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# The Jerusalem Report®

NOVEMBER 2001

COVERING ISRAEL, THE MIDDLE EAST & THE JEWISH WORLD



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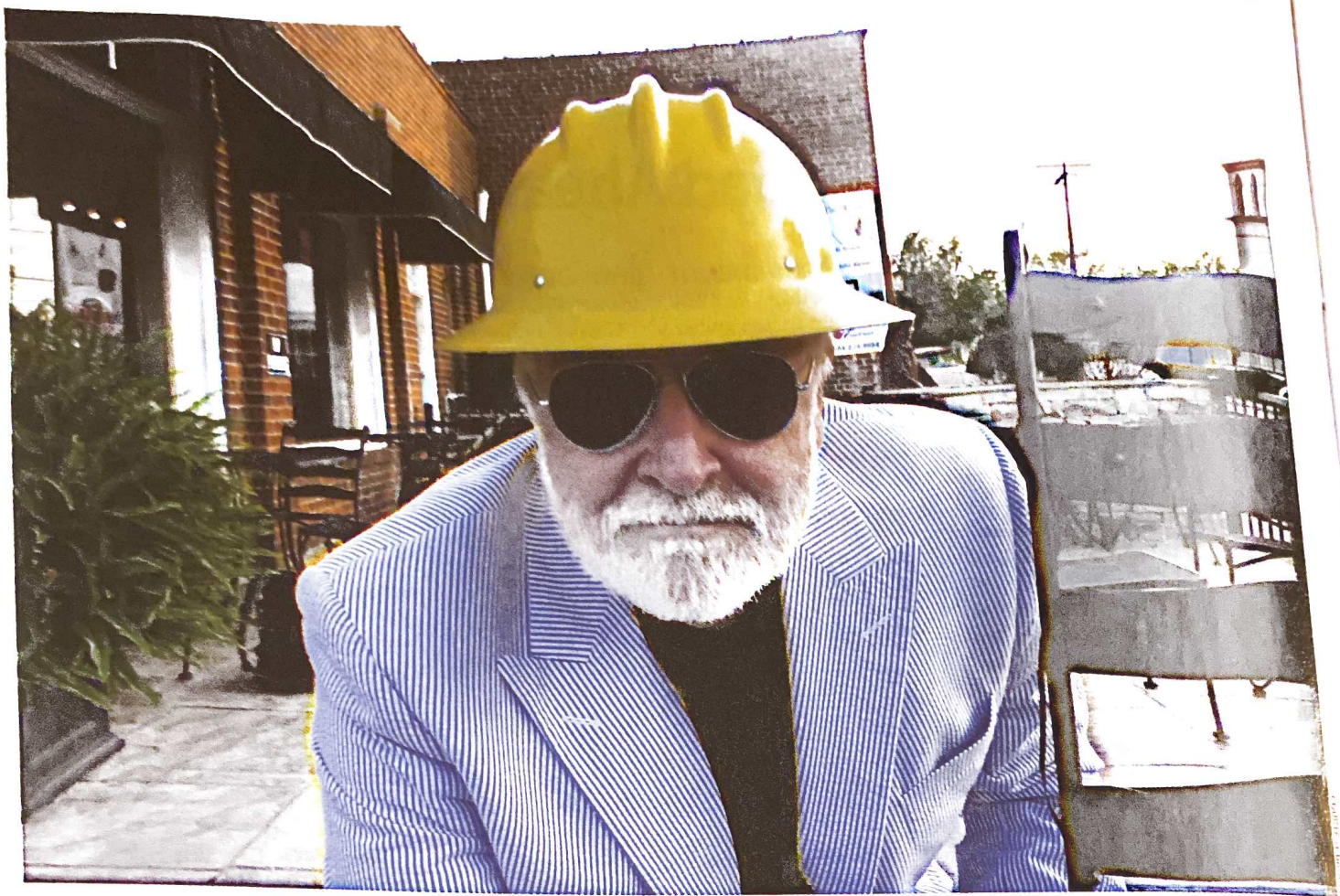
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WRITER HENRYK BRODER: 'I don't even think, for instance, there is one Jewish professor of Jewish studies in Germany'

# Jewish Newspapers without Jews

**Some members of the German Jewish community express skepticism toward newspapers that apparently operate in their name**

**Adam J. Sacks**

**T**HERE ARE JEWISH NEWSPAPERS all around the world, but it might only be in Germany, of all places, where they are staffed almost entirely by non-Jews.

Times are naturally tough for print media the world over, but in post-Holocaust Germany, there is something more at work than career-hungry journalists edging for staff placement to explain this phenomenon.

To start to make sense of this peculiar

predicament, *The Jerusalem Report* approached Henryk Broder, a well-known Jewish writer in Germany, who comments: "No one recognizes this as strange anymore. I don't even think, for instance, there is one Jewish professor of Jewish studies in Germany."



An interview with Moritz Reininghaus, 33, an editor and writer for the "Jüdische Zeitung," helped shed some light on the unusual situation in which non-Jewish Germans put out the two national Jewish newspapers (many Jewish communities publish their own local newsletters).

A self-described grandson of Nazi party members, he is quite aware of the issues at stake in working as a non-Jewish journalist for a Jewish newspaper in Germany. "I am often asked if I am Jewish or not and am greeted with a mix of irritation, curiosity and incomprehension," he tells *The Report*.

Reininghaus and his colleagues cover the full gamut of Jewish life and issues. He relates that he finds himself having to suppress his critical views on Israel, especially when interviewing Holocaust survivors who strongly defend the state and its policies. "I know I may be venturing into territory that is none of my business," he says. Somewhat skeptically he adds, "I am hoping for the day when I will no longer be asked why I am doing what I am doing."

**R**EININGHAUS'S PAPER, THE "Jüdische Zeitung," is a recent addition to the Jewish newspaper landscape in Germany. It was founded in 2005 by two entrepreneurial Jewish

brothers from Moldova, Nicholas and David Werner. The Werners wanted to focus on the growing market of German readers among the large-scale recent emigration to Germany of Jews from the former Soviet Union. (The Werner Brothers preside over a growing media empire, which also includes the largest Russian-language European

### **'The exaggerated presence of the Jewish community is used as political capital by successive German governments'**

*— Alexander Brenner,  
one-time head of the  
Berlin Jewish Community*

newspaper, "Europe Express.")

Their main competitor in the Jewish newspaper market is the "Allgemeine Jüdische Wochenzeitung," which is the official organ of the Jewish community in Germany. (In Germany, the "Jewish

community" is a state-funded corporate entity with an elected board of directors, independent of any specific congregation or synagogue.) This official community-sponsored newspaper was founded in 1946 by a German-Jewish returnee named, oddly enough, Karl Marx.

In terms of coverage, both papers cover Jewish events from the local, national and international levels, with sections on Jewish knowledge, humor and literature. The "Jüdische Zeitung" does tend to include more articles on the subject of the challenges facing immigrants to Germany and normally presents a wider spectrum of opinion on the Middle East conflict.

Although the "Wochenzeitung" is the official community newspaper, that by no means indicates that there are more Jews on its staff. In fact, for a couple of decades until 1990, there was not one single Jew working regularly as a writer or editor. That year, Judith Hart became the only Jewish writer at the organ, only to have editors second-guess and criticize her coverage and content of Jewish community holidays and celebrations. Hart, the child of Romanian Holocaust survivors, who emigrated to Germany in the early 1960s, eventually became the editor-in-chief and implemented a name change (it has been called the "Jüdische Allgemeine" since



**'JÜDISCHE ALLGEMEINE': 'Where non-Jews write about Jews for other non-Jews'**





WERNER MEDIA: Founded the 'Jüdische Zeitung' in 2005

ADAM SACKS

2002) and transformed the paper from a bi-weekly to a weekly format.

Despite her efforts to recruit more Jewish writers, the paper, with a circulation of 15,000, still has a staff made up mostly of non-Jews. In fact the editor/writers in charge of the sections on "the Jewish world" and "Jewish Knowledge" both had grandfathers in the *Wehrmacht*, the wartime Nazi army.

They also expressed little patience with the unwavering support for Israel voiced by many interview subjects. Two of the only young Jewish journalists in the circle of freelance writers refused requests for interviews out of fear for their jobs.

Some members of the Jewish community expressed skepticism and even a sense of alienation toward the newspapers that apparently operate in their name. Talking to *The Report*, Jewish community activist Ronit Braunstein refers to the "Allgemeine," as a place "where non-Jews write about Jews for other non-Jews." A Soviet émigré from Vinnitsa, Ukraine, who works as a doctor in the Berlin provinces, Lev Krasinsky, tells *The Report* that he feels a lack of confidence in the accountability of the paper, stating that "I wanted to write a letter to the paper about how there are no Jewish doctors at the Jewish hospital in Berlin, but then I realized they probably wouldn't print it, because hardly any of them are Jews either."

WHILE MANY POINT OUT that there are not enough willing and active Jewish journalistic personnel in Germany to staff two Jewish newspapers, the existence of the papers does further contribute to the impression of a healthy rebirth of a Jewish presence in Germany, a notion contested by some Jews. "The exaggerated presence of the Jewish community is used as political capital by successive German governments regardless of political affiliation... they use it as a form of self-justification," comments Alexander Brenner, one-time head of the Berlin Jewish Community, the country's largest with 12,000 official members.

Brenner, who escaped with his family to the Soviet Union from Poland on the eve of the Holocaust, was resolute about there not being a revival of Jewry here. "There is no more German or Polish Jewry and nor will there be," he tells *The Report*.

The vast majority of Jews in Germany, over 80 percent, are recent migrants from the former Soviet Union. There are also a good number of Israelis living in Germany – by some accounts over 5,000 in Berlin alone – but these Israelis have not established a pattern of joining official communities.

The question that confronts individual

communities is: how is a previously existing minority supposed to integrate a recently arrived majority? The Jews in Germany before the fall of the Soviet Union were largely Polish Holocaust survivors who look with skepticism upon the "Russian invasion." One can often hear the comment that the new Jewish Community Centers are more like Russian culture clubs for chess playing. Without this infusion, many predicted the Jewish community in Germany would have died out as the younger generation continues to emigrate abroad, especially to Israel. Neither group seems particularly interested in the pre-war Jewish tradition of close ties to German culture.

However, due to German needs, both groups of Jews have assumed a level of "virtual" importance all out of proportion to their strength in numbers. Jews are brought into mainstream media outlets to "perform Purim," like a minstrel show, and several cities sponsor Jewish street fairs, which Broder, the writer, denounces as "calculated klezmer-falafel nonsense designed to shore up their reputation."

This so-called renaissance of Judaism or revival of Jewish life in Germany is often dismissed as *unsinn* (nonsense) or just "wishful thinking." For Broder, "this is a mutual misunderstanding, a con cooperation, and a great screwball comedy." "Germans still cannot believe they have been rehabilitated, and while the Jews are firmly anchored in history, Germans are still searching for their identity," Broder adds.

For Reininghaus, blurring the lines between German and Jew helps alleviate the historical burden created by the Holocaust. He sees this in effect in Germans who are active in Jewish institutions such as museums, archives, and, of course, newspapers. Jewish media becomes in effect a shelter bunker from historical responsibility.

Germany was once home to more than one media empire carried steadily through the generations by Jewish families. The one-time national paper of record, the "Berliner Tageblatt," was owned and published by the Mosse family. Yet those days are long gone and instead Germany now has to contend with Jewish newspapers staffed largely by non-Jews."

Broder concludes, apparently only partly in jest, "Germans want to prove they are the better Jews."