

JEW-BAITERS ON THE SPOT

By VIRGINIA GARDNER

In our January 9 issue, Miss Gardner turned the spotlight on the operations of American Action, Inc., an outfit engaged in subtly disseminating anti-Semitism and propaganda for a soft peace. She recounted her interviews with the two key figures in the organization, the Rev. Dr. Walter M. Haushalter, former vice chairman of the Baltimore branch of the America First Committee, and Eric Arlt, who had been instrumental in bringing Gerald L. K. Smith to Baltimore for two meetings. In her present article Miss Gardner reports on her further investigations—The Editors.

Baltimore, Md.

THE Rev. ~~Gottlieb Siegenthaler~~, pastor of Baltimore's ninety-three-year-old St. Matthew's Evangelical Church, has resigned from ~~American Action, Inc.~~, because he could not stomach its anti-Semitism. He spoke freely of his former association with the organization, on whose board of directors he served, and although he did not at once mention anti-Semitism as a reason for his resignation, when he did, it was of his own volition and without my initiating the subject.

"It was really started," he said at the outset of the interview, speaking of American Action, Inc., "more as an anti-fourth term movement than anything else; at least that was why I agreed to go into it. The people decided otherwise, and we went down with the rest." This was highly interesting, as the Rev. ~~Walter M. Haushalter~~, pastor of Christian Temple and one of two vice chairmen of American Action, Inc., had assured me there was nothing political about the organization. When it sponsored seven pre-election broadcasts it was not interested in electing Thomas E. Dewey or defeating Franklin D. Roosevelt, according to Haushalter, but only in subjecting candidates to a "screening" to see that they lived up to "Christian principles."

When I pointed out that the organization's two seemingly most active members, Mr. Haushalter and Eric Arlt, one of its directors, had told me that American Action was organized as

a permanent committee, Mr. Siegenthaler readily agreed that it was. He was one of three incorporators, and Arlt, who says he operates a wholesale hardware business, was a fourth witness to the signing of the incorporation papers.

"It sounds rather silly," Mr. Siegenthaler said at last, after we had discussed his own ideas on a fourth term, "to say that I went into this thing to help it. But the truth is that while I like Haushalter and I go along with him on some things, I knew he was anti-Semitic and I knew I wouldn't go along there. But I thought I could steer the committee clear of it." In formulating the "Statement of Principles" of AA, for instance, he tried to get a "more inclusive" point of view across. "What was the response?" he was asked.

"Well, Haushalter and Arlt just didn't respond. They both revealed their anti-Semitism," he said. "Then the laymen on the board of directors seemed to take the attitude that since the committee was principally clergymen, the latter should govern the policy."

"Do you know of any connection the committee has with Gerald L. K. Smith [head of the America First Party]?" I asked.

"Certain individuals have—Haushalter and Arlt—but not the organization," he said.

Mr. Siegenthaler tossed this information off with seeming lightness. I already had uncovered the fact that Arlt was responsible for bringing Smith to Baltimore for the first two of three meetings he addressed here during the campaign, and despite Haushalter's ardent denials that he ever had urged his congregation to hear Smith, I was not surprised at Mr. Siegenthaler's remarks. But I was a little taken aback that he appeared so casual about a relationship between the rabble-rousing Smith and the sparkplugs of AA, Inc.

I FOUND puzzling contradictions in this bright-eyed, ruddy-cheeked pastor of St. Matthews'. The idea of racial discrimination was abhorrent to him apparently, although, strangely

enough, he said he didn't believe in "the equality of the races." "I believe in the brotherhood of man. I couldn't stand up in my pulpit if I didn't practice it. Any racial bias denies it. That's why I got out of this committee. I just couldn't stand it—the anti-Semitism."

He talked about "the bureaucracy threatening our democracy," questioned the President's foreign policy, thought Sen. Arthur Vandenberg's recent proposals "just about right," and even thought Sen. Burton K. Wheeler, although "extreme," said "a good many things I'd agree with." Yet he thought FDR should be credited with "lifting the dignity of the human personality in a profoundly Christian sense."

"Would you say that you were a former pacifist and through such sentiments were led to join American Action?" he was asked.

"Well, I would want to do the pigeonholing of myself if any were to be done," he laughed. "In some ways I was, but not altogether."

"Do you agree with the fundamental position of the Allies in demanding unconditional surrender?" I asked at one point. His Wheeleresque reply was:

"I believe that the unconditional surrender policy prolongs the war and costs more lives. If we had a clear statement as Allies of what we are fighting for it could probably solve the problem now."

Occasionally Mr. Siegenthaler alluded to himself as a liberal. He had had a long association, from divinity school days, with Prof. Reinhold Niebuhr of the Union Theological Seminary, who is one of the pillars of the New York Liberal Party. Mr. Siegenthaler admires him greatly but does not go along with him in his anti-Communism. "Or with American Action, either, in its anti-Communism?" he was asked. "That's right," he said.

"There was one plank in the AA platform which seriously concerned me," I said to him. That was the last one, calling for cooperation with other nations after the "present" war "whether they are at present our friends or enemies in the current war (1944)." (Their parentheses.) "Would you say

the intent was that we should have a soft peace?"

Mr. Siegenthaler hesitated. "No, not a soft peace," he said. Then he launched into a discussion which I only partially was able to follow. It concerned "the preservation of moral values," and so on.

Mr. Siegenthaler had told me that he had sent a letter of resignation to American Action during the Christmas holiday week—the week after my investigation was concluded, it happens—but had had no reply. I had tried several times without success to reach the organization's chairman, one William G. Stockhausen. When I finally reached him by long distance telephone, and asked him if he were aware of Mr. Siegenthaler's resignation from the committee, he said he was, but that the committee had not met since December and so had not acted on it. He admitted there had been one other resignation, but when asked who it was, and again if it were a priest or minister, he replied to each question: "I prefer to withhold that information." Then he blurted out with apparent nervousness: "I feel it is going to dissolve shortly—the committee." "Is that just a feeling, or based on—" I began.

"I—" he coughed, then went on: "It's just a personal opinion. The fact is, it is just a small organization got together by some who thought they might possibly do some good and so forth, and they realized their forces are too small to be very effective."

Mr. Stockhausen said he was a contractor. Asked if he had a business address, he replied that that could not be of any public concern. He was "only a temporary head" of the committee, he said—although the letterhead lists him as "chairman." Other questions and answers in our phone conversation:

Q. Is there any connection of the committee, or members of it, with Gerald L. K. Smith? A. No, not to my knowledge.

Q. I understand that the underlying reason for Mr. Siegenthaler's resignation was the anti-Semitism of the committee. Is that your impression of the committee? A. Positively not.

Q. You had one public meeting only? A. That's right. (Mr. Siegenthaler had verified that AA sponsored one public meeting in the Alcazar temple in October, but said he was out of town and did not know who addressed it—but believed Stockhausen, Haushalter and Arlt—"no outsiders." Previously Arlt said AA held a meeting in the Alcazar October 2. Haushalter denied it was

addressed by Smith, and did not recall any meeting held there in October.

Q. Who addressed the meeting, Mr. Stockhausen? A. I don't remember.

Q. But you were present? A. Yes, I was present.

Q. There was nothing secret about the meeting? A. No, of course not. But I don't know what the policy of your publication is. If a magazine is being published it must be with some ulterior motive.

Q. Must it be ulterior, Mr. Stockhausen? A. Well, there must be some motive.

I suggested he buy NEW MASSES on Baltimore newsstands and see what he thought of the motive, and then asked again: "Do you care to reveal who was the speaker at that meeting?" "I don't know whether it was in October or September," he sulked.

Q. Well, Mr. Arlt told me there was such a meeting. A. Mr. Arlt? Oh, both Mr. Arlt and Mr. Haushalter can tell you more than I can. Mr. Arlt and Mr. Haushalter had meetings of this here committee long before I knew anything about it. Then they asked me to come in on it.

Q. Is it true Arlt ran on the Coughlin ticket at one time? A. Not that I know of. (Arlt did, however, run for Congress in 1938 on the ticket of the Union Party, a coalition of Coughlinites, Huey Long followers and Townsendites.)

On the subject of anti-Semitism, he said, "If it was ever brought up at a meeting I'd remember it, and it never was." "Mr. Siegenthaler says it was—that he brought it up. I don't know whether it was a full meeting of the committee, of course," I said.

"If it ever was, it was just the opinion of someone," he faltered. "You can go over those principles we adopted and not find a trace of anti-Semitism. Why, if there was any, how could a Christian gentleman subscribe to it?"

"Mr. Siegenthaler couldn't, I take it."

ON ONE of several trips to Baltimore to inquire about American Action, Inc., I called at the Park Avenue house of the wealthy ex-America Firster, Mrs. Theodore Forbes, who is on the letterhead of AA, Inc., as a patron. I never did get to see Mrs. Forbes, and my talk with her on the telephone was brief, but in the hour or more I waited in her home I had a most interesting discussion with her mother. I told her I was a writer, interested in learning about American Action, Inc. She knew nothing

about it. "My daughter is on so many committees and runs around so much for all these things, I can't keep up with her," said the mother, Mrs. John Chew, who is eighty-four. Mrs. Forbes is sixty.

Later I reached Mrs. Forbes by telephone. I told her I was with NEW MASSES and that I was writing something about American Action, and was waiting in her home. "I think Mr. Haushalter and the others are just wonderful," said Mrs. Forbes. "I really haven't given much money to the committee and I'm not very active, but I'll be glad to talk to you." I had to depart before she arrived home and several subsequent calls failed to reach her. But Mrs. Chew, who said she and her daughter thought alike, gave me an earful.

She was lying on a chaise-longue in an upstairs bedroom when a maid showed me in. Across her knees was a Chicago Tribune, and a pile of them lay nearby. "We just couldn't live without the Tribune," she said. "I was just reading about Senator (Gerald K.) Nye's farewell speech in the Senate," pointing to a top head, page one story. "Senator Nye is a very wise man." She sighed. "Of course we think Roosevelt's crazy. Don't you think he's the tool of a regular gang?"

"Do you mean gangsters?" I asked.

"Yes—that Communist—who is he? Oh, yes, I have it—Hillman." She went on, alternately stroking her dog and her latest copy of the Tribune: "Mr. Forbes thinks Mrs. Roosevelt is a Communist through and through. Of course I don't know what you think but I think anyone is just crazy who would vote for a man who is a cripple from the waist on down." She uttered the last words slowly, with apparent relish. Old age ("You'd never think me eighty-four, would you?" she said archly, and you wouldn't) had obviously produced none of the milder human sentiments in Mrs. Chew. Looking closely at me and noticing, I presume, some traces of the revulsion I felt at her words, she then said in amazement, "I guess you don't feel as strongly about the New Deal as I do."

"No," I said, "but I can see how you feel, reading the Tribune regularly." She agreed, and went on, "I think he's just in control of the Communists and that we'll all be fingerprinted and told what to do."

Did she mean as a postwar measure? No, just any day now. She glanced at the Tribune and mused: "I don't know

why our boys have to die for Poland.”
“For Poland?” I inquired. Yes, I had heard correctly. “Yes, it comes down to that,” said Mrs. Chew. “Britain got us into this war and she went to war over Poland.”

She told me she was the widow of Dr. John Chew, one of the founders of the Henrotin Hospital in Chicago. “Do you remember the house at Scott and Astor?” she asked when I told her I was from Chicago. “That was our house. I sold it for \$90,000, though it cost less than half of that. That Jew who lived in that block wanted it—so

I let him have it.” She laughed. We chatted of various residents of the Gold Coast. I didn’t tell her that I knew them through having been a reporter on the *Tribune*. “I forget names of my friends some times,” she said. “I’m getting old. Sometimes I just get out my copy of the *Chicago Social Register* and look it over and then all the names come flooding back, and whose grandchild married whom.

“My daughter is working most of the time now on the equal rights amendment,” she said later. “They think in Washington that no one can do any-

thing but her. I don’t know—” she smoothed her handsome white hair—“they’ve been working on it and talking about it for twenty-five years. I’m tired of it.”

When I returned to Baltimore I called Mrs. Forbes again. “You can reach her at the National Woman’s Party in Washington,” the maid said. But at party headquarters, where hope is high and funds plentiful for the attempt to put over the reactionary so-called equal rights amendment, it was said Mrs. Forbes was busy seeing Senators.

A SOLDIER’S SOLDIER

By Pfc. NATHAN GROSS as told to DAVID McKELVY WHITE

Pfc. Gross of New York is now home on a twenty-one day leave after thirty-four months of service in the Pacific theater—twenty-one of them in New Guinea. He is a veteran of the Spanish war for democracy, where he saw action for fourteen months as a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. David McKelvy White, former English instructor at Brooklyn College, is executive secretary of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

WHEN I went to look up Herman Bottcher at Aitape in New Guinea in September 1944, I already knew that he was very much alive. A couple of months before, I had come across one of the men under his command and had asked him about the rumor that I had heard of Bottcher’s death.

“Bottcher dead?” he had exclaimed indignantly. “Where have you been? Don’t you know you can’t kill Bottcher?”

Apparently welcoming the opportunity to talk about his commanding officer, he had gone on to tell me how lucky the men of the Division Reconnaissance Troop considered themselves. What he said confirmed everything I had heard about Bottcher’s great popularity with his men and the reasons for their confidence and enthusiasm.

Captain Bottcher was a “soldier’s soldier” and a “soldier’s officer.” He had a remarkable ability to combine authority and friendliness. Never did I hear him spoken of with anything but the highest respect. Yet his men always thought of him as one of themselves. Whether in camp or in the jungle, he would not tolerate any form of favoritism. His men had confidence in the fairness and impartiality of his judgment and always felt free to bring their problems and disagreements and beefs for his decision. They were grateful, too, to an officer who would often sit down and talk with them and help them with his wide practical experience in the tricky art of jungle fighting.

I walked through the gathering dusk toward the tent where I was told I would find him.

There were five or six men in the tent. When I asked for Captain Bottcher, a rather short, stocky man stepped forward. His lean face was strong and self-assured, but his manner, even before he knew who I was, was open and friendly. When I introduced myself, saying that I also had served in the Lincoln Brigade in Spain, he grasped me

warmly by the hand and at once wanted to know how I was making out in New Guinea. At this point, the other men, who I now realize were his subordinate officers, announced that they were going to the movies. Bottcher interrupted my offer to return at another time, told the others to go on without him, and asked me to sit down.

Waving aside a cigarette with a smile and the remark that not smoking saved him “a lot of grief,” Captain Bottcher recalled the grim tobacco shortage in Spain. We found that we had fought not far from one another, but in different companies, in the very tough Sierra Pandols defense, toward the close of the Ebro action in the summer of 1938.

We must have talked together for two hours or more, over a wide range of subjects, but it was hard to get him to talk about himself. He would not speak at all of the famous Buna campaign, where he won his commission, his Distinguished Service Cross, and his world-wide renown. He regarded that as a closed chapter and seemed no longer much interested in it. He did talk some, with a quiet but deep satisfaction, of his patrols far behind the Japanese line, but most of what he said was in a more or less light vein. He remarked, for example, that his troop ate better in the jungle than they did behind our own lines, that often they had “bananas and cream for breakfast,” bananas from the jungle and canned cream parachuted from an occasional supply plane. It was not from Bottcher that I learned that the Japanese themselves could not live from the land through which he moved with such skill and that of the 60,000 enemy troops bottled up by the Americans, many thousands starved to death. Of one thing, however, Bottcher spoke seriously and with pride—of the phenomenally few losses in dead and wounded incurred on his frequent and dangerous reconnaissance expeditions.

America has lost a great soldier. In the five years he carried arms against fascism—two in Spain and three in the South Pacific—Captain Bottcher built up a rich fund of military experience. He was courageous and determined, and he knew why he was fighting. He will live on in the inspiration he provided for all our troops in the Pacific, for the example he gave the American people in his steadfast fight for freedom.

Perhaps, after all, the soldier in his command was right when he said, “Don’t you know you can’t kill Bottcher?”