

# Leading German publisher smeared as anti-Semite

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The Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles has included German journalist and publisher Jakob Augstein on its annual list of alleged anti-Semites. Augstein is editor of the weekly *Freitag* newspaper. He is also a regular columnist for *Spiegel Online* and co-owner of the Spiegel publishing house established by his father.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center was founded in 1977 and named after the famous pursuer of Nazi war criminals. But apart from its name, the organization has little to do with Simon Wiesenthal. It was founded by Rabbi Marvin Hier, a supporter of the political right in Israel. For some time, the center has published a list of what it calls the “Top Ten Anti-Semitic/Anti-Israel Slurs.”

Augstein is listed in the ninth spot, in the company of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan and fascistic organizations such as Swoboda (Ukraine), Golden Dawn (Greece) and Jobbik (Hungary).

There is no public record of Augstein making anti-Semitic remarks. He has occasionally criticized the Israeli government and Israel’s religious right, but has never defamed the Jewish population of Israel or Jews in general.

To support its case against Augstein, the Wiesenthal Center cites passages from his *Spiegel Online* column that—despite in some cases having been shortened or taken out of context—in no way substantiate the accusation of anti-Semitism.

They are examples of Augstein’s criticisms of the influence of Zionist lobby groups over US policy, US and German support for the warmongering of the Netanyahu government, Israel’s nuclear arsenal, and living conditions in Gaza. In other passages, Augstein

compares Islamic fundamentalists with ultra-orthodox Jews, noting that violent attacks by Islamists play into the hands of the US and Israel.

In placing Augstein on its list of anti-Semites, the Wiesenthal Center cites as a witness the German journalist Henryk M. Broder, who is referred to as a “respected columnist for the *Die Welt* newspaper.” He is quoted as saying: “Jakob Augstein is not a salon anti-Semite; he’s a pure anti-Semite ... an offender by conviction who missed the opportunity to make his career with the Gestapo only because he was born after the war. He certainly would have had what it takes.”

In notes accompanying the Wiesenthal Center’s list, Broder describes Augstein as a “little Streicher,” a reference to Julius Streicher, the editor of the Nazi propaganda rag *St ü rmer*, which was notorious for its anti-Semitic agitation. He was sentenced to death by the Allies as a war criminal and executed in 1946.

In the spring of last year, Broder played an important role in the campaign against Günter Grass, the Nobel Prize-winning author. Grass published the poem “What Needs to be Said,” which criticized Israel’s war preparations against Iran and the support for this from Germany. The poem warned of the disastrous consequences of a military strike. (See “Defend Günter Grass!”) Broder called Grass a “prototype of the educated anti-Semite.”

Born in 1946, Broder began his journalistic career in the 1960s with the *St. Pauli Nachrichten* magazine, which published sexually provocative photos alongside long, left-oriented texts. He was soon specializing in “uncovering” anti-Semitism in left-wing journalistic circles, and increasingly denounced any criticism of the Israeli government or expression of sympathy for the Palestinians as anti-Semitism. He eventually declared explicitly that any criticism of Zionism was a form of

anti-Semitism.

As Broder's attacks on political opponents became more venomous and foul-mouthed, the media offered him more platforms. He was a regular contributor to *Der Spiegel* magazine from 1995 to 2010. He also published articles in *Die Zeit* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and participated in broadcasts on public television and radio. In 2010, he joined the right-wing Springer publishing company. Since then he has written for *Die Welt* and *Welt Online*.

The *Axis for Good* blog, for which Broder is jointly responsible, takes a line similar to that of the US neo-cons and promotes a rabid variety of anti-Islamism.

Broder also works closely with the Swiss weekly *Die Weltwoche*, which is associated with the anti-immigrant Swiss People's Party. In his book *Hooray, We Surrender!* Broder accused the West of capitulating to Islamism. It is no coincidence that Anders Behring Breivik, the Norwegian fascist terrorist, used quotes from Broder to justify his mass murders.

Broder participated with the rest of the mainstream political establishment in the attacks on Günter Grass. At the time, Grass faced a virtually united front of media and political opponents. Jakob Augstein was among the very few journalists who supported Grass, albeit half-heartedly.

This time it is different. Augstein is being defended by most of the media, but not by the Springer press.

The Central Council of Jews in Germany has also rejected the accusation of anti-Semitism. Its president, Dieter Graumann, criticized Augstein's articles on Israel. However, he told *Focus* magazine he did not want to "insinuate" that Augstein was guilty of a "camouflaged anti-Semitism, contributing to incitement against Israel."

Salomon Korn, the Central Council's vice-president, expressed himself in a similar vein on Radio Germany. He said he "never [had] the impression that what he [Augstein] wrote was anti-Semitic." Of Broder, he said, "What he says cannot be always taken literally, and what he says cannot be always be taken seriously."

While Grass was attacked by his own Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Free Democratic Party (FDP) foreign minister and the Left Party's candidate for the federal presidency, Augstein has been offered protection from the accusations of anti-Semitism by a broad political spectrum, ranging from Left Party

parliamentary leader Gregor Gysi to Christian Democratic Union (CDU) Deputy National Chairperson Julia Klöckne.

There are likely two related reasons why the German political establishment has lined up behind Augstein but did not defend Grass. First, Grass criticized not only the Israeli government, but also German foreign policy, which was in the process of more actively pursuing its interests in the Middle East. Augstein's criticism, on the other hand, is much milder. It is mainly directed against the Israeli government and not German foreign policy. And even there it is inconsistent and half-hearted.

German foreign policy can to some extent accommodate itself to criticism of Israel. The present German government has fully integrated itself in the preparations for war against Syria and Iran, and is cooperating closely with the government of Israel, but it is unwilling to have its policies completely dictated by Tel Aviv or people like Broder.

The second reason is that the behavior of the Netanyahu government is now viewed by Berlin, London and Washington as problematic. The London *Financial Times* commented only last week that one should not equate support for Israel with backing for Netanyahu's colonization of the Palestinian West Bank. "You can be pro-Israel without backing Mr. Netanyahu," it wrote.



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