

## *Anti-Semitism An Old Issue in New Modern Era*

The growth of anti-semitism we are witnessing is part of a general rise of hatreds. In that respect, the world we are living in is very different from the cold war.

I was a student in the Soviet Union. I could get into arguments with the Soviet students, but I never felt personally threatened; I never felt hate, even though I discovered the Soviet educational system had a program of military-patriotic education, which taught hate. I had to admit the program did not work, at least from my personal experience, and I took that for granted.

It cannot be taken for granted anymore. The conflicts we see around the world are so intractable because they are bottom-up, not top-down. This sort of conflict was described by George F. Kennan in his 1913 book on the Balkan wars. "War is waged not only by the armies but by the nations themselves," he explained. "The populations mutually slaughtered and pursued with a ferocity heightened by mutual knowledge and the old hatreds and resentments they cherished."

Why do people hate? We can identify specific reasons for specific conflicts, but ultimately it comes down to George Orwell's formulation in *Animal Farm*: Four legs good, two legs bad.

My group good, your group bad.

When masses of people feel that way, atrocity will result.

There is, of course, another way of looking at the world. Difference can be seen as an opportunity to learn. After all, we cannot improve if we do not have a willingness to change. That is how progress occurs. Anyone who would dispute that should be asked what Italian cuisine would look like if Marco Polo hadn't gone to China.

But progress can be threatening. It can threaten existing power structures, as new sources of wealth and influence emerge. It can threaten value systems, as people struggle to adjust to new ways of doing things. Think of Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*; he tries to adjust to modernity but he can go only so far. His identity is rooted in tradition, and he cannot abandon it completely.

The forces of modernity are now associated with globalization, which is seen as a threat to the nation-state. It is not the first time: the globalization at the end of the 19th century gave rise to economic nationalism, which in turn produced a virulent political nationalism. The result was the sort of bloody conflict that Kennan chronicled.

We can discuss the specific reasons of anti-semitism, but that would fail to understand that it is part of a larger phenomenon affecting the world. For some reason, people are repudiating the idea of a common humanity. Difference, among these people, is not an opportunity to learn; it is an incentive to murder.

And I fear we are only at the beginning of this era.

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