The International Jew: 1920s Antisemitism Revived Online

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INTRODUCTION

Though some present-day bigots have flocked to newer ideologies such as denial of the Holocaust, much antisemitism still revolves around the basic conspiratorial ideas expressed by older antisemitic texts. By offering older texts at their Web sites, today's haters demonstrate the longevity of their beliefs, thereby legitimizing them to both dedicated followers and potential recruits. Due to the fame of its publisher, Henry Ford Sr., *The International Jew*, a four-volume antisemitic work first published in the 1920s, has been a particularly powerful tool for haters trying to validate their hostile beliefs. Though Ford publicly apologized twice for publishing *The International Jew*, online antisemites continue to use his name to promote it.

THE DEARBORN INDEPENDENT

The Dearborn Publishing Company published *The Dearborn Independent* newspaper. At the peak of its popularity, the Dearborn, Michigan paper, owned by auto magnate Henry Ford Sr., boasted a circulation of 700,000. *The Dearborn*
Independent first attacked Jews in its May 22, 1920 issue and continued to do so in 91 subsequent editions.

Many of the paper's antisemitic articles were reprinted by the Dearborn Publishing Company in four paper-bound volumes: The International Jew: The World's Foremost Problem (November, 1920); Jewish Activities in the United States (April, 1921); Jewish Influences in American Life (November, 1921); and Aspects of Jewish Power in the United States (May, 1922). Collectively known as The International Jew: The World's Foremost Problem, these volumes were later published in a variety of languages and disseminated widely in the United States and abroad.

For decades, The International Jew has been in the public domain. It can be reprinted by anyone who wishes to do so. In the late 1950s, antisemite Gerald L.K. Smith edited and published an abridged version of The International Jew culled from the original Dearborn Independent articles. The complete text of Smith's version now is easily found at many hate sites on the World Wide Web.

THE INTERNATIONAL JEW AND THE PROTOCOLS

Having heard in advance about the Dearborn Publishing Company's plan to attack Jews, E.G. Pipp, editor of The Dearborn Independent, resigned in disgust in April, 1920, and was replaced by William J. Cameron. Ernest Liebold, Henry Ford Sr.'s personal secretary, began to collect antisemitic material. Liebold passed this material to Cameron, who oversaw the articles that compose The International Jew, likely writing many of them himself. "When we get through with the Jews," Liebold was quoted in court as saying, "there won't be one of them who will dare raise his head in public."

A version of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the most notorious political forgery of modern times, found its way into Liebold's hands. Taken by the gullible as the confidential minutes of a meeting of Jewish leaders, The Protocols has consistently been held up by antisemites as proof that Jews are plotting to take
over the world. Even though it has been thoroughly discredited, *The Protocols* continues to circulate among antisemites.

Liebold passed the text of *The Protocols* on to Cameron, who modernized Brasol’s translation and used it as the foundation for *The International Jew*. Each of the chapters in Gerald L.K. Smith's version of the *International Jew* begins with a quotation from *The Protocols*, and one chapter, "An Introduction to the Jewish Protocols," is devoted to it entirely. One *Dearborn Independent* article lauded *The Protocols* as "too terribly real for fiction, too well-sustained for speculation, too deep in its knowledge of the secret springs of life for forgery." "The only statement I care to make about the Protocols is that they fit in with what is going on," Ford stated in 1921. "They have fitted the world situation up to this time. They fit it now."

**THE INTERNATIONAL JEW AND JEWISH CONTROL**

*The International Jew* portrayed Jews as monolithic, malicious schemers plotting to control the planet. "If there is one quality that attracts Jews, it is power," the book stated. "Wherever the seat of power may be, thither they swarm obsequiously."

*The Dearborn Independent* saw Jews as carrying out "revolutionary programs to break up the present control of society." These "revolutionary programs" revolve around economic control: the Jewish plan is "to control the world, not by territorial acquisition, not by military aggression, not by governmental subjugation, but by control of the machinery of commerce and exchange." According to *The International Jew*, "it is not merely that there are a few Jews among international financial controllers; it is that these world-controlers are exclusively Jews." The book claimed that "the motion picture influence of the United States, of the whole world, is exclusively under the control, moral and financial, of the Jewish manipulators of the public mind."
The *International Jew* did not portray Jews as individuals, but as a single-minded, calculating cabal. Conflict among Jews, no matter how real, was painted as a sly trick, part of the Jewish plot. Even the conflict between socialist Jews and capitalist Jews was denied. Jewish socialists and Jewish businesspeople were believed to be working in tandem, "with Jewish capital at one end of the Gentile working scheme putting the screws on the manufacturers, and with Jewish agitators and disruptionists and subversives at the other end of the Gentile working scheme putting the screws on the workmen."

In fact, like other people, Jews involve themselves in non-religious and professional activity as individuals, not as Jews. The number of Jews involved in a particular field bears no relationship to "Jewish power" or "Jewish control" of that industry. Jews do not act in concert with other Jews in the same business simply because they happen to be Jewish.

*The International Jew* also attacked Jews for speaking out about injustice and defending their constitutional rights. "Jewish rights seemed to be summed up in the 'right' to banish everything from their sight and hearing that suggests Christianity or its Founder," it commented. In fact, these so-called "Attacks on Christianity" were reasonable Jewish objections to governmental expressions of Christianity which clearly violated the separation between church and state enshrined in the Constitution.

According to *The International Jew*, demonstrably true Jewish accounts of pogroms in Russia were nothing but fabrications. "This propaganda of pogroms... thousands upon thousands of Jews killed... amounts to nothing except as it illustrates the gullibility of the Press," the book stated. "No one believes this propaganda and governments regularly disprove it." Such statements foreshadowed the pernicious lies spread today by Holocaust deniers.

*The International Jew* blamed nearly all the troubles it saw in American society on Jews. "Whichever way you turn to trace the harmful streams of influence that
flow through society, you come upon a group of Jews," it claimed. Even problems with the "national pastime" were attributed to Jewish influence: "If... fans... wish to know the trouble with American baseball, they have it in three words...too much Jew."

THE SAPIRO TRIAL AND FORD'S APOLOGY

Jews and others were outraged by *The International Jew*, and Ford received thousands of complaints. In September 1920, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the National Council of Jewish Women and B'nai B'rith asked ADL to counteract Ford's work. ADL released a pamphlet, *The Poison Pen*, that targeted the *Dearborn Independent*. More than 100 prominent citizens, including President Woodrow Wilson, former Presidents Taft and Roosevelt, W.E.B. DuBois, Clarence Darrow, and William Jennings Bryan, signed *The Perils of Racial Prejudice*, a statement that urged "all those who are molders of public opinion" to "strike at* The International Jew, which it characterized as "un-American, un-Christian agitation."

Prominent lawyer Samuel Untermeyer penned a widely-published statement describing the pernicious effects of *The International Jew*. He wrote: "These articles are so fantastic and so naïve in their incredible fantasy that they read like the work of a lunatic, and but for the authority of the Ford name they would have never seen the light of day and would have been quite harmless if they had. With that name they spread like wildfire and became the Bible of every anti-Semite."

Despite these complaints, *The Dearborn Independent* continued to attack Jews, even after the publication of the articles that constitute *The International Jew*. In 1927, the paper printed accusations that Jewish lawyer Aaron Sapiro and a group of Jewish bankers and merchants were seeking to control the nation's wheat farming. Sapiro sued for defamation; his case came to trial in Detroit. Though Sapiro's suit was directed personally at Ford, Cameron testified for many days, claiming full responsibility for the articles. He even went so far as to assert that
Ford had never heard of Sapiro. This lie was exposed when James M. Miller, a former *Dearborn Independent* employee, swore under oath that Ford had told him he intended to expose Sapiro.

Just before Ford was to take the stand, he was injured in an auto accident. While he recovered, Ford operatives demanded a mistrial after a juror spoke to a news reporter. Following the declaration of a mistrial, Ford issued public statements and apologies to individuals and Jews as a group. On July 16, 1927, an out-of-court settlement of the Sapiro suit was announced.

Though Ford apologized for *The International Jew* and closed the *Dearborn Independent*, he later accepted the Grand Cross of the German Eagle from Hitler's Nazi government in July, 1938. Some remain skeptical of his apology, claiming that Ford himself neither wrote nor personally signed it.

Ford again expressed his concern about the circulation of *The International Jew* following America's entry into the war against Germany, for *The Protocols* had become a staple of Nazi propaganda. In a 1942 letter to Sigmund Livingston, then ADL national chairman, Ford wrote, "I do not subscribe to or support, directly or indirectly, any agitation which would promote antagonism against my Jewish fellow citizens." He pointed out that he "destroyed copies" of *The International Jew* when he first apologized and had refused to give "permission or sanction to anyone to use my name as sponsoring such publication, or being the accredited author thereof."

In the decades following Ford's death in 1947, the Ford family and the Ford Motor Company have engaged in numerous projects and endeavors in the public interest, including many that have been supportive of Jewish concerns. Ford's grandson, Henry Ford II, consistently supported Jewish charities and cultural organizations. In 1997, for example, the Ford Motor Company sponsored the first screening of Steven Spielberg's "Schindler's List," commercial-free, on national network television.
CONCLUSION

As founder and owner of the Ford Motor Company, Henry Ford Sr. made a positive, lasting contribution to American industry and culture, providing mobility to millions with his inexpensive automobiles. Yet these accomplishments are marred by another of his legacies: his viciously antisemitic publication, the *International Jew*. While that series of books once reached thousands, its reach is now even greater on the Internet. Today, *The International Jew* can touch a whole new generation, connected to hate via the information superhighway.