

Karl Marx and the Jewish Question

A publisher's amazing deception
thoroughly exposed

By LOUIS HARAP

A WIDESPREAD advertising campaign in recent months has informed the world of a 51-page booklet, strangely entitled "*A World Without Jews*," by Karl Marx, Edited with an Introduction by Dagobert D. Runes," priced \$2.75 and issued by the Philosophical Library, of which the same Runes is publisher. On the dust-jacket Runes modestly describes himself as an "eminent philosopher."

We have examined this book carefully. Whatever one's attitude towards Marxism may be, Runes' book violates elementary principles of honest controversy. It is such an incompetent and dishonest piece of editing that one's first impulse is not to dignify it by notice. However, the book obviously has a prodigious promotion budget with display ads repeated in such costly media as the *N. Y. Times*, *N. Y. Post*, many English-Jewish and other periodicals and even abroad, as in the *London New Statesman*.

The advertising copy itself is so irresponsible that comment is necessary. This venture has the earmarks

of a heavily financed, virulently Cold War propaganda stunt. And more, it harms the Jewish people and contributes to attitudes that make peace harder to achieve.

One need go no further than the title to find misrepresentation. Marx never wrote anything entitled "*A World Without Jews*." He did write a two-part essay, "*On the Jewish Question*," which Runes here prints in a translation on which we shall comment later. Runes adds also a third section which, he does not inform the reader, is a translation of a passage out of Marx and Engels' *The Holy Family*.

This is not the first time that Runes has improved on the title of a work by a classic author. In 1956 the Philosophical Library published a "How to" book by Spinoza. This philosopher's *De Intellectus Emendatione*, "*On the Correction of the Intellect*," was issued by Runes under the title *How to Improve Your Mind*. In the case of Marx, however, he went beyond vulgarization to falsification.

In the context of our day, Runes' title, "*A World Without Jews*," recalls Hitlerism. That Runes explicitly intended this association he makes clear in his advertising copy and in his introduction. The advertisement asserts that Marx's "little work be-

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came the fountainhead of anti-Semitic activity in Germany and present-day Soviet Russia." Yet it is an elementary fact that great Marxists—Engels, Bebel, Lenin and others—and Marxist movements in general have been bitter opponents of anti-Semitism. Even if the book is not bought and read by many people, its propaganda purpose is achieved by Runes' untrue and irrational statement.

Runes describes this booklet as "the first unexpurgated English language publication" of Marx's essay. This little lie adds to the mounting structure of deception. The facts are these: in 1926, International Publishers in New York issued a book of Marx's early essays under the title *Selected Essays*; the article "On the Jewish Question" is one of these.

This translation, by H. J. Stenning, does indeed omit material from the original. But by no stretch of the imagination could these omissions be deleted an "expurgation" of the text.

Stenning omits some material that Marx quoted from other authors and about 500 words of Marx's original text. But these omissions do not modify Marx's argument or soften Marx's comments on the Jews. A comparison of the text Runes published with Marx's German original shows that the translation in the Runes book deletes words, clauses and even sentences. Should one then call Runes' book an "expurgated" edition?

The "distinguished philosopher," as Runes alternatively describes himself in his advertisement, has in his editorial wisdom given his own emphases in the text by setting some of Marx's comments on the Jews in very heavy bold type without explaining to the reader that these emphases were not Marx's but his own. It is apparent that Runes is not at all interested in Marx's argument but simply wants

to emblazon these passages out of context historical, social or intellectual.

The advertisement holds out to the reader the prospect of "explanatory notes" by Runes. One would expect that Runes would help the reader to grasp this difficult essay, for it cannot be properly understood without considerable commentary on its historical and ideological context. Instead the reader gets in the Introduction an incitement to rabid Cold War hatred.

By an astonishing farrago of innuendo and direct statement Runes wishes the reader to identify Marx with Hitlerism. Because of Marx's conception of the Jews, says Runes, "it is therefore not surprising that Adolf Hitler was able to take over the Marxist unions of Germany almost unchecked." But Hitler did not "take over" the German trade unions. He destroyed them, executed scores of their leaders and sent thousands of trade unionists, communists, socialists and others, to concentration camps.

So incredibly irresponsible is Runes' Introduction that he charges to "Marxian anti-Semitism" the non-recognition of Israel by Indian Premier Nehru! Runes makes wild charges against Khrushchev and others without documentation. There are Jews in the Soviet Parliament and in other high political posts; some of the Soviet Union's leading atomic scientists and thousands of other scientists are Jewish; yet Runes has the insolence to write: "No Jew may hold major political office or be a member of the Soviet Parliament" and Soviet Jews "are confined to basically menial and subordinate tasks"—both simply contrary to fact. (See partial list of Jews elected to office in March, 1959 on page 47—*Ed.*) His comments on Zionism are hysterically confused. Hardly a sentence in this introduction does

not flout reality and distort the truth.

Before we take up the substance of Marx's essay, a word about the translation (the name of the translator is not given). It is quite unsatisfactory. There are simple mistranslations of single words, phrases, clauses and sentences. For instance: on page 47, "*Eigennutz*" is translated "property" when it should be "egotism" or "self-interest." On pages 37-45, "*Schacher*" is translated "usury" when it should be "petty trade." Elsewhere, many phrases and some whole sentences are curiously omitted. Space considerations forbid our noting the extremely large number of mistranslations and omissions. The translation at the top of page 43 is so garbled as to be unintelligible.

What did Marx really say and why did he say it? The answer to this question is important no matter what one's opinion is of Marx or Marxism. Runes gives the reader no help here. Marx wrote the essay in the fall of 1843 and published it early in 1844. It is a way-station in Marx's development toward what is now known as "Marxism" and by no means represents Marx's mature views. In a series of polemical essays in the few years before 1847, Marx shed the idealistic views of those who influenced him—Hegel, Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer and other "Young Hegelians." "On the Jewish Question" was Marx's polemic with Bruno Bauer, which was completed in *The Holy Family* a year later.

The Jewish question was the vehicle for this polemic with Bauer because the latter had in 1843 published an essay on "The Jewish Question." But why was this a subject of discussion in 1843? Because it formed an issue in the political and ideological struggles of that day. The democratic opponents of the reactionary German

princes attacked the theoretical foundations of Christianity and of the state itself as a means of resisting the repressive German regimes that followed the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

A beginning was made in D. F. Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, a work of "higher criticism" that applied the techniques of secular historical evidence to the Synoptic Gospels. Strauss believed that Jesus was an historical person and that a residue of history underlay the Gospels. But he showed that popular myths were built by the Gospel writers on the facts of Jesus' life. In 1840, Bruno Bauer published a book purporting to deny the historicity of Jesus altogether and to show the Gospels were mythical throughout.

Ludwig Feuerbach in 1841 published his *Essence of Christianity*, in which he held that religion in general had no objective reality but was only a projection of man's desires and needs. In the course of these discussions Judaism also was considered, since it was the forerunner of the Christian faith. In 1843, Bruno Bauer combined his criticism of religion and of Judaism specifically with his criticism of the state in "The Jewish Question." The tenor of all these discussions of Judaism was quite hostile.

Furthermore, the Jews were at this time struggling to achieve full political rights and this issue was a part of the assault on the reactionary monarchy. The Napoleonic invasion had shattered medieval restrictions on the Jews in many of the German principalities. But the defeat of Napoleon after 1812 and the rise to power of reaction with the Congress of Vienna and the Holy Alliance brought a partial return of these restrictions. Overt anti-Semitism intensified and in 1819 there were violent outbreaks against the Jews in many German cities.

When Frederick William IV ascended the Prussian throne in 1840, he declared his kingdom a "Christian State" and Jewish emancipation received another setback. The Jewish leaders petitioned for political rights and there were liberals and radicals who espoused the cause of Jewish rights. They did so not necessarily out of any fondness for the Jews but as a measure to weaken the clerical state. Thus the political urgency of the problem and the attacks on religion and the state merged to focus attention on the Jewish question.

Marx entered the fray with his polemic on Bauer's essay. Bauer maintained that human emancipation could be won by Christians only by rejecting the Christian religion. The Jews, he held, were interested only in their own emancipation and not in the freeing of all Germans. Following the current and generally accepted ideas about the Jews, Bauer asserted that Judaism was exclusive, separatistic and egotistic; that the tribulations of the Jews were their own fault because they believed themselves "the chosen people" and refused to adapt themselves to the societies in which they lived and sought special privileges; that they lived in the nooks and crannies of society and did not contribute to the general culture.

The Jews in the *Christian* state, continued Bauer, were not entitled to freedom unless they gave up their Judaism. For Christianity had superseded Judaism and was a higher stage of development; the Jews had to catch up with the Christians before they could be emancipated from religion altogether. For their part, said Bauer, the Christians could not free the Jews because the Jews opposed their religion and demanded privileges (that is, diverging from the state religion) that the Christians themselves did not possess. The Jews in a *Christian* state

could be emancipated, he held, only if they shed their own religion and adopted the more advanced Christianity.

Marx trenchantly exposes the fallacies of Bauer's thinking on some points: Bauer does not differentiate between political and human emancipation and he does not radically criticize the state as such. For political emancipation is possible in the developed state, as the United States showed, but human emancipation was not possible until man cast off religion altogether. Marx derided the Christian state as a feudal carry-over. He fought for the modern concept of complete separation of church and state.

Marx realized that "political emancipation at least represents important progress; while not the last form of human emancipation generally, it is the last form of emancipation within the existing world order." (All quotations are from the Stenning translation.) Marx discussed some state constitutions of North America and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man to arrive at the real meaning of political emancipation. These documents insure the separation of individual from individual and from the community. That is, the state guarantees (legally, at least) that an individual may without interference of any person or the state itself profess any religion; be free to do what he pleases unless it infringes on others; possess property, have equality before the law and be protected in his person or from invasion of these rights (freedom of religion, liberty in general, the right to property and to security). Because these characteristic bourgeois rights are "withdrawn into his [i.e., man's] private interests and separated from the community," Marx holds that the bourgeois individual is therefore "egotistic man."

Contrary to Bauer, therefore, Marx asserted that not only was political emancipation possible in the bourgeois state, but such emancipation represents progress. "The political emancipation of the Jew, the Christian, or of the religious man in general," wrote Marx, "means the emancipation of the State from Judaism, from Christianity, from religion in general"—that is, complete separation of church and state. Bauer was mistaken, says Marx, in posing the question of the political emancipation of the Jews in purely religious terms, since the Jew can be politically emancipated and yet retain his religion.

Human emancipation, however, is another matter. Man cannot be wholly free, Marx maintained, unless he separates *himself* from religion, frees himself from the fetters of "superstition." In considering how this human emancipation can come about, Marx's one-sided, prejudiced view of the Jew comes into play. In common with most Germans of his time, including the most advanced figures, Marx mistakenly identified the Jew with the commercial spirit. Marx was in this essay still under Feuerbach's influence and Marx's conception of the Jew and his religion follows Feuerbach's ideas in the *Essence of Christianity*. Echoing an idea of Feuerbach, Marx wrote that "we will not look for the secret of the Jew in his religion, but we will look for the secret of religion in the real Jew." (Runes' translator omits this important sentence altogether.) When Marx said that "the secular basis of Judaism" is "practical needs, egoism," he was following Feuerbach's conception.

Marx uses Judaism in this essay to symbolize the commercial spirit, which, he maintains, is the real God of the Jews. It is in the "every-day Jew," not in the "Sabbath Jew," that

he finds the real expression of Judaism. And the worldly Jew, he believes, is the essence of the money power, the drive for money, the spirit of petty trade. Consequently, he writes, "emancipation from huckstering and from money, and therefore from practical, real Judaism would be the self-emancipation of our epoch." Christianity in bourgeois society has, he states, taken over this money spirit of Judaism: "Christians have become Jews"; Judaism has "received its supreme development in Christian society." Because of its historic commercial function, "Judaism has survived not in spite of, but by virtue of history. Out of its own entrails, bourgeois society continually creates Jews." Marx concludes that "the social emancipation of the Jews is the emancipation of society from Judaism." In other words, when the world rids itself of the commercial spirit of bourgeois society, the dominating power of money will disappear and Jews and all mankind will be truly free.

Without condoning Marx's use of the Jew as the symbol of the commercial spirit, let us try to understand how it was possible for Marx to do it at this early stage in his development toward Marxism. It is a matter of history that this view of the Jew was general in German society in his time and Marx was not immune from it. Marx was not himself religious at any time. Two years before Karl was born, his father, as is well known, was baptized a Christian—as were so many Jews of that period, including Heine—because he could not practice his profession of lawyer as a Jew. To call Karl Marx a convert, as Runes does repeatedly, is absurd.

It should be recalled that at this period in Germany severe restrictions
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on the Jews had excluded them from most occupations and forced them into trade and finance for their livelihood. Marvin Lowenthal in *The Jews of Germany* (New York, 1936) notes that "in 1807, 30 out of 52 Berlin banks were in Jewish hands; a crop of court bankers sprang up in the Rhine states and Bavaria." One of the latter was Anshel Mayer Rothschild, who supported the Hapsburg monarchy and other reactionary regimes; and other Jewish bankers lent strength to reactionary monarchs.

Lowenthal adds: "the masses of Jews, however; remained poverty-stricken as before. In 1813, 92 per cent of the Prussian Jews were petty retail-dealers or worse; 20 per cent were peddlers and 10 per cent beggars." In the Rhineland, where Marx lived, 974 of the 3,137 peddlers were Jewish. Many Jews were cattle-dealers and it was in the Rhineland also that Jewish land-jobbers drew the anger of the peasants in the 1820's during the agricultural crisis. A misinterpretation of such conditions stimulated anti-Semitism and Marx was not free from the general feelings of the time. Goethe too succumbed: as privy-councillor of Saxe-Weimar in 1823 he effectively choked off the granting of political rights to the Jews.

Marx still clung to this prejudiced concept of the Jews in *The Holy Family*, published in 1845, where he reiterates his criticism of Bauer along the lines of the essay of the year before. However, when Marx developed his fully matured views, this concept disappeared. It is totally absent from *Capital*, in which Jews are hardly mentioned. When he does refer to Jews there as a commercial group, in

volume III, he mentions them as only one of the historical commercial peoples, along with the Greeks, the Phoenicians and the Lombards. The biased, un-Marxist notion of the Jews which Marx offered with youthful exuberance in 1843 (he was 25 years old at the time) is not a part of Marxism. He had not yet developed his theory of the class struggle, so that his notion of the Jews followed the non-class views of Feuerbach, which he was soon to discard. Unfortunately, he continued in his letters later on to use prejudiced epithets about Jews. That this was a peripheral area of his mind is evident from a letter sent to Marx by the Jewish historian Graetz in 1877. They had met at Karlsbad and exchanged some of their books. Graetz writes Marx in warm personal terms. And in an article in the *New York Tribune* of April 15, 1854, Marx wrote a moving passage about the wretched conditions in which the Jews of Jerusalem were living.

And it must be emphasized that Marx was an advocate of political rights for the Jews, as is apparent from his essay. In fact, the *Rheinische Zeitung*, a Cologne paper that Marx edited from 1842 until its suppression in March 1843, was one of the strongest supporters of Jewish emancipation as one aspect of the struggle against the clerical monarchy. The article which finally brought the suppression of the paper was one by Marx in which he placed the blame for oppression of the peasants on the landowners and bureaucrats and makes no mention of the popular notion that the Jews were responsible. In October 1842 the paper opposed a ghettoising law with an article which answered the charge that all Jews were traders with the argument: ". . . all

other paths were closed to the Jews. If you want to improve the Jews so that they will take part in the mechanical trades and agriculture more than they do now, you must take the necessary steps to remove the pressures that bear down on them."

When new taxes against Jews or new restrictions were proposed, the paper fought against them. It published articles by Jewish liberals and the Jewish paper, *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, in 1842 often quoted material from the *Rheinische Zeitung* on the Jewish question. It was probably because of the paper's militant support of Jewish rights that the leading Jews of Cologne early in 1843 turned to its editor, Karl Marx, to draw up a petition for Jewish rights to be submitted to the *Landtag*. Despite the fact, as he said, that the Jewish religion was "repugnant" to him, Marx consented because he saw in such a move a way to weaken the monarchy. It is significant that all Jewish historians regard the petition campaign of the Cologne Jews as marking a new advanced stage in the Jews' fight for emancipation. Furthermore, as Prof. Solomon F. Bloom of Brooklyn College wrote in a paper on "Karl Marx and the Jews," (*Jewish Social Studies*, Oct., 1942, pp. 3-15): "The fact that he supported emancipation removes Marx at once from the ranks of political anti-Semitism."

It is time to return to Runes. One can see from the brief indication given above of the context of Marx's essay that any responsible editor, in publishing it today, is under obligation to give some of this background. But Runes is not interested in informing the reader. He would rather induce people to see the essay in a false context and thus assign a mon-

strously distorted significance to it.

A strange treatment of the word "*Judentum*" beginning with page 43 of the book is extremely suspicious. This word means, as any German dictionary will show, "Judaism," the Jewish religion, and Runes' translator has up to this point so rendered it. All of a sudden, the translator in six places changes the translation of this word to "the Jews" or "Jewry" (the word for Jewry in German is *Judenschaft* and occurs nowhere in the original essay). The final sentence of the essay in Runes' book reads: "The social emancipation of the Jews is the emancipation of society from Jewry." The accurate translation is: "The social emancipation of the Jew (*des Juden*) is the emancipation of society from Judaism (*Judentum*)." The subtle difference here—shifting from the Jews' religion to the Jews themselves—has the effect, in our present context, of making Marx appear an advocate of Jewish extermination while Marx intended to use Judaism as the symbol for a commercial economy. By this mistranslation, Runes fortifies his fantastic concluding assertion in his Introduction that the "terroristic practices" of Marxism may possibly "bring to reality the sanguinary dream of Karl Marx—a world without Jews."

We leave to the reader, whatever his view of Marxism, to judge the decency and probity of Runes. What is more important, however, is to consider how harmful to the Jews is Runes' hodgepodge of misrepresentation. The presentation in this book is a know-nothing incitement of malignant Cold War attitudes and is propaganda of the wildest kind. It contributes its mite to weaken efforts to prevent atomic extinction by its hysterical confusion of issues about Marxism and the Soviet Union.