

Auschwitz, or the Great Alibi

The left wing press has once again just demonstrated that racism, and primarily anti-Semitism, constitutes the great alibi of anti-fascism. It is its preferred banner and at the same time its final refuge in the discussion. Who can resist the evoking of the extermination camps and the crematory ovens? Who doesn't bow before the six million murdered Jews? Who doesn't shudder before the sadism of the Nazis? And yet, this is one of the most scandalous mystifications of anti-fascism, and we are duty bound to demonstrate it.

A recent poster of the M.R.A.P.[\[1\]](#) attributes the responsibility for the deaths of 50 million people, of which 6 million were Jews, to Nazism. This position, identical to that of the "fascism as war monger" of the so-called communists, is a typically bourgeois position. Refusing to see in capitalism itself the cause of the crises and cataclysms that periodically ravage the world, the bourgeois and reformist ideologues have always pretended to explain them by the wickedness of this one or that one. We see here the fundamental identity of the fascist and anti-fascist ideologies, if we can call them such. Both of them proclaim that it is the thoughts, the ideas, the will of human groups that determine social phenomena. Against these ideologies, which we call bourgeois because they are ideologies for the defense of capitalism, against these past, present and future idealists, Marxism has demonstrated that, on the contrary, it is social relations that determine ideological movements.

This is the basis of Marxism, and in order to realize to what extent our so-called Marxists have rejected it it suffices to see that among them everything has passed over to the realm of the idea: colonialism, imperialism, capitalism itself are no longer anything but mental states. And suddenly all the ills which humanity suffers from are due to makers of evils: makers of poverty, of oppression, of war, etc...

Marxism has demonstrated that, on the contrary, poverty, oppression, war and destruction, far from being anomalies due to deliberate and maleficent wills are part of the "normal" functioning of capitalism. This particularly applies to wars of the imperialist era. This is a point which we will develop at greater length, due to the importance it represents for the subject at hand, that of destruction.

Even when our bourgeois and reformists recognize that imperialist wars are due to conflicts of interest they remain far from an understanding of capitalism. We see this in their lack of understanding of the meaning of destruction. For them the goal of war is victory, and the destruction of enemy men and installations are only means for achieving this goal. To such an extent that there are innocents who foresee wars made by means of sleeping pills. We have demonstrated that, on the contrary, destruction is the principal goal of war. The imperialist rivalries that are the immediate cause of wars are themselves nothing but the consequence of ever increasing over-production. Capitalist production is in fact forced to grow because of the fall in the profit level, and crises are born of the need to ceaselessly expand production along with the impossibility of selling goods. War is the capitalist solution to the crisis. The massive destruction of installations, of the means of production and of goods allows production to start up again, and the massive destruction of men cures the periodic “over-population” which goes hand in hand with over-production. One must be a petit bourgeois crackpot to believe that imperialist conflicts could be settled by a game of belote or around a round table, and that this enormous destruction and the deaths of tens of millions of men are only due to the stubbornness of some, the wickedness of others, and the cupidity of yet others still.

In 1844 Marx already attacked bourgeois economists for considering cupidity innate instead of explaining it, and showed why the greedy were forced to be greedy. Marxism also has demonstrated the causes of “over-population” since 1844. “The demand for men necessarily regulates the production of men, alike any other merchandise. If the supply is greater than the demand a portion of the workers fall into beggary or dies of hunger,” Marx wrote. Engels wrote: “There is only over-population where there is an excess of productive forces in general, and [we have seen] that private property has made man a merchandise whose production and destruction depend only on demand, and that competition has slaughtered and every day slaughters in this way millions of men.”[\[2\]](#) The last imperialist war, far from proving Marxism wrong and justifying its “renewal,” confirmed the correctness of its explanations.

It was necessary to recall these points before dealing with the extermination of the Jews. This occurred, in fact, not at a random moment, but in the middle of a crisis and an imperialist war. It is thus from within this gigantic enterprise of destruction that it must be explained. With this in mind the problem is clarified. We no longer have to explain the “destructive nihilism” of the Nazis, but rather why

the destruction was in part concentrated on the Jews. On this point as well Nazis and anti-fascists are in agreement: it was racism, the hatred of Jews, a “passion,” free and ferocious that caused the death of the Jews. But we Marxists know that there are no free social passions, that nothing is more determined than these great movements of collective hatred. We will see that the study of the anti-Semitism of the imperialist era only illustrates this truth.

It is not by chance that we say “anti-Semitism of the imperialist era,” for if the idealists of all stripes, from Nazis to “Jewish” theoreticians consider that the hatred of the Jew is the same in all times and places, we know that this is not so. The anti-Semitism of the current period is totally different from that of the feudal period.[\[3\]](#) We can’t go into the history of the Jews in depth here, which Marxism has completely explained. We know why feudal society maintained Jews as such. We know that if the strong bourgeoisies, those that were able to make their political revolutions early (England, the United States, France) have almost completely assimilated their Jews, the weak bourgeoisies were not able to do so. We won’t explain here the survival of the “Jews,” but rather the anti-Semitism of the imperialist period. And it won’t be difficult to explain if, instead of examining the nature of Jews or anti-Semites, we consider their place in society.

Due to their earlier history, the Jews find themselves essentially in the middle and petit bourgeoisie. But that class is condemned by the irresistible advance of the concentration of capital. It is this that explains that it is the source of anti-Semitism, which, as Engels said, “is nothing but a reaction of feudal social strata doomed to disappear, against modern society, which is essentially composed of capitalists and wage earners. It thus only serves reactionary objectives under a false veil of socialism.”

Germany between the wars demonstrates this situation at a particularly acute phase. Shaken by the war, the revolutionary advance of 1918-28, ever threatened by the struggle of the proletariat, German capitalism was deeply affected by the worldwide post-war crisis. While the stronger victorious bourgeoisies (the US, Great Britain, France) were relatively untouched and easily overcame the crisis of “re-adaptation to peacetime economy,” German capitalism fell into complete stagnation. And it was perhaps the petit and medium bourgeoisies who suffered the most, as in all crises that lead to the proletarianization of the middle classes and the increased concentration of capital through the elimination of a portion of small and medium-sized enterprises. But here the situation was such that the ruined, bankrupt, seized, liquidated petit bourgeois couldn’t even fall into the proletariat, which was itself seriously affected by

unemployment (seven million unemployed at the worst of the crisis): they fell directly into a state of beggary, condemned to starve to death as soon as their reserves were exhausted. It was in reaction to this terrible threat that the petit bourgeoisie invented anti-Semitism. Not so much, as the metaphysicians say, to explain the misfortunes that struck them as to attempt to save themselves by concentrating it on one group. The petit bourgeoisie reacted by sacrificing one of its parts to the horrible economic pressure, to the threat of diffuse destruction that rendered uncertain the existence of each of its members, hoping in this way to save and ensure the existence of the others. Anti-Semitism comes no more from a "Machiavellian plan" than it does from "wicked ideas." It directly results from economic constraints. The hatred of the Jews, far from being the a priori reason for their destruction was only the expression of this desire to limit and concentrate destruction on them.

It sometimes happens that the workers themselves give themselves over to racism. This happens when, threatened with massive unemployment, they attempt to concentrate it on certain groups: Italians, Poles or other "filthy foreigners," "dirty Arabs," "niggers," etc. But in the proletariat these impulses only occur at the worst moments of demoralization, and don't last. As soon as he enters into struggle the proletariat clearly and concretely sees its enemy: it is a homogeneous class with an historical perspective and mission.

On the contrary, the petit bourgeois is a class condemned. At the same time it is also condemned to be unable to understand anything, to be incapable of fighting: it can do nothing but blindly flail about in the vice that crushes it. Racism is not an aberration of the spirit: it is and will be the petit bourgeois reaction to the pressures of big capital. The choice of a "race," that is of the group upon whom the destruction will be concentrated, obviously depends on the circumstances. In Germany the Jews fulfilled the "required conditions" and were the only ones to fulfill them: they were almost exclusively petit bourgeois, and in this petit bourgeoisie the sole group that was sufficiently identifiable. It was only onto them that the petit bourgeoisie could channel the catastrophe.

It was in fact necessary that identification present no difficulty; they had to be able to precisely define who would be destroyed and who would be spared. From this flows the counting up of baptized grandparents which, in flagrant contradiction with the theories of race and blood, would suffice to demonstrate their incoherence. But logic had nothing to do with it. The democrat who contents himself with demonstrating the absurdity and ignominy of racism, as usual misses the point.

Harassed by capital, the Germany petit bourgeoisie thus threw the Jews to the wolves in order to lighten its sled and save itself. Not, of course, consciously, but this was the meaning of its hatred of the Jews and the satisfaction it got from the closing and pillaging of Jewish stores. We can say that for its part big capital was happy with the gift: it could liquidate a portion of the petit bourgeoisies with the agreement of the petit bourgeoisie. Even better, it was the petit bourgeoisie itself that saw to this liquidation. But this “personalized” way of presenting capital gives a poor picture of the situation: capitalism knows no more than the petit bourgeoisie what it is doing. It is under the influence of immediate economic constraints and passively follows the path of least resistance.

We haven’t spoken of the German proletariat. This is because it didn’t directly enter into the affair. It had been defeated and, of course, the liquidation of the Jews could only be realized after its defeat. But the social forces that led to this liquidation existed before the defeat of the proletariat. It only permitted this to be carried by leaving capitalism’s hands free.

And it was then that the economic liquidation of the Jews began: expropriation in all forms, exclusion from the liberal professions, civil service, etc. Little by little the Jews were deprived of any means of existence; they lived on the reserves they were able to save. During this entire period, which lasted until the eve of the war, Nazi policy towards the Jews was contained in two words: Juden ’raus! Jews out! They sought by every means to favor the emigration of the Jews. But if the Nazis only wanted to rid themselves of the Jews, who they didn’t know what to do with, and if the Jews for their part asked for nothing more than to leave Germany, no one anywhere else wanted to allow them to enter. And there is nothing surprising in this, since no one could allow them to enter. There was no country capable of absorbing and allowing to live a few million ruined petit bourgeois. Only a small portion of the Jews was able to leave. Most remained, despite themselves and despite the Nazis. Suspended in mid-air, in a way.

The imperialist war aggravated the situation both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively because German capitalism, forced to reduce the petit bourgeoisie in order to concentrate European capital in its hands, extended the liquidation of the Jews to all of Central Europe. Anti-Semitism had already shown what it could do; it only had to carry on. This, incidentally, was in accord with the anti-Semitism indigenous to Central Europe, though the latter was more complex (a horrible mix of feudal and petit bourgeois anti-Semitism, an analysis of which we can’t enter into here).

At the same time the situation was aggravated qualitatively. Living conditions were made more difficult by the war, the reserves of the Jews melted away and they were condemned to shortly die of starvation.

In “normal” times, and when it’s a matter of a small number, capitalism can allow those it ejects from the productive process to die on their own. But it was impossible for it to do this in the middle of the war and for millions of men. Such “disorder” would have paralyzed everything. Capitalism had to organize their death.

And it didn’t kill them immediately. To begin with, it removed them from circulation; it gathered them together, concentrated them. And it made them work while under-nourishing them, i.e., in super-exploiting them to death. Killing a man at work is an old method of capital’s. Marx wrote in 1844: “To be led with success, the industrial struggle demands large armies they can concentrate at one point and decimate copiously.” These men had to meet their living costs as long as they were alive, and then those of their death. And they had to produce surplus value as long as they’re capable of it. For capitalism doesn’t execute the men it has condemned unless it profits by that very putting to death.

But man is tough. Even reduced to a skeletal state they didn’t die fast enough. They had to massacre those who could no longer work, then those they no longer needed because the mishaps of war rendered their labor force unusable.

German capitalism resigned itself with difficulty to murder pure and simple. Not, of course, through humanitarianism, but because it wasn’t profitable. It was thus that Joel Brand’s mission was born, which we will speak of because it sheds light on world capitalism’s responsibility [\[4\]](#). Joel Brand was the leader of a semi-clandestine organization of Hungarian Jews. That organization sought to save Jews using all methods: hideouts, clandestine emigration, and corruption of the SS. The SS of the Judenkommando tolerated these organizations, which they more or less tried to use as “auxiliaries” for roundup and selection operations.

In April 1944 Joel Brand was called to the Judenkommando of Budapest to meet Eichmann, who was head of the Jewish section of the SS. Eichmann, with Himmler's agreement, charged him with the following mission: go to see the Anglo-Americans to negotiate the sale of a million Jews. The SS demanded in exchange 10,000 trucks, but were prepared to bargain, both as to the nature and the quantity of the merchandise. In addition, they proposed the delivery of 100,000 Jews as soon as the agreement was received as a sign of good faith. The affair was taken very seriously.

We can't go into detail concerning Joel Brand's misadventures. He left for Turkey and struggled with the English prisons of the Middle East. The Allies refused to take the affair seriously, did everything possible to stifle and discredit it. Finally, Joel Brand met Lord Moyne, British Minister of State for the Middle East, in Cairo. He begged him to at least obtain a written agreement, even if it wasn't to be honored: this would mean at least 100,000 lives would be saved.

"And what will the final number be?"

"Eichman spoke of a million."

"How could you imagine such a thing, Mr. Brand? What would I do with a million Jews? Where would I put them? Who would accept them?"

"If there is no room for us on earth, all that is left to us is to allow ourselves to be exterminated,"[\[5\]](#) Brand said in despair.

The SS were slower to understand. They believed in Western ideals. After the failure of Joel Brand's mission, and in the midst of the exterminations, they again tried to sell Jews to the Joint [\[6\]](#), placing a "deposit" of 1700 Jews in Switzerland. But aside from them, no one else wanted to conclude the affair.

For his part, Joel Brand had understood, or almost. He had understood what the situation was, but not why it was so. It wasn't the earth that had run out of room, but capitalist society. And not because they were Jews, but, because they were ejected by the production process, were useless to production.

Lord Moyne was assassinated by two Jewish terrorists, and J. Brand later learned that he had often sympathized with the tragic fate of the Jews. "His policy was dictated by the inhuman administration in London." But Brand hadn't understood that that administration is nothing but the administration of capital and that it is capital that is inhuman. And capital didn't know what to do with these people. It didn't even know what to do with the rare survivors, those "displaced person" who no one knew how to place.

The surviving Jews finally succeeded in making a place for themselves. By force and profiting from the international conjuncture, the State of Israel was formed. But even this was only possible by "displacing" other populations. Hundred of thousands of Arab refugees drag out their worthless (to capital) existences in refugee camps.

We have seen how capitalism condemned millions of men to death by ejecting them from production. We have seen how it massacred them while extracting the maximum surplus value possible. It remains for us to see how it exploits them after their very death.

It was the imperialists of the allied camp who first used them to justify their war and to justify after their victory the despicable treatment inflicted on the German people. How they threw themselves on the camps and the corpses, showing off the horrible photos and proclaiming: "Look at what bastards these krauts are! How right we were to fight them. How right we now are to give them a taste of their own medicine." When we think of the countless crimes of imperialism; when we think, for example, that at the very moment (1945) when our Thorez sung of their victory over fascism, 45,000 Algerians (fascist provocateurs) fell under the blows of repression. When we think that it is international capitalism which is responsible for the massacres, the ignoble cynicism of this hypocritical satisfaction is enough to make you sick.

At that same time all our good democratic anti-fascists threw themselves on the corpses of the Jews. And since that time they wave them under the nose of the proletariat. In order to make them feel capitalism's infamy? No, on the contrary. It's to make it appreciate, in contrast, the true democracy, the true progress, the well being it enjoys in capitalist society. The horrors of capitalist death must make the proletariat forget the horrors of capitalist life and the fact that the two are indissolubly connected. The experiments of the SS doctors must make them forget that capitalism experiments on a large scale with carcinogenic products, on the effects of alcoholism on heredity, the radioactivity of "democratic" bombs. If they show lampshades made of human skin it's to make us forget that capitalism transforms the living man into a lampshade. The mountains of hair, the teeth of gold, the bodies of men turned into merchandise must make us forget that capitalism made a merchandise of living man. It is labor, man's very life, that capitalism has transformed into merchandise. This is the source of all evils. Using the corpses of the victims of capital to try to hide the reality, to have the corpses serve as protection for capital, is the most despicable way of using them to the ultimate degree.

Notes

[1.](#) Mouvement contre le Racisme, l'Antisemitisme, et pour la Paix.

[2.](#) Quotations are from the Manuscripts of 1844.

[3.](#) Commerce, and especially commerce using money, was foreign to the fundamental schema of feudal society and was rejected onto people outside of that society, generally Jews. The ostracism they suffered from bespoke feudalism's attempt to maintain these activities which it could already not do without on the margins of society. But commerce and usury were the primary forms of capital. The hatred of the Jews expressed in a mystified and inadequate fashion the resistance that the classes of feudal society, from the

peasant to the minor nobility, as well as the guild artisan and the clergy, opposed to the irresistible development of the mercantilism that dissolved their social order. Even once productive capitalism and large-scale industry began their growth petit bourgeois “popular” tradition often continued to identify the Jew with Capital.

[4.](#) see L'Histoire de Joel Brand by Alex Weissberg.

[5.](#) See above.

[6.](#) Joint Jewish Committee, an American Jewish organization.