

Anti-Semitism and Revolution

Bernard Lazare

1899

My dear Jacques:

It's a long time since I've written to you. Work has been tough for the past few months, and I came home in the evening so exhausted that I didn't have the heart to read. I went to bed and slept like a log until the time to go back to the factory. I have to admit that during these days of hard labor I envied you your fate; and while I sweated in front of the furnace I had a vision of you peacefully standing before your cases composing a book you would then read.

The last couple of weeks things have finally calmed down, so I once again took up my reading, and I naturally need your advice. Benoit the bookseller — you know him, I think; the little old man who has a store at the corner of your street and rue Neuve — loaned me a copy of *La France Juive* by Drumont, and I just finished the first volume. The book left me perplexed, and I'm going to frankly explain why.

You know that if I've become something more than a beast of burden I owe it to you. You educated me, you taught me a little — too little, alas! — history; you made me familiar with books of those who were friends of the people; you taught me that our future well-being was a little bit up to we proletarians; and finally, you showed me who our enemies were, how we'd been domesticated by capital and what needed to be done to escape the jug that brutalized us. Perhaps it's because I haven't seen you in a while, or because you haven't supported me through your letters, but I found that Drumont — who nevertheless is not in agreement with you on many points — says things that are correct and good. I leave aside his religious pretensions and his avowed wish to place us once again under the domination of the Mother Church — from which we were just delivered — but putting that aside it seemed to me that his work wasn't bad. He seems to know a lot about French history, and even ancient history, and he must be a well-educated person. He isn't always in agreement with the little manual that you sent me, but I'm not sure that the little manual is correct, since it doesn't talk about the Jews, and Drumont makes it abundantly clear that it has always been the Jews who have brought on the misery of poor buggers by exploiting them *in every possible way*. The proof is that they have been massacred, and there were always good reasons for doing so. According to Drumont, poverty used to be less terrible — and I believe him with no difficulty, for I see all of the unfortunates there are around us. He is perhaps correct when he assures us that if distress and despair have increased it's because we have allowed the Jews to live freely, that we know longer make them surrender to us, that we've let them pillage and rob everything at their ease, that we've permitted them to

put their hands on finance, commerce, industry in such a way that today they are the masters of France, that they own everything and are the cause of the misery of the proletariat. They have also corrupted morality, they've made money the modern god, they solicited consciences and then bought them, and they have demoralized the Aryans.

How is it that you never spoke to me about all this? I'm really surprised. Do you find that his ideas aren't correct, and the affirmations of Drumont exaggerated? I'd really like you to give me your opinion on this. But until you've proved the contrary, I'm quite ready to believe that if — according to Drumont's counsels — we put in place a chamber of justice with the charge of seizing the throats of financiers; if we took measures to prevent the Jews from invading and cheating us, everything would be better. In any event, we don't go to their Jerusalem, so why do they come here?

Answer me quickly, my dear Jacques, because this question interests me a great deal. I talk about this every day with Benoit, who's very anti-Semitic and, I have to tell you, he has converted me a little bit. If Benoit is wrong I really need your arguments to prove him wrong. Do your best, because I'm going to show him your letter.

I shake your hand. Your friend.

Jean

My dear Jean:

Let me tell you that I was very happy to receive your letter, since I was afraid that you had been ill. You're good, work is okay, you're not unemployed, the little ones can have their feet warm and the stomachs full: all this is excellent. I would like it if all the comrades were like you; that they have a tranquil spirit and the time to read and discuss in order to form their ideas. Your epistle pleased me: I see that you are still every bit as ardent in your desire to learn, and it put me in mind of our talks of four years ago.

You haven't changed since then, Jean; you are still the same: the best of proselytes, and you are quick to get annoyed. Don't make that face; you know I'm right, and you are quickly swept up. So sit astride your chair, take your head in your hands and listen to me. We're going to talk a little bit about what interests you.

So you think these Jewish scoundrels have conquered France, if not the world; that they've infected us with every sin, with every vice; that they are our masters, that they govern us at the same time that they cause us to rot; and you think that if we did away with them Golden Age would be reborn on Earth, because France would belong to the French, Germany to the Germans, Russia to the Russians, etc. When I say that you think so, I mean that Benoit made you think this, and that Drumont made Benoit believe this. So it's Drumont that I must respond to. If you will, I'm going to summarize in a few lines anti-Semitic theory.

"The Jews," Drumont and others say, "are Asiatics, Orientals, strangers, different from us in race and constitution. They can't understand our ideas and our feelings. They contribute to the altering of the French spirit; they're immoral and have no notion of the just; they corrupt Christians who, without them, would possess all virtues. Finally, it's to them that we owe all the excesses of the capitalist regime. They are the cause of "the nation's agony" which is under the subjection of a minuscule minority. Thanks to this "foreign body introduced into a body that had been healthy until then;" thanks to him, "money, to which the Christian world attached only a secondary importance" — for example, the conquest of the New World by the most Christian of nations — "has become all-powerful. If we were strictly between Aryans everything would be much better. We've been Jew-ified."

As you see, my good Jean, Drumont, whose phrases you will recognize, see things every bit as clearly when he says “the Duke de la Rochefoucauld and Prince Kropotkin have more or less the same ideas concerning property;” and that “the notion of good and evil is equally obliterated in both of them.” Let’s leave aside the Aryan and Semite question — I’ll return to it — we’ll talk about it and you’ll see that there are neither Aryan nor Semitic peoples, and that all these beautiful phrases that oppose the noble Aryan to the vile Semite are empty and prove only the complete ignorance of those who write them.

In reality, the anti-Semites are all simplistic spirits, a little naïve and often little educated. They proceed a bit like those savages who don’t see very clearly the true causes of events, and who take one phenomenon as the cause of another, simply because these two phenomena occur at the same time. Let’s suppose that the very day a house burned down we had noticed that it had been invaded by rats. Would you say that the rats provoked the fire, or were the cause? No, right? Nevertheless, this is the way Anti-Semites reason.

They find themselves in the presence of an extremely complex organization, one that is the result of a slow economic development, and where the reign of capital — the triumph of money, of financial and industrial royalty — are only the end term. They only consider the present, and they attribute to the Jews what is in reality the result of thousands of causes which have acted over the course of centuries. But the Anti-Semites ignore the centuries long labor that prepared the current capitalist domination. They don’t seem to know that in order to bring on the preponderance of the contemporary bourgeoisie two great expansionist movements were necessary: the Crusades — the moment when the Orient began to civilize the brutal and barbaric Occident — and the discovery of America. The multiple colonizations by Spain, Portugal, England, Holland, and France were needed, as were all the efforts of the commercial regime. The establishment of public credit and the extension of the great banks was needed. The development of industrial manufacture and scientific progress, which brought with it the creation and the perfecting of machines was needed. Full legislative elaboration concerning wages, up to the moment where — under the French Revolution — the bourgeoisie even took from the proletariat the rights of association and coalition was needed. Many other causes were necessary. moral, historical and religious ones in order to create bourgeois society. And they say that the Jews did all that! Really, now! Those who can say such a thing lie knowingly, or they are possessed of an ignorance that is absolute and stupefying. There are no other choices.

I know that many Anti-Semites imperturbably say: “Everything was going along for the best in France, in the land of the lily, faithful to God and his king. Authority was respected, as were holy things; altruism was practiced, the monarchs — fathers of the people- were cherished , as were the nobles, who were ready to defend the little people. There were no Jews then; we were among Frenchmen, and we always get along best when we are among family.”

That’s why, after years of ignominies and misery, the people covered the coffin of Louis XIV with mud and insults; that’s why the history of France can be written as a history of the revolts of the unhappy people, oppressed by those who were then the capitalist class, the capitalist of the land — who were every bit as tough as the capitalists of speculation: the nobles and the clergy who joined the bourgeoisie as soon as they could.

You are told that it’s only today that financiers have the upper hand and live off the poor; you are told that it’s only today that corruption is the master, and that it’s the Jews who have perverted the descendants of the nobles and the sons of the Gauls. These are lies, my poor Jean. Under Louis XIII and Louis XIV — and I don’t want to go any further back — the traders were

already masters. If you read the memoirs written during these times — those of Tallemant des Réaux, for example — you will see how rapacious they were, how they built their fortunes, how they held the upper hand and how the nobility — while mocking them — married their daughters and lived off them. Cupidity was every bit as frightful as today, and it clearly demonstrated this when, under the regency of the Duc d'Orléans, the Scotsman Law came here to apply his system, founded his bank and his Company of the Indies. Everyone then speculated, was thirsty for money and wanted to get it by whatever means. Duchesses were at Law's feet; they kissed his hands in order to get a few shares from him, which led the mother of the Regent to say: "If duchesses act like that what will the other women leave him?" The Papal Nuncio attended the Scotsman's parties; dukes and princes asked to marry his daughter — who was then eight years old. Marquis and counts took as fathers-in-law the most notoriously tainted of speculators and were content to let their wives go when the dowry was devoured and the system collapsed. Then when everything seemed to be compromised, the great speculators converted their bad paper for good marketable values; they took control of all subsistence. It was a time when the Duke de la Force — peer of France, president of the Council of Finance and Commerce — with the complicity of the convent of the Grands Augustins took over several millions worth of food and necessities. The Duke d'Antin, the Duke de Guiche, the Marshal of Estrées did the same thing, and their convents were their storehouses. To set an example — which is to say: forced by the clamor and the anger of the people — the government condemned to the galleys... the steward of the Duke de la Force.

At the same time Father La Valette, a Jesuit, the Superior of Missions in Martinique and a big merchant, went bankrupt to the sum of three million, but was surpassed by another celebrated bankrupt: the Prince of Guémenée. As for the clergy, they got out of this — after Law's fall — by a fraud; they authorized themselves to pay their debts with bills that had no value.. But, you will say, there were the High Courts of Justice. From time to time the bloodsuckers were made to cough up. Yes. When the treasury was misappropriated to such a point that it was empty the cashbox was filled by other financiers who were chosen to squander it again. Let's talk about the High Courts of Justice. In 1716 the ruined nobles had the people rise up against the financiers. They enriched themselves at the expense of the traders, leaving their allies as empty-handed as before. The people danced in front of the buffet, while at this time the people of the royal court and the judges filled their pockets; and the Duke de Saint-Simon could say of Lamoignon, who presided over the Chamber of Justice: "He earned much money there, and dishonored himself." Dishonor was mediocre, for everyone did the same as him. Courtesans sold their influence and received bribes to stop judicial proceedings and blackmailed the recalcitrant.

Do you find their mores very different from those of today? No, right? Well, at that time the Jews were nothing. Do you know how many there were in Paris at that time? 110, of which four were bakers, the others merchants, second-hand dealers or metal- or stone-engravers.

Do you think it was 110 Jews who brought about this corruption? No. This decrepitude was the sign of the end of a regime, and it's the same today. When the Anti-Semites talk about France's agony they are wrong: it's only the agony of the bourgeoisie, and it's not the 80,000 Jews of France who brought it about, not any more than the 8,000,000 Jews on Earth who are causing the death of capitalist society. Think of what 8,000,000 Jews can do among the 1,500,000,000 people who live on the planet; or, if you want to consider only those of the white race, among 507,000,000 people.

Anti-Semitism, my poor Jean, is good for priests, reactionaries and bourgeois, for they are the only ones who can — or who hope — to get something from this. Thanks to anti-Semitism they hope to escape the blows that threaten them and to reinforce their power. By maintaining, fomenting, spreading anti-Semitism priests hope to turn back anticlericalism; reaction hopes to strangle the Republic and rebuild the throne; and the bourgeoisie — Christian or Voltairian — to save its cashbox. As for you and me — poor buggers and proletarians — what can we expect of this movement? Nothing at all, and our situation will not have changed.

A certain number of Anti-Semites — and Drumont is among them — tell you that the French Revolution was an abomination because it overturned the old Christian state; and they tell you — without laughing — that it's the Jew who made the revolution due to hatred of Jesus Christ. Send them back to school and ask them if they want you to believe any old thing. The Revolution was **our** labor, and if Jews participated in it I don't hold it against them; not any more than I wish ill for Karl Marx, or Lasalle — who were Israelites. To the contrary! I like these Jews better than I do Drumont who, deep down, along with all Christian anti-Semitism, hates the modern spirit and sees salvation in religion and faith, which is to say, in intellectual and moral oppression and imbecility. Distrust these people, Jean. They want to realize the reign of God, and the reign of God, you see, is the reign of barbarism, stupidity, ignorance and tyranny.

You will say that not all Anti-Semites are religious. It's true. Apart from Catholic and Protestant Anti-Semites — who tell you the Jew is dangerous because he is anti-Christian — there are the patriotic Anti-Semites. These latter gravely announce that France is the Queen of Nations, that all other peoples are inferior to it, and nothing bad can come from that national divinity. So if evil exists in France — if there are exploiters of the poor world, dishonest speculators, bribers, blackmailers — the fault belongs to the foreigners who corrupt the noble Gauls and, naturally, the Jews. This is the concept of a vain simpleton, that the French chauvinist shares with the German chauvinist, the Italian chauvinist, with all chauvinists. Didn't Benhazin have himself called the King of Kings, and didn't he consider the people of Dahomey the most perfect of people? These are nothing but words, and if there were no foreigners in France you'd still have to work the same 12 hours to earn your meager livelihood. Distrust this patriotic egoism, this national protectionism: it will one day cost you dearly. It's with this that they will one day draw out the best of your blood. Distrust pseudo-socialists who declare that if your salaries are low it's the fault of foreign workers and Jews, and that you'll be happier when both will have been chased away. How happy the bourgeois would be if he could push you against your brothers in misery, against your companions at the factory, and so save his skin.

But let's go back to the Jews. Do you think you will have gotten anywhere the day you'll have chased from France — or massacred — little Jacob, the neighbor you know who is a rug worker and earns five francs a day when he's not unemployed, which happens 100 days of the year? Will you have resolved the social question when little Jacob will have disappeared? Your neighbor Jacob is an exception, you'll say. But my poor friend, of 8,000,000 Jews, there are 7,000,000 who are in Jacob's situation, or worse. In Russia, in Galicia, in Romania, in Serbia, in Turkey, in London, in New York, in certain neighborhoods in Paris their poverty is horrible. Most of them are artisans and as such they suffer from the social state. They are even among the poorest proletarians, among those with the lowest salaries; one day I'll prove all this to you if you're interested.

There remain a million Jewish capitalists — or petit-bourgeois — in the entire world. The day they tell you that this million oppresses the other hundreds of millions, you'll hurt yourself laughing, and should send your Anti-Semite to learn what he doesn't know. And rest assured that the

day you suppress this million Jews — and others besides — capitalist society will remain the same. Just as it's false to say that the Jews made society what it is, it's false to say that their suppression would bring about a change.

Do you know what result that would have? First there'd be no more Jewish functionaries. But tell me, what difference could that make for you that there are many Jews in administration, in the ministries, in the prefectures, etc.? If you chased them, as the good M. Denis and other excellent bourgeois with sons who need jobs would like, all you'd have would be the mediocre advantage of feeding budgetophages Christians in place of budgetophages Jews. What a happy day that would be for you, no?

The second advantage you'd draw from the suppression of the Jews would be to have nothing but Christian bosses! Do you really believe that it's only the Jews who want to restrict your right to affiliate? Is it they who prepared the new law on unions and strikes? Are they the ones who cause unemployment, or the lowering of salaries? Is it only the Jews who refuse to accept the eight-hour day and systematically reject all our demands? You saw what happened when there weren't any Jews. Take the children of Israel from the world and you'll see if the financial associations, the employers' associations, the trusts, and the capitalist syndicates won't survive. You'll see if, even so, whenever possible the "Sweating-system" — as the English call it — won't be practiced; that is, the art of making the proletarian sweat and killing him on the job.

When it comes down to it, and you should understand this by now, the Anti-Semite simply and naively says to you that it's better to be devoured by Frenchmen from France than by the sons of Abraham. As part of which sauce would you rather be eaten / None, right? So mock those who tell you that only the Jews should be suppressed.

Anti-Semitism isn't very important to you as a proletarian, and it leaves me totally indifferent. Nevertheless, you'll say, it has a cause. For the bourgeois, yes, but as for you, you have no reason to be anti-Semitic. The Jew doesn't wrong you; he can only wrong the capitalist, and anti-Semitism is a struggle of the rich; a combat among those who hold capital. It's the merchant, the financier, the Christian industrialist who have reason to complain about the Jew. The petit-bourgeois devoured by speculation holds the Jew responsible for the state of things of which he is but the least of causes — and I speak of the Jewish financier, that is to say, a handful of individuals in France. But the true reason for bourgeois anti-Semitism is competition, direct competition between the money handlers, between the Jewish and Christian merchants and producers. But we don't suffer any more under Jewish bosses than Protestant or Catholic bosses; on the contrary, since here it's the number of bosses who count, it's not the Jews who are the most numerous. Expel Rothschild and the prisons of Schneider, Lebaudy, Sommier, Chagot, Motte, Harmel, Rességuier, Reille, etc. will still remain standing.

Anti-Semitism is the capitalist bourgeoisie's lightning rod. Wait, let me give you an example. You've heard the story about the voyagers followed in the snow by wolves. They're on their sled, well covered in their furs, and the pack is pursuing them. So to slow down their assault — or to escape them completely — they throw their provisions to the pursuers, and end up sacrificing one of their horses, around which the wolves fight like fools, letting the sled escape. To the unfortunate who suffer, to the proletarians who struggle, the bourgeoisie would like to sacrifice a few dozen Jews, and in this way save the sled full of loot.

What would happen if we were to confiscate the goods of Jewish capitalists? The Christian capitalists would naturally share the remains, and there'd be no limit to their power because they will have suppressed a dangerous competitor. They would then be the only masters, and

we'd have the joy of being exclusively devoured by people Drumont would recognize as good Frenchmen and who will have been carefully baptized.

The Anti-Semites aren't people who share, my poor Jean. They love their potage, and they want to eat it among their family. But they aren't our relatives and they want even less to share with us than with the Jews.

So don't let yourself be taken in by empty phrases. Look closely at what the Anti-Semites are: they are the enemies of everything we hold dear. But Drumont hits all the rich, you'll say. Assuredly if he were capable of reflection, he'd recognize that it is I who am right and that his ideas are false, narrow, incomplete and incorrect; he'd admit that he wrote a bad book. He has now gone too far to dare recognize the mediocrity of his conception. In any event, he is perturbed by the religious hysteria; and if he deludes himself with a great jumble on many points he is as dumb as a stump, and his way of writing history is the same as that of Pere Lorient.

Nevertheless, hasn't he done well? you could ask me. To those who thought him sincere he gave the illusion that he is a demolisher. Leaving aside the historian and the sociologist — who are inferior and negligible — they esteemed Drumont as a destroyer, an agent of disorder, an element of revolution. And my friend Nathan — who is a Jew — thought that he could deliver hard blows at capital and society and that — the irony of things — this representative of the past could serve to prepare a future which would horrify his Christian soul if he could conceive it as it would be.

But it's necessary to back up to see in Drumont what he is; the mouthpiece of idiots who eat their daily Jew; of bourgeois who think of saving their safe deposit boxes; of social parasites who want to be named sub-prefect in M. Abraham's place, or tax collector in M. Nephtari's place. Finally, the agent of our worst enemies; that herd of sacristans who want to bring us into the bosom of the Roman Church, which we had so much difficulty escaping from.

So let that band of bourgeois talk to you about Semites and Aryans; of Aryan conceptions and Semitic corruptions; of Aryan noblesse and Semitic abjection. These are big words that don't have any meaning. Don't worry your head about this: they don't mean anything. There are no Aryans and there are no Semites. There are the poor and there are the rich; exploited and exploiters. There is no Aryan morality and Semitic morality, the one admirable and the other ignoble. There is a universal morality: secular, generous and free; and there are religious moralities: intolerant and particular to a few groups of men degraded by an unreasoning faith. As for the Semitic religions which were rightly depicted to you with such horror, I only know of one that is alive today: it's the Catholic religion, which a great number of Anti-Semites want to restore.

Do these explanations suffice, my good Jean? If they can convince you — which I hope — communicate them to your friend Benoit and tell him to profit by them as well. To those who will from now on come to you to vaunt anti-Semitism, respond that anti-Semitism simply tends to put religious prejudices at the service of commercial and private industrial interests, of the competition between two categories of capitalists, and of the chauvinistic egoism that is one of the forms of this competition.

To those who denounce the Jewish peril before you, respond by attacking capital, whatever kind it might be, Jewish or Christian. Capital without any qualifier. To those who enlist you to cry "Down with Israel!" answer "Down with Capital! Down with property!" and don't go any further than that; don't allow yourself to be distracted from your route by those who want to guide you into an impasse which will lead you to nothing. Finance, speculation, capital, property, in one word, all your enemies are not Jews, they are universal: they are Christian, Muslims, Buddhists.

Be careful not to help them and to compromise the cause by unconsciously supporting theirs. They will laugh at you after you will have foolishly served them as an auxiliary, and they will profit from their victory to better enslave you. *Au revoir*, my dear Jean. If you have any more questions to ask me don't hesitate. In the evening I have the time to answer you.

A hearty handshake from your friend

Jacques

Cc: Bernard Lazare

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Source: *Antisémitisme et Révolution*. Stock Editeur. Paris, 1899. Translated: for marxists.org by Mitch Abidor; CopyLeft: Creative Commons (Attribute & ShareAlike) marxists.org 2005. Edouard Drumont's *La France Juive* (Jewish France) went through 210 printings between its first publication in 1886 and 1941. An amalgamation of all the varieties of anti-Semitism: religious, racial and economic, it reached all classes. Its popularity, along with that of his newspaper *La Libre Parole*, made Drumont a redoubtable figure during the era of the Dreyfus Affair. Lazare wrote the following to counteract his influence among the working class.

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