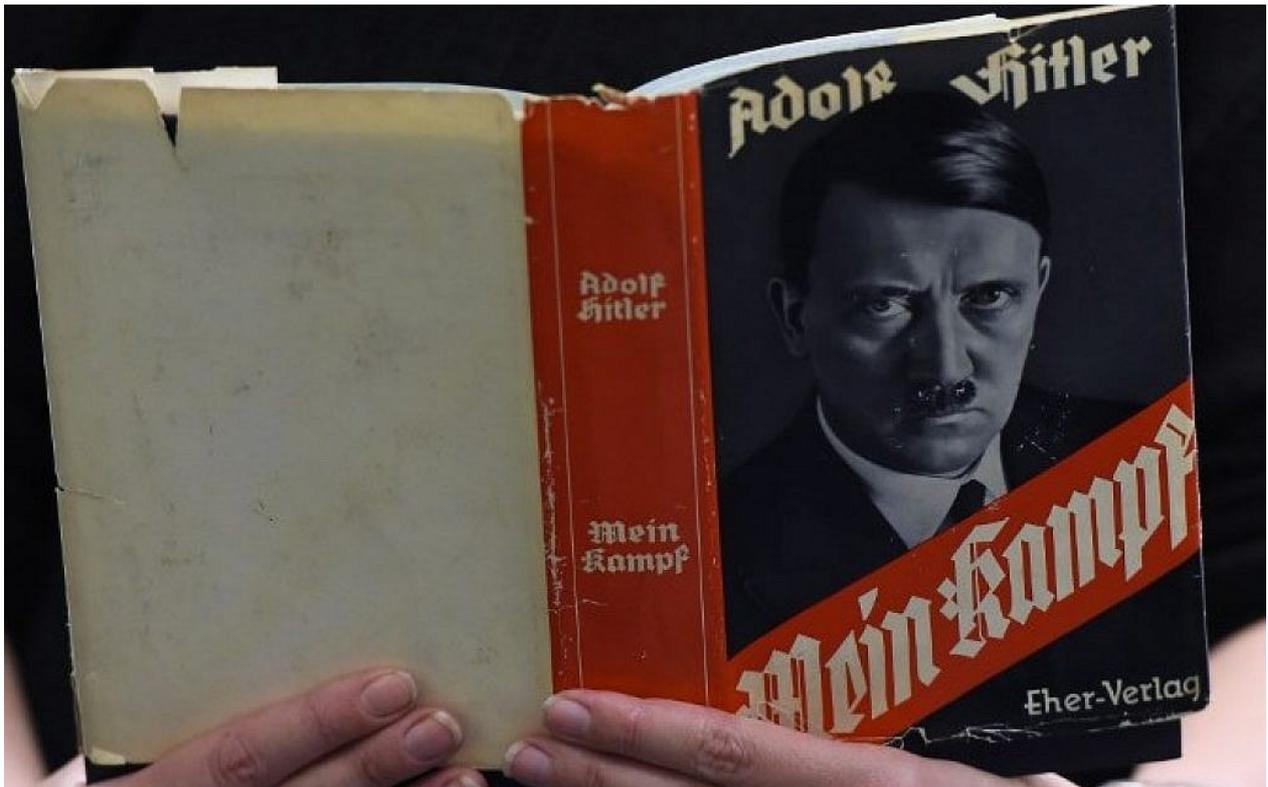


A 'LONG AND YET PATHETIC BOOK' BY AN 'OBSESSIVE PSYCHOPATH'

Why Jews didn't blink an eye when 'Mein Kampf' first came out

Prewar Germany had no shortage of Jewish newspapers, but not one reviewed Hitler's book. They didn't want to 'waste time with such nonsense,' one scholar says, though some Christians went to town on it

By [RAPHAEL AHREN](#) | 14 February 2016, 4:45 pm



This file photo taken on December 7, 2015 shows a German edition of Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf" at the Berlin Central and Regional Library (Tobias Schwarz/AFP)

In January 2016, with the close of a 70-year ban, Hitler's "Mein Kampf" was republished in Germany. The event made headlines worldwide, and sparked particularly anguished debate in the German Jewish community. This volume of "scorning propaganda" must remain prohibited, Josef Schuster, the president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, protested, specifying that "law enforcement authorities should rigorously prosecute the distribution and sale of the book."

By contrast, when "Mein Kampf" came out for the first time, 91 years ago, German Jews hardly noticed it. They certainly did not view it as a threat to their existence, or even as a harbinger of a changing political climate in the Fatherland.

There were several Jewish papers in prewar Germany — *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, *Jüdische Rundschau*, *Der Israelit*, *Das Jüdische Echo*, *Jüdisch-liberale Zeitung*, and right-wing publications like *Der Schild* and *Der nationaldeutsche Jude* — but only one of them ran a short piece about "Mein Kampf," which was essentially an excerpt from another paper's review. On October 9, 1925, C.V.-Zeitung of the "Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith" ran a short piece on page nine entitled "Rather than spirit, arrogance," which did not offer its own critique of "Mein Kampf" but sufficed with quoting a negative review in the conservative *Kreuz-Zeitung*.

"The Jewish newspapers mostly ignored Hitler's book. Now and then there were hints to the book, but no deeper discussion or analysis," said Othmar Plöckinger, who recently published a 700-page book with many historical sources dealing with "Mein Kampf," including 51 contemporary reviews. Only one of them was in a Jewish paper.



Können Rassen einander verstehen?

Von Dr. Hans Driesch, Professor an der Universität Leipzig.

Dieser Aufsatz soll in breiterer Form einen Gedanken durchführen, welcher in einer früheren Studie von mir über „Rasse, Nation und Geist“ bereits an einer Stelle kurz angefasst ist. Die meisten Menschen sind unerschütterlicher Natur.

Ich beginne auf einem Gebiete meiner eigenen persönlichen Erfahrung: Wie haben Germanen und Chinesen zueinander, oder, noch allgemeiner genommen, der europäische und der asiatische Mensch?

The front page of the October 9, 1925 edition of the C.V.-Zeitung of the Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith ([Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main/Digitale Sammlungen Judaica](https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/14444444/Universitätsbibliothek_Frankfurt_am_Main/Digitale_Sammlungen_Judaica))

“The anti-Jewish attitude of the Kreuz-Zeitung... is the best guarantee for the calm and correct judgment of the book and its author,” the C.V.-Zeitung declares. It then goes on to quote one paragraph describing Hitler’s book as superficial, pompous and repulsive.

“One looks for spirit and finds only arrogance; one looks for inspiration and receives boredom; one looks for love and passion and finds slogans; one looks for healthy hate and finds swearwords,” the Kreuz-Zeitung’s reviewer laments.

The editors of the C.-V.-Zeitung, a paper dedicated to “Germaness and Judaism,” have nothing to add. They promise their own review of the “völkisch Führer’s book,” but it never appears.

“When Jewish newspapers reported about Hitler and his National Socialist Party, the main focus was on insults or attacks on Jews, desecration of Jewish cemeteries and so on, but not on the National Socialist ideology,” Plöckinger told The Times of Israel in an interview.

When the Jewish press did examine anti-Semitic “ideology,” they mostly looked at “scientific” anti-Semites — adherents of eugenics — and not at Hitler and his book.

As [Rahel Strauss](#), a physician who grew up in Karlsruhe and in 1933 emigrated to Palestine, writes in her memoirs, “We passed by the boxes of the [Völkischer Beobachter](#) [the official organ of the Nazi Party], read the incendiary articles and indignantly continued working. We didn’t realize that this Völkischer Beobachter was one of the most read newspapers in Germany at the time. We saw Hitler’s ‘Mein Kampf’ on display in every bookstore; none of us bought it, none of us read it.”



Othmar Plöckinger (courtesy)

In some respect, Plöckinger said, the Jews’ reaction to Hitler’s screed, or rather the lack thereof, “was a kind of not wanting to waste time with such nonsense as ‘Mein Kampf.’”

Until the late 1920s, Hitler’s party was just one of many völkisch and anti-Semitic movements that Jewish papers dealt with. But even as Hitler became more prominent, his party was seen as a “radical and brutal offshoot” of a much more important and influential anti-Semitic intellectual superstructure,” explained Plöckinger, who co-edited the annotated edition of “Mein Kampf” that was published earlier this year.

The earliest Jewish reviews

While Jewish papers largely overlooked Hitler’s tome, that does not mean individual Jews and non-Jews opposed to anti-Semitism paid it no attention. They did, but they often dismissed it as poorly written, populist rubbish by a charlatan who should not be taken seriously. One notable exception is the Jüdisch-liberale Zeitung, which on August 20, 1930, [ran a front page](#) article, entitled “The National Socialist Menace,” which deals at some length with Hitler’s ideology as laid out in his book.

Jüdisch-liberale Zeitung

Organ der Vereinigung für das liberale Judentum e. V.

redaktionell. Beauftragter: Bruno Weiss.
Vereinsleitung für das liberale Judentum übernimmt nur
diejenigen Mitglieder, die ausbrüchlich als in ihrem Namen
in ihrem Auftrag bestellt oder ernannt sind, die über-
tragung. Alle anderen Briefe, Mitteilungen und Be-
träge erscheinen unter der Verantwortung der Redaktion.

Die „Jüdisch-liberale Zeitung“ erscheint jeden Mittwoch.
Redaktion und Geschäftsstelle: Berlin SW 11, Halleische Str. 1.
Jahrespreis: 3358, 3359 | Hundert Original-Beilagen
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Bezugspreis durch die Geschäftsstelle Jüdisch lib. J.
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bühren

134 Berlin, 20. August 1930 10. Jahrgang

Die nationalsozialistische Gefahr

Toll in dem Reichstag, den das deutsche Volk am 14.
Februar nicht, etwa jeder seine Reichstagsgebäude mit
den nationalsozialistischen Partei angehört wird, was leider schon
als Teil der angestammten werden. Sitten aber sollte
sich zeigen, dieses ungewöhnliche Anzeichen der national-
sozialistischen Bewegung nur einseitig unter jüdischen Gesichtspunkt
zu verstehen. Wenn ich der Nationalsozialismus eine Wurzel
ist die Hauptursache der wachsenden Bewegung. Aber
auch von den Wurzeln die Wurzeln in dieser Frage ver-
fälschter Darstellung nicht ohne Zusammenhang sind und die
von sie als ein Wurzeln Wurzeln nicht an betonen.
Der Kampf von allen den jüdischen Schicksal auf
ihm stützenden Kammern besteht werden, auf den

erfüllt wird durch die Hochachtung des eigenen und die Ge-
winnung des fremden Volkstumsgehörigen. Schiller hat
im „Schillerbrief“: „Es ist der Geist, der sich dem Körper bewußt.“
In der neuen Zeit ist bestimmt hat durch den Geist.
Die Nation für diese Handlung, erhält sie in der Welt
Geltung, wird das deutsche Volk zu geben haben. Bei dieser
doch niemals Herrschaft sein möglich zur Rettung seiner Ge-
schichte gehabt als in dieser traurigen Gegenwart.

Das
Berliner Wahlbüro
des Liberalen Vereins befindet sich am
Halleischen Ufer 22
Telefon: Bergmann 9666-67

The front page of the Jüdisch-liberale Zeitung from August 20, 1930 (Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main/Digitale Sammlungen Judaica)

On November 1, 1925, Stefan Grossman, who was born Jewish but converted to Christianity, published an extensive review of “Mein Kampf” in the Vienna-based *Neue Freie Presse*, a highbrow paper for which Theodor Herzl had written decades earlier. Grossman started his review by describing his first meeting with the book’s author, whom he met two years earlier when the “unsightly” and “incredibly trivial” Herr Hitler sued Grossman for an article critical of the Nazi party.

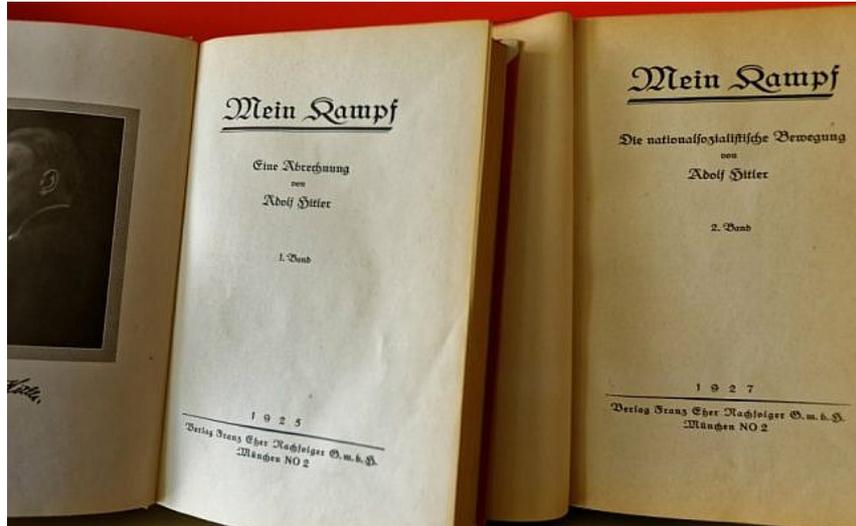
“This book shows Hitler how he is: heartless, ignorant, vain, entirely unimaginative; and the only extenuating cause that can be cited is that he is an incurable war fanatic”

Critiquing both the book and the man, Grossman quoted Hitler boasting of having read “infinitely and thoroughly” in his youth, but remarks that he fails to mention a single book that left a mark on him. “A few pages later, Adolf Hitler writes about this period: ‘In the evenings I was dead tired, unable to look into a book without falling asleep.’ Of both accounts, the second appears to be the more likely one,” Grossman sniped.

Reading this “long and yet pathetic book,” Grossman wondered how it was possible that an “obsessive psychopath” like Hitler managed to attract thousands of people to his political assemblies. The explanation is simple, Grossman posited: A speaker is allowed a certain amount of lunacy; it actually makes him more appealing. Books, however, are different, since bereft of the company of likeminded people, heads are clearer and more rational. “This book shows Hitler as he is: heartless, ignorant, vain, entirely unimaginative; and the only extenuating cause that can be cited is that he is an incurable war fanatic.”

A devastating Catholic critique

The most detailed and most devastating critique of “Mein Kampf” appears to have been written by a Catholic theologian. *Johannes Stanjek* was the editor of the Defense Papers (Abwehr-Blätter), the central organ of the Association to Resist Anti-Semitism, which was founded in 1890 and counted both Jews and Christians among its members.



The first page of the two volumes of an early edition of 'Mein Kampf' (Institut für Zeitgeschichte/Alexander Markus Klotz)

On October 20, 1925, the journal, which had a circulation of 20,000, ran a four-page review of the book's first volume. The byline says Ludwig Kaempfer from Breslau, but since this name does not appear in the association's membership lists nor in the city's population register, Plöckinger believes it was Stanjek's pen name.

With biting sarcasm, the review exposes Hitler for attacking Jews without really knowing anything about them, and then sets out to rebut and disprove many of the outrageous claims made in "Mein Kampf."

For instance, Hitler writes that Jews are so convinced of their race's inferiority that they "want to poison the blood" of other people. Jewish men don't marry Christian women, but the Christian man always marries the Jewish woman, Hitler argues.

"We are perplexed," the reviewer writes. "Real nationalists do not need to provide evidence for their claims, but let us take a look at the statistics." He then goes on to quote exact numbers of mixed marriages in Prussia over the previous 20 years, which show that in fact there were more Jewish grooms with gentile brides than vice versa. Maybe "the tables should be turned around" so as to say that it is not Christianity but Jewry that is being "bastardized," the author suggests.

"Rest assured: Religious Jews will always oppose mixed marriages, just like the Protestant and the Catholic, but they are not fanatical enough to draw biological consequences like Hitler," the review states.

“As long as the völkisch movement cannot find better leaders, much water will flow down the stream before they will win in the the land of poets and thinkers”

The problem with "Mein Kampf" is mostly that "much is claimed, yet little proven," the review continues, and provides countless examples to debunk Hitler's various theories. "The politician from Munich" blames the Jews for the Bolshevism of Bakunin and Lenin (who were not Jewish), talks about Karl Marx's Jewish roots but forgets to mention that Friedrich Engels was a non-Jew. Hitler cites Jews involved in revolutionary movements but conveniently neglects leading Jews in conservative and reactionary circles.

Hitler declared that Aryans were, and are, alone "the carrier of the development of human culture," which leads the reviewer to rattle off a long list of Jewish achievements in architecture, music, statecraft and indeed every human endeavor, but then says that even if the Jews did not have all these accomplishments to show for themselves, "what would that prove? Could a society that for decades was excluded from all progress, education and culture by the horrible cruelty of the ghetto be blamed if it hadn't brought forth these men?"

The journal's review also takes Hitler to task for defiling the memory of 12,000 Jewish soldiers who fought for Germany during World War I, citing the "embarrassing" episode of a leading Nazi who promised 1,000 Reichsmark to everyone who could show him a Jewish family with three sons in the army. Fifty such families were quickly located, some of which had eight members on the battlefield at the same time. "Since this sum had to be paid, you can see the boundless ignorance of Jews with which the German heroes dared to defame their fellow citizens."

While full of facts, figures and cogent arguments, this scathing review of Hitler's book concludes with a fatally mistaken assessment of Hitler's future, a chilling reminder of how woefully naive many Germans were of the threat posed by his genocidal ideology.

"One puts Hitler's book aside with a feeling of satisfaction," it summarizes. "As long as the völkisch movement cannot find better leaders, much water will flow down the stream before they will be victorious in the the land of poets and thinkers."



Adolf Hitler (Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1990-048-29A via Wikipedia)

On February 21, 1927, the Defense Papers ran a review, also likely penned by Stanjek, of “Mein Kampf’s” second volume. It criticizes Hitler with the same sharp wit, though one gets the impression that the author is starting to grasp that Nazism is not a flash in the pan but becoming a mass movement.

The review starts off by quoting from the first volume, where Hitler demands that his movement aim “more at emotion and only very limitedly at the so-called reason.”

It is remarkable that this statement has not attracted even a little public attention, the article notes. After all, nothing describes the Nazis’ “eccentricity and foolishness” better than Hitler’s dismissal of “the so-called reason.” Once readers internalize this bit from the first volume they will no longer be surprised by the drivel served in the second volume, the reviewer writes. “And yet one cannot be silent about it,” he writes and proceeds to rebut some of the more outrageous claims.

“A serious polemic about Hitler, after he declared war on reason, is certainly not in order,” he writes, and goes on to ridicule the future Führer. For example, he takes on Hitler’s “phantasies” about the “leaders of a hoped-for Jewish world empire” who work toward the destruction of Germany and Japan. “Oh, these evil Jews!” he exclaims sarcastically.” Or about Hitler’s call to execute “many tens of thousands” of criminals responsible for the [November Revolution of 1918](#). “Here Hitler got alarmingly close to the point where only a pathologist can make a judgement,” he writes.

In conclusion, the reviewer expresses the hope that the German youth, which increasingly supports Hitler, and their teachers and advisers, start realizing the folly of this growing movement. If Germany does not want to lose its good international reputation, he writes, it is about time to “energetically confront” it.

Six years later, Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor.

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