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WHAT ANTI-SEMITISM IN AMERICA MEANS

I N an article published in the *Dearborn Independent*, June 19, 1920, it is argued that, transplanted in American soil, anti-Semitism will change its character and that it will not, in this country, take the form of mass violence. Not a single fact or historical example is cited in support of this optimistic theory. There are fine phrases about "the genius of Americanism" and the "innate justice of the American mind," but that is all. And these fine phrases can be easily and adequately disposed of by the simple observation that anti-Semitism, like all other forms of race hatred, is incompatible with "the genius of Americanism" and with "innate justice."

These seem to me to be self-evident

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truths. Nevertheless, we have had many bitter manifestations of race hatred in this country, not a few of which have been attended by mass violence. When I reflect upon the savage race riots which have occurred in this country, and the numerous lynchings of negroes by infuriated mobs, I cannot bring myself to accept the easy optimism of the anonymous Jew-baiter. Even as I am writing these lines the morning newspaper comes to hand with the account of the lynching of three negroes, one of them a woman, in Georgia. The story is quite familiar in its shocking details. The three negroes, who were charged with murder, were in the custody of the sheriff of the county, when they were seized by a mob and brutally murdered. That this was due to the fact that they were negroes, a manifestation of race hatred, is beyond question.

My faith that we shall be spared the shame and ignominy of pogroms rests upon other and, I believe, more solid foundations.

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I have confidence that the anti-Semitic propaganda will be met by the stout resistance of the great mass of our citizens of Gentile birth and heritage who will fight and crush anti-Semitism in defense of Christian civilization and of American ideals, traditions, and institutions. That seems to me to be a rational faith; it affords firm anchorage. On the other hand, it is a stupendous and dangerous folly to believe that you can cultivate, as part of our national psychology, anti-Jewish fear and prejudice without reaping in due course a harvest of hatred and violence toward the Jewish people. Racial hatred is everywhere the same.

There is no reason for believing that here in the United States we possess a special immunity from the worst forms of anti-Semitism. It would probably be safer to say that our conditions afford exceptional opportunities for their development. We have drawn heavily upon the Old World for our population, which reflects the divisions

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and the antipathies, the hereditary jealousies and suspicions, which for hundreds and, in some instances, thousands of years have troubled mankind. We have not yet welded these diverse elements into anything approaching homogeneity; our national consciousness is still undeveloped and, as a consequence of that fact, we have as yet not developed fully those self-imposed disciplines and restraints which are attendant upon highly developed national solidarity. Our national life, with its alien masses only partially assimilated, is as susceptible to inflaming passion as the wind-blown dry autumn leaves are susceptible to the flame of the torch.

Michael Davitt called attention to the fact that in the Kishinev pogrom it was not the rich Jews who were the victims, but Jewish workingmen and their families. That, I believe, is the universal experience. The rich Jews can buy immunity or protection. If as a result of vicious propaganda serious anti-Jewish riots take place in this

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country the victims will not be the rich Jewish financiers and brokers, against whom the *Dearborn Independent* fulminates, but innocent and inoffensive, hard-working men and women and their children. And if ever that time comes such men as Henry Ford must bear the major responsibility and guilt.

Let us suppose, for the argument's sake, that anti-Semitism in this country develops, as predicted in Mr. Ford's paper, along less brutal lines; that there will be no such orgies of murder and lust and spoliation as some other nations have had to their shame and dishonor. In that case, how will the organized hostility to the Jews be manifested? Specifically, what is the program of the group of anti-Semites in this country with which the *Dearborn Independent* is identified? Are they prepared to announce that program, and to have it measured by the standard of the American ideal? Or is it possible that the only "secret conspiracy" is on their side; that the real object of this

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anti-Semitic agitation is to prepare the way for a political and economic program which its authors dare not publicly avow?

When I was in England recently,¹ I gained a fairly clear and reliable idea of the political and economic program of those bitter Jew-haters who are responsible for the organized campaign of anti-Semitism in that country. In view of the fact that our anti-Semites, including the *Dearborn Independent*, have so slavishly copied the propaganda of the British anti-Semites, it is justifiable to assume that they are in general agreement with that program, and that they would adopt it in this country, subject to whatever modifications may be made necessary by the differences between the institutions of the two countries. At all events, unless and until the actual program of the anti-Semites of this country is set forth with candor and precision, they have no cause for complaint if it is assumed that their aims are practically identical with those of the British

¹ September and October, 1920.

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anti-Jewish propagandists whose arguments they repeat in detail, including every grotesque stupidity and every clumsy distortion of the truth.

The program of the British anti-Semites, adapted to American conditions, would involve, as a minimum, the following measures:

1. Disfranchisement of all Jews whose parents and grandparents were not all native-born American citizens.

2. Denial of the right to hold legislative or administrative office, either elective or appointive, to all Jews other than those whose parents and grandparents were all born in the United States.

3. Denial of the right of naturalization to Jews on the ground that they are not assimilable.

4. Prohibition or very strict limitation of further Jewish immigration.

5. Exclusion from the legal, medical, and teaching professions of all Jews except those entitled to full citizenship. (See 1 and 2.)

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6. Exclusion of all Jews, except those entitled to full citizenship, from certain economic rights and privileges, including the right to acquire and own land, the right to engage in the sale of stocks, bonds, securities, or real estate, or in banking, money-lending, or insurance.

7. The right of admission to colleges and universities to be so limited as to admit only a small percentage of Jewish students.

That this outline of a program will seem to many to be simply a fantastic jest I am quite well aware. The fact remains, however, that it is simply a bald presentation of the program believed in by a great many anti-Semites. I have only taken the measures that are seriously urged for adoption in England and changed their wording to correspond to American conditions. There is not one item in the program which I did not hear advocated with evident seriousness when I was in England. I learned of one society organized upon a national scale, all of whose members must "prove that their

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parents and grandparents were of British blood." This society is very actively engaged in the spread of anti-Semitic propaganda. Its prospectus states that it was "Founded to secure the re-enactment of the Act of Settlement, 1700, 1701, which secured the government of Britain to Britons and the land of Britain to the ownership of Britons."

The point of the demand for the re-enactment of the Act of Settlement lies in the fact that one of the clauses in that historic instrument provides that, "no person born out of the kingdoms of England, Scotland, or Ireland, or the dominions thereunto belonging (*although he be naturalized or made a denizen*), except such as were born of English parents, *shall be capable to be of the Privy Council, or a member of either House of Parliament, or enjoy any office or place of trust, either civil or military.*" It is also stipulated that no such person shall be capable "to have any grant of lands, tenements, or hereditaments from the Crown to

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himself, or to any other or others in trust for him." In the light of the constitution of this British society with its large dues-paying membership, and its demand for the re-enactment of the above-quoted provisions of the Act of Settlement, the most drastic parts of the suggested program do not seem so fantastic, after all.

Here, then, is a program of anti-Semitism which fairly expresses the political and economic aspirations of large groups with whom our American anti-Semites, led by the *Dearborn Independent*, appear to be working in close co-operation and harmony. Whether the program fully meets with their approval or not, it can hardly be questioned that, if their anti-Jewish agitation is to have the result of bringing about political and economic remedies for the conditions they assail, and not pogroms, it will be necessary to discriminate between Jews and Gentiles in citizenship, in education, in property rights, and in economic opportunity. Precisely how these discriminations are to be

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made may be open to doubt, but that they must be made is—once the anti-Semitic position is taken—beyond all doubt.

Against that reactionary aim I set the American ideal, or what President Roosevelt called "the historic American position of treating each man on his merits as a man, without the least reference to his creed, his race, or his birthplace." Anti-Semitism would divide our citizenship by racial and religious barriers; the Americanism of Washington and Lincoln and Lee and Roosevelt would weld all into a united whole, regardless of race or religion. The way of the anti-Semite is the way of Russia under the tsars, the way of the unspeakable despots who for centuries made the word "Turk" a synonym for oppression and brutal reaction. I prefer the American way. I am opposed to anti-Semitism, not alone for humanitarian reasons, but as a matter of loyalty to America. Anti-Semitism is treason to the American ideal.