

THE NEW ANTI-SEMITISM

By-Rabbi Dr. Herbert Baumgard
Beth Am - Miami, Florida

Part I

Short months ago, Time Magazine ran a series of feature articles the theme of which was, "The 'in' thing is to be Jewish". In this series, the reporters described the growing admiration of Americans for Jewish writers, Jewish culture, and descriptive language growing out of the Jewish community. As a result of this wave of Jewish popularity, some of us were lulled into a false sense of security. We allowed ourselves to think, "Anti-semitism is dead. The Semites are in".

Others of us were a little more cautious, for we remembered pre-Hitlerian Germany. Germany before Hitler was the most liberal and enlightened state in Europe. Had anyone suggested in the early 1930's that a Hitler could come to power, he would have been the subject of ridicule. Anti-semitism in Germany had its living seed in the latent hatreds of German Protestants, but the rich soil in which anti-semitism flowered was the poverty and depression which afflicted Germany after World War One. Hitler came to power as the champion of the poor, and, for him, as for other ignorant Germans, the store-fronts of Jewish merchants were the exposed symbol of the hated rich.

In America today, we are witnessing some distressing signs of developing anti-semitism. Some of these signs are familiar signs. The poor of America are directing their hatred against Jewish store-owners whom they incorrectly fancy to be the controllers of the vast part of America's wealth. This anti-semitism is most obvious in America's largest cities, in New York, in Chicago, and in Los Angeles.

There is a second source of the current wave of anti-semitism, however, which is even more virulent and more frightening. It makes its appearance under the guise of anti-zionism. This kind of anti-semitism is in full force in the Soviet Union. Months ago, about fifty of the outstanding Jews in the Soviet Union signed a public statement condemning Israel and the Zionists as "imperialists" and "reactionaries". We know, of course, that the Jews who signed this statement were forced to do so. Hitler also used this trick of forcing the accused to condemn themselves. In the Soviet Union today any enemy of the state is automatically called a "Zionist". Hitler called all of his enemies "Jews". The recipe is an old and sure thing. Take a little latent anti-semitism, identify the Jews as an enemy of the state, mix together, warm-over slightly, and spread around in large portions.

I would like to think that anti-zionism, the new form of anti-semitism, would not have so fertile a field in the U.S., but there are indications that this is precisely the area into which our professional and more subtle anti-semites are moving. Perhaps, some of you read a recent article by Nick Thimmesch in "The Miami Herald" of Sept. 30th. Under the guise of simply reporting the other side of the story, Mr. Thimmesch, whose past observations on the Middle-East situation have been somewhat slanted, wrote an article that was calculated to be inflammatory .

Mr. Thimmesch gave national coverage to remarks by an obscure "official of the Jordanian Embassy" in Washington. Commenting on the Civil War in Jordan, the "official", according to Mr. Thimmesch, said, "The Israelis are the cause of all these troubles. How can we ever associate with them when they (sic!) turn the Middle-East into a battleground. Right now, Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan are clinking champagne glasses together. They are so happy with our war. Thousands of our people lie dead and rot in the streets...

"People talk about the suffering of the Jews...we suffered massacres too... but we don't take it out on our neighbors.

"Your country has so many liberal hypocrites..doves on Viet-Nam but hawks for Israel.

"We cannot hold big press conferences like Golda Meir..we do not have Arabs who dominate your finance and your press...

"You see a man's guts hanging down, and his enemy says these will be good to feed my cat. That's how Israel views us today when our guts are hanging down...as something to enrich themselves by."

In Medieval Europe the Jew was often pictured as having horns, as being mercenary beyond description, and as having no compassion. Mr. Thimmesch has repeated these myths in modern garb using the device of quoting a Jordanian official. The Jordanians had a brutally cruel Civil-War, and the world watched in disbelief. A Jordanian in Washington pictures the Israelis as inhumanly rejoicing over this spectacle, and Mr. Thimmesch makes this view available to his wide audience, presumably as a public service. Let no one be misled. The battle is joined here in America. We Jews are going to get this kind of treatment more and more.

Another case in point, William F. Buckley Jr. in his column in the "Herald" on Oct. 4th, lifts a statement out of context from James Reston and places it in his (Buckley's) column as if this is Mr. Reston's basic position on Israel. Mr. Reston, the distinguished New York Times columnist, is most sympathetic to Israel, but he once presented in his own column the arguments of pro-Arabs. Mr. Buckley took the pro-Arab statement and presents it to his own readers as the position of Mr. Reston.

The lifted sentence follows: "Israel appeals to justice and is not just to the Arab refugees. It asks for mercy and is merciless in attack. It cries for a decent order in the world and for peace among nations - yet scorns and even vilifies the United Nations which, despite obvious weaknesses, is the only instrument of international order and justice we have." By quoting this extreme statement from Mr. Reston's column, Mr. Buckley cleverly manages to say what he wants to say without making himself vulnerable to criticism that he is deliberately publicizing pro-Arab propoganda. If Mr. Buckley is simply interested in stirring up controversy, he is gaining his end at a great cost to the Jewish people.

It is interesting to note that both Mr. Thimmesch and Mr. Buckley took advantage of the pro-Nasser sympathy at the time of the latter's death to present their slanted views on the Middle-East situation.

How do we respond to this kind of attack? Do we stand idly by while Jews are increasingly vilified, or do we try to counter by speaking the truth? It would seem to me that any Jew who remains ignorant of or detached from the Arab-Israeli encounter does so at his how peril. At the very least, every American Jew has to know the story of the development of the modern state of Israel in precise detail. Perhaps, the best way to learn the basic facts is to propound a series of questions and, then, try to answer them. Those who know the answers already may possibly have their understanding deepened by this review.

See Part II