

Theodor Fritsch to Wilhelm Marr on New Tactics for the Struggle against the Jews (1884–85)

Abstract

Theodor Fritsch (1852–1933) was a prolific writer of antisemitic tracts—often published under pseudonyms such as Thomas Frey, Tritz Thor, and F. Roderich Stoltheim. He was also an editor of antisemitic newspapers, journals, and handbooks. The Nazis considered him a pioneer of their movement. Indeed, Fritsch’s historical importance derives from his role as a bridge between two generations of antisemites—and this fits well with his self-fashioned image as a despairing prophet. In 1882, he participated in the First International Anti-Jewish Congress [*Erster Internationaler Antijüdischer Kongreß*] in Dresden. In 1887, he published the *Antisemitic Catechism* [*Antisemiten-Katechismus*] under the name Thomas Frey: it became one of the most widely read antisemitic works of the day. In 1902, Fritsch founded the Hammer publishing house, Hammer-Verlag, which existed up to 1940. During the First World War, he participated in several political initiatives by the radical Right and contributed to the increasing prominence of antisemitism within the Pan-German League. The following excerpts are from Fritsch’s letters to Wilhelm Marr (1819–1904), another antisemitic publicist who first coined the term “antisemitism.” In this correspondence, the two men express divergent views about the present state of the antisemitic movement in Germany, its future prospects, and the profit motive driving some of its representatives. Fritsch, the younger man, advances more radical views than Marr, whom he addresses in the salutation (not included here) of the first letter as “Herr W. Marr, Pessimistic Ober-Antisemite in Hamburg.” Marr describes the Jews in terms that are as pernicious as those used later during the Third Reich.

Source

I.

Leipzig, May 8, 1884

[...]

I am as much concerned as you are about the present situation of antisemitism. I am also looking tirelessly for a lever with which to overturn the Jewish world. As long as we come as beggars, we cannot win the love of the people. Love needs a proud beloved, like a king, not like a crawling beggar. Power and *success* are the decisive factors in acquiring the sympathy of the masses, and as long as power and *success* are on the Jewish side the hearts of the multitudes will go out to them. You know the expression: “The Jews do it cleverly, *that* way they come to something; that is the way for things to be done.” The Jews are nowadays an object of envy for the majority of the people. Only when antisemitism achieves a striking, i.e., a *resounding* success [...] will the whole world become antisemitic too, out of deep persuasion!

[...] There must be “*profit*”! — Otherwise, nobody is going to swallow the bait of antisemitism. (Most of the present skirmishing antisemites provide the proof themselves; they would not make half so much noise if they did not expect to gain something by it—they are “business-antisemites.”)

But now, dear Marr, comes the real problem: we have nothing to spare; how could we give to *everybody* without taking from anyone? The Jewish problem is solved when you find the “trick” —not a moment before. And, by God, I believe I might be allowed to shout “Eureka.” A plan has been simmering in my

mind for quite a long time—by the way a very simple one—which may fulfill my hopes. The quintessence of the matter is of course the isolation of the Jews, not through platonic principles, but by practical deeds.

I do not want to betray any part of the plan right away, because I am somewhat superstitious—it seems to me always as if the power to do something melts away when the Idea is put into words.

Besides, I belong in the matter of the Jews to the “radicalism.” I regard it as no misfortune if “crude popular force” is used as salt to get rid of the leeches. Still, I have nothing against a few hypocritical expressions of regret in the newspapers. There must be some consideration given because of the existing misunderstandings.

The way I picture the real Jewish character nowadays, it is impossible to accept him as a *human being*, because I can find no trace of any real human trait in him. I accept to some extent the theological Weltanschauung: God creates vermin as a challenge to man. Where dirt piles up vermin multiply, and to get rid of the tormenting vermin we have to remove the dirt and try to keep them away. In this way vermin become a motivation for purification and also the source of all cultural development and refinement. Distorted Jewish logic would at this point conclude that one must honour and cultivate the vermin as the “carriers of culture.” Undistorted human logic comes to another conclusion. Culture does not arise from the *cultivation* of vermin, but exists and consists in *fighting* them. Here you have my entire confession of faith: it is the mission of the Jews to torment humanity, and it is the mission of humanity to trample on the Jews.

It is no wonder that God gave the Jews a shape which closely resembles the human one. The Creator had no problem in using the usual vermin against animals and plants, but man is more sophisticated and knows how to defend himself against common parasites in various ways; so He needed a special sort of *shrewd vermin* in order to force man to exert his mental faculties to the utmost. God probably had to rack His brains for a long time looking for a solution but finally He invented the Jews: vermin disguised as human beings! This was certainly one of the meanest tricks God Almighty ever played on man. The present generation is not yet mature enough to understand this divine jape. But as long as man was not wise enough to grasp these things Providence provided him with another means to keep him from being misled: this was the divine instinct. In earlier times people felt instinctively that there was a clear distinction between the human being and the Jew, that in the Jew there was something false, something hostile that gave the lie to his outer appearance. Today this super-sophisticated generation has forfeited that little instinct, without acquiring however the wisdom with which to replace it, as I said before. There are today a small number who live by their instincts, and they show more understanding of the Jewish problem than the “liberal” and “enlightened” men of reason.

II.

April 7, 1885

[...] Our poor and divided Antisemitic Party has lost so much face because of the disunity of its “leaders” (or rather those who get things done) who threw mud at each other. That has also caused doubts and distrust from within, so that a new step along these lines will perhaps finish the party off. Possibly. But also possibly it might bring about a *gradual*—but only a very gradual —recovery and strengthening.

A great part of the more sensitive and decent antisemites have already become resentful and reserved because of the behaviour of these busybodies: the moment it suddenly became known that these fellows—who still exert a certain fascination over the larger mass of naive and uneducated antisemites—are all *swindlers*, all trust in antisemitism will be lost. Who is going to believe that the new “leaders” who push themselves to the front are the right, the better and the more credible ones? Wouldn't they assume that you and—me—or whoever participates in this activity want to displace the

others out of pure jealousy?

Certainly! Those half-blooded Jew-Antisemites *must be thrown off*; they obstruct the development of the movement and discredit it. I can't stand the clumsiness and foolishness of Grousilliers[1] and Pinkert any more than that of Schmeitzner. (Simony is still the one with the most grit, knowledge and aptitude; he impressed me very much in the Dresden congress.)[2]

[...]

III.

Leipzig, July 1, 1885

In its outward appearance, antisemitism (or at least the antisemites) has become more or less bankrupt. Stoecker has been throttled, the *Volkszeitung* is defunct and with it Liebermann[3] has disappeared from the picture for the time being; he wants to emigrate; Otto Hentze[4] offers me his antisemitic publishing house; Schmeitzner busies himself with the lighting business after failing to enlighten his century spiritually; Pinkert too looks like he is falling apart; he is going to print the "Reform" of 1st July with Luckhardt, Berlin; Glagau's[5] *Culturkämpfer* appears only sporadically—Henrici is silent; Förster[6] plays only a guest role here; old Marr speaks about dying—one of these days I am going to find myself the *sole antisemite*—and the last is always the one who gets caught.

[...]

Nonetheless if I could have my way, I would like to found a weekly, as you advised me to do time and again. I already nursed that idea myself for a long time, but I do not belong to those people anymore who build castles in the air. A broad and safe foundation must be laid first, and this implies a long preparation. I am not thinking only of a *material* foundation, but above all of a true core of people (co-workers and readers as well!).

I want first to convince myself that there still exist some convinced, energetic, in a word—sturdy antisemites. In the meantime, they do not make themselves heard.

These "entrepreneur-antisemites" who now float on the surface are, as a matter of fact, absolutely unreliable fellows: they burst like soap bubbles under the slightest pressure, and will disperse like "chaff in the wind."

[...]

NOTES

[1] Hector de Grousilliers, one of the co-founders of the Antisemitic League, author of *Nathan der Weise und die Antisemiten-Liga*. (All footnotes taken from: Moshe Zimmermann, "Two Generations in the History of German Antisemitism: The Letters of Theodor Fritsch to Wilhelm Marr," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 23 (1978): pp. 95–97.)

[2] The congress, meeting in September 1882, brought antisemitic delegates from Germany, Austro-Hungary, Russia, and France together, and was followed by more antisemitic congresses until 1900.

[3] Max Liebermann von Sonnenberg (1848–1911), co-founder in 1881 of the *Deutscher Volksverein*, a conservative antisemite who was one of the main leaders of German antisemitism during its first period, editor of *Die Wahrheit*, author of *Beiträge zur Geschichte der antisemitischen Bewegung vom Jahre 1880–1885*, Berlin 1885. Later a member of the Reichstag (1890) as a representative of the Deutschland Partei and Deutschsoziale Reformpartei.

[4] O. Hentze, publisher of the *Deutsche Wacht* from 1879, and other antisemitic publications.

[5] Otto Glagau (1838–1892), like Marr and Wagner an antisemite who was previously a left radical. For eight years, from 1880, he was the publisher of the antisemitic *Culturkämpfer*; he reacted in several articles and books to the “Börsenschwindel” immediately after the crisis of 1873, for which he blamed the Jews.

[6] Ernst Henrici, editor of the *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, 1881; as early as 1880, organized the Soziale Reichspartei, one of the most extreme antisemites in the “Berlin Movement” in the early eighties. Bernhard Förster (1843–1889), co-founder of the *Deutscher Volksverein*, 1881, Nietzsche’s brother-in-law, one of the main organizers of the “Antisemitic Petition” of 1880; wrote *Richard Wagner in seiner nationalen Bedeutung*, 1882, *Das Verhältniss des modernen Judenthums zur deutschen Kunst*, 1889.

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