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Aufbau revisited

Adam Sacks

When the Claims Conference came to Berlin, I remembering standing and watching Israel Singer speak with Andreas Mink. We were there as representatives of the newspaper *Aufbau*.

Andreas repeatedly uttered his favorite comparison for Singer: Jesse Jackson. He had in mind not the valiant protegee of Martin Luther King, founder of the Rainbow Coalition, but rather the ethnic charlatan, a hypocrite who fights racism while seeking self-aggrandizement and making anti-semitic remarks himself. After calling Israel Singer the "Jewish Jesse Jackson," Mink continued, "he wants to shake down the Germans for as much as he can."

A textbook example of dramatic irony, the only real ethnic charlatan in that situation was neither Singer nor Jackson, but Mink himself, posturing as the current inheritor of the distinguished German-Jewish tradition.

Now *Aufbau* always was a uniquely cosmopolitan endeavor, at its height with over 50,000 readers in 30 countries. Until the end, there was still one sole subscriber in Mugabe's Zimbabwe, an octogenarian refugee still a faithful reader. Let's not confuse cosmopolitanism with impersonation, or transcending identity to confuse issues rather than clarify.

Aufbau certainly never was a local paper. In its last few years that is just what it became: the local paper of the real Holocaust industry. By "real" Holocaust industry, I mean not Finkelstein's phantasm of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy, but rather the real existing market of Europeans and German Gentiles whose careers and jobs are based on the exploitation of the legacy of murdered European Jews.

First a disclaimer, I was personally involved with *Aufbau* for three years, and wrote dozens of articles for it. I am rather ashamed to add that I fully and enthusiastically participated in the launch of the "homecoming", of the Berlin bureau. In fact, in the inaugural issue, in which I had three articles, "Berlin baut auf" I was featured on the cover reading the paper. To my further dismay, this image was used without my consent as advertising for new subscribers.

When the French-German channel ARTE did a feature on *Aufbau* I was selected for the stand-alone interview as the sole Jew there. To my great regret, I downplayed the question regarding the identity of the staff, caught up in the moment as I was. Although I like to have some level of vanity as to my aesthetic

Film

Schweiz

appeal, they were nevertheless in serious short supply of *echt* Jewish *punim*. (e.g real jewish face).

Even more distressing, when brochures were developed and printed for fundraising purposes, I saw more photos of myself and a better looking American Jewish friend from New Orleans, who I had brought with me to the office on just a couple of occasions. Again the images were used and printed without our foreknowledge or consent.

I was also present in New York for some of the debates as to the wisdom of opening a Berlin bureau to begin with. Some on the staff wanted to switch to English, naturally as the logical audience would be the children and grandchildren of refugees whose language was by and large English. The opposing view, held largely by Mink and the German Gentiles, was for an enthusiastic homecoming, which won out in the end. Of course, the homecoming itself was a misnomer, *Aufbau* of course was never in Germany, it was always a Manhattan-based paper there to help with employment and life in the US and restitution and justice in Germany.

It was not there to criticize the Jewish representatives of that effort at restitution as Mink had twisted its aim. It helps remembering that in its last New York years *Aufbau* funded its comically low article rates, with the inheritance of one Monica Ziegler, whose father's fortune undoubtedly had grown through the era of Aryanization. Of course I recall the consistent difficulty in collecting fees, which would go unpaid for months. I remember on one occasion with a stern look in her eye glaring at me as she said, "this is not a place to make money." Maybe it was right that it went to Berlin and Mink, after all it was funded by Nazi gold.

Another major enterprise supported by Ziegler & Co. was the rotating stream of young interns from Germany. I was shocked to find out that most of them knew little of the history of the paper and hardly bothered to find out more during their stay.

What interested them was what looked good on their resume and a ticket to New York courtesy of Nazi Austreibung. I particularly enjoyed regularly receiving "Merry Christmas" wishes from them each year at Hanukkah time. I seem to remember Christmas decorations in the *Aufbau* office. The irony (and the knowledge) of this was of course completely lost on them. Who were the grandfathers who provided their grandchildren with these vacations to New York? Unlike mine, they had not fled Germany. Responses were various: one an SS general, another was actually a guard on the trains to the camps.

Of course the real head in Berlin was not Mink but Irene Armbruster of whom it must be said, at the risk of being brutally offensive, resembled nothing less than the most offensive caricatures of *Der Stuermer*. This Black Forest native was about as Jewish as the Pope in point of fact, though she could conveniently led that fact go overlooked when she was on the verge of an important interview.

I remember the time she had Dr. Ruth in the Jewish Museum, who I am sure took her for a Jew the whole time. During editorial meetings, one of Irene's favorite phrases for shooting

down an idea was "*Zionistisch*," or even "*Zionistische Propaganda*."

This particular phrase was used in reference to a letter that the Jewish community of Berlin had wanted *Aufbau* to publish. In fact, *Aufbau* never did cooperate with the Jewish community on that letter or several others. Of course, when a colleague or I would use the descriptive term "Nazi" even in reference to self-proclaimed Neo-Nazis, Irene and others bristled and told us "that's not polite."

I can also recount several instances in the editorial process when subtle censorship would politically transform the message of certain articles. After September 11th, I wrote a reflection piece on a series of anti-war demonstrations that took place while the fires were still burning at Ground Zero. One particularly incisive quote often heard those days was edited out: "Die Amerikaner kamen mir fremder vor als die Islamisten." On another occasion I covered a conference on the cultural achievements of the Weimar era. The title Irene chose to my great umbrage was "Weimar war chaos," thereby unwittingly endorsing the National Socialist characterization of that period of greatest Jewish cultural achievement as a chaotic period embedded in a wholesale loss of values.

The whole palaver of a Jewish Renaissance in Germany is actually a shaky construction of American Jewish academics there only on cushy and brief research trips and sabbaticals. (I recall one visit of ultra-liberal American rabbis from Beverly Hills who were hardly let off their bus during their hours long tour.) It is rather the birth of the real Holocaust industry of insider impostors of which *Aufbau* is but one example. Repentance work is set upon by a lunatic fringe whose grotesque belated acceptance of the German-Jewish tradition results in an outpouring of hallucinated Jewishness. While we trudge on trying to sanctify the name of our holy martyrs, they are just trying to make a name for themselves.

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