

The New York Times Has a Jewish Problem

by Hugh Fitzgerald



An editor at the New York Times has recently apologized for having written several anti-Semitic and racist tweets. Tom Wright-Piersanti is a senior staff editor at the Times. In the years 2008-2010, Wright-Piersanti wrote several offensive tweets, which were uncovered by the website *Breitbart*.

On New Years' Day 2010, Wright-Piersanti tweeted, "I was going to say 'Crappy Jew Year,' but one of my resolutions is to be less anti-Semitic. So... HAPPY Jew Year. You Jews."

The previous month, during the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, Wright-Piersanti shared a picture of a car with a lit menorah on its roof and wrote, "Who called the Jew-police?"

"I have deleted tweets from a decade ago that are offensive," Wright-Piersanti tweeted after the *Breitbart* article was published. "I am deeply sorry."

He also mocked Native Americans, and Afro-Americans, for which no doubt he is also "deeply sorry."

Amazing how "deeply sorry" people are about so many things the

minute they are found out, but not one minute earlier. Perhaps he is “deeply sorry” only because those tweets came to light. They were not just “offensive,” but disgusting. In any event, Wright-Piersanti apparently needn’t worry about his job. As of this writing, he’s still at the New York Times, a paper that has a Jewish, and latterly an Israeli, problem. It recently published two antisemitic cartoons in its international edition. The more offensive of the two depicted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a guide dog (a dachshund) wearing a Star of David collar and leading President Donald Trump, who is wearing a black kippah. Anyone of sense would have seen this cartoon as antisemitic, save apparently the editor at the *Times* who approved the cartoon. And the *Times*, just like Wright-Piersanti, said it was “deeply sorry.” Yes, it was “deeply sorry for the publication of an anti-Semitic political cartoon” that appeared in its international print edition. And the *Times* has decided to stop publishing cartoons from non-staff members. It has also said that it will also overhaul its bias training to have an emphasis on antisemitism, according to an internal note from the Times’s publisher, A.G. Sulzberger. What about training on how to bring a modicum of fairness to reporting on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Or would that be asking too much?

The *Times* has had a “Jewish problem” ever since Hitler came to power in 1933. So let’s go back to the 1930s and 1940s, before there was even an Israel for the *Times* to be anti-Israel about, to see how, and to ask why, the most influential paper in the world, owned by Jews, paid so little attention to the murderous threat of Hitler and the Nazis as it grew throughout the 1930s. It was precisely because the paper was owned by Jews, who were determined not to have their paper be thought of as an organ of special pleading about Jewish suffering, that the New York Times failed so miserably, in its under-reporting of the Holocaust and the antisemitic crimes during the 1930s that led up to its final, murderous efflorescence. In her brilliant *Buried by the Times: The Holocaust and*

America's Most Important Newspaper, Laurel Leff notes that Arthur Hays Sulzberger, who became the publisher in 1936 (though he was effectively the publisher from 1933, because of the illness of the previous publisher, Adolph Ochs) and continued in that post until 1961, at the most critical period for the Jews of Europe, had studiously refrained from having anything to do with Jewish organizations or causes. **He (Arthur Sulzberger, the publisher of the Times) refused to donate to the United Jewish Appeal or the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. He wrote in 1934, "I am a non-Zionist because the Jew, in seeking a homeland of his own, seems to me to be giving up something of infinitely greater value of the world. ... I look askance at any movement which assists in making the peacemaker among nations merely a national Distribution Committee, favoring instead the National Missions of the Presbyterian Church." In 1948, he wrote, "I know of no difference in my way of life than in that of any Unitarian."**

Sulzberger was committed to an odd definition of journalistic balance. The *Times* refused to run letters to the editor that attacked the rise of antisemitism in Germany, so that it would not also have to offer space to those supporting antisemitism.

Instead of speaking of Jewish refugees, *Times* editorials tended to speak of *German* refugees. Arthur Hays Sulzberger refused to intervene with American officials to get a visa for a cousin, Fritz Sulzberger, advising him in 1938 to stay in Germany. So indifferent was he to what was going on in Germany, apparently, that he thought as late as 1938 that Jews should remain in Germany and ride out the storm. His misreading of reality was astonishing. By that year, it should have been clear that staying in Germany amounted to a death sentence. In 1933, Jews had been discharged from all universities, and then from all civil service jobs. Long before Kristallnacht, there were boycotts of Jewish shops, Jews were attacked, even beaten to death, on the street, Nazi rallies were held where Jews were hysterically denounced; a

phrase from a 19th-century antisemite, Heinrich Treitschke, was recycled for use by the Nazis: **“Die Juden sind unser Unglück!”** (“The Jews are our misfortune”).

Yet in 1938, the publisher of the *New York Times* was advising a relative to remain in Germany. A. H. Sulzberger didn't want to hear about all the atrocities German Jews were enduring. And he didn't want his paper to make too much of such things either.

The threat to Jews was always minimized by the *Times*. Early in the war, the *Times* ran a campaign of nine editorials and three front-page stories that urged Congress to allow British families to send their children to safety in America, but made no such campaign on behalf of the Jews. Those British children might have been in danger from V-2 rockets, if they lived in the East End of London, but the Jews in Nazi-occupied countries faced certain death if they were not brought to America. *The New York Times* – under Arthur Hays Sulzberger – didn't care enough to call for their admission.

Nor did the *Times* think helping Jews find refuge from the Nazis outside of America was a cause to promote in its editorials. **When the British issued the White Paper of 1939, restricting Jewish immigration to Palestine to 15,000 a year for five years, the *Times* ran an editorial praising the move as necessary “to save the homeland itself from overpopulation as well as from an increasingly violent resistance on the part of the Arabs.”** That White Paper effectively kept hundreds of thousands of Jews, who might have escaped from Europe in time, from being admitted to Mandatory Palestine. Churchill thundered against it as unjust and cruel. But not according to the *New York Times*