

COMING BACK . . .

I.

I DEPARTED FROM HAMBURG AS FAST AS I COULD. Germany had become a madhouse and I longed to get back to the States.

I knew, of course, that America was no paradise, either. Almost every day while abroad, I read in the Paris edition of the *New York Herald* about the millions of unemployed Americans; about the clubbing of strikers and the lynching of Negroes. Nor did I have the illusion that there was no anti-Semitism in America. Not at all. I have encountered it while working as a seaman on American ships, as a student at the university, as a clerk in a Long Island post office, etc. Still, after my experiences in Germany and Poland, I visualized the United States as a land of freedom and democracy.

After all, I thought to myself, there is anti-Semitism in the United States but it is neither violent nor open. "A kike," as the famous American joke goes, "is a Jew who has just left the room." But as long as he is in the room, the anti-Semite is forced to wear a mask. In the South, to be sure, they hate a Jew almost as much as a Negro and they don't even attempt to hide it.

How long the American anti-Semite is going to wear this mask is another question. The law of life in the United States is not different from anywhere else in the world. With the deepening of the crisis, as the economic conditions of the masses grow from worse to worse, as the workers become more militant and rebellious, America, too, will need a scapegoat. And who is a better scapegoat than the Jew? Didn't the same thing happen in Tsarist Russia? Isn't it true of Poland, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Roumania, etc.?

Besides, it did not take me long to discover that Hitlerism has already made deep inroads into American life. On the boat, coming back, I had already felt its influence.

One day I had overheard an Irish boy from New York, the crew's mess boy, remark to another seaman:

"Jeez, if I had a good machine gun I'd line up all the Jews against the wall and shoot them one by one . . ."

The other fellow nodded in sympathy.

"Tell me," I asked the mess boy, "what have you got against the Jews? What have they done to you?"

There was hatred in the boy's eyes.

"Don't try to pretend to be wise. They've done me plenty. I know that there are a lot of white Jews but most of them make suckers out of poor people."

"Whom do you mean in particular?"

"Well, have you heard of the gang of lousy Jews

that run the Bank of U.S.? They cleaned us out of our last penny."

"Of course," I admitted, "the gang that ran the bank of U.S. were Jews. But aren't the majority of Jews just as poor as you and I? Have you ever seen those poor suckers work for miserable pay in the New York dress shops? Besides, are all the bankers Jews? How about J. P. Morgan, is he a Jew, too?"

"Sure," he replied, "Morgan is a Jew, I'll bet you any amount of money that Morgan is a Jew . . ."

What could I say after that?

2.

With the rise of anti-Semitism in America, however, it did not take me long to discover the awakening of a Jewish consciousness among the American Jewish youth.

Shortly after I arrived in New York I was asked to deliver a lecture before a group of Jewish students at the Bronx Y. M. H. A. I myself had not long ago been a student and I recognized the type that came to hear me. They were respectable sons of Jewish middle class families. Until recently, no doubt, they were busy figuring out how to become a success in the world. Political questions—besides the immediate problems of the Democratic or Republican parties with which one had to be acquainted in order to get along—were anathema to them. But now they all showed a keen interest in social, economic and politi-

cal questions. I could tell by their questions that they were perplexed.

When I was through with the lecture, they all wanted to know:

“Is there a solution of the Jewish problem?”

“Yes,” I replied, “there is. There is no Jewish problem in Soviet Russia. And when the Jews over the rest of the world, like their Russian brothers, join the great movement for liberation of all humanity, they, too, will achieve freedom. . . .”