

From Other Journals

"Modern Ideologies and The Jews," by Alain Besancon, Commentary, March, 1983, pp. 41-45.

This article is a thoughtful effort to place Jewish history within the context of social and political and cultural developments of the general history of the 19th and 20th centuries. The basic forces operating are considered to be the several aspects of nationalism, the growth of socialism, and the emergence of Zionism.

In western Europe the main influence is seen as the impact of the liberal state, although the nature of the impact differed in different countries. For example, in France and England, the egalitarian objective gave Jews a sense of acceptance and quality. In Germany, Russia and Poland, the cultural tradition stressed the importance of race and related ethnic considerations, and where minorities were considered inferior. "The nationalisms of the Germans and Slavs were founded on myths and . . . lies."

Although many Jews were attracted to Marxism-Leninism, Russia was the least liberal of the countries of Europe, and was also the major influence in the socialist movement of Eastern Europe. This was a major factor in the paradox of anti-Semitism in a movement dedicated to equality. This factor is seen as a major cause of the development of Zionism and of the basic trends in Israel. ". . . in Israel, socialism is subordinated to the higher principle of democracy." While Zionism developed out of these several movements, it is seen as having created in Israel a political and social pattern which is completely its own.

"Israel's Alienated Intellectuals," by Edward Rothstein. *Commentary*, February, 1987, pp. 53-57.

This article discusses an aspect of life in Israel which is rarely referred to but has serious implications for the future. That aspect is a cultural shift, "This shift is all the more important because it involves . . . the intellectual class, the 'elite' that once felt that the country was theirs."

The intellectual sector of Israel consists for the most part, of the sons and daughters of early immigrants from America and other parts of the world. They have a sense of disappointed frustration about the "soul of Israel." Their vision is of a country which was originally one of promise, hope, democracy, pastoral peace, compassion and devotion to moral law.

That highly romanticized conception is now one of detachment and condemnation. That government and people are seen by intellectuals as arrogant, vindictive, oppressive, undemocratic, racist and imperialistic.

The problem takes on special significance because a number of Israeli writers and publicists are influential with representatives of the media in other countries, and are therefore helping to shape increasingly negative attitudes in those countries toward Israel.

From the point of view of the intellectuals, the "dark forces" which created the change were the influx of people with middle-class aspirations and values, religious fundamentalism, military victories, racism and others. The author of the article points out that these critical at-

titudes rarely take into account the highly practical considerations of Arab enmity, international, regional and local political considerations, economics, military factors, and a host of day to day realities. Perhaps most important, the intellectuals display a type of elitism which fails to take into consideration the wishes of the majority of Israelis, who have made those wishes known by their actions at the polls.

"The Rise and Fall of Interfaith Dialogue," by Howard Singer, *Commentary*, May, 1987, pp. 50-55.

In this article, Singer raises the basic question as to whether interfaith dialogue does, in fact, contribute to mutual understanding, an assumption which is now generally accepted.

The article reviews the history of Christian anti-Semitism in this country and how certain developments stimulated the concept and practice of interfaith dialogue after World War II. A dramatic element in the new approach was the fact of the Holocaust having arisen and developed in a Christian country. Another major factor was the election of Pope John XXIII in 1958, who stood for "fraternal dialogue"

with Protestant groups. Although Jews were not included, Vatican II raised great hopes among them for an extension of the "ecumenical" movement. Catholic scholars "looked at the death camps and remembered their own anti-Semitism."

It is Singer's view that while there were great expectations originally, experience demonstrated that discussions were superficial and did not result in significant changes of attitude on either side. He points out that the Catholic Church itself, while it opposed anti-Semitism, continued to teach that "the Jewish people were superfluous to God's salvational plan," and to express the hope for their integration into the Church. Other scholars have pointed out that in both Christian and Arab teachings, "Jews have no ultimate or integral right to exist, in their land or anywhere." This basic belief persists and does not appear to have been reduced by interfaith dialogue.

Singer also believes that dialogue has had the value, at a minimum, of placing the anti-Semites on the defensive, of helping to clarify Jewish attitudes, and of creating greater sympathy for Israel.

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