

# Jewish Chronic

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

You remember last week I criticized the Jewish Chronicle (together with Anglo-Jewry, in general) for making an unnecessarily lurid item out of [the Richard Desmond case](#)? Well, they didn't like it. Not one bit. So much so that I have been informed by email that I have been banned, excluded and blackballed from writing occasional pieces for them! Well, if that isn't a typical Anglo-Jewish response. "Tow the party line or else." "No criticism." And then comes the usual, "Don't we have enough enemies outside without being attacked from within?" Most of my life it has been the Orthodox world that has been seen to be clamping down on dissent. Not any more! "Oh, how the mighty have fallen." What kind of journal cannot take criticism? In all fairness, it must also be said that having the guts to come out so brazenly is a new departure, because traditionally the JC has tended to play too safe. Perhaps new editors are Jekylls and Hydes.

"Freedom of the press," I hear you say? The truth is there never has been complete and absolute freedom. But I guess it's relative. We get more information in the West, even if much of it is both wrong and biased, than they would in Saudi Arabia, for example. Why even the iconic internet company, Google, caved in to Chinese pressure and allows censorship. Even the most unbiased editor makes decisions. And that's only fair. I wouldn't quibble with that because that's his job.

As students we used to argue that in Russia it required a committee of Communist Party hacks to approve anything printed in Pravda. Then we realized that in the West a wealthy power broker could control the free press through his money and decide what would go in or what would not. Most often the bottom business line decides what news is fit to print. The saving grace of a free society is that you at least have the chance of hearing different points of view, and indeed we know jolly well what sort of angle on the news you'll get from the Guardian or the Telegraph, and what sort of illustrations you'll get in the Sun or Sporting Life!

But the Jewish Chronicle doesn't need money, not really. It is now an independent trust set up by the Kessler family and does very well indeed. It charges exorbitantly for adverts, even from Jewish educational institutions, and makes a small fortune because it is a sort of monopoly, in that it reaches more Anglo-Jews than any other journal and is still regarded by a lot of people as the best the Jewish community has to offer. So this offence that I gave cannot be because they think they'll lose money. No. It is either a new editor under pressure trying to flex his muscles, or a particular kind of mindset that wants to punish any disagreement, which is really most inappropriate to journalism.

My late father used to make disparaging remarks all the time about the Jewish Chronic, as he used to call it—usually when there'd be some reference to the Jewish identity of the person who danced with the person who danced with the

Duke of Edinburgh. One Shabbat he asked me if I'd read that week's edition. I said I hadn't. He flew into a fury. "How can you know what's going on in the Jewish world if you don't read the JC?" he said.

My father was a friend of then-editor William Frankel, who I respected as a wise, generous and good-hearted man, though I think his campaign to establish the Conservative Jewish movement in Britain backfired (in particular on Rabbi Louis Jacobs), even if his critique of the Orthodox establishment was spot on. At one stage I actually used to fill in for Chaim Bermant when he was away. The JC published poems and cartoons of mine as well as articles. Then there was Geoffrey Paul, whom I have always admired very much as an editor and as a man of substance in the community. I've been friendly with important members of the team, from Meir Persoff to Bill Wilson to Melvyn Weinberg to Simon Roker. But then I started to spend more time away from Britain and never had a lot to do with Ned Temko, so I guess, gradually I have diminished my credit line. But it strikes me as very sad when a journal cannot take criticism or reacts to it like a spoilt child. It can't be in anyone's best interest.

I write a weekly column for the Manchester-based Jewish Telegraph. The editor there has been pretty peeved by one or two things I have written over the years. But maybe it's his experience that has led him to realize that indulging favored children can sometimes produce dividends!

The JC still is the widest read paper in Anglo-Jewry but its reader base is shrinking. Overall, Anglo-Jewry is shrinking, through assimilation and emigration. As the community polarizes, fewer Jews on the left are reading the JC and many Orthodox Jews are reading papers that more closely reflect their values, often from Israel. Internet access now means we can know "what's going on in the Jewish world" without the JC. Many of my friends prefer reading the English versions of Ha'aretz and the Jerusalem Post. This way they are closer to millions of Jews rather than thousands. It should make sense for the JC to include rather than exclude.

For me, it matters little. But for Anglo-Jewry I think it's a sad state of affairs.

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