

Kristallnacht: Confessions and Concerns

By Arno Herzberg
(JTA)

Whenever the month of November appears on the calendar, I know that days of pain and remembrance wait for me. Hesitant and almost discouraged, I turn the leaves of days passed and pause on the day which seems destined to harbor disasters for our people. It is heart wrenching to remember Nov. 9-10. Too much happened on these days to be glanced over on the pages of history — Kristallnacht, the death of German Jewry in 1938; the United Nations resolution equating Zionism with racism in 1975; and the Berlin Wall coming down in 1989.

With a heavy heart we record these events. The wounds are still fresh and I wonder whether they will ever heal. What happened more than 50 years ago on the Night of the Broken Glass is standing before us in all its ugliness, more vivid than ever.

Germans burning down the synagogues, tearing up the scrolls of our Law, burning prayer books, coming into the houses of Jews to smash their furniture, tearing up their linens, destroying everything in sight, smashing windows of every business owned by a Jew, ransacking merchandise and, in the end, arresting all Jews and shipping them to concentration camps. A gray-haired lady, a child at that time, tells how a Gestapo agent tore her precious doll right out of her arms, smashing the toy against the wall and pushing her to the floor. Those German heroes stopped before nothing.

The good German burghers saw it all. They clapped when the Jewish men were marched through the streets. It was a glorious achievement. Nobody can duplicate it so easily.

But can we forget this? Can I, or shall I, forgive — as President Bush wants me to — what all these good Germans have done? It was a preposterous idea the president advanced in preparation for German unification: I should forgive the Germans that they murdered my father and my mother, wiped out my whole family. He forgot that forgiving is the first step toward forgetting.

In the final analysis, we were all alone 50 years ago, as victims usually are. There were a thousand questions. Did God die in the flames of the synagogues? Did he turn away from the concentration camps? Was the world deaf and blind, closing its borders and leaving us to the hatred of a whole nation?

There were no answers. There was no understanding, not even a feeling word.

Even the Jewish leaders in America at that time were of a peculiar brand. I left Germany in 1938 at the end of September. Somebody sent me to Stephen Wise, the great leader. I tried to inform him about the hardships Jews in Germany had to bear and told him that it was only a matter of weeks before German Jews would be faced with

a catastrophe.

His answer: We know everything that is going on in Germany; our American correspondents give us all the details. This was the end of my audience. I left with a bitter taste in my mouth. This was the time when news about the persecution of Jews in Germany appeared in small print on some inside page of American newspapers — if it was printed at all.

There was something unreal in the attitude of people who should have known better. Their

schools devote hardly any space to the Holocaust. Sure, the Germans are eager to learn. They learned to adapt themselves from the republican regime to Hitler's Reich, and then again from the depth of base human behavior to the benefits of the post-war world.

In the East, they had even more hurdles to overcome. They turned from the Third Reich to communism and now again they have to switch from communism to values of the West. And we are told that everything is alright



judgement was clouded by the ingrained experiences of past times. Events had outpaced them, but they did not know it. Have times changed now?

Today, a year after the Wall fell on the same date our misfortune took such a turn for the worse. I wonder whether our reaction is adequate.

Kristallnacht was the end of a beginning and it was, at the same time, the beginning of an inglorious end. The Wall torn down was the end of a post-war era that reminded the Germans what they have done to Jews and to others, but it might also be the beginning of an end to remembering the past.

After all, those who perpetrated the evil are still alive and want to forget what they did. Those who were born after the war were never told about the misdeeds of their fathers. History books used in German high

with those moral acrobatics. It is hard to believe. We only have to point to the desecration of Jewish cemeteries, which continues in East and West Germany unabated with perpetrators "unknown." German efficiency does not apply to these cases.

Jews have always believed what Woodrow Wilson once said, that it is possible "to reduce political interest to moral principle." It has been a standard fare for preachers and their lies. But the real world is different, and with the Germans on their own, Kristallnacht and the break in the Berlin Wall, all on the same day, can hardly be reconciled. The Germans will celebrate. We can only mournfully remember.

Arno Herzberg was JTA bureau chief in Berlin in the 1930s.



"CJN" Keeps Readers Informed

Dear Rita:

I read with interest the October 1990 edition of *The Charlotte Jewish News*. I would like to compliment you on the quality publication that you provided to the community in light of the columns by the publisher of *The Charlotte Observer*. The reader is informed with insightful responses to the misinformation in the secular press and provides a number of viewpoints on these important issues which are facing the Jewish people.

I am fortunate to be able to read over 40 community newspapers weekly. The October's edition of *The Charlotte Jewish News* challenged the issues of the day which face all of us as caring and committed Jews.

I look forward to continuing to work with you on behalf of the Charlotte Jewish Federation and CJF.

Sincerely,

Barry R. Swartz, Consultant
Southeast Area Office, CJF

We encourage our readers' viewpoints. Letters should be submitted typewritten and double-spaced and signed. Please include your address and phone number. We reserve the right to edit.

Palestinian Attackers Transformed into Victims

By Bertram Korn, Jr.

Violence in Israel is often misreported by the American media, but coverage of the recent Arab rioting on Jerusalem's Temple Mount was extraordinary for its level of distortions and omissions. From the brief stories broadcast on the nightly television news to the lengthy, detailed reports in the major daily newspapers, no stone was left unturned in the effort to transform violent Palestinian attackers into defenseless Palestinian victims.

Newspaper headlines were unanimous in placing blame on Israel, with "Israel Kills 19 Arabs" as the most frequent lead. The fact that the Arabs initiated the violence somehow escaped the headline-writers' attention. Perhaps the most distorted headline was the one which appeared on the front page of *USA Today*: "Stones vs. bullets in Israel." The truth, of course, was that the clash was between Arab stoners and defenseless Jewish worshippers; later it was Arab stones versus tear gas, then versus rubber bullets, and only then versus bullets.

The photographs that accompanied articles about the violence were overwhelmingly sympathetic to the Arab side. Most major dailies printed one or more photos of wounded Arabs, and none of wounded Jews (for example, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Boston Globe* and *USA Today*). The few that published a single photo of the Jewish victims made sure to publish several of the Arabs (most notably, the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*).

The fact that Arab rock-throwers initiated the clash was distorted or downplayed throughout the media, with much focus placed on the Arabs' fear that Jewish protesters were going to march near the Temple Mount. The fact that the Israeli government paid for large ads in the Arabic press, several days before the clash, announcing that the march had been prohibited, was mentioned by the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (although buried deep in the story), while completely ignored by the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Boston Globe*.

The Arab rock-throwing assault, and the Jews who were wounded by it, got short shrift. The *Washington Post's* estimate of 35 Jewish victims was the closest to being correct. Others offered gross underestimates: the *Boston Globe* said that only seven Jews were hurt, the *New York Times* reported 11, the

Philadelphia Inquirer claimed that it was 20. Several leading television news programs simply failed to report that any Jews were hurt. The most evasive description of the Jewish casualty toll was made by the *Wall Street Journal*, which reported that "all but a handful of those who were wounded during the Jerusalem clashes were Arab."

The tactics used by the Israeli police to defend themselves against the Arab mobs garnered much of the media's attention. Martin Fletcher of NBC said (twice) that the Israelis had carried out a "slaughter"; the *Boston Herald* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* characterized it as a "bloodbath." Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* would allow only that the Arabs' behavior was "apparently provocative." The *New York Post* featured a huge front-page headline: "Bloody Israel."

The background information about the clash likewise left much to be desired. The *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* all described the Temple Mount as a Moslem holy site and the nearby Western Wall as Judaism's holiest site. In fact, it is the Mount that is Judaism's holiest site (and only Islam's third holiest). Many reporters (including the *Boston Globe's* correspondent, ABC's Dean Reynolds, and Bill McLaughlin of CBS) referred to the Wall as the "Wailing Wall," thereby accepting the derisive term invented by the Arabs to mock Jews who did not have free access to the Wall during previous centuries of Moslem occupation.

Finally, there is the question of how to interpret the latest incident. The rush to draw extreme conclusions was led by the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, which in a lead editorial blamed Israeli "insensitivity" (among the examples cited was the purchase of an apartment in Jerusalem's Old City by an Israeli cabinet minister three years ago!) for the violence, and urged the U.S. to respond by linking its aid to Israel to the behavior of the Israeli police in Jerusalem.

It was quite a journalistic sleight-of-hand for newspapers like the *Inquirer* to deceptively transform Palestinian attackers into Palestinian victims, and then cite their alleged victimization as a reason for the U.S. to punish Israel. But that sort of dishonesty was typical of how the media treated the Jerusalem rioters.

Bertram Korn, Jr. is Executive Director of the Philadelphia office of CAMERA, the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America.

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