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## MARX AND THE JEWISH QUESTION: A RESPONSE TO JULIUS CARLEBACH

Gary Ruchwarger

Marx's article, "On the Jewish Question," published in 1843, has long been an embarrassment to Marxists and a source of satisfaction to anti-Marxists because of its numerous anti-Jewish remarks. Commentators sympathetic to Marx usually explain away these remarks by pointing out that *Judentum*, the German word for Judaism, had the derivative meaning of commerce, and therefore recommend that the reader substitute the word "capitalist" for the word "Jew" in the essay. They thus read it as one of the first formulations of Marx's critical understanding of capitalist society. But this word-play evades the fact that Marx was writing about Jews in particular as well as about society at large. Critics hostile to Marx, on the other hand, often reject the article as a whole, since it misunderstands and consequently misrepresents both Jews and Judaism. To dismiss it entirely on the basis of its prejudice, however, is to ignore the substantial contributions of this essay: Marx's preliminary analysis of state and society and his novel defense of Jewish emancipation.

In his scholarly study, *Karl Marx and the Radical Critique of Judaism\**, Julius Carlebach avoids the pitfalls of such uninformed treatments of Marx's article. Carlebach maintains that throughout this work he is "endeavoring to understand Marx's critique of Jews

I am indebted to Debra Reuben for her editorial contributions to this paper.

\* London, Henley and Boston; Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978; 66pp., \$20.00

and Judaism in the intellectual and historical contexts in which it was written." (p. 157) Indeed, in some respects he succeeds in this endeavor. He certainly deserves credit for his portrayal of the historical context in which the Jewish fight for emancipation and the great debate surrounding it took place. As he correctly states: "Neither Marx, nor Bauer whom he is reviewing, said anything about the real nature of the problem; i.e., who were 'the German Jews', how many were there and what caused them to seek emancipation at that time." (p. 9)

What was the status of the German Jews when Marx and Bauer wrote their essays? The Jewish question emerged as a result of the French Revolution. This upheaval provided the first instance in Europe of the complete legal emancipation of the Jews, and had a great effect on those parts of Germany where Napoleon's armies destroyed the old regime. After 1815 German Jews witnessed the erosion of many gains they had made when Prussia refused to honor the spirit of the Congress of Vienna peace settlement, which guaranteed civil rights to Jews. By the beginning of the 1840s, however, the issue had acquired general interest again. The controversy over Jewish emancipation raged, especially in the commercial centers such as the Hanseatic towns and the Rhineland.

Carlebach devotes the first part of his book to an account of the campaign for Jewish civil rights in Germany. He focuses on the factors which shaped this campaign; the socioeconomic forces which engendered it, the upheavals within the Jewish community which led to urgent demands for citizenship, and the role of the Prussian state as arbiter of Jewish demands.

One of Carlebach's major points is that the Prussian landowning aristocracy feared that the emancipation of the Jews, with their alien social structure, would lead to their intrusion into all social classes. "It was not so much a question of Jews occupying 'interstitial roles' in social structures as Bauer and Marx were to argue . . . but that Jews would move predictably *into* all social classes, most of which at that time of transition from feudal to capitalist society were unwilling to grant Jews membership of their groups." (p. 16) Carlebach observes that the greatest resistance to Jewish emancipation in Germany stemmed from the aristocracy and senior civil service establishment on the one hand, and the peasants and guild members on the other. The least resistance was offered by those in the independent professions and higher merchant groups.

#### Carlebach comments:

Indeed the apparently irrational list of restrictions applicable to Jews in Prussia in the early 1840s acquires a semblance of meaning when they are viewed as state-sponsored responses to class prejudices in the Prussian population. The dilemma of course was not one-sided. The Jews themselves, unacquainted with and perplexed by the rigid and highly structured class system in Prussian society, were at a loss to know how they could fit into such a closely-knit system which made no concessions to newcomers and tended to obliterate any vestige of 'other-group identity' of those it eventually accepted. (p. 17)

Nevertheless, the drive for complete emancipation proceeded. As Carlebach notes, on July 13, 1843, the chamber of deputies of the Rhineland Province moved that the king of Prussia be requested "to prepare for the removal of all existing restrictions which prevent equality between the Jew and his Christian subjects in civil and political matters." (p. 89) Carlebach then concludes his account of the historical background to Marx's essay with the following:

. . . although hostile voices continued to be heard the traditional prejudices and fears remained, the general trend in Prussia was positively and unmistakably moving towards acceptance, however reluctant, of the Jews as equal citizens in the state and loyal subjects of the king. This was the trend, until the radical critics of state and society issued a renewed challenge to the Jews. (p. 90)

This last sentence is grossly misleading; for Carlebach here implies that "the radical critics of state and society" — including Marx — interrupted the drive for Jewish emancipation. At the very least, this suggestion contradicts Carlebach's later observation that Bauer — the leading representative of this "radical challenge to the Jews" — "had no influence at all on the legislative processes in Germany..." (p. 147) More importantly, Carlebach's subtle indictment of the "radical critics" fails to convey the extent to which Marx himself advocated Jewish emancipation.

#### Marx and the Question of Jewish Emancipation

It is clear that in the early 1840s Marx was a supporter of civil

rights for Jews, and that this support set the stage for "On the Jewish Question." During the period shortly before he wrote this essay, Marx was a contributor to and editor of the Cologne paper, the *Rheinische Zeitung*. This paper had a number of Jewish backers and strongly favored Jewish rights. In the spring of 1842, just before Marx became its editor, the *Rheinische Zeitung* opposed a suggested Prussian law that would have established separate "corporations" for Jews to ensure that they would have no jurisdiction over Christians.

In his own first contribution to the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx wrote of the necessity for the separation of church and state, and argued against any religious criteria for the individual's relation to the state. Although this article did not deal directly with Jewish emancipation it was implicitly included in Marx's argument. When Bruno Bauer took on the supporters of Jewish civic rights (in "The Jewish Question" — an essay that prompted Marx's "On the Jewish Question"), one of his main opponents was the *Rheinische Zeitung*. Bauer, agreeing with the standpoint of Carl Hermes (a conservative advocate of the Christian state who had called for a form of apartheid for Jews), attacked the argument for Jewish rights made by Ludwig Philipson in Marx's paper. In August 1842, Marx himself collected Hermes' articles against the Jews with the intention of writing an article on the subject of Jewish emancipation. Near the end of his editorial stint, Marx agreed to a request from the head of the Jewish community in Cologne that he draft a petition to the Rhineland Diet in favor of Jewish rights. By then, Bauer's work had appeared and Marx wrote in one of his letters: "However detestable the Jewish religion is to me, Bauer's conception is too abstract."<sup>1</sup>

The essence of Bauer's position was that the German situation could not be solved primarily by political means, such as granting the Jews equal rights with Christians, but only by emancipating all Germany from religion itself — Christianity as well as Judaism. Bauer, like Marx, approached religion under the influence of Feuerbach, who insisted that religious descriptions of God were only veiled accounts of the essential qualities possessed by human beings. For Bauer, it was the problem of religion — the abolition of religion — that was the key to social and political change, not the reverse. He therefore dealt with the question of political rights for Jews from an atheistic position which rejected Christianity as well as Judaism and sought the liberation of human beings from all religious

mystifications.

For Marx, however, the direct attack against religion that Bauer proposed was futile and misdirected. Since religion is only the symptom of a more basic malady, its demise cannot be hastened. The real foe is the distorted social order of which, as Marx put it, religion is only the "spiritual aroma."

It is from this perspective that Marx wrote "On the Jewish Question," his response to Bauer's "abstract" conception of the Jews' demand for civil rights. In the first part of his essay, Marx points out that to criticize religion without criticizing its secular roots amounts to maintaining a position that is no less "theological" than the religious position itself. And he declared: "We do not turn secular questions into theological questions; we turn theological questions into secular ones. History has for long enough been solved into superstition; but we now resolve superstition into history."<sup>2</sup>

Marx summarized Bauer's stance as follows: First, Germans *themselves* are not free, and the Jews should work for a free Germany rather than for their own special emancipation. Second, if they seek the same rights as the Christians they are accepting the Christian state, a regime in which both Jews and Christians are enslaved. Third, neither the state nor the Jews, so long as they remain religious, are capable of being emancipated. Even if the Christian state granted the Jews political rights, the fact that they oppose their own "illusory" nationality to "actual" nationality and that they adhere to an irrational system of law, would lead them to consider themselves as foreigners in such a state.

So Bauer's solution to the Jewish question was that the Christian state must be emancipated from Christianity before any advance is possible. Only then would it make sense to call for freeing the Jews.

While Marx agreed with Bauer's critique of the Christian state, he attacked him for not recognizing the distinction between the state and civil society.\* Society could not overcome its flaws merely by liberating the political state from religious constraints. Political emancipation was not "human emancipation," for even in the most highly developed states (such as North America), the equalization of

\*Marx followed Hegel in presenting these two terms as polar opposites. Civil society was the realm of private persons whose only aim was "their own petty selves and particular interests." The state, on the other hand, was the embodied principle of a people's collective life and general welfare.

political rights still left human beings enslaved to the delusions of religion and separated from each other by the barriers of private property. There was, therefore, no contradiction between people having political rights and preserving any particular religious consciousness. In its full development, the state "acknowledges itself simply as a state and ignores the religion of its members." (*EW*, p. 10) Thus, Jews in Germany should be granted full civic and political rights.

Marx also believed, unlike Bauer, that Jews should be endowed with the "rights of man." These rights were those of "a member of civil society, that is of egoistic man... an individual separated from the community, withdrawn into himself, wholly preoccupied with his private interest and acting in accordance with his private caprice." (*EW*, p. 26) For Marx, Bauer's insistence that Jews should be denied these rights was absurd. Jews pursued their own personal needs just like everyone else. It was not, as Bauer held, the Jewish religion, but the limitations of "political emancipation" that had to be surpassed. The freedom that political emancipation provided, Marx claimed, was merely the liberty to engage in the competitive struggle to meet individual needs that is required in a society based on private ownership. Thus Marx said to the Jews: "If you want to be politically emancipated, without emancipating yourselves humanly, the inadequacy and the contradiction is not entirely in yourselves but in the nature and the category you share the general prejudice." (*EW*, p. 21)

So Marx ended the first part of his essay having shown that an immediate political demand of progress (civil rights for Jews) can be supported, and, at the same time, linked systematically with the further goal of social change.

The second part of the essay is a much shorter review of an article by Bauer entitled "The Capacity of the Present-Day Jews and Christians to Become Free." Bauer's article focused on criticizing Judaism *as a religion* in comparison with Christianity. For Bauer, Christianity is a religion which already implies freedom and human progress; Judaism is a religion based on adherence to an irrational, outmoded system of law. Whereas Christians had only to dispense with their own religion to attain emancipation, Jews had to break with the completion of their religion, that is, Christianity; the Christian had only one hurdle to overcome, the Jew two.

Rejecting again Bauer's theological depiction of the Jewish question, Marx approached the problem in terms of a social critique. For him, the question of Jewish emancipation had become the question of what specific *social* element must be overcome in order to abolish Judaism.

This is the special theme of the second part of Marx's essay: not the religious "sabbath Jew" of whom Bauer wrote, but the *economic* Jew; not the role of religion among Jews but the role of Jews in the socioeconomic world. Marx links the everyday Jew with practical need and self-interest or egoism — the central features of civil society in general — and the pursuit of money and financial power, symbolized by the bill of exchange.

The first aim is to view the question in a historical manner. Judaism, according to Marx, was "a universal *antisocial* element of the *present time*, whose historical development, zealously aided in its harmful aspects by the Jews, has now attained its culminating point, a point at which it must necessarily begin to disintegrate." (*EW*, p. 34)

The subject of this part of Marx's essay, then, was not the Jewish character, but the question raised by Bauer's contrast of Judaism and Christianity: "which of the two is more *capable of emancipation*?... which makes free — the negation of Judaism or the negation of Christianity?" (*EW*, p. 32) The declaration that the basis of Judaism was self-interest and its god money prepared Marx's answer to Bauer's question:

Very well: then in emancipating itself from *huckstering* and *money*, and thus from real and practical Judaism, our age would emancipate itself: . . . when the real Jew recognizes his *practical* nature as invalid and endeavors to abolish it, he begins to deviate from his former path of development, works for general *human emancipation* and turns against the *supreme practical* expression of human self-estrangement." (*EW*, p. 34)

Marx's quarrel with Bauer did not end with "On the Jewish Question." Bauer replied to his critics on the Jewish emancipation issue in three articles published between December 1843 and July 1844, marked by his increasing elitism and outspoken animosity towards the "masses." Marx's rejoinder appeared in three sections of *The Holy Family*, written in the autumn of 1844. For the most part, Marx refers to and reiterates the points of his article "On the Jewish

Question" to prove that Bauer's reply did not deal with the essential issues of the controversy. He insisted again that the modern state — precisely because it left human beings free as private individuals — could not make religious affiliation a condition for citizenship. He also reaffirmed the difference between political and human emancipation, and declared: "[S]tates which cannot yet *politically* emancipate the Jews must be rated by comparison with the perfected political state and shown to be under-developed states."<sup>3</sup>

Noteworthy in these sections of *The Holy Family* is Marx's extensive defense of the leading Jewish advocates for emancipation. He supports their contention, against Bauer, that the Jews were an historically significant people who had made a distinct contribution to human development. Although Marx regarded these writers — Gabriel Riesser, Gustav Philippson, Samuel Raphael Hirsch, and others — as "poor opponents" for Bauer, they could not be defeated by the arguments of what Bauer termed "absolute criticism." In general, Marx emphasizes his agreement with all the Jewish writers that religious freedom is a necessary aspect of political emancipation.

At the outset of his discussion of "On the Jewish Question," Carlebach states that is easy to see why many scholars have expressed the view that Marx was not really interested in Judaism. For the first essay, at least, deals mainly with preliminary forms of some of the most fundamental concepts in Marxism, including the criticism of civil, i.e., bourgeois society, a materialist approach to history, and the analysis of the "rights of man" as inadequate. (p. 165) With some justification Carlebach states: "It is the misfortune of the Jews that these substantive ideas should have been developed under a heading 'On the Jewish Question', which has thereby given credence and circulation to his second essay, which is incomparably weaker and less convincing." (p. 165)

And Carlebach is precise when he states that "it is not quite correct to argue . . . that Marx championed political emancipation for Jews. It would be more correct to say that the Marxian concept of political emancipation made it impossible to exclude any category in civil society from it." (p. 165)

Carlebach agrees that in one sense it is possible to argue that Marx

equated Judaism with what he would later call capitalism, because he associated Jews and Judaism with money and commercialism. "Since he regarded them (money and commercialism) as essentially antisocial, he also describes Jews and Judaism as anti-social," (p. 113) Carlebach points out, however, that Marx does not merely present an analysis of the "social significance" of Judaism, but he also "confirms and supports Feuerbach's and Bauer's criticisms of the Jewish religion and Jewish history and adds some comments on his own, which are even more contemptuous and certainly less well informed than those of his predecessors." (p. 173) Carlebach concludes: "In the Marxian conception, the Jewish religion is wholly negative." (p. 173)

Now it must be noted that critics of Marx usually end their case at this point, claiming that Marx never returned to the Jewish question after his essay appeared early in 1844. Carlebach is to be applauded therefore, for his discussion and interpretation of the sections on the Jews found in *The Holy Family*, in which Marx practically rewrote (says Carlebach) the essays "On the Jewish Question." Carlebach affirms that Marx in the earlier essays wanted to present Judaism as a social and historical phenomenon in such a way that the question of Jewish emancipation could be shown to be a political issue free of religious overtones. Since this was only partially achieved, Marx set out to correct the shortcomings of the earlier essays in *The Holy Family*. According to Carlebach, Marx made a number of changes in his analysis, including a new, more favorable view of the Jews' role in civil society as an agent of change. (p. 176)

Carlebach's treatment of Marx's "radical critique of Judaism" is one of the few that clearly explains its political purpose and content in connection with the Jewish emancipation question, or that even ascertains the views of its target, Bauer. Despite its considerable scholarship, however, this book joins the large production of literature that alleges that Marx's essay "On the Jewish Question" is anti-semitic because it equates Judaism with the spirit of moneymaking, self-interest, and egoism, and Jews with the role of merchant-huckster.

Carlebach, who sometimes writes as a prosecuting attorney, states his case as follows:

. . . Marx's second essay on the Jewish question is cast in the same mould as those of Luther and Hitler. Like them, Marx

knew little about Judaism and cared little for any empirical realities. Luther wanted to convert Jews; Marx wanted to abolish them; Hitler wanted to expel and subsequently to exterminate them. Marx is a logical and indispensable link between Luther and Hitler. He transmitted many of Luther's ideas on the Jewish religion in secular form and underwrote many of the ideas which were eventually to find their way into Hitler's conceptual system. . . . Practical need was the 'worldly basis of Judaism — the foundation of the Jewish religion — the human basis of the Jewish religion — the subjective basis of Judaism'. Peddling was the world cult of the Jews — the empirical essence of Judaism. The triadic pattern: essence — beliefs — socioeconomic role was too close to the other two systems to be ignored. (p. 353)

Carlebach goes on to argue that Marx contributed to the "semantically created stereotype" of the Jews which prevented many from distinguishing between illusion and reality:

Even those who rejected 'the mystifications of anti-semitism' directed at 'the mere sociological phenomenon of Jewish particularity' nevertheless attacked and continue to attack the 'Jewish narrowness of society', oblivious of the reality that so nebulous a distinction may acquire meaning in a Marxist conceptual system, but in the final analysis can lead only to the destruction of innocent Jewish lives (p. 354)

And he concludes with a presentation of evidence showing that "Marx's polemic against the Jews has found its way into the arsenals of anti-Semitism." (p. 354)

#### Was Marx an Antisemite?

But for Carlebach to accomplish this feat — making the Marx of the 1840s an "antisemite" in this century — he can only be one of those historians who, as Hal Draper remarks, "project themselves back into history as undercover agents of the Anti-Defamation League."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as Draper declares: "Mainly, the allegation is supported by reading the attitudes of the second half of the twentieth century back into the language of the 1840s. More than that, it is supported only if the whole course of German and European anti-Jewish sentiment is whitewashed so as to make Marx's essay stand

out as a black spot." (p. 591)

It must be remembered that in the 1840s both sides, for and against political emancipation, shared the economic image of the Jews.<sup>5</sup> The strong bourgeois-liberal movement campaigning for Jewish rights made it clear that civil emancipation was required in order to solve the Jewish question by dissolving Jews as a distinct group into the common body of Germanness and thus eventually eliminating it. Gustav Mayer says of the pro-Jewish liberals: "Only through full and equal rights, they believed, would it be possible to wean away the Prussian Jews from their un-German customs and from their one-sided preference for petty trade." (*KM*, p. 595)

In the course of his indictment of Marx, Carlebach writes:

Marx did not invent the negative connotation associated with words such as 'Jews' and 'Judaism'. He merely gave stereotypical folk-images an aura of social and philosophical respectability by giving the folklore of the Grimm brothers' *Deutsches Wörterbuch* which defined among Jewish characterist 'slovenliness as well as their greed for money and their usury. . . . dirt. . . . stink' an intellectual significance which persuaded generations of his followers and admirers that, since he had defined Jews thus, they must indeed be so. In this way the prejudices, hates, and preconceptions of centuries of Christian and German nationalist advocates became 'empirical knowledge' for Marxists. (pp. 353-54)

It is interesting to note that Carlebach does not mention any other major thinkers whose critiques of the Jews may have influenced *their* followers.

Carlebach notwithstanding, the act of granting "social and philosophical respectability" to the stereotype of the economic Jew was not at all limited to Marx or to socialists; this stereotype was found wherever there was a hostile attitude to the bourgeois or financial world — on the right as well as on the left, in France and England as well as in Germany. Thus, for example, the reactionary anti-bourgeois critic Thomas Carlyle was not only malignantly anti-Jewish but also opposed offering greater legal rights to the Jews.

Moreover, it is totally misleading to situate the economic-Jew stereotype only within an anti-Jewish context. For this stereotype had at this time gained general *Jewish* acceptance. Witness the case of Moses Hess, a young Hegelian who had been raised in an

orthodox household and later become a proto-Zionist. Carlebach, in his treatment of Hess, dismisses the charge that Hess drew an even more repellent picture of Judaism than Marx. During the course of his apologetics, however, Carlebach understates Hess's view of the Jews' role given in an essay, "On the Money System."

Hess's thesis was that contemporary society was a "huckster world," a "social animal world," in which people became fully developed "egoists," beasts of prey and bloodsuckers. "The Jews," wrote the father of Zionism, who in the natural history of the social animal-world had the *world-historic* mission of developing the *beast of prey* out of humanity have now finally completed *their mission's work*." Hess condemns the priests of ancient Judaism as the "hyenas of the social animal-world" which are as bad as the other animal-people because of their "common quality as beasts of prey, as bloodsuckers, as Jews, as financial wolves." (*KM*, pp. 592-93)

Heinrich Heine was another famous Jew who shared the image of Jews as money-grubbers. His article on the Damascus affair of 1840 — one of the famous "blood-libel" frameups — is filled with bitterness toward French Jews for ignoring their fellow Jews abroad. "With the French Jews, as with all other Frenchmen," wrote Heine (in France) "gold is the God of these times, and industry the prevailing religion." He calls Baron Rothschild and the well-known financier Fould, "two distinguished rabbis of finance." Heine states caustically: "I do not believe that Israel ever gave money, save when its teeth were drawn by force. . . There are, of course, now and then examples that vanity can open the obdurate pockets of Jews, but then their liberality is more repulsive than their meanness." (*KM*, p. 593)

It is also enlightening to examine the first *Jewish* socialist movement which arose in the late 1870s, three decades after Marx wrote his essay. The Jewish question now must be seen in relation to a growing racist antisemitic movement. Jewish socialists were facing an antisemitic threat at a time when a significant number of Jews lived by selling their labor power. Although the situation of Jews was thus different from the 1840s, read the words of Aaron Lieberman, the historic founder of this movement who tried to win the Jewish masses over to socialism. *His Call to the Jewish Youth* echoed the spirit of Isaiah with its demand: "Emancipate yourselves from the power-lust that lies at the bottom of your privileges. Stop praying to gold and might." Lieberman castigates the Jewish bankers and

merchants for the misery of his people:

We have had to pay for your sins! The race hatred, the religious hatred, with all their terrors have fallen mostly upon us the poor Jews. You kindled the fire that devours us. We have you to thank for it that the name Israel has become a curse. The entire Jewish people, suffering and astray, must suffer more than all other peoples because of your greed. It is your fault that we have been exposed to calumny. International speculators, who have dragged our name through the mud, you do not belong to us!" (*KM*, p. 597)

The influence of the age-old stereotype is acknowledged here by the very passion of the appeal to reject it, to stress the class struggle *among* the Jews in order to overcome it.

Surely it would be unfair to apply Carlebach's formula for what makes a polemic "antisemitic" to Lieberman's proclamations. Yet, as Hayim Greenberg, a leading theorist of Socialist Zionism has confirmed: "The views of many Jewish socialists in regard to the economic role of the Jews have also been tinged by a certain anti-semitic bias. . ." But Greenberg doesn't stop here; he says of the socialist Zionists themselves *and* their left wing: "Nor is Zionism free from its share of responsibility. There was a time when it used to be the fashion for Zionist speakers (including the writer) to declare from the platform that "to be a good Zionist one must first be somewhat of an anti-Semite." (*KM*, p. 602)

Greenberg points out that this position was held by Pinsker, Syrkin, Borochoy, A.D. Gordon, and others — all founders and mentors of the Labor Zionist movement. To this day," he submits, "Labor Zionist circles are under the influence of the idea that the Return to Zion involves a process of purification from our economic uncleanness." (*KM*, p. 602) Moreover, the movement's social democratic theoretician, Ber Borochoy, rests his entire theory of Socialist Zionism on a class analysis of the Jewish people according to what, *ex post facto*, are deemed "antisemitic" conceptions; and his essential "Marxist" case for Zionism was that it was the only way to alter the class structure of the Jews.

### Marx and the "Economic Jew" Stereotype

We have assumed thus far that the reader has a general

understanding of the economic history behind the stereotype; that is, how Jews were for centuries restricted to a distorted economic position because of their function as intermediaries within the small scale commodity production economy of feudal society and because of medieval Christianity's prohibition on their entrance into agriculture, guild occupations and professions. European Jews, and especially the German Jews with whom Marx was familiar, were regarded as "a universal and contemporary antisocial element" for the following reasons:

(1) The upper stratum of the Jews played a significant role in the development of post feudal society, particularly considering the small fraction of the population they comprised; (2) Jews were concentrated heavily in "middleman" and financial occupations, including the majority of *poor* Jews in huckstering occupations such as peddlers and petty merchants; and (3) the economic role of the Jews was highly visible, as, for example, when Prussian Junkers hired Jews as loan collectors and mortgage foreclosers — the Junkers earned the profits, and the Jews, the epithet "bloodsuckers."

Carlebach repeatedly chastises Marx for his failure to examine the historical and empirical realities of the Jews' situation. The truth is, however, that in 1843 little was known, even to those greatly concerned with the question, about the social or economic development of the Jews. The very concept of a *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Jewish studies) emerged only in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.\* Today there is a great deal of scholarship on the subject, but it is anachronistic to imply that it was available in the 1840s. We now know, for instance, that by the early 1800s Jewish financiers had grown rich in the new capitalist order and had achieved a privileged position in German society. As the historian Eleanore Sterling observes:

In the sections where capitalist commerce and industry had already made important progress even without Jews, the

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\*In fact, those who pioneered "Jewish Science," showed little interest in the economic or social aspects of Jewish history. As Meyer Waxman observes of Leopold Zunz (the founder of Jewish studies): "he develops the view that the two main phases of the life of the Jews in exile are thought and reaction to suffering, and that it is these two which constitute the principal elements of Jewish history." *A History of Jewish Literature*, Volume III (New York, London: Thomas Yosoloff, 1960), p. 425.

Christian population by no means felt that the success of the Jewish upper stratum was a handicap for themselves. Thus, already in 1817 the *Gewerbepolizei* in Aachen said that Jewish business in the Prussian Rhineland could no longer be considered "usury" but a synonym for free trade and the profit system. (*KM*, p. 599)

Carlebach is well aware of these facts. He observes that the Jews sought allies in their emancipation drive from those "sections in the social structure in which they found least resistance, or better, the greatest degree of acceptance, namely in the middle classes, the bourgeoisie — the fast-rising, expanding, ambitious and least tradition-bound sections of the community." (p. 63)

It is incorrect, however, to imply — as Carlebach does throughout his work — that the stereotype of the economic Jew among the population derived solely from the prominence of wealthy Jews such as the Rothschilds and Foulds. Many or most of the *poor* Jews also made their living from commerce; they were peddlers, hawkers, petty traders and merchants, small money-lenders — in immediate contact with the poor Christian population. They subsisted as go-betweens, caught in the classic pattern of having to oppress those below as they were oppressed from above. Jews were linked with "financial exploitation" on levels well below Rothschild. As Solomon Boom states of the period when Marx wrote his article: "Recent happenings in the Rhineland and Alsace strengthened this popular suspicion; Jewish money lenders broke up properties of landlords and farmers at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. The western radical community was not unaffected by the resulting animosities." (*KM*, p. 600) And Gustav Mayer claims that to the young Marx: "'The Jews' . . . meant mainly the Jewish cattle dealers in the Rhineland; those who bought from, and sold to the small peasants, taking advantage of their own superior business abilities." (*KM*, p. 600)

Carlebach also complains that "Marx concentrates his entire critique on a metaphysical abstraction called 'the Jew', whom he has equated with every facet of an emerging capitalist system." (p. 161) While it is certainly true that he identified the Jews with commercialism, the Marx of 1843, like the rest of the socialists at that time, had only a superficial idea of the real workings of capitalist



society. In this period before Marxism, he concentrates on the role of money and the chase after money; he has not yet uncovered the dynamics of capitalist commodity production, class exploitation, etc. Thus he can say: "The contradiction which exists between the effective political power of the Jew and his political rights, is the contradiction between politics and the power of money in general. Politics is in principle superior to the power of money, but in practice it has become its bondsman." (*EW*, p. 36) While it is therefore incidentally recognized that the state has become the instrument of a new economic power, this new power is seen only in terms of money:

Money is the jealous god of Israel, beside which no other god may exist. Money debases all the gods of mankind and changes them into commodities. Money is the universal and self-sufficient *value* of all things. It has, therefore, deprived the whole world, both the human world and nature, of their own proper value. Money is the alienated essence of man's work and existence; this essence dominates him and he worships it. (*EW*, p. 37)

It is therefore the organization of society that Marx claimed has to be changed: "An organization of society which would abolish the preconditions and thus the very possibility of huckstering, would make the Jew impossible." (*EW*, p. 34)

It has already been stated that the equation of Jews with huckstering and money-making presupposed here by Marx, was widely assumed in the early nineteenth century. Clearly, as Carlebach shows, Marx shared many of the vulgar and hostile views prevalent about Jews and Judaism and injected them into his essays. But the paradox is that for Marx, Judaism provided the basis for the liberation of modern society precisely *because* it was emancipation from bargaining and money that would liberate human beings. As Jerrold Siegel has argued in *Marx's Fate*: "Here (in "On the Jewish Question") we find Marx asserting for the first time that a purely materialist standpoint — what he called 'practical need' or 'egoism' . . . — was the source of true liberation. . . In the perspective Marx took up here, materialism was Jewish, and its implications were positive." (p. 118)

Although Siegel stretches things with his claim that Marx's anti-Jewish remarks were "part of a strange and perverse but nonetheless insistent affirmation of his own identity as a Jew,"<sup>6</sup> he offers a

significant contribution with his discovery of "surprising similarities" between Marx's image of the Jews and his early depiction of the proletariat. There were, to be sure, substantial differences between the two groups. Whereas Jews who had money were part of the propertied class, the proletariat was propertyless. And while the Jews insisted on their political rights in Germany, the proletariat did not claim any "particular redress"; it was not "opposed to particular consequences but is totally opposed to the assumptions of the German political system." (*EW*, p. 58) Nevertheless, both the proletariat and the Jews were groups whose life was totally immersed in the world of material need. The proletariat was the only class with the capacity to liberate the Germans because it was compelled "by its *immediate* situation, by *material* necessity and by its fetters themselves." (p. 58) Judaism, also, since it was "the religion of practical need," by its very nature "could not find its consummation in theory, but only in *practice*, just because practice is its truth." (*EW*, p. 38) The proletariat was a "passive element," its existence a product of modern social development. Judaism, also, "is always passive, cannot expand at will, but *finds* itself extended as a result of the continued development of society." (*EW*, p. 38) The proletariat's existence was a proclamation of the "*dissolution of the existing social order.*" (*EW*, pp 59-60) The Jews were "a universal *antisocial* element of the *present time,*" (*EW*, p. 34) whose development to a culminating point meant that society had attained "a point at which it must necessarily dissolve itself." (*EW*, p. 34)

As Siegel further affirms: "Marx wrote the essay 'On the Jewish Question' before he penned his description of the proletariat. The similarities in the two portraits suggest that — consciously or unconsciously — Marx's image of the Jews was a stage on his path to conceiving the proletariat as he did." (p. 118)

But such insights concerning Marx's thought are beyond the grasp of Carlebach. For despite his attempt to place Marx's critique of Jews and Judaism in its proper intellectual context, he fails to understand the critique within the context of Marx's own intellectual development. It is important to note that throughout the period 1837-43, Marx's thought combines insights of a unique critical depth and incisiveness with ideas adapted from theorists like Feuerbach and Bauer and from socialists like Hess. The form is still borrowed and at times eclectic; but the critical content is Marx's own. It follows, therefore, that two errors must be avoided when discussing

the work of the early Marx. One is to claim that by 1843-44 Marx's thought had reached maturity and had cast off its idealist heritage, for that is obviously not the case; the other, corresponding mistake — is to claim that because Marx was still influenced by the Young Hegelians at that time, his work does not stand on its own, exhibiting a concreteness and rationality which clearly outstrips the writers who influenced him. Carlebach, in failing to comprehend both the development and originality of Marx's thought, manages to commit both errors.

Carlebach protests that Marx converted "flesh and blood people into a socioeconomic category." (pp. 2-3) In doing so he fails to acknowledge that Marx wrote his essays on the Jewish question before much was known of the concrete realities of Jewish life and, more importantly, before Marx had developed his exhaustive analysis of the capitalist mode of production.

Indeed, because Marx viewed the economic basis of society as the key to understanding the life of society, Marx soon moved away from his early thesis that freedom was the emancipation of society from Judaism. In *Capital* he wrote: "Trading nations ... like Jews in the pores of Polish society... can arise and exist only when the development of the productive power of labour has not risen beyond a low state, and when, therefore, the social relations within the sphere of material life ... are correspondingly narrow."

Many Jews were proto-capitalists; as merchants and financiers they fulfilled a primitive role in the development of the social division of labor as it evolved in European society. The economic basis of modern society was, however, *industrial capitalism*. Jews, as merchants and financiers, were capitalists before capitalism emerged in its mature form, and with the rise of industrial capitalism, the role of the merchant and financier diminished.\* Indeed, those with capital became just another stratum of the capitalist class receiving a portion of the surplus value exploited from the laborer by the

\*As Abram Leon claims: "Judaism was an indispensable factor in precapitalist society. It was a fundamental organism within it. That is what explains the two-thousand year existence of Judaism in the Diaspora. The Jew was as characteristic a personage in feudal society as the lord and the serf. It was no accident that a foreign element played the role of 'capital' in feudal society... The 'capital' of precapitalist society existed outside of its economic system. *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation* (New York: Pathfinder Press, Inc., 1970), p. 257. But, Leon goes on to argue, the rise of capitalism to hegemony in the social system corresponded with the *decline* of Jewry in this function.

industrial capitalist. The Jews may have bequeathed "the god of money" to European society but the Jews themselves had become relatively unimportant in an economic sense, and increasingly so as time went on and the strength of industrial capital grew. Although some remained in *prominent* economic positions they were by no means *dominant* ones, as few Jews became industrial capitalists.

Thus, while Marx was the first to provide a secular rather than a theological critique of the Jews' position and role in the modern world, his concern with the Jews *per se* disappeared. For Marx, emancipation from "Judaism" was no longer the path to human freedom; rather it was to be attained by emancipation from the capitalist mode of production. Because he focused his attention on the real economic basis of society, Marx realized that Judaism — the commercial spirit — was not the source of the problem but only one of its manifestations. Marx's later writings contain few references to the Jews, and they cease to be an important category in his analysis of modern society.

In conclusion, it should be said that Marx's treatment of the Jewish question perhaps best reflects the futility of the Jews' reliance on political emancipation to gain their social emancipation. With the advent of the secular state and society animosity toward Jews became secularized. Whereas formerly the Jewish problem seemed to arise from conflicts between religious communities, it now became clear that the dilemma stemmed from the intermediary function that Jews served in the economy. The Jew became the immediate symbol of a society increasingly based on exchange, and thus a target for those elements in Europe who blamed the Jews for ills inherent in capitalism.

In considering Marx, however, it must be remembered that his call in 1843 for the "abolition" of Judaism did not at all mean the "abolition" of Jews. As Carlebach himself emphasizes:

Marx's call for the 'abolition' of Judaism, a concept which has disturbed many Jewish writers ... did not mean to provide 'a warrant for genocide'. He was trying to reduce Judaism, which he equated with the 'money system', into an abstract 'principle' in civil society that would have no function and therefore no place in a communist society... he no more intended personal harm to individual Jews by calling for the dissolution of Judaism than he would have wanted workers attacked when he called for the abolition of labour.(p. 178)

## Notes:

1. Quoted by Jerrold Siegel, *Marx's Fate: The Shape of a Life* (Princeton, New Jersey; Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 69.
2. *Karl Marx Early Writings*, translated and edited by T.B. Bottomore (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 10. Hereafter *EW* in the text.
3. *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism*, translated by Richard Dixon and Clemens Dutt (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), p. 130.
4. *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution: State and Bureaucracy* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1977), p. 607. Hereafter *KM* in the text.
5. Much of the following discussion—and quotation—is drawn from Draper's "Special Note A: Marx and the Economic-Jew Stereotype," *ibid.*, pp. 591-608.
6. In his review of Saul Padover's *Karl Marx: An Intimate Biography*, *The New Republic*, January 6, 1979, p. 29.



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## THE HOLOCAUST SEASON: A SINGER'S STORY

*Karen Bogen*

The following poems and commentaries were selected from *Crucifixion and Holocaust: Two Poetic cycles with Exegeses and Commentaries*, a doctoral dissertation by Karen Iris Bogen, copyright 1978.

### THE DEATH OF THE SCHOLA CANTORUM

My voice like sun is glowing in my throat:  
 every lesson's the first. The towers  
 like my teacher's fingers live  
 for a certain direction; like prayers  
 they shoot up to God. But now  
 a tank rolls past my studio window—  
 what is a tank doing here?  
 A black gangle of unmusical youths  
 has rammed my teacher's hands behind his head;  
 his back is hanging from a Star of David.  
 King David! when will the smoking clouds  
 reveal your manhood? But only a psalm  
 fans over us. The Schola Cantorum's  
 a hole in ash. Through it we crawl  
 to the ghetto.