

Book World



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Antisemitic History: The Fate of the 6 Million

DENYING THE HOLOCAUST **The Growing Assault on** **Truth and Memory**

By Deborah E. Lipstadt
Free Press, 278 pp. \$22.95

By Paul Johnson

ANTISEMITISM is one of the oldest and most persistent of human delusions. Some Jews resignedly believe it is ineradicable. It is protean and takes countless different forms, so that it is peculiarly resistant to empirical disproof: Nailed in one shape, it instantly reappears in another, often contradictory one. The fact of the Holocaust ought to have ended antisemitism everywhere, forever. The characteristic response of the antisemites has been to deny that it happened, and to posit the existence of yet another secret Jewish conspiracy to foist onto a gullible world the myth that six million Jews were killed by the Nazis.

In fact, Holocaust-denial is now the fastest-growing and probably the commonest form of antisemitism. In the United States, where it appears regularly on the campus and in innumerable extremist publications of both Left and Right, it is easily given a current political context. Thus: "Each year a foreign govern-

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ment literally steals millions of dollars from you and other U.S. taxpayers. The thief is the corrupt, bankrupt government of Israel . . . And the theft is perpetrated primarily through the clever use of the Greatest Lie in all history—the lie of the 'Holocaust.' "

This particular statement was put out by an organization called the Institute for Historical Research, a pseudo-academic body that has been one of the most energetic exponents of Holocaust-denial. In 1979 it held the first "Revisionist Convention" in Los Angeles. The IHR had been founded the year before by Lewis Brandon, who was born in 1951 in Northern Ireland and has a long record of fascist activities on both sides of the Atlantic. His real name was William David McCalden, though he also operated as David Stanford, David Berg, Sonda Ross and David Finkelstein. Behind McCalden was an older man called Willis Carto, identified by the Anti-Defamation League as the most important and professional antisemite in the United States. Born in 1926 in Indiana, Carto was a member of the John Birch Society until he quarreled with its founder, Robert Welch. He then set up his own organization, which eventually emerged as the Liberty Lobby and by the 1980s had an annual income of close to \$4 million. This financed the IHR and its publication, *Spotlight*, which by the early 1980s claimed a circulation of 330,000 and was connected with other antisemitic outlets such as the *American Mercury*, *Washington Observer Newsletter* and

—Continued on page 14

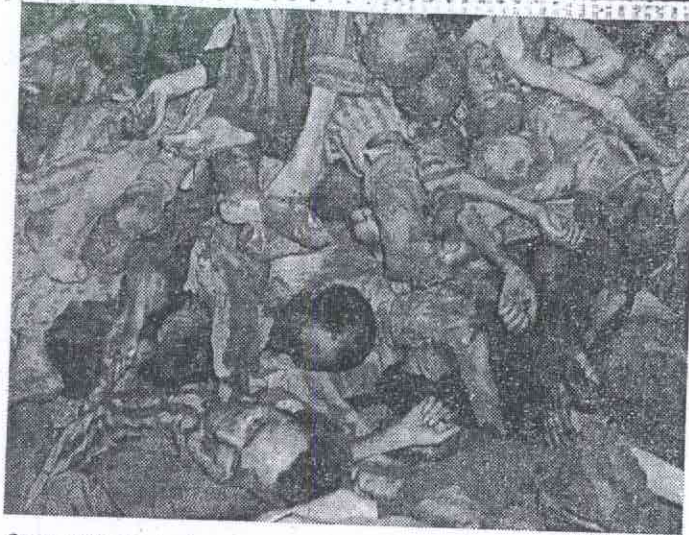
Denying The Holocaust

Continued from page 1

Noontide press. All assiduously propagate Holocaust-denial.

The U.S. is not the only country where this form of antisemitism flourishes. It is to be found all over Europe, particularly in France and in former communist states, in Latin America and even in Japan, where Jews are rare but extremist groups plentiful. It takes many forms. Some deniers say that the Holocaust was a complete fabrication from start to finish. Others, such as President Tudjman of Croatia, claim that the numbers of Jews killed has been hugely and deliberately exaggerated: Tudjman insists that only 900,000 Jews died. Another approach is to produce "scientific evidence" that Jews who died in the death camps could not have been killed in the way historians and war-crimes tribunals have asserted. In particular, deniers claim that Zyklon-B gas was totally inappropriate as a homicidal agent. A Boston engineer called Fred A. Leuchter, who specialized in constructing execution apparatuses, was sent out to Auschwitz and Majdanek to collect "forensic samples" and on his return produced a report that concluded there had never been homicidal gasings at these sites. Yet another common tactic is to attack the authenticity of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which has sold over 20 million copies in scores of countries as well as being made into a prize-winning play and movie. For countless people, it personifies the tragedy and horror of the Holocaust. But deniers claim that the *Diary* is a post-war invention, written by a professional New York playwright in collaboration with Anne Frank's father.

DEBORAH LIPSTADT, who teaches religious studies at Emory University and who has already



Some of the dead prisoners found by the U.S. Seventh Army at Dachau

written a useful work on the presentation of the original Holocaust story in the American media, has now produced a documented history of the rise and spread of Holocaust-denial. Her object was two-fold. First, she wanted to establish—and does so beyond any doubt—that denial activities in no case spring from genuine efforts to question or revise established history or from any concern for the truth, but are conducted by convinced fanatics whose antisemitism long antedated any "scientific" interest in Holocaust studies. A few gullible fish, like Noam Chomsky, may have been hooked, but the vast majority of explicit deniers are motivated simply by hatred of Jews. Second, Lipstadt fears that in today's intellectual climate of deconstruction, where it is a campus game to overturn established truth and values, Holocaust-denial is finding a receptive audience among young

people.

If the second point is valid, and I fear that it is, Lipstadt has produced an effective antidote. By simply tracing the origins and spread of denial-theory and its endless manifestations, she provides the best possible refutation of its conclusions by demonstrating, with names, dates and quotations, that it has from start to finish been inextricably associated with extremists of the vilest kind. She shows that the arguments of the deniers, when they are specifically formulated, have no scientific or historical basis. The book is particularly useful in demolishing the Zyklon-B and Anne Frank versions of the slander. It is, in fact, an essential text that journalists and teachers ought to have handy whenever this form of antisemitism makes its appearance.

Some will question Lipstadt's wisdom in dealing with the subject at such length, thereby giving it further publicity. They are mistaken. There are really only two effective ways of dealing with blatant antisemitism. One is the use of the law: Lipstadt shows that specific statutes have been employed both in Europe and Canada to expose and combat Holocaust-deniers, and that even in the United States, where freedom of

speech, however outrageous, is zealously protected by the First Amendment, litigation was successfully conducted against the IHR. These court cases are most instructive. Although, as Lipstadt says, a law court is not the ideal arena for establishing historical truth, it is an objective forum whose findings are generally accepted by the public, and in every case where the reality of the Holocaust has been tested there, it has eventually been vindicated.

Moreover, the fact that evidence of the Holocaust has been successfully validated in the courts makes it easier to pursue the second method of dealing with the plague: to destroy its intellectual respectability. In the long run, the only way to eradicate antisemitism is to make it impossible for any politician, journalist, writer or academic who holds antisemitic views, including Holocaust-denial, to be taken seriously. We have come a long way since 1945 in attaining this objective, and in the end we shall get there. Lipstadt's book is an important step forward because it means that, henceforth, any opinion-former who tries to deal in this particular antisemitic coin can easily be shown to be using false currency. ■