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Issues

The Tribe of the Wicked Son

Norman Podhoretz

NO ONE knows how many Jews either belong to or actively support or lazily acquiesce in the attitudes of "the party of revolution," as Walter Laqueur (p. 38) calls what in its contemporary American guise is better known by the more appropriate (because so evasively vague) name of The Movement. It is certain that most American Jews were always hostile to The Movement, both in its narrowly political guise as the New Left and in its general incarnation as the counter-culture. It is equally certain that a great many of the more visible leaders of The Movement are not now and never have been Jews. David Dellinger is not Jewish; Tom Hayden is not Jewish; Staughton Lynd is not Jewish; Carl Oglesby is not Jewish; Timothy Leary is not Jewish; Kate Millett is not Jewish; and neither, it somehow seems necessary to add, is Stokely Carmichael Jewish, nor Huey Newton, nor Angela Davis. I myself can testify from personal experience that in its early days The Movement was remarkable for, precisely, the paucity of Jews among its leaders and constituents alike. Around 1960 it had, I would say, a decidedly Protestant flavor, with its tone being set by divines like A. J. Muste and Martin Luther King, so much so that some of the small minority of Jews associated with it at the time, mindful of the importance of Jews in the radical movement of the 30's, would often make self-conscious jokes about the wondrous Americanness of this new radicalism, the first indigenously American radical movement, it seemed, since the IWW and the Socialist party of Eugene Victor Debs.

Within a few years, of course, and especially with the luxuriant exfoliation of The Movement under the highly favorable climatic conditions of the American university campus, Jews had become more numerous and more visible within it. For every Hayden, there was now a Rudd, for every Leary a Rubin, for every Davis an Alpert, and for every Brown a Marcuse. Jews were still probably a small minority within The Movement itself, just as those Jews who joined or even sympathized with The Movement or any of its works unquestionably continued to represent an even smaller minority of the total Jewish population; and with the increasing hold of anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist ideas on The Movement, that minority has been diminishing further and further in size. Nevertheless, no matter how small the number or the proportion of Jews included in The Movement or among its supporters and apologists, it was large enough to encourage the kind of historical speculation Mr. Laqueur engages in and to inspire the kind of forebodings Nathan Glazer (p. 55) expresses as to its effects on the future security of the entire Jewish community.

Now, there is a notion abroad in the world, less common I think than it was a year or two ago but still to be encountered even in circles professedly (and professionally) committed to the goal of Jewish survival, that the participation of Jews in The Movement, far from constituting a problem to the Jewish community, does honor to that community and is an ornament to its "idealism." Thanks to the in-

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fluence of this notion, Jewish organizations sometimes pay court to groups on the New Left through "dialogues" and subsidies and expressions of sympathy and solidarity. The most disgraceful example of such behavior which has ever come to my attention is the imprimatur (or perhaps one should say *hekhsheer*) given by Balfour Brickner and other prominent rabbis to Arthur Waskow's *The Freedom Seder*, which Robert Alter (p. 47) characterizes after careful analysis as "a document of self-loathing and self-abasement masquerading as an expression of self-affirmation." With this formulation I would quarrel only to the extent of asking whether, harsh as it may sound, it is still not a touch too gentle to do justice to the truly abominable case at hand. For my own part, taking a lead from Mr. Laqueur's suggestive observation that New-Left radicalism is for American Jews a form of assimilationism and that the Jews who, for example, support Al Fatah against Israel are not primarily motivated by self-hatred, I would say that *The Freedom Seder* might more accurately be considered a contribution to the literature of Jewish anti-Semitism than to the literature of the often overlapping but nonetheless distinct phenomenon of Jewish self-hatred.

By anti-Semitism I mean here, very simply, *against the Jews*: against their duty and their right to exist, to live and not to die, to look after themselves and their families, to make the best of their circumstances, to pursue their own interests, to defend themselves and their own against all who wish for whatever reason to diminish or destroy them. A person of Jewish birth who consistently violates his human duty by denying those rights to himself may be said to be suffering from the sickness of self-hatred; if he extends that denial to the Jewish people in general, and especially if he does so in the name of justice, he may also be said to be guilty of the sin of anti-Semitism. To me it seems clear that such a person should no more be permitted to make any claim upon the sympathies, let alone the financial resources, of the Jewish community

than his non-Jewish anti-Semitic friends could do.

WE HAVE lived these past few years in America through a re-enactment of the so-called Third Period of the 1930's when revolutionary militancy and provocation were the order of the day. Now, one gathers from a great many signs in the air, we have arrived at the threshold of a re-enactment of the Popular Front of the late 30's, when revolutionary militancy was muted for the sake of forging a broadly based alliance against the threat of fascism. The fact that there actually was a threat of fascism then in the form of Adolf Hitler and his allies and that no comparable threat exists anywhere today is unlikely to make much difference to all those who, having spent the years of their youth vainly Waiting for Lefty, are now apparently determined to pass their declining years huddled together with their progeny vainly Waiting for Righty. Convinced, at any rate, that the "Repression" is imminent, if it is not indeed already upon us, The Movement and its supporters are now reaching out for allies among groups which only yesterday were being stigmatized as fascists and imperialists themselves—the labor unions, for example, and the organized Jewish community.

In such a climate revolutionists suddenly start talking like reformers, haters of "Amerika" turn up as fervent patriots of the "real" America and Jewish anti-Semites as loyalists of the Higher Judaism. From this perspective, Waskow and some of the others mentioned by Mr. Alter might, as it were, be seen as premature Popular Fronters. But the Jewish community should not be fooled: they still belong to the tribe of the wicked son of whom it is said in the Haggadah—the real Haggadah, not the one the wicked son himself seems to have written in collaboration with his brother the simpleton under the title of *The Freedom Seder*—that his wickedness consists of his having removed himself from the community. Should his teeth then not be set on edge, and should he not be told that he has betrayed one of the most essential principles of the religion of his fathers?



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