror against their opponents.

Baschwitz’s eldest daughter recalled:

My father listened to the results, tense and nervous, pacing up and down in front of the radio set. Suddenly, he stood still and said: ‘Children – never forget! A third of the German population has chosen this man in free elections!’ We stood assembled around the radio, and he stood with his finger in the air. He added: ‘I do not want to live in a country like that, I am going to leave!’ And he left [a few months later].

By the new year, Baschwitz saw a telling summary of the political evolution of the last dozen years, in a special supplement of the Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung that is still among his personal papers. A diagram clearly demonstrated the melting away of Baschwitz’s favourite liberals in just a few years’ time, of all the other smaller centre and even rightist parties, and the dramatic growth of the Nazis.

An ad for the Nazi press in the same supplement claimed its circulation had exploded, along with the membership of the party: from 7 in 1919 to 550,000 in mid-1931. ‘Every minute a new fighter’, it boasted, all ‘Trumpeters with the Swastika flag’. After trying all kinds of other solutions with various politicians from the Catholic Centre party, president Hindenburg and his ‘camarilla’ of advisers finally saw no other option than to make Hitler chancellor, later in that same month of January 1933.

Hitler’s fans exulted. One woman wrote to her daughter:

Daddy came running with an extra edition of the newspaper. Daddy’s face was radiant. I laughed as well, but when the first mirth was over, I

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44 Interview with Nanda van der Zee, weekly De Groene Amsterdammer, 29 April 1998. With two added sentences from the long video interview available at the JHM, about the same subject and scene. In November, Hitler got 33.1 percent. She referred to March 1933, but on that occasion, Hitler got 43.9 percent (after a surge in repression).
had to sit down, and let a few tears run over my cheeks. At last, at last! This once so simple man, who had been in the trenches, sits in the place where Bismarck sat – after the most incredible attacks and slanderous campaigns. Fourteen years ago he had seven followers, now thirteen million. That is the result of an unbelievable energy, power, and self-sacrifice that have seldom occurred in world history. And the struggle is only beginning.45

Events did indeed soon accelerate. The Reichstag parliament building was set on fire. The Nazis accused a Dutch communist, triggering a wave of repression against political opponents. At the same time, they began to advocate boycotts against Jewish businesses and professionals, press for

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45 Long after the war, Dutch scholar Bart van der Boom did an elaborate study of ‘ego-documents’ like letters and diaries that survived in The Netherlands. This letter by Elisabeth Gebensleben from Braunschweig was written to her daughter in Utrecht. Quoted in Van Liempt (2010), p. 10.
their dismissal from key institutions. Jews were molested in the streets. So Baschwitz concluded that he, too, might soon be in the line of fire.

Sources differ about exactly when and how he left. The eldest daughter was adamant that he must have left in early March 1933, as he was already gone on her eleventh birthday by the middle of that month. He left for Amsterdam, probably first on a tourist visa – or maybe he had some journalistic pretext. He quickly oriented himself there, then decided to stay and apply for a permanent residence permit as a refugee. To do so, he demanded an official letter of dismissal from his employer – which he soon got.46

On the 26 April his boss, the chairman of the association of newspaper publishers, sent him the notice: ‘Very honourable Herr Dr. Baschwitz! We are forced by the course of events, to suspend you from your post as editor of the Zeitungs-Verlag at the earliest possible date’. He would apparently still be paid for the next few months, and could even get the entire sum at once. He would also be free to leave, in order to pursue other options.47

So, on the one hand, the association implicitly conceded that there was outside pressure to let him go. On the other hand, they tried to accommodate him by providing him with time and money to pursue alternatives. It was all very hush-hush. Apparently, the leaving of the editor-in-chief was never explicitly mentioned in the columns of the weekly itself.

**Split-up and departure**

Baschwitz’s eldest daughter later said that, until that point in time, she had hardly been aware that he was, or might be considered, ethnically Jewish. Meaning that she, and her brother and sister, might be considered half-Jewish. Her mother, by contrast, was Reichsdeutsch – supposedly of ethnic German stock. As they would stay with her, they would probably be considered less Jewish and more ‘Aryan’. But it was a great and unexpected drama for them.

Gisela/Isa stated that her father was a typical bookish person, a ‘scholar. He loved his kids, but …’ She suggests that he did not know very well how to express it. She herself confessed emotionally, ‘I loved my father much more than my mother. I worshipped him. I thought he was so special – as small as I was. And that has remained’. She said: ‘I felt it was terrible [that

47 The original of this letter is reproduced in Anschlag, opposite p. 43.
he was to leave], I almost died. So we said goodbye; he left by train'. She added: ‘I seem to have written him a very sad letter’ saying ‘I never want to go through this again’. 

Baschwitz must also have felt contradictory emotions during the last stretch of the long journey to Amsterdam. While the train rolled past the Eastern docks, into the giant Central Station. Next to the IJ waterway connecting the North Sea canal and the Zuiderzee inlet (which had recently been closed by the giant Afsluitdijk dam and thus turned into the IJsselmeer interior lake). Then, walking out of station into the busy square buzzing with trams and taxis. Straight ahead would have been a large avenue with grand hotels: from the Victoria just in front of him, to the Krasnapolsky on the Dam square further down.

A new future seemed to lie ahead, although fraught with great uncertainties. Little could he fathom that it was from this very same ‘CS square’ that he would be deported some ten years later to the Westerbork transit camp, in view of a further transport to certain death in the East. It would also be in this very ‘CS square’ that his son would be flaunting a bazooka some twelve years later, and that his eldest daughter would almost be killed by sniper fire when she crossed the battle lines as a courier during the very last day of fighting of the Second World War.48

The return to The Netherlands, with which Baschwitz was somewhat familiar after having spent the latter half of the First World War there, was also a strange experience for other reasons. He had not considered himself a Jew. But he had been fired because he was considered both a Jew and a regime critic. Now he found Jewish social workers in Holland standing ready. They probably helped with getting him registered as a refugee, somewhere around July.

According to his eldest daughter, they also impressed on Kurt that his children might be considered half-Jewish if they stayed behind, and might thus possibly also be at some kind of risk at some future point. So they offered help for them as well. He therefore proposed to his ex-wife that they be sent to The Netherlands, too. Her reaction was categorical: ‘Not without me’.

At that point he made up his mind to try and start anew with a clean slate. And also to give their troubled and cancelled marriage a new try.49

48 A ‘bazooka’ was a portable recoilless anti-tank rocket launcher, which the allies probably parachuted to the local resistance forces.

49 Gisela/ Isa Baschwitz’s video interview available at the Jewish Historical Museum JHM, approximately minute 8, and minute 15 a.f. She claimed that at her father’s funeral (in 1968), a
Reunited abroad

The eldest daughter Gisela said that she was still in German school at that point. Initially, she was not supposed to say anything. But after a decision had been made to follow her father, she took a few teachers into her confidence: that they were not going to come back after the 1933 summer break. ‘Some said: “Are you leaving because of Hitler? What nonsense! It is not going to last. Within half a year he will be gone”. For us it did not exist, she said: Jewish or non-Jewish. There were only nice people and not-nice people. [But] I had a female teacher of French, probably Jewish, who said: “I envy you”.50

She says that at one point she had also been in some kind of youth group.

But suddenly, I could not be standard-bearer anymore. A blonde friend of mine took over. Although she was full-Jewish [but others apparently did not know]. My parents laughed their heads off [...] My brother was in boarding school. At one point he came home in a brownish uniform. My mother said: ‘take it off immediately!’ He said: ‘But then I cannot go back’. She said: ‘Then you will not go back’.51

Baschwitz would have preferred to move straight on to the U.S. But for that he would have needed money, which he simply did not have. He had had some savings earlier, but lost them in an investment gone wrong. So he wrote to an acquaintance in the U.S., to ask for help with a so-called affidavit: a sworn statement to guarantee his livelihood. It never came. His eldest daughter said he inquired after the war. ‘The man said that he had not known it was so urgent. That was the attitude of many people’.

According to surviving letters that he sent home, he felt upset about what he had seen along the way, between departure and arrival: ‘I saw so much agony and despair and doom among people around me. Also among acquaintances, and those who used to be big people [...] So you should not be surprised about my depressed state’. He also wrote about the trouble of finding an apartment in Amsterdam, the high costs of decorating it and of

former Jewish social worker had told her that they had pressed her father to bring his children to The Netherlands at that point in time (and that she might not have been around anymore if they had not).

50 Same JHM video itw.
51 JHM video itw., approximately minutes 20-22. It is not entirely clear whether these two incidents took place during the last period in Germany, or the first period in The Netherlands; she also mentions the ‘Verein für das Deutschum im Ausland’.
paying the movers, as well as other financial worries. He pressed Erika not to take any risks during her trip: not to say anything careless, not to try and smuggle anything – as the dangers were too big.

He also forced himself to write: ‘We should really be happy [...] Because we belong to the exceptions, to the few. Apart from that, it will be really “gezellig” (that is the Dutch word for [the German] “gemütlich”) here’ (both more or less the equivalent of snug, cosy). He said Amsterdam was nice and looked a bit like Hamburg, where they had spent the happy early years of their marriage – with the waterway, the canals, and the old town.

He was first trying to identify possible future sources of income: ‘I want to have my family here, but I want a minimum of security’. They might get some help in the beginning: ‘Maybe from a scientific fund, 75 guilders per month (=150 marks)’. Or maybe later ‘course fees’, as a ‘private lecturer’ at the university. This was a precipitous drop from his previous comfortable Z.V. income.

Apparently, he had also decided he wanted to make a completely new start with their marriage. His letters began with ‘Meine liebe Erika’ (My dear Erika), and ended with ‘a thousand greetings and kisses [...] for you and the children, in love and fidelity, your Kurt’ (!). He added, rather clumsily: ‘Is our marriage anniversary on the 20th or the 25th of September? At home I could always check it on our silver showpiece, the breadbasket. But here I have no clue’.

In the autumn, both mother and children packed as well. The eldest daughter Gisela said, ‘Then we arrived in The Netherlands. My father stood on the platform [at the train station]. Of course it was difficult in the beginning. But it did not matter – because father was there. And my mother felt the bride again’. They did not advertise that they had been divorced and lived like all other couples, sleeping in the same bed.

Gisela continued: ‘The Dutch were so nice, they did not snarl like in Prussia. The Jewish Refugee Committee received me so well, education-wise, that I could later attend the Barlaeus gymnasium [grammar school …] Holland was marvellous. The school system was different, not so military’.

A whole new phase seemed to open up.

52 Letters, 20 September–3 October 1933. Part of the new batch from the youngest daughter, added by Ebels-Dolanová to the Baschwitz archive in 2015.
53 Same JHM & De Groene interviews.