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PATTERNS OF PREJUDICE
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Since its inception in 1967, Patterns of Prejudice has been published by the Institute of Jewish Affairs, for the last two years in conjunction with SAGE Publications. The journal has been given new impetus and enhanced importance by the upsurge in xenophobic excesses accompanying the political upheavals of 1989-90. Its niche lies midway between the more diffuse concerns of Ethnic and Racial Studies and the specialized focus of the Leo Baeck Yearbook or Holocaust and Genocide Studies. Although many of the contributions deal with anti-Semitism in its historical and contemporary guises, the journal is explicitly dedicated to the “study of national and international conditions, causes and manifestations of racial, religious and ethnic discrimination and prejudice”, wherever they occur. In practice, notwithstanding one bold attempt to include the Marsh Arab or the Tuvisi in a comparative study of genocide, the approach is Eurocentric, the one recent exception to this, Lawrence Goodhert’s fascinating study of the anti-Semitic views espoused by Malcolm X – a part of the project edited by Professor Charles W. Jones, a cool appreciation of the merits of entrepreneurship and self-help as paradigms for black Americans – deserves to be emulated in future issues. The journal is explicitly interdisciplinary in approach. This means several fine contributions by historians, some indifferent “cultural studies” including an attempt to equate repressive Nazi state policy towards the arts with American “New Right” morally based objections to the public funding of artists like Robert Mapplethorpe, and various articles on contemporary German xenophobia. In the latest, a political “science” manages to transform the eerie, sodium-lit menace of skinheads hanging around bus shelters and railway stations waiting for a passing African or Vietnamese, into a series of responses to opinion polls, which in practice tell us virtually nothing about why the former are so bored or malevolent that they have to beat or kill the latter by way of Saturday night entertainment. Werner Bergmann’s piece does, however, go some small way to correcting the impression that the German government is indifferent to foreign people being murdered on its streets, by adumbrating the measures it has taken, belatedly in the wake of Rostock and Mönls, to prohibit certian lunatic groups, increase penalties for racial attacks, or to observe some of the more perennial youth sub-cultures.

In contrast to the blandness of the contributions to Germany, one of the co-editors, Tony Kushner, is responsible for a thoughtful and persuasive article on the contemporary British paradox of declining membership and support for extreme right-wing parties, but a marked increase in racially motivated violence, which, according to recent Home Office estimates, involves about 300,000 “incidents” a year. Kushner cautions against any complacency engendered by notions of British “exceptionality”, either contemporary or historical. There may well be only about 4,000 active neo-fascists in Britain today, with their electoral base restricted to the dank areas overshadowed by the glinting towers of London’s Docklands, but a few of their hatreds and slogans have been internalized by a much larger group of thugs wielding knives and baseball bats, for whom Holocaust denialism or taunting Muslims with the name “Rushdie” no doubt adds a little conventional sophistication beyond their more restricted racist vernacular. Kushner writes with real authority, and has clearly done his homework on football hooligans, “oi” rock bands and the sillier “cultural” flirtations with fascism of, inter alios, David Bowie, Gilbert and George, or sections of the “animal rights” scene, who come full circle with the fascists on the issue of ritual slaughter.

What makes Patterns of Prejudice compelling reading is not just the authority of contributors such as Goodhert or Kushner, or the quality of the book-review sections, but also the provisory, work-in-progress feel of parts of the journal. One hopes this last quality will not disappear as the journal becomes more widely known or established. Some of the most interesting contributions are by scholars striving thoughtfully outside their immediate parishes, notably Colin Richmond and Michael Marrus. This gives the journal a risky, unpredictable quality, lacking in some of its competitors. Richmond, a later medievalist by profession, who, unusually, has a serious interest in the Holocaust, describes the impact made on him by Norman Cohen’s Europe’s Inner Demons, a book which led him radically to revise what he regarded as central to the period’s history. The result has been his growing desire to see an “un-English history of England”, that is, one which engages England’s role within a wider European persecuting or victimizing society. As he puts it, Magna Carta or the development of English Common Law probably looked very different from the perspective of Lincoln or London Jewry or to the Scots, Welsh or Irish.

In similar vein, one of the most distinguished of Holocaust scholars, Michael Marrus, argues that anti-Semitism is a stagnating force relative to the hatreds visited on immigrants, refugees, or racial and religious minorities, and that the youths adorning with tin swastikas who attend concerts by “Screwdriver” should not be confused with the authentically 1930s article. As he puts it, “heterophobia... is essentially not continous, with its targets being less defined by historical tradition than by current sociological realities”. Without playing down anti-Semitism in its strategic, geopolitical and economic aspects, and the unpleasuness of the thugs profiled in journals like Searchlight, Marrus cautions against seeing parallels with the 1930s, when there were “mass movements with a broad and aggregate programme for victimizing a particular group”. He may be right in this case, but one fears that promiscuous heterophobia will guarantee this excellent journal a venerable future.

MICHAEL BURLEIGH

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This first issue of Israel Affairs is devoted to the 1993 Israel-PLO peace process and its possible consequences. It explores several aspects of the accord: political, diplomatic, military, economic and cultural.

A “peace process” might be described as a period of international manoeuvring during which the parties concerned do not want to make peace on the terms available, but find it impossible or imposible to make war other than intermittently and at half cock. It provides journalists and academics with numerous opportunities for profitable speculation, and politicians and diplomats with ostentatious and gainful employment; and the longer it endures, the more it enhances the chances of the principals on the Nobel Peace Prize. A peace process, however, should never be mistaken for a serious endeavour to make peace; rather, it should be viewed as a device for prolonging low-level conflict until the situation turns decisively in favour of one or other of the contestants.

Israel’s peace process has continued since the first armistices of 1948 and has been punctuated by six wars and several skirmishes. Is the process now on the way to being converted into an actual “peace”? What are we witnessing: another stage or variation on the theme of conflict? Or, thirdly, is someone winning the peace negociation? A good case could be made for the last proposition. Israel’s ambition has been to secure peace with the Arab states bordering her territories, and her greatest success to date has been the removal, in 1979, of Egypt from the list of her enemies. Israel’s second peace target was Syria, because, if Syria made peace, Jordan and Lebanon would follow, and the Palestinians would have nowhere to go for effective help. The novel feature of the Oslo agreement was that Israel changed her target and made an agreement first with the PLO (which had been ready for some agreement since 1988). No doubt Israel hoped, with some reason, that such an agreement would smooth the path to dealing with Jordan and Syria. In the case of Jordan, the hope was justified. King Hussein, who has never lacked courage, has made peace without Syria. And, to outside observers, little now seems to stand in the way of agreement with Syria: much depends on the military significance of the Gulf War for Israel; gone; the accord with the PLO makes control of a security zone in south Lebanon less important; and only Zionist sentiment appears to stand in the way of a Syrian settlement which would complete the Israeli agenda. From the perspective of 1948, or even that of 1967, Israeli appears to be on the verge of a remarkable triumph of military and diplomatic skills, resolution and perseverance. Shimon Peres, the architect of the new Israeli approach, might well come to be ranked with Cavour.