

## BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

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Davies, Alan, ed. *Antisemitism in Canada: History and Interpretation*. Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992. vii+304pp.

There is no comprehensive history of antisemitism in Canada, but Alan Davies has helped to fill that gap by soliciting contributions from twelve Canadian scholars working in the field. Davies rightly regrets that the focus, as usual, is on Central Canada with the West given little attention and the Atlantic provinces none at all. Of course, both the oldest and the largest Jewish communities are in Quebec and Ontario, and reported antisemitism still ranks highest in those locales.

Davies undertakes no summation or analysis of antisemitism in Canada, the principal forms which it took, its significance in Canadian life, or how it compares to other societies. Stanley Barrett (*Is God a Racist?*) believes that Canada has had its proportional share of both tolerance and antisemitism, but the essays in this collection support a more optimistic conclusion.

My favourite essays in this collection are Gerald Tulchinsky's study of Goldwin Smith, and the late Howard Palmer's work on Alberta. Prof. Tulchinsky vigorously corrects previous biographers of Smith, who overlooked or suppressed the noted liberal's antisemitism. Nor was his antisemitism some idiosyncratic quirk as Smith paid for professional research assistance on the subject, read widely in the continental sources from Marr to Renan, and disseminated his views to a wide audience. Nineteenth century liberalism, as personified by Goldwin Smith, was not necessarily the ideology of toleration. The Jews stubbornly rejected the

freedom that liberals of Smith's ilk offered — the freedom to assimilate — and Smith responded with a campaign of hatred. Tulchinsky provides us with an important case study of that elite brand of anti-semitism which is often more elusive than the populist variety.

The late Howard Palmer examined our native populists in Alberta and one of its principal manifestations, the Social Credit movement. His fair and nuanced treatment of that movement and its leaders is convincing. Premier William Aberhart is depicted as a foe of antisemitism who could argue, as in a 1937 radio broadcast, that the nations of the world would be judged by how they “treated the brethren Israel.” Yet Palmer also points out that Aberhart might also slide into remarks about Jewish financiers and the responsibility they had for the woes of their people. In this, Aberhart was much like his American populist counterparts whose conspiratorial bent could hardly resist fastening on those whom, they believed, controlled the world money supply.

It was among the staunch Social Credit ideologues who followed the movement's ideological founder, Major C.H. Douglas, that Palmer locates the hardcore antisemites. They including federal M.P. Norman Jaques, were prominent in the movement's educational arm, the Alberta Social Credit Board. Jaques was so imbued with antisemitism that he even attempted to read from the *Protocols* in the House of Commons. After World War II Premier Ernest Manning abolished the Board, and by 1955 had purged most of the antisemites from influential party and legislative positions.

Palmer understood antisemitism in Alberta and within Social Credit as a phenomenon of an economically depressed debt-ridden region. But his most interesting conclusion is that religion did not promote antisemitism in Alberta. Indeed, “fundamentalist and non-conformist Christianity restrained rather than encouraged it.” In his own essay on the Keegstra case, editor Davies reinforced Palmer, pointing out that the Eckville teacher “drew relatively little support from Christian fundamentalists in the vast Bible Belt of the prairies.” It would be well to remember this as we face the revived religious right, at least south of the border, and Palmer's

reminded us that Protestant fundamentalism is too complex to be turned into an easy scapegoat.

Pierre Anctil's essay on Judeo-Christian relations in Quebec between the two World Wars is, for this reviewer, the most problematic. It is strongest in documenting antisemitism on both sides of the linguistic divide including the polite, covert but devastating quotas of McGill and the angry, public manifestations such as the strike by interns at l'Hôpital Notre-Dame over the admission of a single Jewish intern who was then forced to resign. In other words, no linguistic community had a monopoly on antisemitism.

Anctil's blind spot is revealed when he deals with certain aspects of Quebec nationalism, particularly the roles of *Le Devoir* and of l'Abbé Lionel Groulx. It is no secret that Anctil and Esther Delisle, the author of the recent *The Traitor and the Jew*, have hotly disputed this terrain. Anctil writes of *Le Devoir*, for example, that "full editorials devoted to the 'Jewish problem' appeared *only* [my emphasis] a dozen times in 1934-35." Not only does Delisle see that as a fairly significant number, but she had also read hundreds of articles in that newspaper dealing with the subject. Delisle has also found that Groulx used various pseudonyms for his vile antisemitic writings and that Anctil's contention that "Jews did not rank very high in . . . [nationalist] preoccupations" is incorrect. (Recently, Prof. Ramsay Cook has declared that he has in his possession a French language edition of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* which seems to have been prepared by Groulx although issued under a pseudonym.) The problem may be that Groulx remains a nationalist icon whose name graces a major metro station, a college, a university building, etc. That does not make a modern democratic Quebec nationalism antisemitic, but by this point nationalists should have enough self confidence to clean the xenophobic skeletons out of their closet.

For the historian, it is equally important to come to terms with this unflattering chapter of Quebec history in order to understand subsequent events such as Quebec's important role in barring the Jewish refugees from Hitler who sought to enter Canada, or the Groulxiste nationalists of the 1940s (some still active today) who

protected Nazi collaborators after the war. Clerical fascism was not uniquely a Quebec phenomenon in the world of the 1930s, but the chroniclers of other nations do not seem to have had the same difficulties in dealing with it.

In other essays, Richard Menkis and Michael Brown respectively supply serviceable accounts of antisemitism in the Pre-Confederation period and in Quebec from Confederation to World War I. Phyllis Senese's essay is a rather thin account of Western press treatment of the Dreyfus affair. Her work on the same subject in Quebec is more substantial and would have been a better selection, except that the editor undoubtedly wanted more Western Canadian material. Stephen Speisman's chapter on Ontario yields no surprise for those familiar with his major work on Toronto Jewry. Alan Davies and Manuel Prutschi deal with the recent cases of James Keegstra and the unfortunately on-going Ernst Zundel story. Morton Weinfeld and Harold Troper contribute a summary of their work on Jewish-Ukrainian relations and the Nazi war criminal issue. Marilyn Nefsky gives a more positive account of the response of the Protestant churches to Nazism than Abella and Troper in *None is Too Many*. In the light of recent refugee crises, however, her assertion that much would have been different had "Christian opinion in Canada . . . been mobilized fully" seems unlikely. A more sensitized post-Holocaust Canada and all its churches — and synagogues — have sadly made little impact on the refugee problems of our own day.

One carries away from a reading of this book the sense that except in a very few instances antisemitism was a very minor theme in Canadian life. Few violent incidents are cited in the work. The citizens of the "peaceable kingdom" were no pogromists, though perhaps we require more oral and social history to reveal this side of the story. Many Montreal "old timers," and I suspect Torontonians as well, have stories about antisemitic gang attacks in the 1930s and 1940s which should be factored in, to flesh out the story of antisemitism in Canada. Meanwhile Davies and his contributors have provided a seminal work for the field.

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