

A Hoax of Hate: The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion

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Introduction

The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion is a classic in paranoid, racist literature. Taken by the gullible as the confidential minutes of a Jewish conclave convened in the last years of the nineteenth century, it has been heralded by anti-Semites as proof that Jews are plotting to take over the world. Since its contrivance around the turn of the century by the Russian Okhrana, or Czarist secret police, "The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion" has taken root in bigoted, frightened minds around the world.

The booklet's twenty-four sections spell out the alleged secret plans of Jewish leaders seeking to attain world domination. They represent the most notorious political forgery of modern times. Although thoroughly discredited, the document is still being used to stir up anti-Semitic hatred.

Origins of the Protocols

Serge Nilus, a little-known Czarist official in Moscow, edited several editions of the Protocols, each with a different account of how he discovered the document. In his 1911 edition Nilus claimed that his source had stolen the document from (a non-existent) Zionist headquarters in France. Other "editors" of the Protocols maintained that the document was read at the First Zionist Congress held in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland.

The Hoax Spreads

Impact of the Bolshevik Revolution

After the Russian Revolution in 1917, frustrated supporters of the ousted Czar rescued the document from obscurity in order to discredit the Bolsheviks. The emigre Czarists portrayed the Revolution as part of a Jewish plot to enslave the world, and pointed to the Protocols as the blueprint of that plan. The scheme of yoking the Protocols to the Bolshevik Revolution not only led to the allegation of a Judeo-Communist conspiracy, but promoted the forgery internationally. In later years, vicious Soviet anti-Semitic propaganda under Stalin and others echoed the conspiracy mythology of the Protocols.

International Publicity

In the 1920's, two British correspondents, Robert Wilton of the London Times and Victor Marsden of the Morning Post, each of whom had lived in pre-Communist Russia, promoted the idea of a Jewish conspiracy in Great Britain. Eighteen articles on the subject of a Jewish conspiracy as well as on the "Protocols" themselves were published in the Morning Post. Marsden translated the Protocols into English and in his introduction to the document asserted:

...the Jews are carrying it out with steadfast purpose, creating wars and revolutions...to destroy the white Gentile race, that the Jews may seize the power

during the resulting chaos and rule with their claimed superior intelligence over the remaining races of the world, as kings over slaves."

A Polish language edition of the Protocols appeared in 1920. The following year the Arabs of Palestine and Syria used the Protocols to stir up resentment against Jewish settlers in Palestine, suggesting that the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine would further advance the "international Jewish conspiracy." This propaganda tactic persists in the contemporary Middle East; Arabic editions of the Protocols have been widely circulated by official Saudi sources, among others.

American Debut

The Protocols were publicized in America by Boris Brasol, a former Czarist prosecutor. Auto magnate Henry Ford was one of those who responded to Brasol's conspiratorial fantasies. "The Dearborn Independent," owned by Ford, published an American version of the Protocols between May and September of 1920 in a series called "The International Jew: the World's Foremost Problem." The articles were later republished in book form with half a million copies in circulation in the United States, and were translated into several foreign languages.

By 1927 Ford had repudiated the "International Jew," but hundreds of thousands of people around the world had been encouraged by his initial endorsement to accept the Protocols as genuine.

The Protocols and Nazi Germany

The Protocols served to rationalize anti-Semitism and genocide in Hitler's Germany. The myth of the Jewish world conspiracy permeated Hitler's thinking, and he linked Germany's economic hardship during the 1920s to the secret plot. Once in power Hitler invoked the Protocols to justify anti-Semitic legislation and suppression of all opposition to the Third Reich. For example, the first anti-Semitic measure in April of 1933, a one-day boycott of Jewish stores, was deemed a defense against the "Plan of Basel" (another name for the Protocols).

Note: According to reputable scholars, including Prof. Norman Cohn in his noted book, *Warrant for Genocide*, the world-control myth was actually lifted from a 19th-century French political satire in which the alleged plotters weren't even Jewish.

Contemporary Re-Emergence

Anti-Semites around the globe still actively circulate the Protocols. It has appeared in Japan-where bestsellers by anti-Semite Masami Uno cite them as evidence of a "Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world'-and in Latin America (including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Paraguay). The document is also favored by such U.S. right-wing extremists as the Ku Klux Klan and Aryan Nations. The most common U.S. edition was published by hatemonger Gerald L. K. Smith's Christian Nationalist Crusade.

The Protocols have become a major source of Arab and Islamic propaganda. Between 1965 and 1967 alone, approximately 50 books on political subjects published in Arabic were either based on the Protocols or quoted from them. In 1980, Hazern Nuseibeh, the Jordanian delegate to the United Nations, spoke about the Protocols as a genuine document. In October of 1987 the Iranian Embassy in Brazil circulated copies of the Protocols, which it said "belongs to the history of the world."

During the 1980s Muslim groups peddled the forgery worldwide. The Muslim Student Associations at Wayne State University in Michigan and at the University of California at Berkeley disseminated the document. American Black Muslim groups have sold it. The Protocols were for sale at an Islamic exhibition in Stockholm and in London's Park Mosque, and during a 1986 conference sponsored by the Islamic Center of Southern California the Protocols were prominently displayed. Based on a perverse "interpretation" of the Protocols, the Saudi Arabian government blamed Israel for an attack on a synagogue in Istanbul in 1986.

With Glasnost there has also been a reappearance of the Protocols in the Soviet Union. A Soviet book released in 1987 called "On the Class Essence of Zionism" revived insidious canards contained in the Protocols, and made repeated references to Jews engaging in "constant efforts to gain control of the world." And sections of the Protocols have reportedly been read during meetings of the anti-Semitic Russian nationalist movement Pamyat (Memory).

Widespread Condemnation

During the past 60 years impressive authorities have publicly attested to the Protocols' fraudulence.

- Hugo Valentin, lecturer in history at the University of Upsala in Sweden, characterized the Protocols in his 1936 study *Anti-Semitism, Historically and Critically Examined* as "the greatest forgery of the century."
- Father Pierre Charles, Professor of Theology at the Jesuit College in Louvain, France, stated in a 1938 essay: "It has been proved that these 'Protocols' are a fraud, a clumsy plagiarism. . . made for the purpose of rendering the Jews odious..."
- In 1942, several prominent historians, including Carl Becker of Cornell, Sydney Fay and William Langer of Harvard, and Allan Nevins and Carlton J. H. Hayes of Columbia, introduced Professor John Shelton Curtiss' 'An Appraisal of the Protocols of Zion' with their endorsement of his findings as "completely destructive of the historicity of the Protocols and as establishing beyond doubt the fact that they are rank and pernicious forgeries."
- In 1961 Richard Helms, then Assistant Director of the CIA, stated at a Senate subcommittee hearing: "The Russians have a long tradition in the art of forgery. More than 60 years ago the Czarist intelligence service concocted and peddled a confection called The Protocols of the Elders of Zion."
- And in August of 1964 a subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee issued a report repudiating the Protocols, to which Senators Thomas J. Dodd

and Kenneth B. Keating appended the following: "Every age and country has had its share of fabricated 'historic' documents which have been foisted on an unsuspecting public for some malign purpose. . . One of the most notorious and most durable of these is the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion.'"

Conclusion

In 1935 a Swiss judge, presiding at a trial of two Swiss National Socialists charged with circulating the Protocols, wrote:

I hope that one day there will come a time when no one will any longer comprehend how in the year 1935 almost a dozen fully sensible and reasonable men could for fourteen days torment their brains before a court of Berne over the authenticity or lack of authenticity of these so-called Protocols... that, for all the harm they have already caused and may yet cause, are nothing but ridiculous nonsense.

Unfortunately, the judge's hope has not yet been fully realized. There are still those anti-Semites and their willing audiences who remain ready to circulate and believe this fantasy of hate.