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Book Review: A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism by Paul Hanebrink

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Hanebrink, Paul. *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018. 353 pages. Hardcover, \$29.95.

The idea of Communism as a Jewish machination and Jews thereby guilty for the exploits of communist organizations and governments became a primary trait of diverse promoters of authoritarianism, counterrevolution, and racism in twentieth-century Europe. The accusation that Jews invented and promoted Bolshevism, and should therefore be held accountable for its offenses, had horrific consequences for Jews. After *some* Jews became Bolsheviks, Europe's deep-rooted and longstanding anti-Judaism reappeared through the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism, which updated timeworn anti-Jewish stereotypes while associating Jews with Russian Bolshevism. Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Russian Civil War was fought between Bolshevik and anti-Bolshevik forces, chiefly the White Army, whose leadership comprised former officers of Russia's imperial army. Supporters of the defeated White Army moved west into exile. Some found safe haven in Romania, where they encountered young anti-Semites like Corneliu Codreanu, the future founder of the Iron Guard, the fascist organization that would play a significant role in Romanian politics between 1930 and 1941. Stories about the terror of Bolshevik rule in Russia from those who went to France were well-received by Roman Catholics and French monarchist groups. With many others, Alfred Rosenberg fled to Germany. Rosenberg became a primary ideologist of Nazism.

Revolution and the Great War put an end to the empires of Eastern Europe. A new order came about amidst fierce struggles, as assorted nationalist groups fought each another and the Bolsheviks. Fear of Judeo-Bolshevism stirred several European nations to pass discriminatory legislation against Jews, who came under increasing surveillance by various European governments. In *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism*, historian Paul

Hanebrink presents a gripping account of the national and transnational dimensions of this myth that stimulated aggression and bloodshed against European Jewry. Hanebrink aptly describes how the figure of the Jewish-Bolshevik became a potent stereotype, especially in Hungary, Poland, and Romania. In books, newspapers, travel accounts, and government-issued posters distributed across borders, Hanebrink finds ample evidence that Jews were perceived as embodying the Bolshevik threat which purportedly endangered all European Christendom. Intercontinental fear was stoked by writers like the French brothers Jérôme and Jean Tharaud. The Tharauds' 1920 tour of Hungary stimulated their book about the Austro-Hungarian Empire's downfall and the brief catastrophic rule of Hungary's Bolsheviks under Béla Kun, the head of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919. Kun was the son of a Jewish village clerk. According to the Tharauds, Hungary's Bolshevism was correspondingly Jewish.

Repeatedly, Eastern European Jews endured prejudice and violence because it was alleged that they advocated Bolshevism. Hanebrink notes liberal Jewish leaders' efforts "to neutralize, explain, or deflect attention away from debates about the Jewishness of prominent revolutionaries because they saw clearly how it could be used as a weapon to deny Jews their place in the national communities with which they identified so deeply" (p. 19). Jewish activists organized relief efforts and sought legal protection and security. They publicized the plight of European Jewry, notably the ferocious attacks on Jews in the Ukraine that took the life of tens of thousands in 1919. They sought to counter the persistent association of Jews with Bolshevism in rightwing and Roman Catholic publications, especially in Poland. Yet fear of an aggressive and seditious Judeo-Bolshevism continued to incite terror, while developing into a crucial component of Eastern European political life.

In the interwar years, the dreaded Judeo-Bolshevik endured as a persuasive figure in nationalist politics across Europe. Before long, national varieties of the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism overlapped with the version promoted by the Nazi Party in Germany. “Judeo-Bolshevism made Adolf Hitler,” asserts Hanebrink (p. 83). As the Nazis swept across Europe during World War II, local variants of the Jewish Bolshevik stereotype awaited them. Nazi occupiers spread Hitler’s message of the Germanic people’s unique mission to safeguard the world from Judeo-Bolshevism. Soviet studies were nazified in Germany by scholars like Hermann Greife, who claimed Jews were the inventors and spreaders of Bolshevism. The Institute for Scientific Research on the Soviet Union, created in 1933, produced works that were disseminated around Europe. Hermann Fehst’s 1934 book *Bolshevism and Jewry* was an early creation of Nazi Germany’s Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question founded by Eberhard Taubert.

Germany’s declaration of war on the Soviet Union in 1941 exacerbated the idea of Judeo-Bolshevism. Hanebrink explains how the Nazis rationalized Operation Barbarossa as “a preventive war that would destroy the Judeo-Bolshevik system before the enemy—a racial-ideological composite of Jews, Communists, and subhuman Slavs always labeled Asiatic and un-European—could impose a cruel reign of terror on Germany and all of Europe” (p. 206). The malevolent Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels called to save the West from Asiatic brutes goaded on by their Judeo-Bolshevik masters. Nazi leaders argued the danger of Judeo-Bolshevism compelled them to fight on the Eastern Front with ruthless brutality. In Eastern European areas that underwent Soviet then Nazi occupations, the arrival of Nazis and their allies often prompted attacks on local Jews. Hanebrink argues that these “pogroms in which cries for

revenge against suspected Jewish Communist collaborators overlay deep desires to reestablish community boundaries through looting, degradation, and killing” (p. 161). Moreover, numerous nationalist partisans who resisted foreign domination during wartime envisioned a future life devoid of ethnic minorities, including Jews.

While consolidating their control over Eastern Europe after World War II, the Soviets encountered many who understood their presence as unwanted foreign occupation. Perceiving the allegation of Judeo-Bolshevism as a challenge to their dominance, Communist leaders labored to thwart their party’s Jewish image. The myth of Judeo-Bolshevism also profoundly affected postwar reconstruction in the West, particularly in West Germany, where “the question was not how to make Communism seem national, but how to imagine anti-Communism after Hitler” (p. 199). Christian churches were key participants in rebuilding a democratic and anti-Communist West Germany. Hanebrink cogently interprets the removal of Judeo-Bolshevism from Cold War Anti-Communist politics in the West. As postwar anti-totalitarianism reanimated the notion of a Christian Europe, liberal democracy’s claim to be rooted in Judeo-Christian civilization was bolstered. Judaism came to be regarded in the West as Christianity’s partner in the ideological contest with Communism in the East. Nazi officials had fashioned the notion of Judeo-Bolshevism into a key component of their justification for the Holocaust. Hanebrink concludes by examining how the idea of Judeo-Bolshevism outlasted the Soviet Union due to its becoming enmeshed in the political and moral work of Holocaust remembrance. Unquestionably, Hanebrink’s judicious scholarship is indispensable for understanding twentieth-century European thought and politics.

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