

JEWISH COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL

OF SAN FRANCISCO, MARIN AND THE PENINSULA

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The Fight Against Anti-Semitism: 1981

There is not one anti-semitism; there are *three* anti-semitisms. There are *three* fronts on which the fight against anti-semitism must take place. They are different phenomena. They have different symptoms. They have somewhat different causes. They call for different remedies. They are not directly connected with each other, in a causative sense.

A. DEFINITIONS: WHAT ARE THE ANTI-SEMITISMS?

1) Covert acts of anti-semitism. Physical acts of anti-semitism which are covertly done and are illegal in one form or another. Thus: arson, defacement, vandalism.

2) Anti-semitic attitudes. The prevalence of negative, hostile and prejudicial feelings and beliefs towards Jews. Notably: the belief that Jews have too much power; that Jews try to control everything; that Jews cause the nation's problems; that Jews are interested only in money; that Jews are more dishonest than others.

3) Organized anti-semitic political movements. Movements which are organized in the public arena to take political power, with a built-in and public anti-semitic platform. Thus: Nazism, Ku Klux Klan. This is the ultimate concern of the Jews.

---3A: Public expression of anti-semitic attitudes.

Literature, leaflets, public statements and public meetings which express negative, hostile and prejudicial beliefs towards Jews.

These are most often the product and instrument of organized anti-semitic political movements. But sometimes, these are expressions which seep out of the reservoir of anti-semitic attitudes, uttered by a public figure such as General George Brown, or in private insult. Sometimes, they are anonymous -- a covert phenomenon, but differing from other covert acts of anti-semitism in not being physical nor, under present law, illegal.

(Note: The term "overt anti-semitism" is often used, and presumably includes categories 1, 3 and 3A above -- but it is too broad a term to be remedially useful.)

B. PERPETRATORS: WHO COMMITS THESE ANTI-SEMITISMS?

1) Ideological anti-semites. These are people who believe in a package of the anti-semitic attitudes described above. They may or may not commit anti-semitic acts or join anti-semitic movements.

2) Situational anti-semites. These are people who commit anti-semitic acts, or join anti-semitic movements, even though they do *not* hold significant anti-semitic beliefs or attitudes.

Example: When the American people were asked whether they would support a Congressional candidate running on an anti-Jewish platform, the overwhelming majority said "no." But about a third of all Americans said it "wouldn't make any difference." In other words, if the candidate promised them better jobs or lower taxes, or whatever, they would go along with his anti-semitism. These people are not committed to anti-semitic belief; it is just that they are not committed *against* anti-semitism.

C. WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATE OF THESE ANTI-SEMITISMS?

INCIDENCE, CAUSES, CONNECTIONS, EVALUATIONS1) Covert acts of anti-semitism.

Incidence: There are clearly more physical acts of anti-semitism being committed in America today than in the 1950s; and more, according to the ADL, than in the past few years. Thus, while considerably fewer physical acts of anti-semitism are being committed than in the 1930s -- a "high" point in American anti-semitism -- the current *direction* is towards more frequency.

Causes: Organized anti-semitic political groups do not normally commit covert acts of anti-semitism. They desire recognition, credit and political advantage for what they do. Covert acts of anti-semitism are normally committed by disconnected individuals or disconnected non-political groups.

Such disconnected individuals or groups can be either ideological anti-semites or situational anti-semites (see above). But in either case, they are individuals or groups without constraints in engaging in violent or illegal behavior.

The increase in covert acts of anti-semitism would indicate that there are either more anti-semites, or there is more license for ideological and situational anti-semites. Since the prevalence of attitudinal anti-semitism is down rather than up (see below), the indication is that increased covert anti-semitism results from more license for anti-semites, and for those who are willing to use anti-semitism, rather than from an increased number of ideological anti-semites.

That increase in *license* has two causative aspects: a) Generally decreasing constraint with respect to violence and illegal behavior. For one thing, there is a constant percentage of the population which is emotionally disordered in a way that can lead to unconstrained behavior. As populations get larger, and become

compacted, there is an increasing number of such people in evidence. For another thing, a general climate of unconstrained behavior tends to become contagious.

b) Generally decreasing constraint with respect to expressing anti-semitism publicly. For almost two decades after World War II, anti-semitic beliefs were largely unfashionable and underground. They have come out of the closet. This is a form of license, too.

Evaluation: Those who commit acts of covert anti-semitism are not often those who form or even become significant members of organized anti-semitic political movements. But covert acts of anti-semitism have a *significance of their own* which requires utmost attention:

- . They are evidence of a license to violence which is *in itself* dangerous, and contagious.
- . They are also evidence of a license to act out anti-semitism, which is *in itself* dangerous and contagious.
- . *In themselves*, they frighten and endanger Jews, who are entitled to society's best protection.

2) Anti-semitic attitudes.

Incidence: The prevalence of negative and hostile beliefs about Jews has considerably diminished since the 1930s and *has continued to diminish* since the 1950s. *Fewer* Americans believe that Jews have too much power in comparison with other American groups. (In American public opinion, Jews are now ranked *behind* evangelical Protestants, Catholics and Blacks, among others, in having "too much power.") *Fewer* Americans believe that the Jews are the cause of our national troubles, or that Jews are more dishonest than others. In short, at this particular time, there seem to be fewer ideological anti-semites than in either the remote or recent past.

Causes: There is a constant reservoir of anti-semitic beliefs because they have been culturally transmitted in the West for so long. In the United States, in the 1930s, almost half of the American population held some package of anti-semitic beliefs which qualified them as "anti-semitic." In the 1950s, about a third of the American population held such a package of beliefs. In more recent years, less than a quarter of the American population held such beliefs.

However, because of the "cultural reservoir" of anti-semitism, that figure could go up or down, depending upon its stimulation. The rise of organized anti-semitic political movements is usually the *cause* of a higher prevalent level of anti-semitic attitudes, rather than the result (see below).

Evaluation: The bulk of the membership of organized anti-semitic political movements are not ideological anti-semites. Most ideological anti-semites do not act out their anti-semitism, unless the political climate stimulates them and gives them full license. Covert acts of anti-semitism are committed by both ideological and situational anti-semites.

Hundreds of programs and tens of millions of dollars have been spent trying to reduce the prevalent levels of anti-semitism. Success is slow, and reversible. Nevertheless, it is obviously necessary to maintain a constant effort to diminish the reservoir of anti-semitic attitudes at any given time. While that prevalence of anti-semitic attitudes does not *cause* covert acts of anti-semitism, or organized anti-semitic political movements -- it does make their existence easier.

3) Organized anti-semitic political movements.

Incidence: There has been no major anti-semitic political movement in America since the 1930s, when the Coughlinite movement had millions of followers. There is still none. The KKK is the closest candidate today, but is overwhelmingly rejected by the American people.

While embryonic organized political anti-semitic movements are fragmented, and have not significantly gained in membership, they are clearly more vocal and demonstrative than several years ago. This would seem to follow the patterns described above: *not* that there are *more* ideological anti-semites, or more ideological anti-semitic movements, but that there is *more license* for both, and for those willing to engage in anti-semitism. That is not a matter for comfort, but to note in terms of perspective and remedial program.

Causes: The mass base of anti-semitic political movements is not primarily composed of ideological anti-semites. Most of them are situational anti-semites; people who go along with anti-semitism because it serves their other purposes, and they don't care about anti-semitism one way or another.

Example: The members of the Coughlinite movement, the largest anti-semitic political movement in American history, were -- by actual count -- not significantly more ideologically anti-semitic than the rest of the population. They joined the movement for other reasons, and went along with the anti-semitism.

Evaluation: Organized anti-semitic political movements are effective and gather a mass base, only when the conditions are ripe for political extremism. Such conditions include a general breakdown of law and order in society; a breakdown of the economic order; a bitterly divided society, where some groups feel that they are hopelessly left out, and other groups are fearful that they are going to lose what they had; where political life becomes fragmented, non-coalitional and fractional.

While there is currently no major anti-semitic political movement, that is no reason for complacency as long as the conditions for political extremism remain possible, and a significant segment of the population remains "indifferent" about the political use of anti-semitism.

SUMMARY:

Of the three anti-semitisms, covert acts of anti-semitism are on the increase, prevalent levels of anti-semitic attitudes are slightly on the decrease; and there are no major anti-semitic political movements, embryonic groups such as the KKK and neo-Nazis being fragmented and without broad support, although they are more vehement than they have been in recent years.

The lower levels of prevalent anti-semitism -- of ideological anti-semites -- are not inconsistent with higher levels of covert anti-semitic acts; nor would it be inconsistent with a future growth of anti-semitic political movements. Neither covert acts of anti-semitism, nor organized anti-semitic political movements depend on ideological anti-semites.

While the three anti-semitisms are not causatively connected, they each deserve deep concern in their own right. Covert acts of anti-semitism are abhorrent and dangerous in themselves. Organized anti-semitic political movements can spring up virtually overnight, if conditions are right.

Since each of the anti-semitisms is a serious but somewhat different phenomenon than the others, each requires a somewhat different remedial program (see appended Action Checklist). We would do a disservice by too glibly connecting the three anti-semitisms, and not distinguishing among them, giving each its remedial due.

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