

# The Left's Anti-Semitic Chic

By George F. Will

Wednesday, February 25, 2004; Page A25

It used to be said that anti-Catholicism was the anti-Semitism of the intellectuals. Today anti-Semitism is the anti-Semitism of the intellectuals.

Not all intellectuals, of course. And the seepage of this ancient poison into the intelligentsia -- always so militantly modern -- is much more pronounced in Europe than here. But as anti-Semitism migrates across the political spectrum from right to left, it infects the intelligentsia, which has leaned left for two centuries.

Here the term intellectual is used loosely, to denote not only people who think about ideas -- about thinking -- but also people who think they do. The term anti-Semitism is used to denote people who dislike Jews. These people include those who say: We do not dislike Jews, we only dislike Zionists -- although to live in Israel is to endorse the Zionist enterprise, and all Jews are implicated, as sympathizers, in the crime that is Israel.

Today's release of Mel Gibson's movie "The Passion of the Christ" has catalyzed fears of resurgent anti-Semitism. Some critics say the movie portrays the governor of Judea -- Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect responsible for the crucifixion -- as more benign and less in control than he actually was, and ascribes too much power and malignity to Jerusalem's Jewish elite. Jon Meacham's deeply informed cover story "Who Killed Jesus?" in the Feb. 16 Newsweek renders this measured judgment: The movie implies more blame for the Jewish religious leaders of Judea of that time than sound scholarship suggests. However, Meacham rightly refrains from discerning disreputable intentions in Gibson's presentation of matters about which scholars, too, must speculate, and do disagree. Besides, this being a healthy nation, Americans are unlikely to be swayed by the movie's misreading, as Meacham delicately suggests, of the actions of a few Jews 2,000 years ago.

Fears about the movie's exacerbating religiously motivated anti-Semitism are missing the larger menace -- the upsurge of political anti-Semitism. Like traditional anti-Semitism, but with secular sources and motives, the political version, which condemns Jews as a social element, is becoming mainstream, and chic among political and cultural elites, mostly in Europe. Consider:

- A cartoon in a mainstream Italian newspaper depicts the infant Jesus in a manger, menaced by an Israeli tank and saying, "Don't tell me they want to kill me again." This expresses animus against Israel rather than twisted Christian zeal.
- The European Union has suppressed a study it commissioned, because the study blamed the upsurge in anti-Jewish acts on European Muslims -- and the European left.

- Nineteen percent of Germans believe what a best-selling German book asserts: The CIA and Israel's Mossad organized the Sept. 11 attacks.
- On French television, a comedian wearing a Jewish skullcap gives a Nazi salute while yelling, "Isra-Heil!"
- If Israel is not the Great Satan, it is allied with him -- America. European anti-American demonstrations often include Israel's blue and white flag with a swastika replacing the star of David, and signs perpetuating the myth, concocted by Palestinians and cooperative Western journalists, of an Israeli massacre in Jenin: "1943: Warsaw / 2002: Jenin."
- Omer Bartov, a historian at Brown University, writes in the New Republic that much of what Hitler said "can be found today in innumerable places: on Internet sites, propaganda brochures, political speeches, protest placards, academic publications, religious sermons, you name it."

The appallingly brief eclipse of anti-Semitism after Auschwitz demonstrates how beguiling is the simplicity of pure stupidity. All of the left's prescriptions for curing what ails society -- socialism, communism, psychoanalysis, "progressive" education, etc. -- have been discarded, so now the left is reduced to adapting that hardy perennial of the right, anti-Semitism. This is a new twist to the left's recipe for salvation through elimination: All will be well if we eliminate capitalists, or private property, or the ruling class, or "special interests," or neuroses, or inhibitions. Now, let's try eliminating a people, starting with their nation, which is obnoxiously pro-American and insufferably Spartan.

Europe's susceptibility to political lunacy, and the Arab world's addiction to it, is not news. And the paranoid style is a political constant. Those who believe a conspiracy assassinated President Kennedy say: Proof of the conspiracy's diabolical subtlety is that no evidence of it remains. Today's anti-Semites say: Proof of the Jews' potent menace is that there are so few of them -- just 13 million of the planet's 6 billion people -- yet they cause so many political, economic and cultural ills. Gosh. Imagine if they were, say, 1 percent of Earth's population: 63 million.

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