

Anti-Semitism in Germany – a Permanent Challenge.

A) Kurzfassung

by Philipp Sonntag / Child Survivors Deutschland e. V. **SHORT for Mishpocha**

In Germany, official support for Jewish institutions and people is well established. Most people in public agree. Still anti-Semitism in Germany is evident in many ways. It has manifold gradations, increments, nuances, shades. Police is provided for continuous protection of public Jewish buildings, and it is necessary.

The official actions and policies of the federal government, states and communities are against anti-Semitism. A neo-Nazi party only seldom achieves the 5% to enter a state parliament. All other political parties fight against antisemitism. They support Jews somehow. Many supporting laws and regulations have only been achieved after political pressure from Israel, from Claims Conference, and from local Jewish representatives like Zentralrat der Juden. While laws may sound good, the factual value will be determined on the administrative level.

The overall attitude regarding antisemitism is a broad range of nervousness, confusion, embarrassment and avoidance. Unfriendly context can be antisemitic or xenophobic. Still the impact is limited. Public anti-Semitic actions are effectively limited by alert public protesters.

In Germany, fascist movements seek their tradition, even their pragmatic aims, from old Nazi context. For instance currently in Germany there are provocations, like: "Du Opfer!" (you victim!), and it is a cuss word, intending to hurt, by young neo-Nazis and/or muslim groups. In 2010 at least 13.500 proven criminal offenses have been committed by neo-Nazis and other fascist wrongdoers, this includes 650 cases of violence with 600 persons injured. During the last 20 years about 140 persons have been murdered in Germany due to fascist or similar motives. In Germany, for the European Parliament, less than 2% have elected fascist parties. Neo-Nazis are a small group.

In an official handbook against fascism we find:

"Neo-Nazism and fascism is not an opinion, but a crime."

Most people as well as politicians are against Nazis, and for instance do protest a lot against Nazi demos.

For successes in dealing with German administration for compensation it takes guts, and it takes human angels in action, who dare to stand up against long odds: A formidable example is judge Dr. Jan-Robert von Renesse / Germany, who helped with ghetto pensions. In Germany and Israel most ghetto survivors applying for a rent had been denied access. It was not before Dr. von Renesse took up the issue, that successful revisions were achieved. A shame for Germany is, that 2010 he has been mobbed by authorities, and deleted from his job as judge, all in context of a bad tradition of jurisprudence.

Conclusion: Antisemitism requires our ongoing alertness and determination!

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B) Langfassung (wie vorgetragen in Warschau)

by Philipp Sonntag / Child Survivors Deutschland e. V.

Panel on Antisemitism at WFJCSH conference 2011 in Warsaw.

In Germany, official support for Jewish institutions and people is well established. Most people in public agree.

Still anti-Semitism in Germany is evident in many ways. 2% did vote fascist parties for EU parliament, about 20% is an estimate for fellow travellers, for sympathisers.

Antisemitism has manyfold forms, graduations (Abstufungen, Ausmaße), nuances, and shades (Schattierung, Tönung, Zwischenton).

Actions, persons and mood

The interpretation of the importance and danger is highly controversial:

the official actions and policies of the federal government, states and communities are all against antisemitism. A neo-Nazis party only seldom achieves the 5% to enter a state parliament. All other political parties fight against antisemitism. They support Jews somehow. Many supporting laws and regulations have only been achieved after political pressure from Israel, from Claims Conference, or from local Jewish representatives like Central Jewish Council (Zentralrat der Juden). While laws may sound good, the factual value will be determined on the administrative level. Altogether a lot has been established, for instance there are large memorials and documentations. But police is provided for continuous protection of public Jewish buildings, and it is necessary.

Actions and comments of significant figures in legislative, judiciary and administrative areas depend a lot on the character of single persons. Worst case: These persons in some cases were former Nazis and/or neo-Nazis, and half-rightist conservative persons often are in charge. It is a common issue, that civil servant status (Beamtenstatus) did protect former Nazis from losing their jobs. In contrast emigrants coming home to Germany were “kept out” of good jobs, had to improvise by offering badly paid service, and often Child Survivors were stuck on a deficient education. One result often is a low retirement pay. A common manifestation of anti-Semitism is, that in administration and courts old Nazis, old psychiatrists would be in charge for compensations of Child Survivors. They might under Nazi regime have suppressed the same Jew, and benefitted from his belongings. Altogether many compensations for Nazi victims were granted, but even more were denied.

The mood of the country is nervousness toward anti-Semitism. The guilt feelings regarding Hitler are powerful, but consequences unclear for many. They regard guilt

feelings towards Jews as unavoidable, but nevertheless criticise Israel in view of its attitude toward Palestine perceived as suppressive. But many antisemitic people, whether of German and/or Muslime and/or other background, have never had much any contact with any Jew or Palestinian and their conditions of life. Within Germany many see Jews as foreigners, regardless whether with or without German passport. The overall attitude regarding antisemitism is a broad range of abashment, confusion, embarrassment and avoidance. Unfriendly context can be antisemitic or xenophobic. Still the impact is limited. Public anti-Semitic actions are effectively limited by alert public protesters.

Widespread, and yet weak anti-Semitism

Quite different in Austria and Hungary anti-Semitism can have broad public and political support. The majority in Germany is indifferent or slightly annoyed. Reactions towards Jews are often halfway friendly, yet in an inhibited, pressed mood, out of guilt conscience, trying to avoid or quit the issue rather fast.

Jews are not really considered as German citizens, as has been deplored by Ignatz Bubis in his last interview: "I achieved almost nothing as president of the Central Jewish Council in Germany: Jewish and non Jewish citizens of Germany remained alienated towards each other ...".

While evaluations can reveal injustice, and enormous fascist leftovers, still hardly any consequences will happen. A masterpiece are the 879 pages of DAS AMT¹. They reveal, finally 2010, that and how 40 % of staff at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs were former Nazis, 20 % came from the victims or opponents. Cover-up of former crimes was routine, old comrades would help each other. It has been documented in detail. The well cultivated myth, that the Foreign Office would have been a site of resistance against the Nazis, has been completely destroyed. Revealed finally in 2010, that is 65 years late.

In Germany, fascist movements seek their tradition, even their pragmatic aims, from old Nazi context. For instance currently in Germany there are provocations, like: "Du Opfer!" (you victim!), and it is a cuss word, intending to hurt, by young neo-Nazis and/or muslim groups. In 2010 at least 13.500 proven criminal offenses have been committed by neo-Nazis and other fascist wrongdoers, this includes 650 cases of violence with 600 persons injured². During the last 20 years about 140 persons have been murdered in Germany due to fascist or similar motives. In Germany, for the European Parliament, less than 2% have elected fascist parties.

Antisemitism in East Germany mainly after reunification

Definitely within the GDR (German Democratic Republic, former socialist East Germany), Antisemitism had no chance. It is easy to understand, in view of the very strict actions of the Soviet administration against all fascists 1945 – 1949, already before

¹ Eckart Conze, Norbert Frei, Peter Hayes and Moshe Zimmermann: DAS AMT UND DIE VERGANGENHEIT. Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik. Blessing Verlag, 2010

² antifa March/April 2011, p. 10

the foundation of the GDR. Then ongoing over decades, neither old Nazis nor neo-Nazis had any possibility to exert any criminal acts and/or arrange provocative demonstrations. There had been a few exceptions in GDR, like desecration of a cemetery, but overall such issues were rare.

Imagine, that only in GDR former nazi teachers and judges altogether (!) lost their jobs. With anti-fascist power, school teaching housewives etc. were improvised, with fast and then ongoing educational courses. It was tough, and a success.

Of course after the “Wende”, the reunification 1989, the situation adapted to the attitudes and procedures of FRG (Federal Republic of Germany). Conservative scientists and politicians keep trying to denounce the former GDR and new Leftist party as antisemitic. That cannot work, see a deliberate attempt³ in comparison to reality:

At KZ memorials “Jewish victims were on the margins” – well, of course communist victims were respected best, but that is far from antisemitism; then supporting “Palestinian terror against Israel” was quoted as proof, but that is also common in East and West Germany by people, who deliberately distance themselves from antisemitism; furthermore also in GDR there were Jews, who would “rather hide their Jewish background”, again a quite common attitude that in no way might indicate antisemitism of government or administration in GDR.

Much the same “Die Linke” (former communist SED) always was antisemitic, but also sceptical, critical towards Israel. Mainstream parties see that as contradiction. Discussion is fierce.

Dealing with anti-Semitism in FRG now

The issue is not, that FRG would be basically and essentially fascistic. In an official handbook against fascism we find⁴:

“Neo-Nazism and fascism is not an opinion, but a crime.”

Neo-Nazis are a small group, and most people as well as politicians are against Nazis, and for instance do protest a lot against Nazi demos. This includes Andrée Leusink, a member of our CSD group, who since 1989 year by year has arranged many protest demos against neo-Nazis.

Of course the 2nd generation is familiar with the problem. We are linked with the organisation “Der halbe Stern” (Half Star), which in 2009 had a conference named:

“Never tell you are Jewish!”,

and mental stress of the 2nd generation has been investigated.

Local politicians would avoid outright antisemitism, but quite some might also avoid open solidarity with Jews. For instance, an initiative by our member Peter Paul Klinger to

³ Frank Jansen: Antifaschistisch und judenfeindlich. In der DDR blühte der Antisemitismus. Die SED diskriminierte Juden, Neonazis attackierten Friedhöfe. In: Tagesspiegel 26. 8. 2010, p. 4

⁴ Schroeter, Albrecht: Sind Sitzblockaden eigentlich strafbar?, S. 173 in Kulick, Holger und Toralf Staud (Hrsg.): Das Buch gegen Nazis, Rechtsextremismus – Was man wissen muss und wie man sich wehren kann.

establish “Stumbling Stones” (Stolpersteine), in a small German town with a lot of seemingly conservative “political correctness”, met many objections, considerations, delay actions on the political level.

Child Survivor Hans Frankenthal in his book "Verweigerte Rueckkehr"⁵ (Denied Return) had reported deliberate forms of common repression against the very few survivors, all in perfect compliance with the former broad support of the Nazi regime. He reported, how administrators will use all kinds of restrictive regulations, to avoid compensation payments.

For instance, mental sufferings were not recognized during the first decades. That was provoked by trifle, irresponsible psychiatric expertise, which later turned out to be completely wrong. He had survived Auschwitz, but nobody wanted to listen to the horrors he went through. The home town would integrate him alright in local groups, like a local sports club, but the fine and relaxed mood would immediately deteriorate, in case he would report any detail – the listeners would even deny, that any such horror would have been possible.

CSD does support the activities of the citizens initiative and association "Train Of Commemoration" (Zug der Erinnerung, see www.zugdererinnerung.de) and its tough chairman Ruediger Minow. Our member Andrée Leusink has contributed to a protest demonstration December 2010 at the main railway station in Nuernberg, where the Deutsche Bahn AG (German Federal Railway Corporation) celebrated its 150th anniversary, while refusing to compensate victims deported to Concentration Camps.

Actually the "Deutsche Reichsbahn's" successor enterprise – the Deutsche Bahn AG – had only contributed very small "humanitarian gestures", especially an average of about 5 € (five Euros) per person for surviving victims from Ukranian and other Eastern Europe countries, who were in stock cars (Viehswagen). But the company had paid 250.- € compensation for train passengers, who in 2010 had suffered a failing air conditioning system (3 hours too hot in summer).

⁵ Hans Frankenthal: Verweigerte Rueckkehr – Erfahrungen nach dem Judenmord. Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999

Recently CSD cooperates with Postsoviet Jewish Immigrants. Dr. Alexej Heistver is president of „German Assoziation of Holocaust Survivors - Immigrants from Postsoviet States“, see also www.holocaustonline.de In April 2011 the Bundesrat has started an initiative, to engage the Federal government in a minimum of rent payments for postsoviet Jewish immigrants, so as to avoid cumbersome social welfare attempts.

For successes in dealing with German administration it takes guts, and it takes human angels in action, who dare to stand up against long odds: A formidable example is judge Dr. Jan-Robert von Renesse / Germany, who reported about: “Child Survivors testifying in the court as witness of Shoah. Judge’s experience with so-called ghetto pensions.” In Germany and Israel most ghetto survivors applying for a rent due to a new law for exactly this option, had been denied access. They had been asked before court, whether they had worked “on their own will” for pay (as low as that had been anyway), and of course they had answered the truth, that they had been forced to work. But it triggered a denial of rent. It was not before Dr. von Renesse took up the issue, that successful revisions were achieved. A shame for Germany is, that nowadays he has been mobbbed and deleted from his job as judge by authorities, all in context of a bad tradition of jurisprudence.

Final remark: In view of all we went through and still go through, a tough Jewish team may well be the only human team, that would survive an expedition to planet Mars, where there is no air to breath and temperature on average 35 degrees lower than on Earth. For here and now my conclusion is:

Antisemitism requires our ongoing alertness and determination!