

Haters, Baiters and Would-be Dictators
Anti-Semitism and UK Far Right

Nick Toczek

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This is a very detailed account of the British anti-semites of the first half of the twentieth century, the hard-core handful who believed that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* really was a blueprint for Jewish domination of the world and devoted their lives to propounding this belief. Toczek concentrates on Henry Beamish, the founder of this dismal dynasty, but we also learn about the *Protocols* British publisher, The Britons, Arnold Leese – Beamish’s successor – and Colin Jordan, the last in the line.¹ These used to be just names to me, predecessors of the National Front and British Movement, about whom I knew almost nothing. Now, after decades of research by Toczek, we have their lives, their finances, their beliefs, their disputes, their correspondence and their publications laid before us.

And what a strange, unattractive bunch they were! Which is reassuring for my understanding of the unity of personality: for what if one of these anti-semitic obsessives had been interesting, intelligent and good company? On Toczek’s account there isn’t one of them you would have enjoyed talking to. (Listening to is probably more accurate; these people were transmitters not receivers.) There is no real indication from these biographical sketches of why these people ended up with their heads full of this particular rubbish. There is just the occasional glimpse of the conjunction of personal ambition or frustration intersecting with these ideas, offering gratification to the individual concerned, nudging them in that direction, when with slightly different circumstances they might have gone down another route.

What is now missing is the context in which these ideas could be taken even half seriously. In the late 19th and early 20th century there was very little data available about this society and its workings, let alone those abroad. The idea of

¹ There are also substantial appendices on related figures and groups.

mysterious secret societies of 'others' pulling the strings behind the curtain was less implausible than it is now.² Even someone as sophisticated and politically connected as Alfred Milner – one of the key figures in the British 'establishment' for 30 years – could believe the Russian revolution was the work of a Jewish conspiracy (p. 25). And if Milner could contemplate this, could write of himself as a 'race patriot' (p. 26), perhaps the issue isn't why Beamish *et al* fell for this tripe, but why so few others in this country did, compared with many other societies in Europe.

Did any of this matter? Toczec argues that the fact the *Protocols* is still around, and is still taken seriously by many, especially in the Arab world, is largely down to the proselytising efforts of Henry Beamish and The Britons group who kept it in print for decades. Maybe so.³ On the other hand, after Mrs Thatcher's second election victory in 1983, while the British Left (me included) were scrabbling about trying to understand the strange people with the antiquated ideas who had taken over at Westminster, G.C. Webber published his then-groundbreaking *The Ideology of the British Right 1918-39*.⁴ In that, the anti-semites, Beamish and Leese, were very marginal figures. Nothing presented by Toczec in this impressive bit of research suggests that they were anything more.

Robin Ramsay

² The Jewish conspiracy theory has been in decline in the West ever since the Internet got established. There are other, sexier theories, perhaps, for those who need such things.

³ Knowing nothing of the *Protocols*' history outside the UK, this is the one judgement here that I am unsure of.

⁴ London: Croom Helm, 1987