

ADMINISTRATIVE PROPOSALS

1. A committee of about twelve to be constituted at London, consisting of
 - a) the present nucleus: Astor, Legum, Andrew Shonfield, Zuzannah Shonfield, Cohn
 - b) established academic authorities including representatives of history, social anthropology, sociology and psychoanalysis (e.g. Beloff, Fortes, Shils, Wilson, Hampshire, Bullock, Carstairs);
2. The committee to appoint a sub-committee of four to six to draw up a project of research, taking as a starting point the existing memoranda by Astor and Cohn;
3. Contact to be established with Dr. Daim of the Institut für politische Psychologie, Vienna;
4. When a project has been worked out, an approach to be made to possible sponsors with the aim of securing the endowment of an optimum of three senior and three junior academic posts at University College London, but failing that of two or even one of each; the endowment to provide for rising salaries to keep pace with general academic scales;
5. This to be combined if possible with the integration of the Wiener and Parkes Libraries into London University.

N. Cohn

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ON THE INVESTIGATION OF PARAMOID TENDENCIES IN SOCIAL LIFE

I. Delimitation of the field

The tendency of in-groups to 'dehumanise' out-groups is quasi-universal. Every war and every revolt entails a far-going dehumanisation of the enemy. A group faced with an enemy automatically becomes more of a group, its empire over the minds of its members is strengthened. In a group faced with a deadly threat most individuals undergo a certain psychic regression towards the kind of consciousness which is characteristic of e.g. tribal societies, where the enemy is totally dehumanised. That is what makes it possible for normally kindly and quite unfanatical men to burn to death tens of thousands of helpless civilians, including women and children, as was repeatedly done by Allied airmen in the Second World War. It is however very doubtful whether so general a proclivity would lend itself to investigation or whether any very useful discoveries could be made about it. Psychoanalysts who have ventured into this vast field have brought back little but generalisations so general as to be almost valueless. It would therefore seem prudent to confine the projected investigation, at least at first, to certain specific types of dehumanisation.

It can happen that a group will distort or magnify a conflict out of all recognition, or even create one out of its own imagination. In such cases the process of dehumanisation is activated primarily not by an objective rivalry but by the subjective psychic needs of the in-group; and it is precisely in such cases that it is carried to the greatest extremes. Here the out-group is seen not merely as less than human but as demonic and/or bestial. It is in fact a scapegoat on to which the in-group projects its own rejected impulses - a symbol therefore of cruelty, domination, dirt or lust, or of any combination of these. It can even be imagined as forming part of a world-wide conspiracy to harm, degrade or destroy mankind. Such a group becomes the object not of cold indifference (as is

sometimes the case with an enemy even in war) but of powerful negative emotions which may be anything from mere physical repulsion to the most passionate fear and hatred. By analogy with individual cases of mental disorder social attitudes of this kind can be called paranoid, even when they are normal by the standards of the society in which they occur. It is suggested that the proposed enquiry should concentrate on examples of these extreme forms of dehumanisation.

II. Selection of phenomena

It would be in accord with the general purpose of the undertaking if the choice of examples were based on the fantasies (in the sense of illusory beliefs) involved. In that case the fantasies selected for investigation should be as varied as possible, and not only in their content. They should for instance, include fantasies from the Far East as well as from the Western world and from earlier centuries as well as from recent times. Some should be ancient institutionalised assumptions and others temporary obsessions. Some should emanate from privileged social strata and others be directed against such strata. Some should concern real groups and others groups which are purely imaginary.

Such a selection might well include (though it need not be limited to) widespread hostile fantasies concerning the following groups:

- witches in Europe from the 15th to the 17th centuries;
- Jews in Europe from the 11th to the 14th centuries;
- Jews in Europe (including Russia) in the 19th and 20th centuries;
- Freemasons in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries;
- the Africans in South Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries;
- Negroes in the U.S.A. in the 19th and 20th centuries;
- Untouchables in traditional Indian society;
- monopoly-capitalists as seen by Communists.

III. Method of analysis

A possible method of analysis is indicated by the following basic schema. This would however have to be slightly modified from case to case, and especially where the out-group is either imaginary as such or else remote and invisible.

1. Survey of objective social situation

Consideration of the traditional situation of the out-group concerned within the larger society, with particular reference to any exceptional exclusiveness or secrecy, any distinctive physical characteristics, and any specialisation in despised or hated economic roles.

2. Survey and interpretation of psychic factors

- i. detailed description of the fully developed hostile fantasy;
- ii. survey of the historical antecedents of the fantasy;
- iii. survey of the traditional world-view of the society concerned, with particular reference to the sense of cosmic order and to any dualistic tendencies in the traditional religion;
- iv. consideration of the average degree of ego-development in the society, i.e. how far a normal member of the society experiences life as an autonomous individual and how far in terms of a group or groups.

3. Psychoanalytical interpretation of the data collected under the above heads

4. Survey and interpretation of immediate social factors

Where the fantasy is not institutionalised or where an institutionalised fantasy takes on a new importance, the following factors should also be considered:

- i. any long-term strains affecting the integration of the society as a whole (e.g. any cumulative discrediting of traditional norms and values);
 - ii. any recent catastrophes (natural, economic or military) affecting the security of the society as a whole;
 - iii. the social situation of the group which actively propagates the belief, with particular reference to any recent experiences of humiliation or disorientation (e.g. discrimination; loss of status or security);
 - iv. the same for any social strata which show themselves exceptionally receptive to the belief; with reference also to possible atomisation and lack of institutions to represent their interests;
 - v. any objective conflict of interest between either the propagating group or the receptive strata and the out-group;
 - vi. where possible, any mental abnormalities in leaders or followers, with particular reference to any hysterical or paranoid syndromes.
5. Sociological interpretation of the data collected under the above heads
6. Concluding socio-psychological interpretation of the phenomena

IV. A Paradigm

To gauge what kind of insights can be expected one need only apply the suggested method of analysis to a fantasy on which some research has already been done. The following paradigm shows, though only in the briefest of outlines, what happens when it is applied to the medieval fantasy about Jews.

1. SURVEY OF OBJECTIVE SOCIAL SITUATION.

It was northern Europe, especially France and Germany, which saw most of the persecution and killing of Jews from the 11th to 14th centuries. Until the 11th century Jews and Gentiles lived together, if not amicably, at least without violence.

Before the 11th century Jews did not yet have any peculiar economic role. It is true that in an overwhelmingly rural society, Jews were nearly all to be found amongst the town-dwelling minority; they had no part in the world of nobles and peasants. It is also true that a small number of Jews were amongst the earliest international merchants. Yet in general it cannot be said that Jews followed any particularly unpopular trades. The specialisation in moneylending came only after, and largely as a result of, the great massacres around 1100 - though later it certainly did contribute to the already existing antagonism, as did the royal and princely protection often extended to the moneylenders.

Jews were nevertheless clearly separated from the Christian society around them, even before they were persecuted. This was due above all to an exclusiveness springing directly from their religion. When the Temple was destroyed the rabbis correctly perceived that special precautions were required to ensure that Jews preserved their communal identity. The taboos which they instituted made it impossible for Jews even to eat with Gentiles. This exclusiveness was sufficient to turn the Jews, in the eyes of Gentiles, into a secretive, mysterious and sinister people.

Already long before the institution of the ghetto, there was little chance for Jews and Gentiles to get to know one another.

How far Jews were recognisable by their features in medieval Europe is uncertain, but after the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) they were forced to wear yellow patches and horned hats, which associated them with Satan and with Cain.

2. SURVEY AND INTERPRETATION OF PSYCHIC FACTORS

i. The fully developed fantasy

In Western Europe from the 12th to the 16th centuries there existed an institutionalised fantasy of Jews as agents of Satan, leagued in a secret conspiracy to destroy Christianity and ruin Christendom. The particular acts of which Jews were commonly accused were: having tortured and murdered Jesus; ritual murder of Christian boys; desecrating and torturing the consecrated wafer of the Eucharist; poisoning wells; worshipping Satan in the synagogue.

ii. The historial antecedents of the fantasy

The image of Jews as agents of Satan had been elaborated as early as the fourth century as part of the polemical campaign by the young Christian church against the parent body, the Jewish religious community. It was incorporated into the writings of many of the Fathers, and so entered the common world-view of medieval Christendom.

iii. The traditional world-view of medieval Christendom

The world-view of medieval Christendom was a teleological one with strong tendencies to dualism. Medieval Christianity had inherited from Persian (Mazdean) and Jewish religion the view of the world as the scene of

an unending struggle between the forces of good, which were trying to fulfil the will of a unique personal god, and the forces of evil, which, under the leadership of Satan, were trying to thwart that will. God's will would be fully attained and history would reach its consummation when all human beings became followers of Christ, which included the acceptance of Christ as incarnate God. In western Christendom the Jews were the only group which, by that standard, consistently thwarted God's will. This automatically made them into Satan's chief allies.

iv. The average degree of ego-development

Save to some extent for courtiers, administrators and great merchants, medieval people experienced life very largely as members of groups - in the country as members of a kindred, in the town as a member of a guild as well as (often) of a kindred. Those who had no institutionalised group felt a deep need to form a new group, often a salvationist group under a charismatic leader.

The division between in-group and out-group was normally absolute. Particularly in the lower strata of society whoever offended against accepted norms and values was seen as wholly evil.

3. PSYCHOANALYTICAL INTERPRETATION

(In principle the psychoanalytical interpretation should be made by a professional psychoanalyst; but for paradigmatic purposes it seems permissible to set down such thoughts as occur to a layman, as follows:)

The particular image of the Jew with which we are concerned is rooted, historically, in the fact that Jewry was the parent community which gave birth to the community of Christians and from which the latter broke away. This circumstance was underlined by the fact that the Jewish god stood, in Christian doctrine itself, in a parental relationship to the founder of Christianity. It was therefore

to be expected that the image which would be projected on to the Jews would be that of a bad parent.

The particular accusations brought against Jews in the middle ages confirm this expectation. They were accused of having tortured and murdered Jesus, and in the passion plays the Jews who did this were always shown as bearded Elders; the spectacle was of a young man being tortured by old men. The same pattern recurs in the accusation of ritual murder: pictorial representations of this always show a boy being tortured and mutilated (especially castrated) by a group of old men. The otherwise incomprehensible accusation of torturing the eucharistic wafer by flogging, piercing and stamping on it becomes meaningful when viewed in this light - and in some versions the baby Jesus actually appears in the wafer, weeping and bleeding. Even the accusation of causing famine and of poisoning the wells takes on a new and more sinister significance when one reflects that one of the essential parental functions is the providing of food and drink.

The Jews, then, were seen as cruel and murderous parents; and their religion was interpreted accordingly. They were supposed to worship Satan, and Satan is himself a father-figure, the enemy and opposite of God the Father. Moreover it was believed that immediately before the second coming of Christ, Antichrist, 'the man of iniquity', would set up his throne in Jerusalem and attempt to dominate the world. Antichrist too was given all the attributes of a bad father - cruelty, tyranny, deceit, hypocrisy and near-omnipotence. But Antichrist was to be a Jew of the Tribe of Dan and all the Jews were to become his servants. The fact that some of the greatest massacres of Jews took place in the context of the 'people's crusades' is particularly significant, for in these movements to Jerusalem there was always an expectation that Antichrist was about to appear there. In the perspective of medieval Christian soteriology Jews were seen as a conspiracy to thwart the divinely appointed consummation of history, which was the dominion of the Son.

That beliefs such as these could become so prevalent and endure so long was due partly to the fact that Jews formed a closed community which, even apart from persecution, had little social contact with the larger society around it. But it also reflects a low degree of ego-development in the believers. A minority group which appears to be secretive and unknowable, in a society where individuals identify themselves with their group, is a perfect object for negative projections.

4. SURVEY AND INTERPRETATION OF IMMEDIATE SOCIAL FACTORS

The fantasy of the Satanic Jew, though enshrined in Patristic writings, did not result in persecution in Western Europe before the late 11th century. For centuries before that Jews and Christians lived side by side, at least without violence. There were no ghettos, and Jews were free to travel. From the time of the First Crusade onwards a rapid deterioration set in, from which European Jewry has never fully recovered.

i. Longterm strains

Persecution began as Western Europe ceased to be a static, exclusively rural and intensely traditionalist society and entered on a period of rapid economic and demographic expansion. And it took the most violent forms in those areas which were most deeply affected by these changes.

ii. Recent catastrophes

There is a very close correlation between the medieval massacres of Jews and natural catastrophes such as famines and plagues, both of which were commonly regarded as being due to Jewish sorcery. The biggest massacre of all occurred during the Black Death of 1348/49, when Jews were accused of having caused the plague by poisoning the wells.

iii. The leadership

The people who preached and led the massacres were usually

monks or friars, many of them irregulars who had become unauthorised wandering preachers. Biographical details are hard to come by, but men such as these must certainly have included many 'failed intellectuals'. They had no official status at all and were detested by the bishops and abbots; the latter were interested in converting Jews, not in killing them.

iv. The receptive strata

The followers were usually drawn from the lowest strata of the population in the most seriously overpopulated areas. The early massacres were carried out by the wandering hordes known as the 'people's crusades', which were recruited from landless labourers, shepherds and cowherds, unskilled urban workers and the unemployed. These strata were exposed to constant insecurity and represented the most desperate section of the medieval population.

The sociology of the smaller, local massacres which followed accusations of ritual murder etc. has yet to be investigated.

v. Objective conflicts of interest

At all times there were a few prosperous Jews whose money and belongings were worth taking; but this would not account for the killings of entire Jewish communities. Similarly, the debtors of Jewish moneylenders had good reason to kill their creditors, but not to kill Jews indiscriminately. But above all the fact that any Jew, even a moneylender, could always save his life by accepting conversion to Christianity shows that objective conflicts of interest played only a minor part in these massacres.

vi. Mental peculiarities

The material for this early period is inevitably scanty, but even so it is evident that the leaders of these massacres often showed tendencies to paranoid megalomania. Some claimed to be acting on direct instructions from Christ or the Virgin, some to be as pure as Christ, others again to be destined to take over the government of the Empire.

5. SOCIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

Hostile fantasies about Jews were institutionalised in medieval Europe, but they took on a special aggressiveness at certain times and in certain areas. Here the objective social function of the Jews - the fact for instance that Jews were moneylenders - is of only minor importance. Massacres of Jews began when and where the highly traditionalist rural order broke down and people found themselves exposed to the strains and stresses of a society in a state of change. They occurred particularly when and where, on top of this general weakening of routine, there came some catastrophe which could not be tackled with the means at the disposal of that society. They were carried out chiefly by the elements in the population most exposed to insecurity and least equipped to protect themselves. They were normally instigated by free-lance intellectuals with no recognised place in society and often with tendencies to paranoid megalomania.

It seems clear, therefore, that the killing of Jews was a stock reaction to a condition of extreme insecurity and anxiety. It is significant too that, so far as can be discovered, the killers usually came from those strata of the population where institutionalised groups (kindred, guilds etc.) were lacking. In following an inspired leader these people formed a new group and were thereby relieved from the intolerable burden of autonomy.

6. CONCLUDING SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

To those who took part in it the violent persecution and still more the killing of Jews offered at least a temporary escape from psychic tensions encouraged if not engendered by their social situation.

In a general sense, the killing of Jews offered a relatively safe and permitted means of discharging aggression - and insecurity and anxiety commonly exacerbate aggressive feelings.

More specifically, the killing of father-figures was a way in which people who lacked institutionalised means of furthering their interests could make a symbolic gesture of revolt and defiance.

It was also a way in which atomised individuals with weak egos could form a group such as they desperately needed. Moreover the group so formed was no ordinary group, but a self-appointed elite. In their undertaking of clearing the world of beings on to whom all the attributes of bad parents had been projected, Jew-killers felt themselves as good children of God the Father and closely identified with the divine Son. This meant that they were carrying out a mission of unique importance and merit - a compensatory fantasy appropriate to people who in reality were singularly downtrodden and defenceless.

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