

# THE ROOTS OF ANTI-SEMITISM

**Only through a basic understanding of its origins  
can this political weapon of reaction be defeated.**

By **MORRIS U. SCHAPPES**

WITH fascism and imperialism having suffered a major defeat in the recent war, the struggle against these forces is now being waged, for a time at least, with other instruments. The peace is in that sense a continuation of the war with other, peaceable, means: political clarification, education, organization. Imperialism and its legitimate but savage offspring, fascism, live on the confusion and division of peoples. In the labor movement, progressive forces have for some time recognized that anti-Semitism is one of the widely-used means for creating such division. To prevent the dissemination of that fact is one of the main goals of imperialists and of the intellectuals they endow and win for their use. Currently, reactionary forces have begun to stress the psychoanalytic interpretation of anti-Semitism. My interest here is not in psychoanalysis as such, but in the way in which psychoanalysis is being used, or abused, in order to "prove" that anti-Semites are mentally disordered, psychically ill, more to be pitied than feared, to be "cured" rather than fought. The only practical conclusion implied in such psychoanalytic interpretations is that anti-Semitism can be eradicated by psychoanalyzing the anti-Semites or by confining them in asylums.

Attempts to divert attention from the main fact that anti-Semitism is a political problem, with class economic and social roots, are dangerous. In this light, one may welcome the appearance of *An Enemy of the People: Anti-Semitism*.<sup>\*</sup> This little volume is the most mature statement on the sub-

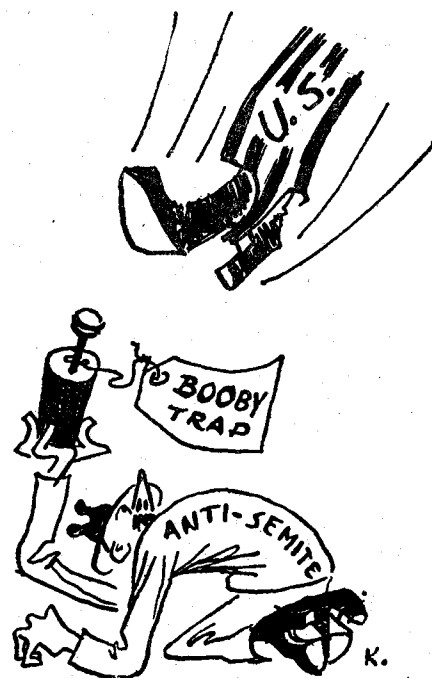
<sup>\*</sup>AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE: ANTI-SEMITISM, by James Parkes. Pelican Books: 25 cents.

ject so far made by Mr. Parkes, an Englishman who has devoted almost two decades to a study of the relations between Jews and non-Jews. (It is unfortunate that another publisher has seen fit to issue at this time a slight revision of another volume by Mr. Parkes, *The Jewish Problem in the Modern World*, first published in 1939. Mr. Parkes' intellectual grasp of the problem has matured considerably in one major respect since 1939, but the growth is registered not in the revision but in *An Enemy of the People: Anti-Semitism*, which is much the superior of the two books.)

What Mr. Parkes learned since 1939 is not exactly news to the progressive movement, but it is important to have this knowledge so well presented, so cogently argued on the basis of the experience of several countries, and so inexpensively produced that it can reach a large audience. Mr. Parkes demonstrates that since the 1870's and 1880's anti-Semitism has been a political weapon used by reactionary classes against the people's movements, no matter how elementary these movements were in their demands. Anti-Semitism "was a most versatile and effective stick wherewith the conservatives might beat the progressives. Political anti-Semitism had extremely little to do with the Jews as such. . . ." Mr. Parkes fortifies his argument by analyzing the class relations and conflicts of the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Germany, Austria-Hungary, France and Czarist Russia. Even persons who have long accepted Mr. Parkes' thesis are likely to learn something from his pithy summary of the events described, and from his illuminating interpretation of them in terms of class issues. To the student of methodology it will be interesting

to note how the same facts, as presented years before in *The Jewish Problem*, lacked this illumination.

FROM this basic element in his analysis he moves more surely than ever before, although not without inconsistencies, to a major conclusion in his program for "the elimination of anti-Semitism." He is sound in recognizing that "the cure of anti-Semitism is intimately bound up with the solution of our national and social problems," and that anti-Semitism will be a problem and a weapon of reaction "so long as the world is a place in which life to ordinary man means insecurity, frustration and unemployment. . . ." If Mr. Parkes does not see world socialism as the world solution to the problem, he does acknowledge the value of the Soviet Union's method of abolishing anti-Semitism. Discussing how, under capitalism, legislation against anti-Semitism is not entirely effective, he adds: "In the Soviet Union such a law also existed, and had no such disadvantages; but that is because it was part of a whole campaign, and not the most important part. For the attack on anti-Semitism took place on a basis of increasing security and employment; in other words, the general situation was favorable. Moreover the center of the campaign was education in racial tolerance within the proletarian society, and anti-Semitism was pilloried as 'bourgeois' and 'reactionary,' which was much more serious than just making it 'il-



legal.'” And is there not a touch of wistfulness in his comment that in England and the United States “we shall, unfortunately, have to do it without being able to attach the magnificently derogatory word ‘bourgeois’ to it”? I am not so sure, Mr. Parkes! At least some of us can, and you are welcome to share the use of our accurate epithet.

Nevertheless, the inconsistencies I have mentioned are fundamental and reveal that there are elements of his older type of thinking that he has not yet brought into harmony with his more recent insight into the nature of anti-Semitism as a political weapon.

First there is the half-truth, too often mistaken for the whole truth by too many Jews and their “friends,” that the position of the Jew is a dangerous one because he everywhere is, and has been for two thousand years, in a minority. Zionists, orthodox Jews who regard the past two thousand years of Jewish history as a chronicle of “exile,” and many liberal non-Jews like Mr. Parkes assert and repeat this half-truth as if it alone were basic to an understanding of the problem. The Jews are a minority in every country, living with a non-Jewish majority, and that is the root of the evil—thus goes the old refrain. But Mr. Parkes himself gives us the clue to what is wrong with this theory when he demonstrates that anti-Semitism is a political weapon. Whose weapon? and against whom is it used? Is it the weapon of the non-Jewish majority against the Jewish minority? Neither history nor contemporary life supports that view. Anti-Semitism is actually the weapon of the *minority*, consisting of the reactionary ruling classes, against the *majority*, composed of the people, including the Jews. It is not that they have been scattered among the nations that has exposed the Jews to persecution; the main factor is that until very recently in every one of the countries in which Jews lived a minority class was ruling a majority and from time to time found it useful to exploit the weapon of anti-Semitism in order to divide, confuse and continue to dominate that majority. In the Soviet Union, for instance, the Jews are a minority, and a very small one, but Mr. Parkes himself does not now say that they are in any way endangered by anti-Semitism. The reason is, of course, that in the Soviet Union there is no minority class ruling the majority by force, deception



and anti-Semitic confusion. In other words, anti-Semitism is a product of class relations, and not of the fact that the Jews are dispersed.

If the history of anti-Semitism is long and bloody, the cause is to be found in the fact that all recorded history is the history of class struggles.

**A**LLIED to this half-truth of Mr. Parkes' is another one, equally popular. How have the Jews been able to survive, and even increase in number (until Hitler organized the slaughter of six million Jews and brought the Jewish population down to the level of the First World War), despite the long history of anti-Semitism? In *The Jewish Problem*, Mr. Parkes explained it thus: “The feelings of privilege and responsibility which they drew from their religion were the basic causes of the survival of the Jews.” This interpretation seems to me thoroughly unsound, for it ascribes an objective fact to a subjective state of mind among

religious Jews. Loyalty to a religious ideal cannot prevent an individual or even a people from extermination by superior physical force; religious loyalty *can* prevent an individual or a group from becoming apostates, from renouncing their God, but it cannot prevent them from dying. A noble death is not survival. While, therefore, religious zeal was often a factor in stimulating *resistance*, their faith cannot explain the survival of the Jews.

The theory that their religion was the main factor in their survival goes hand in hand with the theory that the Jews are subjected to anti-Semitism merely because they are a minority. However, these two propositions are fantastic. No minority can survive when the majority outnumbers it as the Jews are outnumbered by non-Jews and when the majority is really determined to destroy that minority. But the simple fact is that the non-Jewish majority in the world has never attempted such a destruction. The very

fact that the Jews were dispersed in so many lands, and that these lands were unequally developed and continued to develop at uneven rates, has been the greatest factor for the survival of the Jews. When the class relations in Spain became such that in 1492 the ruling powers exiled the Jews, the class relations in North Africa, Turkey, the Balkans, Holland and the newly discovered Western Hemisphere were such that Jews found a welcome and a haven, at least until the class relations in these areas changed and brought into use the political weapon of anti-Semitism. When the class relations and the government-inspired pogroms in Russia in the 1880's drove hundreds of thousands of Jews into emigration, the class relations in the United States made immigration possible.

Had the Jews been concentrated in any one country, and had the class struggles in that country brought into use the weapon of anti-Semitism by a force as ruthless as Hitlerism, for instance, there might not have been any survival of the Jews. Peoples of Africa as numerous as the Jews have been wiped out completely by imperialist oppression. And if Hitler in this past war did not destroy three-thirds instead of one-third of the world Jewish population, he failed in his objective because the others were scattered in countries, particularly the Soviet Union and the United States, where he could not get at them. In other words, it is exactly because the majority of the non-Jews have never been anti-Semitic, despite the flamboyant utterances of the Ben Hechts and similar latter-day prophets of doom-in-

exile, that the Jews have survived. And this observation is consistent with Mr. Parkes' evidence that anti-Semitism is a reactionary weapon in the class struggle.

His faulty thinking on the significance of the minority status of the Jews and on the causes of their survival is connected with his dangerous political program for the Jews in Palestine. In this respect he accepts the Zionist "Biltmore Program" of 1942 for a Jewish state that would dominate the Arabs of Palestine. And if the Arabs do not like this solution, Mr. Parkes calmly assures us and them that "there would certainly be room elsewhere for Arabs who might find it intolerable to live under Jewish rule"! Theoretically, it is clear that his concept of anti-Semitism as being caused by the Jews' minority position leads him to look for a solution mainly in the situation in which the Jews would be in a majority. But he forgets the relativity of that majority. Let us suppose that, by some force of arms, British or Anglo-American, the Jewish state is created in a part of Palestine and the Arabs are subdued, allowed to emigrate, or neutralized for a time. The Jewish state in Palestine would then be a tiny power, a majority in relation to itself perhaps, but a tiny minority in relation to the many-millioned populations of the Arab states that surround Palestine on three sides (with the deep blue Mediterranean on the fourth). Can this "power" endure long in a state of hostility with its circumambient Arab neighbors? And how is it to develop "good-neighborly" relations? By allying itself with the imperialism that subjugate and wish to continue to subjugate the restive Arab national liberation movements?

The fatal flaw in Mr. Parkes' thinking on the subject of Palestine is that he regards the Arabs and not British imperialism as the main cause of the problems that exist there. It is not the Arabs but their colonial status in Palestine that is the main problem. The solution can be found only along the lines of a Jewish-Arab anti-imperialist struggle for an independent Palestine, in which the national rights of both Jews and Arabs would be guaranteed.

Without failing to criticize its weaknesses, I can recommend *An Enemy of the People: Anti-Semitism* because, amid its half-truths and inconsistencies, it sheds full light on the basic truth that anti-Semitism is a political weapon of reaction in modern class relations.

## portside patter

By BILL RICHARDS

*News Item: 42% of the American people believe that the press makes Russia seem worse than it is.*

EASTBROOK O'DONNELL REPORTS

(Ed note: Mr. O'Donnell is a leading authority on the Soviet Union, having lived there for five years between 1911 and 1916.)

There is no freedom in the Soviet Union. In that oppressed country it is a crime to incite racial prejudice and all races must work, learn, and play together. A clear-cut violation of individual liberty.

The Russians have no such thing as a free press. The editorial policy of fully 95% of our press is decided by men of such varied ideas as Hearst, McCormick, Howard, and Luce. In Russian papers all the stories, editorials, advertisements, and letters to the editor are written by Stalin himself.

Our big industrialists and members of Congress want to protect the rights of labor unions despite the fact that union members want these rights abolished. The Soviets eliminate labor problems by the sheer trickery of letting the workers own all the factories.

The Russians make no secret of their expansionist plans. The cities of Leningrad and Stalingrad have already been considerably enlarged. The Red Army is also preparing—it is rapidly being demobilized to allow the troops

to rest up. There have been reports that the remaining men are being fed uranium tablets.

The standard of living is woefully low in the USSR. I drove around Moscow for hours without seeing a single Cadillac convertible. The people are already resigned to the fact that this year they will only be wearing one pair of shoes at a time.

If the Russian people appear happy and full of hope for the future it is only because Stalin has forced them to be that way.

*The end of the coal strike came as a great relief to the President's advisers. For awhile it looked as though Truman would finally have to make a speech.*

Great Britain and the US are opposed to sanctions against Franco. The UN took action despite the stumbling bloc.

*There are reports that Byrnes is just "itching" to resign. His successor would practically have to start from scratch anyway.*

The Senate Investigating Committee was a good idea. However, with Ellender heading it the real Bilbo isn't expected to come out in the white-wash.