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ANTI-SEMITISM: A PRACTICAL MANUAL

A Hungarian Joke: During the June 1967 war, a Hungarian meets his friend. “Why do you look so happy?” he asks. “I heard that the Israelis shot down six Soviet-made MiGs today,” his friend replies.

The next day, the friend looks even more jubilant. “The Israelis downed another eight MiGs,” he announces.

On the third day, the friend is crestfallen. “What happened? Didn’t the Israelis down any MiGs today?” the man asks. “They did,” the friend answers, “But today someone told me that the Israelis are Jews!”

This is the whole story in a nutshell.

The Anti-Semite hates the Jews because they are Jews, irrespective of their actions. Jews may be hated because they are rich and ostentatious or because they are poor and live in squalor. Because they played a major role in the Bolshevik revolution or because some of them became incredibly rich after the collapse of the Communist regime. Because they crucified Jesus or because they infected Western culture with the “Christian morality of compassion”. Because they have no fatherland or because they created the State of Israel.

That is in the nature of all kinds of racism and chauvinism: One hates someone for being a Jew, Arab, woman, black, Indian, Muslim, Hindu. His or her personal attributes, actions, achievements are unimportant. If he or she belongs to the abhorred race, religion or gender, they will be hated.

The answers to all questions relating to anti-Semitism follow from this basic fact. For example:

Is everybody who criticizes Israel an anti-Semite?

Absolutely not. Somebody who criticizes Israel for certain of our actions cannot be accused of anti-Semitism for that. But somebody who hates Israel because it is a Jewish state, like the Hungarian in the joke, is an anti-Semite. It is not always easy to distinguish between the two kinds, because shrewd anti-Semites pose as bona fide critics of Israel’s actions. But presenting all critics of Israel as anti-Semites is wrong

and counter-productive, it damages the fight against anti-Semitism.

Many deeply moral persons, the cream of humanity, criticize our behavior in the occupied territories. It is stupid to accuse them of anti-Semitism.

Can a person be an anti-Zionist without being an anti-Semite?

Absolutely yes. Zionism is a political creed and must be treated like any other. One can be anti-Communist without being anti-Chinese, anti-Capitalist without being anti-American, anti-Globalist, anti-Anything. Yet, again, it is not always easy to draw the line, because real anti-Semites often pretend just to be “anti-Zionists”. They should not be helped by erasing the distinction.

Can a person be an anti-Semite and a Zionist?

Indeed, yes. The founder of modern Zionism, Theodor Herzl, already tried to enlist the support of notorious Russian anti-Semites, promising them to take the Jews off their hands. Before World War II, the Zionist underground organization IZL established military training camps in Poland under the auspices of the anti-Semitic generals, who also wanted to get rid of the Jews. Nowadays, the Zionist extreme Right receives and welcomes massive support from the American fundamentalist evangelists, whom the majority of American Jews, according to a poll published this week, consider profoundly anti-Semitic. Their theology prophesies that on the eve of the second coming of Christ, all Jews must convert to Christianity or be exterminated.

Can a Jew be anti-Semitic?

That sounds like an oxymoron. But history has known some instances of Jews who became ferocious Jew-haters. The Spanish Grand Inquisitor, Torquemada, was of Jewish descent. Karl Marx wrote some very nasty things about the Jews, as did Otto Weininger, an important Jewish writer in fin-de-siecle Vienna. Herzl, his contemporary and fellow-Viennese, wrote in his diaries some very uncomplimentary remarks about the Jews.

If a person criticizes Israel more than other countries which do the same, is he an anti-Semite?

Not necessarily. True, there should be one and the same moral standard for all countries and all human beings. Russian actions in Chechnya are not better than ours in Nablus, and may be worse. The trouble is that the Jews are pictured and picture themselves (and indeed were) a “nation of victims”. Therefore, the world is shocked that yesterday’s victims are today’s victimizers. A higher moral standard is required

from us than from other peoples. And rightly so.

Has Europe become anti-Semitic again?

Not really. The number of anti-Semites in Europe has not grown, perhaps it has even fallen. What has increased is the volume of criticism of Israel's behavior towards the Palestinians, who appear as "the victims of the victims".

The situation in some suburbs of Paris, which is often cited as an example of the rise of anti-Semitism, is a quite different affair. When North African Muslims clash with North African Jews, they are transferring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to European soil. It is also a continuation of the feud between Arabs and Jews that started in Algeria when the Jews supported the French regime and Muslims considered them collaborators of the hated colonialists.

Then why did most Europeans state in a recent poll that Israel endangers world peace more than any other country?

That has a simple explanation: Europeans see on television every day what our soldiers are doing in the occupied Palestinian territories. This confrontation is covered more than any other conflict on earth (with the possible exception of Iraq, for the time being), because Israel is more "interesting", considering the long history of the Jews in Europe and because Israel is closer to the Western media than Muslim or African countries. The Palestinian resistance, which Israelis call "terrorism", seems to many Europeans very much like the French resistance to the German occupation.

What about the anti-Semitic manifestations in the Arab world?

No doubt, typically anti-Semitic indications have crept lately into Arab discourse. Suffice it to mention that the infamous "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" have been published in Arabic. That is a typically European import. The Protocols were invented by the secret police of Czarist Russia.

Whatever inanities may be voiced by certain "experts", there never was any widespread Muslim anti-Semitism, such as existed in Christian Europe. In the course of his fight for power, the prophet Muhammad fought against neighboring Jewish tribes, and therefore there are some negative passages about the Jews in the Kor'an. But they cannot be compared to the anti-Jewish passages in the New Testament story about the crucifixion of Christ that have poisoned the Christian world and caused endless suffering. Muslim Spain was a paradise for the Jews, and there has never been a Jewish Holocaust in the Muslim world. Even pogroms were extremely rare.

Muhammad decreed that the "Peoples of the Book" (Jews and Christians) be treated

tolerantly, subject to conditions that were incomparably more liberal than those in contemporary Europe. The Muslims never imposed their religion by force on Jews and Christians, as shown by the fact that almost all the Jews expelled from Catholic Spain settled in the Muslim countries and flourished there. After centuries of Muslim rule, Greeks and Serbs remained thoroughly Christian.

When peace is established between Israel and the Arab world, the poisonous fruits of anti-Semitism will most probably disappear from the Arab world (as will the poisonous fruits of Arab-hating in our society.)

Aren't the utterances of the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir bin Muhammad, about the Jews controlling the world, anti-Semitic?

Yes and no. They certainly illustrate the difficulty of pinning anti-Semitism down. From a factual point of view, the man was right when he asserted that the Jews have a far bigger influence than their percentage of the world's population alone would warrant. It is true that the Jews have a large influence on the policy of the United States, the only super-power, as well as on the American and international media. One does not need the phony "Protocols" in order to face this fact and analyse its causes. But the sounds make the music, and Mahathir's music does indeed sound anti-Semitic.

So should we ignore anti-Semitism?

Definitely not. Racism is a kind of virus that exists in every nation and in every human being. Jean-Paul Sartre said that we are all racists, the difference being that some of us realize this and fight against it, while others succumb to the evil. In ordinary times, there is a small minority of blatant racists in every country, but in times of crisis their number can multiply rapidly. This is a perpetual danger, and every people must fight against the racists in their midst.

We Israelis are like all other peoples. Each of us can find a small racist within himself, if he searches hard enough. We have in our country fanatical Arab-haters, and the historic confrontation that dominates our lives increases their power and influence. It is our duty to fight them, and leave it to the Europeans and Arabs to deal with their own racists.