

# Anti-Semitism and the Soviet anti-Zionist campaign

## ПОД ЧЕРНЫМ ФЛАГОМ АНТИКОММУНИЗМА

„Сионизм служит одним из орудий империализма в его глобальной борьбе и подрывной политической и идеологической работе против СССР и всей мировой социалистической системы, работе, направленной на расшатывание социалистических режимов изнутри“.

Из газеты Коммунистический парти Израиля "Народный фронт" в интервью в газете "Дейли"

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by  
Dave  
Davies

Мы должны быть бдительны и всегда готовы пресечь провокации и идеологические диверсии международного сионизма и империализма.

A caricature used in the Soviet anti-Zionist campaign

Late in 1963 a booklet published in Kiev in the Soviet Ukraine sparked a world-wide furor. Entitled "Judaism without Embellishment" and written in Ukrainian by T.K. Kichko, the booklet became the centre of a debate on anti-Semitism in the USSR.

The debate spread to most communist parties including the Communist Party of Australia, where it culminated in a small booklet endorsed in June 1965 by the Political Committee (now called the National Executive) of the CPA.<sup>1</sup>

Among other things, the statement criticised the Kichko book, expressed rather tentative concern at the persistence of people with anti-Semitic prejudice in the USSR and said that "there is evidence leading to a conclusion that a vigorous campaign in the Soviet Union would be valuable to eliminate all surviving remnants from the virulent anti-Semitism promoted under Tsarism and later in the Hitler-occupied areas in World War II".

Such a "vigorous campaign" has not been conducted. On the contrary, a long list of publications open to the same condemnation as the Kichko booklet has appeared in the USSR. This article will give some examples and discuss some of the underlying reasons for these manifestations which have caused such traumas among socialists and friends of the Soviet Union.

Anti-Semitism is defined here as hatred of the Jewish people on racial grounds. (It is realised that Arabs are Semites too, but this will be put aside for the purpose of this article.)

Anti-Semitism has deep roots in many countries. It was officially promoted for centuries by the Christian Church. Jews were convenient scapegoats for political demagogues and exponents of various narrow economic interests and it was little wonder that anti-Semitic prejudices took root in wide sections of the population including the working class, the peasantry and the lumpen proletariat.

A particularly brutal form of anti-

Semitism flourished in the Tsarist Russian empire, particularly in the Ukraine, Poland, the Baltic region and western areas of Russia. Jews were confined to a "Pale of Settlement" and subject to pogroms — a Russian word meaning massacre which has become international.

Lenin and other prominent bolshevik leaders wrote on the Jewish question in Russia. Some of their predictions — such as those on the "assimilation" of Jews into the more numerous nationalities have not been proven correct and some of their analyses are open to debate in the light of subsequent events.

At the same time they strongly condemned anti-Semitism and called for sustained efforts to eradicate it. In March 1919, for example, Lenin made eight gramophone records of speeches. He thought the subject of anti-Semitism important enough to devote one record to it. He said, "Only the most ignorant and downtrodden people can believe the lies and slander that are spread about the Jews .... " And, "Shame on accursed Tsarism which tortured and persecuted the Jews. Shame on those who foment hatred towards other nations."<sup>2</sup>

(Later, Lenin's speeches were transcribed onto a long-playing disc. I bought this record in Moscow, but only seven of the eight speeches were on it. The missing one was the one just quoted.)

There is no doubt that Jews in the USSR have made big advances along with other nationalities in terms of living standards, security and culture. People of Jewish origin are prominent particularly in science and culture.

Given that there are widespread and deep-rooted anti-Jewish prejudices in the USSR and that no campaign has been conducted against them, it is hard to see how *any* "anti-Zionist" campaign can avoid the danger of striking anti-Semitic chords, no matter how scientifically and carefully it is conducted.

But it will be contended here that the "anti-Zionist" campaign has been conducted with

anything but science and sensitivity, but on the contrary is excessive, out of proportion in volume and venom and frequently based on a one-sided selection of facts and even distortions.

The word "Zionism" itself has been used and misused in so many senses that it has almost lost any meaning. In many contexts it has become synonymous with Jews. For example, if the authorities in a particular country say that the troubles of the day are being stirred up by "Zionists" and there is an atmosphere of popular anti-Semitism, large sections of the population are going to translate that mentally into "It's the bloody Jews again!"

It is often stated that what has been conducted in the USSR particularly since 1967 is an *anti-Zionist* campaign and that this is *not* anti-Semitism. In general, it may be true that criticism of Zionism as a political trend is not necessarily anti-Semitic. Whether it is or not in a given situation depends on circumstances and the way in which it is conducted.

A new wave of anti-Semitism came to the USSR during the nazi occupation of World War II. Millions of Jews died as part of Hitler's "final solution" of the Jewish question, while the population in nazi-occupied areas was subjected to large doses of racist propaganda against the Jews. It should be added that millions of Jews from the western parts of the USSR and Poland survived when evacuated to eastern parts of the USSR.

The novel *The Fixer* by Bernard Malamud (Penguin) depicts the situation of Jews under Tsarism. The sad book *Babi Yar* by the exiled Soviet writer A. Anatoli (A.V. Kuznetsov) tells of nazi atrocities in the Soviet Ukraine during the second world war. (The Sphere Books paperback of *Babi Yar* contains additional elements of sadness. The version of the book published in the USSR is printed in ordinary type but interspersed are passages in bold type. These were deleted by the Soviet censor. Further passages in brackets were added later by the embittered writer.)

A Russian-speaking visitor to the USSR frequently hears the word "Yevrei" (Jew) or its feminine equivalent used as a term of abuse. A person of any nationality who

commits a mean or petty act is often called "Yevrei". The insulting word "Zhid" (Yid) is frequently used. Frequent, too, are anti-Semitic jokes which perpetrate the hoary Jewish stereotypes — mean, grasping, stupid and cunning by turns.

I recall taking up this matter with a Soviet sea captain whose ship was berthed in Melbourne. He seemed educated and open-minded. Not on this subject, however. "My dear Davies," he said, "I must tell you rankly that I am fed up with all these Goldbergs and Silversteins ...." He went on to inform me how Jews seek out gentile blood to bake in matzos for ritual purposes. This was one of the charges in the notorious Beiliss case in Kiev in 1912. What a tragedy to hear it from a well-educated Soviet citizen after decades of socialism.

In Australia too the word "Zionism" is greatly misused. Indeed, there is perhaps no word in the political vocabulary that is uttered with such venom — something which seems strangely out of proportion even allowing for the policies and actions of the Israeli government. I cannot forget what happened when I was leaving a meeting on Viet Nam some years ago in the company of a Jewish friend who had spoken in the rather heated debate in which no mention at all had been made of Israel or the Middle East. A person standing at the door snarled at my friend, "Zionist!"

A strong case can be made for the term "Zionist" to be dropped by marxists, but if it must be used then it should be defined. It is no good "defining" it in terms of invective such as "a vicious racist theory" or "the ideology of the international Jewish bourgeoisie" because they tell us nothing of its content.

An example of the confusion in Australia was an interview which appeared in *Tribune* in 1976<sup>3</sup> with a leading activist in the Australian Union of Students. The debate on Palestine in the universities was at its height. Asked what was meant by a "Zionist", the person interviewed replied that it was one who supported the continued existence of Israel. This definition thus covered all Communist Parties (including the CPA) and Social-Democratic Parties throughout the world. It was little wonder that the campaign ended in disaster.

Most Jewish people have an extremely broad interpretation of what the term means, allowing it to cover those who have any kind of sympathy towards Israel.

In May 1976 a group of young Jews who called themselves Zionists demonstrated outside a hall in Melbourne against visiting Israeli General Bar-Lev. Their action caused consternation among some of the pro-Israel hard-liners who spat on them and threw punches. But the action bewildered some on the left who could not comprehend that the term "Zionist" might include strong opposition to policies of the Israeli government and did not necessarily denote unmitigated evil.

One can perhaps understand the confusion and misunderstanding in the Australian left on the question of "Zionism". The new generations of leftists were not born when the world went through the horror of the Nazi holocaust followed by the formation of Israel with the support of the overwhelming majority of progressive people. Young (and no so young) leftists have grown up in an epoch inspired by struggles of Third World peoples and justified sympathy of the plight of the Palestinians. But these positive developments have contributed to a one-sided evaluation of Israel.

To return to the USSR — there is evidence that some Soviet authorities who should know better also confuse the two terms "Jew" and "Zionist". For example, late in 1974, the American General George S. Brown, a well-known reactionary and anti-Semite trotted out the old story that the banks and the press were owned by Jews. A writer for the Soviet press agency Novosti wrote at the time that "General Brown was right when he spoke of the strong hand of Zionists in the United States".

Since Kichko, a long list of "anti-Zionist" writers has appeared on the Soviet scene. Their works appear in booklets, newspapers and mass-circulation magazines and their names include Y. Ivanov, L. Korneyev, Y. Yevseyev, V. Skurlatov, D. Zhukov, V. Begun, V. Bolshakov, L. Modzhorian and many others.

Titles include: "Caution: Zionism!", "Fascism under the Blue Star", "Invasion

without Arms", "Zionism's Secret Weapon", "A Hotbed of Zionism and Aggression" and many others. Even the discredited Kichko has published again in Ukrainian with his "Judaism and Zionism" (Kiev 1968) and "Zionism — Enemy of the Youth" (Kiev 1972).

In July 1978, the mass circulation weekly *Ogonyok* printed in Russian in over two million copies, carried a series of two long articles entitled "The Most Zionist Business" by L. Korneyev. Its main thrust was that the world's armaments concerns were mainly owned and controlled by Jews.

If that were not enough, the article is spiced with references such as: "Goldwater ... is connected with the Jewish-Sicilian mafia"; the South African industrialist Oppenheimer is "a Christian by religion, a Jew by origin".

One of the sub-headings in this article is worth comment. It reads: "Cosmopolitans of the God of War". If ever a word should be avoided in the USSR in dealing with these matters it is "cosmopolitan" for it evokes the most fearful memories.

In July-August 1952 the flower of Jewish cultural life in the Soviet Union was savagely cut down by Stalin. The names of those tried and executed included David Bergelson, Itzik Feffer, Peretz Markish and other prominent writers and critics. The full truth of this tragic event — from which Soviet Yiddish culture is yet to recover — is still to be told. It was not included among Khrushchov's revelations. But we do know that it was publicly justified at the time by the infamous struggle against "rootless cosmopolitans".

Criticism of the Israel government, its internal and foreign policy, its denial of legitimate rights to the Palestinians, the seizure of lands and the whole of Jerusalem, the internment of people — all this is legitimate and obligatory on socialists. But some balance is required.

I recall my attendance at the 24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Moscow in 1971. Delegates applauded the representatives from Arab Communist Parties as they denounced Israel as "fascist". After the Congress, nearly all those Arabs returned to their homes in exile — in East Berlin, Sofia,

Budapest, Moscow, because their own parties are illegal. The two delegates from the Israeli Communist Party — one of whom was an Arab and one a Jew — boarded commercial flights for Tel Aviv.

An extraordinary case of one-sidedness is to be seen in Yuri Ivanov's booklet "Caution: Zionism!"<sup>5</sup> which is available in English. He devotes pages to alleged "collaboration" of Zionists with the nazis with the aim of maximising anti-Semitism and hence driving more Jews to seek refuge in Israel. But the monstrous crimes of nazism against the Jewish people are passed over in a few calm lines.

To read Ivanov's book, one would think that it was the machinations of a few Zionist agents that convinced those Jews who survived to seek refuge in Israel rather than the vast and "efficient" system of nazi death camps, set up with the stated aim of eradicating the whole of the Jewish people.

Early in his book, Ivanov argues that the Jewish people have not suffered any more than others and that to assert otherwise "is tantamount not only to deliberate misrepresentation of the historical facts in the interests of base nationalistic aspirations, but also deliberate adoption of an inverted racialist stand ...."<sup>6</sup>

Does Ivanov not know of the anti-Semitic campaigns, official and unofficial, conducted in a long list of countries? Does he not know of Hitler's singling out of the Jews? Does he not know that when the nazis took Soviet prisoners during the Second World War the communists and the Jews were immediately shot? Perhaps the writer Sholokhov who referred to this practice should be branded as a Zionist?<sup>7</sup>

The Soviet monthly magazine *Sovetish Heimland*, published in Yiddish, has made some muffled criticisms of some "anti-Zionist" publications. The July 1978 issue, for example, reviewed "Zionism and Apartheid" by V. Skurlatov. The review has been written by a scholar in Middle East affairs, Academician M.A. Korostovtsev and translated from Russian. He criticised many "unscientific" concepts of Skurlatov and while stopping short of using the term "anti-Semitic" he wrote that the book resembles those in which "the chief blame for all the anomalies in social life, in politics and in culture, etc. rests not with the

exploiting classes that are of varied ethnic composition, but rather on a single people taken as a whole, especially on the Jews".

Sad to say, Korostovtsev's views were published only in Yiddish in this small-circulation magazine. And the Russian summary of articles made no mention of it.

In June 1973, *Sovetish Heimland* published a criticism of V. Begun's book "Invasion with Arms". This book has now been republished in an even more objectionable form, once again evoking a critical article from *Sovetish Heimland*. That magazine is not noted for being particularly outspoken or bold, but its critique by R. Brodsky and Y. Shulmeister speaks of "considerable errors" and "serious defects" — and this on a subject requiring such accurate and sensitive treatment.

The two Soviet writers say, "Though he declares that anti-Semitism should not be accounted as class struggle, Begun himself, nevertheless, proceeds from just this standpoint and he explains anti-Semitic manifestations as a struggle between classes. In the edition under review Begun writes: 'Judophobic (anti-Jewish) feelings can also arise as a result of the mass invasion by the Jewish bourgeoisie into the most important spheres of social life.' (p.65) How is this statement to be understood? In the book, "Creeping Counter-revolution", Begun asserts more frankly that he regards anti-Semitism as "an elemental response of the enslaved strata of the working population to the barbaric exploitation of the Jewish bourgeoisie" (p.79) Yet it wasn't the Jewish bourgeoisie that had been protected by the police and the gendarmerie which suffered from these 'Judophobic feelings' or 'elemental response', but the Jewish poor who were just as exploited as were the laboring people of other nationalities. What kind of class struggle can one speak of that takes the form of 'Judophobic feelings'? Why did Begun occupy himself with such a thankless task as to revise the clear and definite standpoint of V.I. Lenin and of the Communist Party on the essence of anti-Semitism?"

The reviewers note instances where Begun confuses the terms "Zionists" and "Jews".

Once again, this material is published only in this small Yiddish-language monthly and once again there is no mention of it in the Russian-language summary.

Would it not be more appropriate to publish these critical remarks in the language of the original "anti-Zionist" materials?

One of the worst examples in this genre appeared in 1979. It was a 240-page book entitled "Zionism as a form of Racism and Racial Discrimination" by L.A. Modzhoryan.<sup>8</sup>

The writer draws on sources published by the authorities in Tsarist times to smear Jews. She plays down the frightful pogroms instigated by the most reactionary elements in Russian/Ukrainian society as mere "reaction to the exploitation to which the broad masses were subjected in capitalist enterprises".

The truth is that the anti-Jewish violence in Tsarist Russia was directed first and foremost at the Jewish poor.

The pogroms, according to Modzhoryan's account, were "artificially exaggerated and widely used by Jewish entrepreneurs and Rabbis ...." Anti-Semitism was nothing but a "bugbear" used by Zionist leaders for their purpose.

This book ignores the emphasis that Lenin and the Bolsheviks placed on the need to combat anti-Semitism. When the Bolsheviks proposed a "National Equality Bill" in 1914, Lenin wrote, "No nationality in Russia is so oppressed and persecuted as the Jewish".

Is there any other aspect of Bolshevik history that could be so disparaged in the USSR today?

Modzhoryan really scrapes the bottom of the barrel in her gathering of material with which to smite the "Zionists". Favorably quoted is the bizarre United Nations speech made in 1975 by (of all people) Idi Amin of Uganda. He stated that the United States had been "colonised" by the Zionists, in whose hands were all the instruments of development and power, all the banking institutions, the most important industrial plants and most branches of manufacture. The USA, says Amin to the Soviet reader of this book, is in the power of the Zionists.

What, then, is the explanation for the avalanche of "anti-Zionist" propaganda in the USSR? Paradoxically, I believe it has little or nothing to do with the Soviet Jews. The overwhelming reasons are to be found in

the foreign and domestic policies of the USSR and their reflection in Soviet public opinion.

Space does not permit here an adequate discussion of the role of public opinion in Soviet politics. Suffice it to say that the widespread assumption in the West that it plays no role at all — that the leadership merely carries on as if it did not exist — does not correspond with reality. On the other hand, the assertion that "the party and the people are one" is not correct either. Soviet political life provides inadequate means for public opinion to be expressed and manifested — so it does so mainly in indirect and even negative ways such as privatisation of life, attitudes to work, etc.

A great deal of Soviet public opinion concerns material living standards. In this connection, a significant trend of opinion is unhappy about the large sums of money spent on overseas aid. In the 'sixties, a large portion of this aid went to Arab countries, particularly when Nasser was the leader of Egypt. What a shock it must have been when, in June 1967, a war between the Arab states and the tiny and much denigrated Israel ended in defeat for the Arabs in six days. (I am not here entering into the rights and wrongs of that war, but merely referring to the result.)

Then followed a series of setbacks for Soviet policy in the Middle East, including a re-orientation of Egypt back to the West. One of the channels for Soviet public opinion is the telling of jokes — and a rash of anti-Arab jokes broke out, usually racist, which depicted the Arabs as stupid, cowardly, incompetent. There was a feeling that the Soviet government had lost a fortune by backing a poor horse.

The answer was a campaign to depict Israel as part of a powerful world body, ruthless, conspiratorial, completely integrated with the imperialist system and often manipulating that system itself. A joke in the form of a riddle expressed the main preoccupation of the time.

Q. Is Mao Tse-tung a Zionist?

A. That's all we need

Soviet Jews were caught in the backwash. Already suffering from "popular" and "petty" anti-Semitism, ordinary people were made to feel alien, untrusted. This fed the

upsurge of applications by Soviet Jews to leave the country which in turn gave rise to further tensions.

But there are other currents, less spectacular and more complex to complain, which fed the "anti-Zionist" campaign.

"Bash the Yids and save Russia!" was the cry of the Black Hundreds under Tsarism which found some response among the masses. The Soviet Union today is far from those dark times, but there are echoes.

The analogy should not be taken too far. Nevertheless, alongside steady and even spectacular progress in many spheres, there are a number of sources of discontent and frustration in the USSR. Nationalism, including Russian nationalism, has increased. (Russians constitute some 52 per cent only of the population.) Avenues for open political debate and criticism are inadequate, with the result that there is a tendency for certain kinds of dissent to express themselves in strange ways. "Anti-Zionist" phraseology is one way in which dissent can be expressed with little fear of reprisal.

The most bizarre expression of this was a recent "underground" leaflet circulated in the Soviet Union which accused President Brezhnev of being the "chief Zionist" among others who have taken charge of the Politburo.

This factor was a powerful one in Poland in the late 'sixties when anti-Semitism was used by warring factions in the Polish United Workers' Party. The resulting anti-Semitic manifestations led to the small remnant of Poland's Jewish community — including those who had stuck to their socialist commitment through thick and thin — leaving the country.

Some commentators have compared the role of "anti-Zionism" in Soviet politics with that of anti-communism in American politics during the years of McCarthyism. Once again, the analogy can be taken too far, but there are similarities.

The whole picture is not gloomy. Soviet Jews continue to play an important part in Soviet life, often out of proportion to their numbers. There are people of all nationalities who oppose the "anti-Zionist" campaign along the lines of Leninist tradition and, given the opportunity, would defeat it in debate.

Also encouraging is the fact that very few examples of anti-Semitism appear in Soviet literature. Indeed, according to some reviews, Jews are frequently presented in a balanced way and their exceptional suffering brought out. The novel "Heavy Sand" by A.N. Rybakov is quoted as one example.

In the more turbulent year of 1961, the poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko was reading his poem "Babi Yar" to mass audiences.

*O my Russian people!*

*I know you*  
*Are international to the core.*  
*But those of unclean hands*  
*have often made a jingle of your purest name*

The poem concludes:

*The Internationale, let it*  
*thunder*  
*when the last anti-Semite on earth*  
*is buried forever.*  
*In my blood there is no Jewish blood.*  
*In their callous rage, all anti-Semites*  
*must hate me now as a Jew.*  
*For that reason*

*I am a true Russian.*

If people of mass standing and prestige were to speak out like that today — in the context of a widening of civil and political liberties — the prestige of the Soviet Union would rise and the real anti-Soviet slanderers would have to scuttle for cover.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. *Soviet Jewry — A Reply to I. Leibler*. Current Book Distributors, June 1965.
2. *Lenin: Collected Works Vol. 29* (March-Aug 1919) Progress Publishers Moscow 1965.
3. *Tribune* Nov 3, 1976.
4. *Ogonyok*, Nos. 28 and 29, July 1978. "Sami Sionistski Biznes."
5. Yuri Ivanov : *Caution: Zionism* Progress Publishers. Moscow 1970.
6. *Ibid*, P. 26
7. M. Sholokov: *The Fate of a Man* (Sud'ba Cheloveka).
8. L.A. Modzhoryan: *Sionism kak forma rasizma i rasovoi diskriminatsii*. Moskva "Mezhdunarodniye otnosheniya" 1979.