

The perennial conspiracy theory

*The Perennial Conspiracy Theory:
Reflections on the History of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*

Michael Hagemeister

London: Routledge, 2021, £44.99, h/b

*The Hitler Conspiracies:
The Third Reich and the Paranoid Imagination*

Richard J Evans

London: Penguin, 2021, £9.99, p/b

John Newsinger

The Protocols of Hate

In the summer of 1903, a series of articles with the title "Programme for World Conquest by the Jews" was published in an obscure right-wing newspaper in Saint Petersburg. The newspaper itself folded soon after; only a few rare copies can now be found in select libraries. However, the text itself . . . was to have an extraordinary career. Largely ignored at the time, it had, by the 1920s, been translated into all major world languages. (p. xiii)

This is how German historian Michael Hagemeister starts off the preface to the collection of his essays on the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. The book is not an easy read, but it is certainly worth making the effort.

The editor of that 'obscure right-wing newspaper' which first published the Protocols, Pavel Aleksandrovich Krushevan, was one of those responsible for the Kishinev pogrom only a few months earlier. This had left 49 Jews dead and hundreds more injured. In a local newspaper he had peddled the ritual child murder slander after a young Christian boy was found dead – he had in fact been killed by a relative – sparking off the murderous attack on Kishinev's Jews. Krushevan went on to become an enthusiastic supporter of the nationalist, anti-semitic Russian Black Hundreds movement. In 1905, Sergei Nilus published the fuller version of the Protocols and it was this version that was to go global post World War One. Hagemeister devotes chapter 5 of his book to Nilus, an apocalyptic

Orthodox Christian writer and mystic, who believed that the Jews had been plotting world domination since the time of Solomon. His various works were all banned during the Soviet era – he was imprisoned on a number of occasions – but since the collapse of that regime, he has ‘become a cult figure among Orthodox fundamentalists and nationalists’. (p. 89) It is worth making the point here that, for Nilus, the coming apocalypse would involve the willing conversion of the Jews to Christianity – the fulfilment of prophecy – not their extermination.

One interesting point that Hagemeister makes is that, while the Protocols originated in Tsarist Russia, they actually had very little impact there. As he points out, they didn’t figure in the 1913 trial of Mendel Beilis for ritual child murder, a Black Hundreds attempt at framing an innocent man to whip up hatred. The case was so weak that, despite the prosecution being assisted by the Tsarist secret police, even a jury that included seven members of the Black Hundreds found him not guilty. Given how central anti-Semitism was to attempts to rally support for the regime, all this might seem quite surprising. As Hagemeister points out though, the Protocols were ‘completely devoid of the old, traditional accusations against Jews such as deicide, host desecration, well poisoning, ritual murder, blood defilement, fake conversion, or interest taking and usury’. (p. 3) Instead, the Protocols were all about a great Jewish plot to achieve world domination, a strategic deployment of anti-Semitic prejudice rather than the tactical deployment of prejudices that the Black Hundreds and their like routinely propagated at street level. This strategic anti-Semitism had no serious ideological purchase before the 1917 Revolutions and their global impact in the 1920s was very much a response to the threat of revolution across Europe and beyond, offering an explanation of that threat and providing a ready-made scapegoat.

In his first chapter, ‘A fake conquers the world’, Hagemeister makes clear that we shall probably never know who actually authored the Protocols, this ‘patchwork of plagiarism and fiction’, (p. 2) before going on to look at how they went global. In the United States, for example, the Protocols were first published in 1920, during the Red Scare and had a considerable impact. Most notoriously, they were taken up by Henry Ford, who published a series of articles in his newspaper, the *Dearborn Independent*, exploring the Jewish threat to the USA. The articles revealed ‘that the Jews were using Communism, banking, labor unions, prostitution, gambling, alcohol, the press, the movies, and jazz (“moron music rubbish”) to weaken American culture and absorb the United States into a Jewish world government’. (p. 8) This anti-Semitic onslaught was

published in book form as *The International Jew* and sold over half a million copies in the United States. It was also published abroad, translated into seventeen languages. The book had a great impact in Germany where Adolf Hitler was to proclaim great admiration for Ford, and even had a picture of his hero on the wall in his office.

In chapter 4 Hagemeister focuses on 'One of the most mysterious figures associated with the reception and dissemination of The Protocols . . . the American Leslie Fry'. (p. 63) She was active both inside and outside the United States in her propagation of the Protocols and their message; in the 1920s 'apparently financed by Henry Ford', and in the late 1930s, it was at least rumoured, by Joseph Goebbels. (p. 63) She was 'considered the chief Fascist propagandist in Southern California', condemning Roosevelt's 'Jew Deal' and founding the American Anti-Communist Federation, the American League of Christian Women and the Militant Christian Patriots. This last organisation, Hagemeister tells, us also 'had a branch in England'. (p. 71) Her efforts reinforced the Christian Fascist cause in the United States in this period, and Hagemeister mentions in particular Father Coughlin, the anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi 'radio priest', who had an audience of millions. Fry was interned during the Second World War but continued promoting the Jewish World Conspiracy once she had been released. She died in 1970, but 'the effects of her work as a writer and activist continue to be felt even today'. (p. 72)

The Protocols were first published in Britain in January 1920 under the title, *The Jewish Peril*, by the very respectable firm of Eyre and Spottiswoode. The first edition of 30,000 copies sold out in a couple of months. The rights were then sold to the viciously anti-Semitic proto-fascist organisation the Britons, that had been established by Henry Hamilton Beamish in 1919.¹ The Britons publishing firm was to keep the Protocols in print until 1975. Upon their first appearance in Britain, the Protocols had considerable credibility in right-wing circles, even being 'enthusiastically received . . . by senior cabinet members'. (p. 9) Consumed by his hatred for Bolshevism, even Winston Churchill seems to have briefly given the Protocols some credence. And then on 16, 17 and 18 August 1921, *The Times* published a series of articles by Philip Graves exposing the Protocols as a forgery. This rebuttal proved so popular it was republished as a pamphlet. As far as most British Conservatives were concerned, this seems to have effectively demolished the credibility of the Protocols, although a pervasive anti-Semitism continued to hold sway

¹ For the Britons see Nick Toczek, *Haters, Baiters and Would-Be Dictators: Anti-Semitism and the UK Far Right*, (London: Routledge, 2015).

regardless.

What of Germany? Hitler and Goebbels, it seems, were sceptical regarding the veracity of the Protocols, with the latter actually dismissing them as fake in a diary entry from 1924. This did not stop them making use of them, however. Even if they were a forgery, the conspiracy they warned against, the Jewish plot for world domination, was certainly real. In this respect, they had what Hitler called an 'inner truth'. (p. 11) Other Nazis seemed to have swallowed them whole, with Alfred Rosenberg and Julius Streicher leading the way. Certainly the Nazis, both before and after they took power, made use of the Protocols as a propaganda tool, but a good case can be made that they reinforced – rather than created – their genocidal anti-Semitism.

Hagemeister's book also contains a useful chapter on the Berne Trials of 1933-1937,² but let us end with a look at his final chapter, 'The Third Rome against the Third Temple: Apocalypticism and conspiracism in post-Soviet Russia'. The revival of interest in the Protocols in Russia began during the years of Perestroika: 'copies of the *Protocols* were sold for a few rubles on almost every street corner' and even some of Hagemeister's own Russian friends seemed to regard them as explaining 'the sorrowful history of their country in the twentieth century'. (p. xiii) There followed a 'veritable torrent' of publications exposing 'the secret activities of dark supernatural forces and their earthly allies'. Much of this was Orthodox Christian propaganda example – an example being that the Antichrist had been born in Israel in 1962. There are many similarities with the thinking of elements of the US Christian Right, except that where the Americans generally saw the Jews as part of God's purpose – still the Chosen People – the Russian Christians saw them as allied with the Antichrist. Hagemeister writes of the paranoid belief that the 'seal of the Antichrist' is being either implanted 'into the forehead and the right hand of new-born babies' via microchips or that 'a laser is used to tattoo it under the skin'. Either method will enable the Antichrist's super computer in Brussels to rob people of 'their Christian identity . . . making them defenceless in the face of anti-Christian forces, which already control the global computer network'. The Covid pandemic is a sign of the times because, of course, the Protocols proclaimed inoculation 'as one of the methods to achieve world domination'. (pp. 100-102) This particular chapter on contemporary Russia urgently needs to be expanded into a book length study either by

² <<https://wiener.soutron.net/Portal/Default/en-GB/RecordView/Index/93196>>

Hagemeister himself or by someone else.³

The Hitler conspiracy theories

In this volume, Richard Evans looks at a number of 'conspiracy theories' that derive from the Nazi era. He starts with the Protocols and then goes on to examine the 'Stab in the Back' myth, the question of who burned down the Reichstag, Rudolf Hess's flight to Britain and, lastly, whether Hitler actually died in the bunker or escaped. The essays are both well-informed and well-written – indeed a pleasure to read, considering the subject matter. Let us start with the chapter on the Protocols. Evans discusses what we know about the origins of the forgery, before going on to consider the impact their publication had in Britain. The *Morning Post* newspaper, edited by H A Gwynne, was a strong champion of the veracity of the Protocols, 'winning favourable comments from none other than Winston Churchill among many others. There was pressure from some Conservative MPs for an official inquiry into the Jewish conspiracy supposedly uncovered in the document'. (p. 31) *The Times*' decision to publish Philip Graves' three part exposé of the fake was, according to Evans, motivated at least in part by a desire to discredit its rival newspaper. Even more interesting, by the end of the 1930s, the then editor of *The Times*, Geoffrey Dawson, was actually regretting that the paper had taken the stance it had. Graves wrote to Dawson noting that 'you told me that you regarded the discovery . . . of the forgery as in some respects unfortunate', indeed that 'The Times might wish to be dissociated from this publication in the future . . . because the connexion of The Times with the exposure makes it hard to persuade many important people in Germany and elsewhere that The Times is not "Jewish influenced" or "Jewish run"'. (p. 35). Very interesting, as they say!

What of the impact of the Protocols on the Nazis? Evans reproduces the Joseph Goebbels 1924 diary entry that Hagemeister refers to, wherein the Nazi's chief propagandist dismisses them as 'a forgery'. Goebbels goes on to make the point that the evidence of a Jewish conspiracy to take over the world is everywhere, but 'I do not think the Jews are so completely stupid as not to keep such important protocols secret'. (p. 32)

³ Another Routledge book on the Protocols worth a look is *The Global Impact of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion: A century-old myth*, edited by Esther Webman and published in 2018. This volume includes useful accounts of the Protocols impact in Germany and the USA in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as chapters on their post World War 2 life in Japan, Iran, Turkey, South Africa and the Arab world. There is also a useful chapter on the Protocols on the internet. For this reader, though, Beate Kosmala's chapter, 'The re-emergence of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in Łódź, 1968' is a particularly powerful and worthwhile contribution.

For the likes of Alfred Rosenberg, however, they exposed the Jewish conspiracy to the light of day and every German should have been encouraged to read them. General Erich Ludendorff was also, evidentially, a strong believer. The Protocols were first published in Germany in 1920 and within a few months had sold over 120,000 copies. By 1933, it had gone through over thirty editions and the Nazis had published their own version. How did they respond to Philip Graves exposé? Obviously, he had to be either a Jew or in the pay of the Jews. Evans is not convinced that the Protocols were a decisive factor in the construction of the Nazis' anti-Semitic world-view, seeing them as merely one component. He is not even convinced that Hitler himself had ever bothered to read the Protocols (there was no copy in his personal library).

Had there been a vast Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world, would the conspirators not have done more to defeat the Nazis and protect European Jews in the run up to war? Even some of the most brutal perpetrators of the Holocaust seem to have wondered about this. Evans quotes the senior SS man, Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, to the effect that his experience of actually carrying out mass murder showed that the Jews 'had no organization whatsoever They did not know at all what to do; they had no directives or slogans as to how they should act'. Surely, if there had been some sort of all pervasive hidden conspiracy then 'these people could have been saved by the millions; but instead they were taken completely by surprise'. (p. 38) The people he was murdering were in the main just helpless victims, he admits. As for the Protocols, they were never reprinted in Germany once the Second World War had begun, not even as the Holocaust got underway. As Evans writes, as far as the Nazis were concerned, the Protocols were 'far from being a revelation, their existence was taken by the Nazis to confirm what they already knew'. (p. 45)

The chapters on the 'Stab in the Back' myth, on the Reichstag fire and on Rudolf Hess's flight to Britain are all interesting, but let us look at Evans' last chapter, 'Did Hitler escape the bunker?'. Here, to great effect, he explores the extensive literature claiming that Hitler escaped to South America. He looks at the work of the American writer, Harry Cooper, who in 2006 published his *Hitler in Argentina: The Documented Truth of Hitler's Escape from Berlin*. This compilation of photographs, documents and first-hand testimony 'includes a photograph purporting to be of an elderly Hitler, his face half covered by a handkerchief'. With clear reference to the original photographer Evans shows that, unfortunately,

the picture is actually of a British old age pensioner, taken in 1947!⁴ Evans is careful to make clear – presumably for legal reasons – that *Hitler in Argentina* 'is not a deliberate hoax or designed to fool anybody'. He then goes on to examine the book's publisher, Sharkhunters International, an organisation founded by Cooper himself in 1983, a 'non-political' organisation devoted to the study of World War Two U-Boats. As Evans points out: 'Sharkhunters International does offer tours of Nazi sites in Germany and, indeed, tours to alleged Nazi sites in Argentina. It sells Nazi memorabilia and has advertised in pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic publications'. Among the U-Boat enthusiasts who have been members of Sharkhunters International are the likes of Leni Riefenstahl; Leon Degrelle, who was a Belgian Nazi, a former SS commander, war criminal, and later a Holocaust denier; and Manfred Roeder, a Nazi activist and Holocaust denier in post-war Germany.⁵ As Evans points out, right-wing political motives 'often lie behind seemingly innocent attempts to prove Hitler's survival'. A useful clue seems to be whether the investigators are concerned with bringing Hitler – and those who helped him escape to justice – or rather with showing him and Mrs Hitler 'living in domestic bliss to a ripe old age in South American exile'. (pp. 177-179)

Evans provides very useful demolitions of Simon Dunstan and Gerrard Williams' *Grey Wolf* book and film.⁶ He is equally scathing about the History Channel's TV show, *Hunting Hitler*, whose three series were shown between November 2015 and February 2018, with some episodes getting as many as 3 million viewers. (pp. 180-195) There is a flourishing 'good old Adolf got away' industry, it seems.

Let us end though with the rabid right-wing American writer and commentator, Jerome Corsi, who was for a while the Washington DC bureau chief for InfoWars. He even 'hopped aboard Pizzagate' and relentlessly went after Hilary Clinton. According to Corsi's 2014 *Hunting Hitler*, Hitler's escape was assisted by Allen Dulles, who had 'recognized that National Socialism was the way of the future' and began the process

⁴ Evans goes on to state that 'The copyright is held by Getty Images, though Cooper claims it as his own.' The inference being, perhaps, that Cooper is doing so because, of course, the Gettys are Jewish.

⁵ For more on Cooper see <<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2013/touring-third-reich>>.

⁶ For the book, see <<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Grey-Wolf-Escape-Adolf-Hitler/dp/1402781393>>. The film has a very mediocre 5.5/10 rating on the Internet Movie Database. See <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2493402/>>.

of helping to transform the USA into 'the Fourth Reich that we ourselves have unwittingly become'. Both the Democrats and the Republicans were involved in this betrayal. Hitler's escape is, for Corsi, somehow symbolic of the US Establishment's commitment to advancing the cause of 'big government' which has destroyed altogether American liberty and taken the country away from God. (pp. 198-202) Inevitably, Corsi is a Trump enthusiast, publishing *Killing the Deep State: The Fight to Save President Trump* (2018), *Silent No More: How I Became a Political Prisoner of Mueller's 'Witch Hunt'* (2019) and *Coup D'Etat: Exposing Deep Treason and the Plan to Re-Elect President Trump* (2020). Forthcoming he has an 'exposé' of the neo-Marxist, anti-capitalist global warming hoax, *The Truth about Energy, Global Warming and Climate Change: Exposing Climate Lies in an Age of Disinformation*.⁷

Evans ends by hoping that his book might contribute to helping combat 'disinformation'. Good luck with that!

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His latest book is

Chosen by God:

Donald Trump, the Christian Right and American Capitalism,
published by Bookmarks. <<https://bookmarksbookshop.co.uk/>>

⁷ Corsi has published over twenty books including *Atomic Iran: How the Terrorist Regime Bought the Bomb and the American Politicians* in 2005, *The Obama Nation: Leftist Politics and the Cult of the Personality* in 2008, *America for Sale: Fighting the New World Order, Surviving a Global Depression and Preserving USA Sovereignty* in 2009, *Where's the Birth Certificate? The Case that Barack Obama is not Eligible to be President* in 2011 and *Bad Samaritans: The ACLU's Relentless Campaign to Erase Faith from the Public Square* in 2012. He was also the co-author with John O'Neill of *Unfit for Command: Swift Boat Veterans Speak Out Against John Kerry* published in 2004.