

# Arendt's Eichmann and Jewish Identity

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I

A NUMBER OF THE BEARDED, black-garbed Jews who help to make the Lower East Side "picturesque" are slumlords. The aging buildings they scraped to mortgage or lease, and now cannot afford to repair, are the locus of rent strikes staged by Negro and Puerto Rican tenants who see the old-country Jews (and the several slumlord Rabbis) as greedy, shrewd, Jewish exploiters — the traditional anti-Semitic stereotype — rather than as bent, suffering Jewish believers — the traditional Semitic stereotype. A friend of mine, fluent in Yiddish and Spanish, but swarthy enough to pass for Italian and somewhat implausibly, on the Lower East Side, for Hispano-American, accompanied a Puerto Rican grandmother to the office of her *Chasidic* landlords, to help her complain about some undated rent receipts. He listened to the bearded *Chasids* chatting in Yiddish about the woman's complaint, and heard himself and the grandmother defined, contemptuously, as no better than *schwartzes*. After the landlords unwillingly corrected their mistake, and my friend assured the grandmother, in Spanish, that her receipts now affirmed what she had known all along, that she had paid each month's rent on time, my friend wished the two *Chasidim* good health and a long life, in Yiddish, and said goodbye.

When I heard that story I suggested, with some venom, that had the *Chasidim* also been Zionists, they might have used *cushi* instead of *schwartzes*, for *cushi* is the Israeli word for nigger and is used by those Israelis who consider themselves Anglo-Saxon, to define those non-European Jews (Yemenites, Berbers, Cochinese) who find an ambiguous refuge at the bottom of the Israeli social structure. I tell that story now because it suggests the conflicts which Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* presented to American Jews. Her book aroused fierce controversy in this country because it questioned the myth of

the victim which Jews tend to substitute for their history, and suggested that the performance of the State of Israel, in the Eichmann trials, was no better than that of most nation-states. The Jew is assimilating into America with a success no other Jewish community has managed, and only the myth of his separateness as a member of the tribe marked for eternal suffering as victim, and the reverence for the State of Israel as a realization of refuge, revenge, and the age-old prophecies, can help to differentiate him from other Americans. The drive toward assimilation has eroded Jewish religion of its remaining spiritual value, has made impossible, for most Jews, the traditional observances of the *Kashruth*, the Sabbath, the holidays, and even the ordinary forms of worship. The secular values once endemic in Jewish communal tradition — the reverence for social justice, the use of intellect, the pursuit of knowledge — were similarly displaced by the pressures of Americanization. Today the Jew shares with most middle-class Americans a barren but inflated religiosity, a binding set of material imperatives, an increasing inability to see himself as a social individual with communal as well as personal responsibilities, and a consequent increase in loneliness, despair, and the forms of mental illness characteristic of social atomization. Most important, the Jew increasingly fails to utilize his traditional values and his religious heritage to define his meaning, or his life's project, in any way that differentiates him from his surrounding countrymen. The history of Jewish (and every other culture's) assimilation has been a dynamic of gradual loss of once-orienting traditions and extended entry into the nightmare of inadequate identity which faces most Americans. Jews currently exist within the polarities of a traditional European Judaism and a totally secular, bankrupt Americanism. The only vibrancies within those polarities are the victim myth of the Jewish past, which suggests an unending, dangerous uniqueness, and the State of Israel, which offers both refuge and at least a partial conclusion to the epochs of Jewish suffering.

The victim myth of the Jewish past replaces the continuities of political and economic conflict which form the history of most cultures. It dictates that until the time when the Messiah manifests God's justice, the Jewish people face endless misery, for they will continually encounter the implacable hostility of the Gentile world, and suffer repeated persecution. But their role is to endure, as the Chosen People, until the end of time.

This myth guarantees a unified identity only to the communities of orthodox Jews separate from whatever national community within which they temporarily reside. For a Jew attempting to assimilate, into Germany or America, the myth creates several problems. How does the new life he is accepting, which involves the abandonment of traditional Jewish practices, fulfill the traditional role of witness? If he accepts the myth of unending Gentile hostility, how much can he value his chances for complete assimilation? If, however, the possibilities for assimilation seem unending, perhaps the victim myth needs to be discarded? In that case, who is the Jew?

The establishment of the State of Israel added another complexity for the American Jew. Diaspora Jews flocked to Israel, and many now see the country as the fulfillment of the Biblical prophecy to re-establish the Promised Land, and end the epochs of Jewish suffering. But American Jews have always nourished a curious ambivalence towards Israel; they grant it continuous emotional, political, and financial support, but they steadfastly refuse to emigrate. Ben Gurion's call, a few years ago, for all Diaspora Jews to return to Israel, received hostility and protest from the American Jewish community.

American Jewish identity faces all these pressures: the demands of the old myth, which dictates traditionalism and denigrates the chances for assimilation; the appeal and advantages of assimilation into America, which suggests that the myth must be discarded, but offers no replacement; the State of Israel, which defines itself as the culmination of the victim myth, and offers refuge should that myth become reality in the United States. Identity, for the American Jew, lies in an individual resolution of these three pressures, in which one is usually clearly dominant. But the pressures themselves are inescapable. Hannah Arendt's book caused such controversy because she suggested new definitions for all three pressures. She interprets the man Jews have defined, since 1945, as a monster epitomizing fanatic anti-Semitism as a banal functionary. She analyzes the causes and operation of the Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jews, and finds them far more complex than merely the most vicious example of Gentile hatred and persecution. She assesses the role of the Jews in their extermination, and finds, not the martyrdom of the eternal victim, but cooperation of the Jews with their exterminators. Finally, her evaluation of the conduct of the Israeli trial of Eichmann suggests that Israel is predominantly a national state, involved in the same competitive policies, international duplicity, warfare, and atrocities which characterize the behavior of most national states. Because it offered all these reinterpretations of conventional myths necessary to the tenuous identity of the American Jew, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was vociferously attacked, in this country, by Jews.

## II

THE RESPONSE to *Eichmann in Jerusalem* started with the publication of Arendt's first trial report in *The New Yorker*, but because that magazine prints no readers' comment or letters to the editor, the public controversy started with the publication of the Viking Press edition, expanded and altered, in the spring of 1963. The favorable responses, in the Sunday book sections of major newspapers, the weeklies and monthlies with space for serious reviews, and the quarterly journals, were written by both Jews and non-Jews. The hostile responses, in those same Sunday book sections (and even in reviews in many daily

newspapers), weeklies, monthlies, and quarterlies, were all written by Jews, with one exception (Justice Michael A. Musmanno of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, in the *Times* Book Section). The local Jewish press was unanimously hostile, and often vicious, and the quality Jewish press, although more restrained in tone, was almost equally hostile (Jacob Robinson in *Fact* and *Hadassah*, Marie Syrkin in *Jewish Frontier*, Norman Podhoretz in *Commentary*). Only Konrad Kellen's provoking article in *Mid-stream* managed an original, dissenting interpretation of the Jewish role in The Final Solution, and a disagreement with Arendt argued with grace and without rancor.

The unanimous hostility of the reviewers of the traditional left press is more surprising than the response of the Jewish press. Lionel Abel's frank polemic in *Partisan Review* was one of the most passionate, and least intelligent attacks (though it is doubtful that *PR* should be cited as a journal of the left). But consider Gertrude Ezorsky, in *New Politics*, Marie Syrkin in *Dissent*, Morris Schappes in two issues of *Jewish Currents*, Louis Harap in *Science and Society*, Charles Humboldt in the *National Guardian* — all defined as left, all Jewish, all hostile. And those reviewers, with one exception, wrote as Jews rather than as Socialists; only Gertrude Ezorsky challenged the reading of history, and the theories of politics, she felt were implicit in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

But to suggest, as Mary McCarthy does in a defense of Arendt's book in *Partisan Review*, that the controversy amounted to "a division between Jew and and Gentile," is to oversimplify the response. Bruno Bettelheim wrote the most sympathetic and comprehensive appreciation of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in *The New Republic*; many other Jews (Hans Morgenthau, Loren Baritz, Harry Golden) praised the book and accepted its conclusions. A third group of reviewers, including both Jews and Gentiles, examined the book dispassionately, disagreeing, evaluating, offering new suggestions. (Daniel Bell in *Partisan Review*, Oscar Handlin in *The New Leader*, E. V. Rostow in the *New York Herald-Tribune Book Section*, Hugh Trevor-Roper in the *London Sunday Times*, John Gross in *Encounter*. George Mosse in *The Progressive*.) So the attempt to see the controversy as a simple Jew versus non-Jew split is inaccurate. One of the crucial divisions may be between those Jews whose ethnicity is part of their identity, but whose concerns, work, direction, and commitment transcends their Jewishness and relates them to a wider community of purpose and value, and those Jews who tend to maintain the traditional myths of Jewish identity, are more closely connected to Jewish organizations, and seem more rooted in a Jewish ambiance.

If this division between Jew and Jew has any validity, it suggests a further complexity. Arendt's book, as Bettelheim and many others have pointed out, is directly relevant to our American situation. For we also legitimate and participate in the maintenance of a totalitarian state, because we allow and support our government's treatment of individuals as things, not only in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Viet-Nam,

the Congo, and Cuba, but in all those countries whose inhabitants we see as ciphers in a political confrontation, and whose lives we threaten with nuclear annihilation. The implicit support, through inaction and the refusal to confront the racism interlaced throughout our own society, which we grant to our overt racists and the systems of inequality we perpetuate, increases the extent of a flaccid but pervasive American totalitarianism. The ability to confront that totalitarianism, as Bettelheim does, may possibly depend not only on assimilation, but on the ability to emancipate oneself from both ethnic and national myths. There may be some correlations between traditionalist responses to Jewish realities and traditionalist responses to American realities. What does seem evident, if the previous linkages I posited prove valid, is that participation in the organized American Jewish community involves a static and uncritical acceptance of contemporary American society, since none of the hostile Jewish critics even considered the relevance of Arendt's book to the spread of totalitarianism in America. (Though it is arguable that if critics disagreed with Arendt's theses as they applied to The Final Solution, they would necessarily disagree with the relevance of Arendt's basic theses about totalitarianism. Podhoretz and Ezorsky do this explicitly, and Abel attempts to.) Finally, most of the Jewish critics of the traditional left failed to mention the implications of Arendt's work for the drift of American society. Their failure reinforces their accommodation to American society; they responded to Arendt's book as American Jews rather than as Jewish radicals.

### III

FOUR MAIN FOCI emerge from the hostile Jewish critics' attacks on Arendt's book: her scholarship; her strictures on the trial; her judgments about the extent and result of Jewish cooperation; her portrait of Eichmann. The charges about the inaccuracies, distortions, and cavalier treatment of fact leveled against her scholarship are similar to the charges raised against her other books. Part of the trouble is the scope Arendt habitually takes on; she offers theses ordering vast periods of history, into which mistakes inevitably creep. But she seems also to be somewhat careless of fact, which may again be the inevitable result of writing her variety of history. But the charges of bad scholarship leveled against *Eichmann in Jerusalem* were seriously out of proportion to the mistakes discovered. A curious log-rolling quality marked the adverse Jewish criticism; one critic discovered a supposed mistake, and subsequent critics, whether or not they agreed with his general attitude toward the book, added that mistake to their listing. As more hostile critics wrote, the indictment grew, until Louis Harap, writing in *Science and Society* a year after the controversy started, could flatly

declare that Arendt's theses had been destroyed by her numerous errors, and then simply list all the errors previous critics had discovered.

But very few of those critics stock-piling the errors were historians, or, indeed, had any sophistication about what constitutes historical fact, hypothesis, and error. Many of the "errors" they discovered were caused by mis-reading — the distortions of Arendt's arguments and positions were so widespread and severe, by supposedly intelligent critics, that many "neutral" observers decried the abandonment of usual intellectual standards. Many of the supposed errors discovered were actually the result of false notions about history held by the critics, like the myth that Stalin had destroyed Jewish organization in Russia which I shall examine later. But most of Arendt's errors were actually her reinterpretations of events and persons which the hostile Jewish critics had ordered into a species of historical "fact" both intransigent and immutable.

The two authorities cited by many hostile critics were both named Robinson. Dr. Jacob Robinson is defined by *Facts*, the bulletin of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, as "an authority on international law and contemporary Jewish history . . . a special consultant to Justice Jackson at Nuremberg and to the prosecution at the Eichmann trial." His article in *Hadassah* magazine, and his report, published as an entire issue of *Facts*, subtitled "A Report on the Evil of Banality," provided a supposedly firm basis for the charges of inaccuracy and distortion.

But Dr. Robinson forfeits his claim to authority, and indeed, to any respect for his scholarship, in his opening paragraphs. Though he commits himself only to demonstrating "the inaccuracies, fallacies, and misjudgments" of Arendt's book, he begins his article by attacking a category of books, including Arendt's and Bruno Bettelheim's *The Informed Heart*, which do a "disservice to the real story of the Jews under Hitler." Robinson accuses Bettelheim of holding a "death-wish" responsible for Anne Frank's family's failure to survive the Nazis, and then continues to disastrously misread Bettelheim's argument about why the Frank family was not able to face the Nazi danger realistically enough to protect itself. The mis-reading suggests serious limits to Robinson's intelligence, as well as to his ability to control his bias, but the misquotation is deliberate distortion, since Robinson attributes "death-wish" to Bettelheim by using the phrase three times in quotation marks. I have carefully checked all the passages about the Frank family in *The Informed Heart*: Bettelheim never uses the phrase. (I suspect it never occurs in the entire book.)

After this speciousness, Robinson's authoritative stance, as well as his numerous attempts at correction, seem somewhat dubious. He does point out several clear mistakes, which are perhaps more glaring than one expects to find in an authoritative history. (Arendt's book was written as journalism, a running trial commentary, and then re-written for publication.) But the lapses, inaccuracies, and mistakes Robinson cites are all minor, and corrections would not shake Arendt's theses

Robinson actually set out to challenge those theses, and not merely to point out inaccuracies, but his limitation (aside from his dishonesty) is his inability to understand that historical hypotheses are dislodged by opposed hypotheses which offer more convincing orderings of evidence, rather than by isolated corrections.

Nehemiah Robinson, the director of the Institute of Jewish Affairs of the World Jewish Congress, also published a review and a report, distributed by the World Jewish Congress and cited by other critics. Robinson offers detailed corrections of Arendt's judgments about the extent of Nazi persecution of Jews before 1939, and objects to one of her most bizarre speculations, that both Heydrich and Frank were part- or full-Jews. But most of his other objections are based on mis-readings. He questions Arendt's argument that the law Israel should have used to try Eichmann was the Genocide Convention (pointing out, as J. Robinson does, Arendt's ignorance of the Israeli adoption of that Convention in 1950), and charges that Arendt never considers the problem of retroactivity involved in the use of that Convention, drafted in 1948, to try crimes committed before 1945. But Arendt treats the problem of retroactivity which both the Nuremberg Trials and the Eichmann trial faced, just a few pages before she considers the use of the Genocide Convention; only a singularly obtuse reader would demand that the discussion be repeated. Most suspicious, given the tone of Nehemiah Robinson's attacks on Arendt for her errors and her pretensions to *any* scholarly status, are the similarities between his report and Jacob Robinson's. Whole paragraphs repeat, word for word, the arguments Jacob Robinson made; only an occasional phrase is altered. Reading the reports side by side, it becomes obvious that large sections of one are copied, almost verbatim, from the other. Which is the original seems impossible to discern. But what conclusions can one draw about the supposedly crippling inaccuracies of Arendt's book, and the flawed nature of her scholarship, when one of the two chief Jewish authorities attempting to question that scholarship is forced to copy from the other?

**T**HE ATTACKS ON Arendt's evaluation of the Israeli trial of Eichmann suffered from similar mis-readings and distortions. One would expect that Dr. Jacob Robinson, as assistant to the Israeli prosecutor, would correctly summarize Arendt's objections to the trial, especially since she succinctly stated them: "the failure of the Jerusalem court consisted in its not coming to grips with three fundamental issues . . . : the problems of impaired justice in the court of the victors; a valid definition of the 'crime against humanity'; and a clear recognition of the new criminal who commits this crime." (p.251)\* Robinson distorts

\*All pages, except when followed by a cited text, refer to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Viking Press, 1963. A paper edition recently published by Compass carries the same pagination.

her first charge to read "non-admission of witnesses for defense," which is only one of the failures Arendt locates within the major problem of impaired justice in the court of the victors. Robinson argues that Arendt is wrong to accuse the Israeli court of non-admission of defense witnesses, and charges her with not knowing, or never stating, that sixteen witnesses from abroad were interrogated by courts of law in Germany, Austria, and Italy. But Arendt does consider the nature of the examination accorded those sixteen witnesses, and their resulting testimony; she finds these inadequate for the defense (see pp.126, 129, 200, 259). Moreover, her charge is not that no witnesses for the defense offered evidence, but that the Israeli prosecutor retracted his pledge to allow defense witnesses immunity from Israeli prosecution so that they might testify in court. Arendt's charge against the Israeli court is not limited to the court's attitude toward possible defense witnesses. She stresses the more complex problem of impaired justice. She analyzes the inadequate nature of the documents available to the defense, since all the material was compiled by hostile researchers and prosecutors. She considers the kind of research an adequate defense would have to undertake, and the amount of recorded testimony which would have to be challenged, and perhaps excluded. She considers that the problem of impaired justice involves the question of the limits of the Israeli judges' impartiality. Finally, Arendt sees that the entire kidnapping and trial procedure makes Israel vulnerable, as the Allies were at Nuremberg, to the *tu-quoque* argument; could not several Israelis be kidnapped and tried, in Egyptian or Syrian courts, on charges of "crime against humanity," citing the Eichmann trial as a precedent?

For all these reasons, Arendt argues that the Israeli court never adequately faced the problem of victor's justice, and that only two solutions — a trial under the Genocide Convention, or a trial by international tribunal — were possible. By not facing all Arendt's analyses of the problem of impaired justice, but instead distorting the charge into a simpler failure to admit defense witnesses, Dr. Robinson rebuts it and absolves the court, but evades, as the court evaded, the major problems. One of the ironies involved in the attack on Arendt's evaluation of the Israeli trial was that none of the critics understood that in attempting to define a legitimate and valid method under which to try Eichmann (the Genocide Convention), Arendt offered defenses of the trial which answer most of the objections raised by jurists and legal observers. She defends the trial against the charge that Israel lacked previous territorial jurisdiction, arguing that since the Jews were exterminated as Jews, no matter where they were found, the Jewish state, as the political manifestation of that Jewish community which was murdered, had the right to try Eichmann even though no state existed when Eichmann arranged the transportation of the victims. She also defends the trial against the charges of inevitable partiality, arguing that elementary principles of justice as well as the previous trials of war criminals indicate that judges can successfully separate their legal functions from their passions. But Arendt insists that the Israelis imposed limitations

on the defense *more serious* than those imposed at Nuremberg, and that these limitations resulted in a seriously impaired justice.

Few of Arendt's critics faced her arguments. Instead, Jacob Robinson and Schappes introduce testimonials to the trial's fairness written by international jurists and legal experts, as if anyone even vaguely familiar with the issue was not aware that there is a continuing controversy, in all legal circles, about the precedents for the Nuremberg Trial, the validity of both the Nuremberg and the Eichmann trials, and the contribution of both to the development of international law. Abel misunderstands her objections to the Israeli trial so completely that he judges them quibbles about "legal niceties." Schappes perceives that Arendt questions the validity of the Nuremberg trials, but simply asserts that, in spite of Arendt, the Nuremberg trials "constitute a landmark in the development of international law — and the Eichmann trial, following in its wake, will take its honored place in that development." Both Schappes and Syrkin disagree with the distinction Arendt offers between what Eichmann *did* and what the Jews *suffered*, and Syrkin is particularly pointed in accusing Arendt of callousness toward the expressions of emotion and suffering which the Jewish survivors offered the court. But Arendt argues that justice must only be concerned with what Eichmann *did*, and that no court can evaluate the amount of suffering any man, or any crime, causes another. And Arendt's objection to the parade of the sufferings-of-the-Jewish-people witnesses, as the prosecutor styled them, was not simply that they were irrelevant to what Eichmann did, and therefore not necessary to the process of justice. After listening to the first background witness, Zindel Grynszpan, (the father of the Herschel Grynszpan whose assassination of the German third secretary to its Paris embassy, Ernst vom Rath, triggered the *Kristallnacht*) Arendt "thought, foolishly: Everyone, everyone should have his day in court. Only to find out . . . how difficult it was to tell the story, that — at least outside the transforming realm of poetry — it needed a purity of soul, an unmirrored, reflected innocence of heart and mind that only the righteous possess. No one either before or after was to equal the shining honesty of Zindel Grynszpan." (p.209)

Rather than callousness, what this indicates is Arendt's compassion for the truth of human suffering, and her sense that few individual sufferers are able to maintain that truth in a court of law, fifteen years after the event. Moreover, what Syrkin and Schappes failed to read, when they charged Arendt with a meaningless distinction between what Eichmann did and what the Jews suffered, was that Arendt had pointed out that the District Court judges echoed Arendt's distinction in their written judgment; they held that the sufferings transcended normal human understanding, were perhaps accessible to the realm of art, but did not belong in the courtroom (see p.193).

Both Dr. Robinson and Schappes dispute Arendt's second charge against the Israeli court (that it failed to achieve a valid definition of the "crime against humanity") by arguing that it was clear from the

statutes the court applied that a "crime against humanity" was also a crime against the international order. But Arendt argues that the Nuremberg Charter, and all the trials which were legitimated by it, never adequately defined the "crime against humanity," and confused definitions further by also prosecuting "crimes against peace" and "war crimes," both vulnerable to the *tu-quoque* argument. Therefore the Israeli court had an opportunity to establish a new international precedent, either by re-defining the "crime against humanity" or by trying Eichmann under the Genocide Convention.

Instead, the Israelis tried Eichmann under The Nazis and Nazi Collaborators Law of 1950, which is based on Article 6 of the Nuremberg Charter, and defines the "crime against humanity" as: "any of the following acts: murder, extermination, enslavement, *starvation or deportation* and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population, and persecution on *national*, racial, religious or political grounds." (From Schappes, who quoted from *6,000,000 Accusers*, Appendix, p.309. The italicized words were added by the Israelis.) This definition, Arendt argues, is too broad to apply to the unique genocide the Nazis attempted, for enslavement, deportation, and persecution of religious and political groups have always been practiced by nation-states. Though the Jerusalem court managed to separate the systematic crimes against the Jews from the far more inconclusive categories prosecuted at Nuremberg, it failed to understand the necessity to separate genocide from the other charges of persecution and deportation, and to prosecute genocide as a unique crime which threatened the basic fabric of international order.

This distinction is crucial to Arendt's argument, for she sees the emergence of the Nazi totalitarian movement, and its practice of genocide, as an entirely new and dangerous phenomena, necessitating a new international order and a new and effective international penal code to prevent its re-emergence. To argue that genocide is merely a continuation of conventional warfare or the latest form of Gentile anti-Semitism is, to Arendt, to misunderstand the meaning of the Third Reich, and to surrender whatever initiative we still possess to shore up our civilization against another collapse into the barbarity of Nazism, and to progress to an international order which might prevent another attempt at genocide. Whether or not one accepts Arendt's interpretation of the causes and mechanisms of totalitarianism, it is clear that the social conditions favorable to the emergence of a totalitarian movement existed in post-World War I Germany. That movement emerged, and attempted to exterminate some 11 million people. Arendt argues that the enormity of that attempt so violates the basic assumptions of nations, and so threatens our international order, that new precedents are necessary to prosecute, and punish the perpetrators, and to insure against repetition. The Israeli court, Arendt argues, had the opportunity to try Eichmann under the Genocide Convention; she outlines the argument the court could have used to meet the territorial objections. But the court chose to follow the limiting and questionable precedents

of the Nuremberg Charter and Trials, dispensed a more flawed justice, and most important, failed to advance the development of that international order and law Arendt thinks is crucial to our communal survival. One can easily quarrel with the utopian and apolitical nature of Arendt's imperatives for international development, but none of the hostile critics did. Instead, they defended the Israeli trial by distorting and evading Arendt's arguments.

THE FAILURE OF ALL the hostile critics to see that new definitions of both the "crime against humanity" and the criminal who commits those crimes were necessary for the Eichmann trial was linked to their anger at Arendt's interpretation of Eichmann. Robinson, Syrkin, Podhoretz, and Schappes question Arendt's facts, accuse her of perversity and distortion, and deny her portrait of Eichmann any validity, but do not explicitly argue that Eichmann was aware of his criminality and therefore a monster. Abel and Ezorsky explicitly make this link, and try to argue that historic, psychological, and moral evidence proves Eichmann's monstrosity. Central to both positions is a curious insistence on the intransigence and immutability of "facts" which the critics possess. But "facts" never exist in isolation. The evidence necessary to disprove a historical thesis consists of a series of facts unified into a counter-hypothesis, or a more consistent interpretation of the same series of facts.

If these critics were quarreling with an economic and political history, their tendency to insist, as Ezorsky does, that Arendt exhibits "indifference to living fact" might be less embarrassing. (How can Ezorsky, herself a teacher of philosophy, indulge in the naivete of asserting the existence, let alone the vitality, of facts apart from the interpretative contexts of historians?) But Arendt's book is a clearly speculative attempt at interpretive biography, and the "facts" here are historical fragments, scraps of conversation, perceptions recorded by men whose views can no longer be analyzed, judgments offered by unknown witnesses. Rather than a concrete order of historical fact, Arendt uses the most elusive evidence for her material. Yet all her critics accuse her of ignoring the "facts" of Eichmann's consciousness, behavior, beliefs, and personality as if these "facts" were clearly inscribed in some eternal, monolithic history.

Arendt's attempt to interpret Eichmann could easily be attacked for its folly, given the paucity and flimsiness of the available evidence, the absence of any non-partisan research, the difficulties inherent in any attempt at evaluation. But none of Arendt's critics make this point. Instead, Jacob Robinson sees Arendt's attempt to analyze Eichmann's crisis of conscience as "astonishing and reached in ways contrary to usual methods of scientific research." Do methods of scientific research exist for analyzing conscience? Robinson, Syrkin, Ezorsky, Abel, and Podhoretz charge that Arendt accepted Eichmann's own evaluation of himself and his role, but a careful reading of the text will indicate

that Arendt constantly juxtaposes Eichmann's testimony with the evidence she has collated from other sources, in order to demonstrate Eichmann's bad faith, bad memory, distortions, ambitions, inability to use anything but the *Amtssprache* (officialesse) of cliches, and his failure to think.

Many of the critics distorted Arendt's portrayal. Nehemiah Robinson finds Arendt's Eichmann "a quite likeable chap," while Schappes concludes that Arendt has made Eichmann "Everyman." For Abel, Eichmann "comes off so much better in her book than do his victims." At stake here is the refusal of these Jewish critics to believe that the man who administered the machinery which sent millions of Jews to their deaths could be more human than monster. Ezorsky's treatment of the Veessenmayer telegram is a valuable corrective to Arendt's presentation, but the conclusions Ezorsky draws are revealingly distorted. The telegram defines Eichmann's protest against both Himmler's and Hitler's decision to allow the emigration of the remaining Hungarian Jews. Eichmann wanted to continue the deportations, and though Arendt argued that Eichmann intended to set his obedience to Hitler's *Fuhrer order* (to exterminate the Jews) against Himmler's political decision to allow the Hungarian Jews to emigrate, Ezorsky's use of the telegram shows clearly that Eichmann was prepared to seek a new decision even from Hitler. But Ezorsky concludes, from this obdurance, that these "facts exhibit not Eichmann's conscience or his obedience to Hitler's orders but his fanatical hatred for Jews." The words of the Veessenmayer telegram indicate only that Eichman felt that the decision to allow emigration was not wise, that Himmler had not really agreed to it, and that "the Jews concerned were all biologically valuable material." (If the phrase about the Jews, attributed to Eichmann by Veessenmayer, was actually used by Eichmann, it indicates the repetitions of a bureaucrat rather than the implacable hatred of a fanatic anti-Semite.) It is possible to argue that though Eichmann used *Amtssprache* throughout his official life, the Nazi *newspeak* only camouflaged his hatred for Jews, but evidence is required for such a statement, not merely the repeated assertions that Eichmann was a fanatic anti-Semite.) Consider these judgments, and the relevance they exhibit to any order of historical fact: "But the real Eichmann was a killer, ready to take the initiative even against Hitler's orders, so that no Jew should live." "How could the man not have been morally monstrous? And all the more a monster if he did not know that he was one!"

Ezorsky made the first statement. The second, by Abel, indicates both the impassioned nature of his polemic and the failure, to face the problem of intent, which he shares with Ezorsky, the District Court, and all those Jews who believe that Eichman was indeed a monster. If Eichmann was clearly aware of his criminality, than we can judge him monster. But if Eichmann performed his murderous duties within a criminal state which so transformed conscience, value, and judgment that he had no sense of his evil, how then shall we judge him?

In spite of all the mis-readings, the real quarrel Jewish critics have with Arendt is not about Eichmann's role, but about the extent of his awareness. We know from sources independent of the present controversy that Eichmann's role in The Final Solution was exaggerated by the defendants at Nuremberg; that he was never an originator of policy but rather a high-level functionary, carrying out comprehensive orders which left him a comfortable latitude for organizational originality and initiative. (See Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution*, Vallentine, Mitchell and Co., Ltd., London, 1953.) Within those bounds, Arendt constructs her portrait. She is always careful to insist that Eichmann's responsibility was major, although she has been distorted to argue that he was a tiny cog in an infernal machine. Arendt attempted to define, precisely, the limits of Eichmann's responsibility because the Israeli prosecutor and the Appeal Court judges found Eichmann totally responsible for The Final Solution. Arendt (and the District Court judges) see Eichmann not as the architect, but as the chief of transportation arrangements for The Final Solution.

The quarrel, then, is not about what Eichmann did, but how he did it; about the nature of his conscience and consciousness as he performed his role. Arendt expends her major effort on both a speculative exploration of Eichmann's psyche, and a more concrete description of the criminal state within which Eichmann performed his duties. She discovers in Eichmann a new form of criminal, a man who abets mass murder without the awareness that he is transgressing. Her critics disagree, asserting that Eichmann committed his evil in full awareness. But they never face the central problem: how is normal conscience and normal morality sustained in a criminal state? To argue, as Abel does, that the Greek view of morality still relevant to our values damns Eichmann as a monster, is only to reassert *our* means of judging Eichmann; that argument still evades the problem of how we can evaluate Eichmann's own awareness of what he did. Charles Humboldt, in his *National Guardian* review, attempts to absolve the German people, and to judge Eichmann, by offering a distinction between those "ordinary men who can be deceived, persuaded, or forced to do evil to their fellow men, and those who deceive, persuade, and force them." But this is both an irrelevant and a dangerous argument. Irrelevant, because it obscures the discussion as to whether Eichmann was a persuader or, as Arendt argues, one of those who was persuaded. Dangerous because it implies that only those men with sufficient power are responsible. Ezorsky evades the problem of awareness by a sophism: "That situation (Eichmann's role as a lowly bureaucrat in the thirties) did not bring out — what *must* have been there already — a capacity for mass murder. That capacity was realized in his crime. It was Eichmann the *man* who became a mass murderer." (Emphasis added.) Eichmann was not a mass murderer; he had no capacity to participate in mass murder — the two executions he witnessed made him violently ill. His capacity was for the efficient and assiduous performance of the manifold administrative tasks which made mass murder possible. The

question is whether he was aware of the monstrous evil he was abetting, and the answer is not tautologies which argue that the *essential man* always possessed the *capacities* for mass murder, no matter what situation he found himself in.

The critics who refuse to face the problem of Eichmann's conscience and awareness imply, when they do not directly assert, that what we take to be normal consciousness of good and evil was operative within Eichmann, and that he acted in full cognizance of the evil he was aiding. But since they refuse to face the operations of a criminal state which seeks to transform and replace conventional morality, they must also conclude that the myriad Germans who participated *directly* in some form of the round-ups, deportations, transportations, and mass executions (the number exceeds a million, and might even exceed the number of Jews murdered) also acted with full awareness of their evil, and were therefore monsters like Eichmann. The inevitable question suggests itself: how is it possible for a supposedly civilized nation to turn itself into a collectivity of murdering monsters? Arendt answers this question in both *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, by developing a complex model and analysis of the operations of the totalitarian *movement* and its transformation of individual consciousness. But those Jewish critics who attack Arendt's analysis have no answer to the *fact* that a civilized nation sanctioned and participated in the deliberate and systematic murder of perhaps six million Jews. They refuse even to think about causes, development, process, individual involvement. Arendt's hostile critics insisted, repeatedly, that *there was nothing to learn from The Final Solution*. What these hostile critics are asserting, in their intransigent insistence that Eichmann was not a dull man transformed into an administrator of murder by the Nazi movement, but the latest incarnation of the eternal anti-Semitic fanatic, is the hoary monster myth which substitutes for Jewish history. Eichmann was a monster like the rest of the murdering *goyim*, and the list is both particular and endless. All the Germans were monsters. The Jews have always been persecuted and murdered by monsters. The entire Gentile world is potentially monstrous. And so the myth, the emotions, and the argument proliferate; Arendt's attempt to portray the petty, distorted, and finally horrible humanity of Eichmann, encounters the skein of centuries-old Jewish myth; the thread of Jewish uniqueness unwinds into the frightening tangles of universal Jewish paranoia. And perhaps some of the reviewers were particularly hostile because Arendt herself is Jewish; several of the smaller Jewish newspapers I read accused her of betraying her people.

The hostile Jewish critics expended most of their energy and emotions on Arendt's charges against the European Jews, although the few sections and scattered pages of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* which examine the Jewish role in The Final Solution take up less than a tenth of the book. The attacks on Arendt's general attitude to the Zionist movement, and her characterizations of Zionist movements and leaders

within Nazi Europe, I think have some validity. Though Arendt was attempting to suggest the common ground between the aims of the pre-Final Solution Zionist movement and the Nazis, she distorts, as Syrkin clearly points out, the role of the several Zionist organizations after the policy of extermination became clear. Neither Syrkin nor Ezorsky challenge Arendt's judgments about the early Zionist collaboration with Nazism, but they point out her misrepresentation of the Zionist movement once the Final Solution began.

**B**UT THE MAIN ATTACK was against Arendt's charges of Jewish complicity. The two passages which state Arendt's position require quotation, because they are so often distorted:

Of course, he (Eichmann) did not expect the Jews to share the general enthusiasm over their destruction, but he did expect more than compliance, he expected—and received, to a truly extraordinary degree—their cooperation (p. 103-4).

But the whole truth was that there existed Jewish community organizations and Jewish party and welfare organizations on both the local and the international level. Wherever Jews lived, there were recognized Jewish leaders, and this leadership, almost without exaggeration, cooperated in one way or another, for one reason or another, with the Nazis. The whole truth was that if the Jewish leadership had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people (p. 111).

The general point that these two paragraphs make is the same point that Raul Hilberg exhaustively documented in his massive study, *The Destruction of European Jewry*. The only quarrel Jewish authorities had with the Hilberg book was his use of German sources, and his consequent neglect of the Jewish response to Nazism. No critic seriously quarrels with Hilberg's judgments. Arendt repeats those judgments, perhaps exaggerating them by the qualifications she introduces, and is vehemently attacked. Moreover, she is not attacked simply for her qualifications, for exaggerating the extent and effect of Jewish cooperation. Her position is first distorted into a wholesale indictment: a "picture of Jewish leaders eager to annihilate their own people," (Nehemiah Robinson); "all the brave, heart-rending efforts (at resistance), slight as they were against the Nazi machine, added to the disaster," (Marie Syrkin); "recognized Jewish leaders, 'almost without exception' served in the murder of their fellow Jews," (Ezorsky). Then this position is attacked, first by arguing that chaos and leaderlessness would not have saved the Jews, then by defending the Jewish leadership. Critics like Podhoretz are capable of pointing out that nothing Arendt tells us about the nature and extent of Jewish cooperation is new, and then denying the validity of Arendt's judgment.

Part of the trouble lies in the conclusion of that second statement, for Arendt offers a hyperbole instead of a judgment, to emphasize her

point about the extent of Jewish cooperation. Arendt obviously understands that no people can ever exist unorganized and without leaders; she has introduced this impossible supposition to indicate how seriously she views the scale and damage of Jewish cooperation. Yet Podhoretz, Nehemiah Robinson, and Schappes laboriously point out that the condition Arendt postulates is an impossible one within human society. Worse, Podhoretz, Nehemiah Robinson, Jacob Robinson, Abel, Ezorsky and Harap seize what they understand to be the Russian example to disprove Arendt's judgment.

The Russian argument asserts the *Einsatzgruppen* (the action groups of the Security Police and the SD) murdered close to a million Jews (the number is disputed) behind the German lines in Soviet Russia. Everyone knows that the Russian Jewish community was totally leaderless and disorganized (because Stalin had completely decimated the Jewish leadership). Therefore Arendt is totally wrong in her assertion that Jewish leadership and organization was crucial to Jewish extermination, and that chaos would have saved Jewish lives. But the assertion that Stalin decimated the Jewish leadership in the Baltic States, White Russia, the Ukraine, and South Russia (the four areas where the *Einsatzgruppen* massacred) is a thirties' myth. A glance at the relevant pages in Reitlinger's *The Final Solution* will reveal that Stalin destroyed the leadership of the Jewish political and Zionist organizations, and severely limited the educational and religious ones, but that intricate welfare, religious, and communal organizations survived to carry out the traditional registering and selection of German victims *only five months after the Germans attacked Russia*.

In July, 1941, ghetto organization began in Kovno, Vilna, Libau, and Dwinsk; by September the whole machinery of Jewish badges and *Ausweise*, or employment certificates, was in force throughout the Baltic States; by October, 1941, only four months after the German invasion, Jakob Gens had personally delivered a group of Wilna Jews to be executed by the *Einsatzgruppen* in the pits at Ponary. Throughout the six months that Abel, Ezorsky, and most critics cite, from November 1941 to June, 1942, when more than a half-million Russian Jews were killed in the Ukraine by the *Einsatzgruppen*, the ghettos functioned as collecting and registering depots for Jewish victims. The massacres at Kiev were initiated by an order to the Kiev Jews to assemble for resettlement; according to Reitlinger the Germans were astonished when 30,000 Jews assembled. On September 29th and 30th, at the Babi Yar ravine Yevtushenko's poem commemorates, 33,771 Jews, by *Einsatzgruppen* records, were shot to death and then buried. We will probably never learn enough about the role of leadership within the innumerable hierarchies which allowed 33,771 Jews to assemble for 'resettlement' after the news of the massacres in the Baltic States had been disseminated through all the ghettos by the courageous Jewish messengers Ezorsky cites. But can anyone doubt that in one of the largest Jewish ghettos in all Europe, let alone the Ukraine, the operation, advice, and organization of that Jewish leadership was not



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involved in the submission to massacre of so many people?

What complexities are involved in the acceptance, by so many supposedly intelligent Jewish critics, that the Russian Jews were unorganized and leaderless, and that the *Einsatzgruppen* murdered hundreds of thousands by executing in a chaos? How could the same critics who lectured Arendt about the impossibility of her hyperbole of social disorganization then conceive of a people, numbering over two million, living in towns and villages from the Baltic to the Caspian, without the intricate relationships, communal patterns, religious traditions, and social divisions that result in organization and leadership?

The attempt to defend the European Jews from Arendt's charges of complicity never transcends this level of mulishness, except in parts of Syrkin and Ezorsky's articles. They suggest the complexity of Jewish response, the manifold and varying organizations, the development of different qualities of Jewish leadership, the effect of the selective process the Nazis instituted, the extent of the resistance movements, and the lack of alternatives available to almost all of the leadership. The question of alternatives is complex, and most critics have misunderstood Arendt's arguments. She states clearly that when the bulk of the Jewish populations are confronted with deportation to the death camps, and the S.S. men armed to conduct them aboard the "resettlement trains," it is too late for a resistance which has probably become psychologically impossible anyway. She criticizes the Israeli prosecutor for constantly asking the ordinary Jewish witnesses at Jerusalem, "Why didn't you resist?" The question is futile.

But to conclude from that position, as Syrkin and Podhoretz do, that the Jewish leadership had no alternative to its cooperation, is to distort and simplify Arendt's argument. For what she implies in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and has stated clearly in *Origins* and in interviews, is that the Jewish leadership had alternatives, especially in the early stages of the Nazi organization. That leadership ought to have evaluated and understood the German menace (especially after the first news about the extermination camps was received in the ghettos); it ought to have realized that the Nazis were dedicated, as they repeatedly proclaimed, to Jewish extermination; it ought to have warned each Jewish constituency that the Germans meant murder, and that they must prepare for covert and overt resistance on a total scale. That leadership ought to have understood that its own functions, and the daily communal life of the ghetto and the *stetl*, could not continue; that normal rituals, worship, and cultural and social events obscured the danger and reduced the ability of Jews to prepare to fight desperately for their survival. (The literature describing the social and cultural life within the ghettos facing extermination is terrifying. Approving critics cite scores of examples of *courageous* Jews carrying on with life as usual: worshipping, disputing, holding literary meetings, even dances during the worst periods of Nazi extermination. What is heroic about continuing life as usual when facing extermination?)

It is obvious that an entire people could not have gone under-

ground. It is also obvious that, had the attempt been made, the Nazis would have been forced to expend an enormously increased number of men and materials to accomplish The Final Solution. They might have succeeded, though the evidence Arendt cites about Nazi experience when meeting intransigent moral resistance suggests some qualifications. But it is false to argue, as Abel, Robinson, Ezorsky, and Podhoretz do, that the Nazi will to murder was so extreme that no commitment of resources would have been considered too great to insure Jewish destruction. The Nazis were certainly not rational, and their war effort suffered considerably from their intransigent commitment to murder. But that will was *not* total, and it was constantly inhibited by rational considerations. Reitlinger's *The Final Solution* is full of examples of extermination proceedings shut off because of higher military priorities, and of considerable numbers of Jews kept alive for military, political, and especially economic reasons. Moreover, the comparative success of those small bands of Jews who went underground, printed their own passes, killed Nazis to get uniforms and weapons, and survived to join partisan units, begins to indicate what wholesale Jewish resistance might have accomplished. (It is true that partisans frequently murdered those Jews who sought to join them; it is also true that those Jews who escaped to join the partisans survived in much higher percentages than those Jews who remained in the ghettos and waited for resettlement.)

Hilberg argued that the only chance for Jewish survival was total resistance, the transformation of the Jewish people into a revolutionary movement. He also developed the reasons why the various Jewish communities were unprepared for total resistance, a universal underground, and a constant, determined attempt to insure their own survival. The genocide the Nazis contemplated was so unprecedented that not only the Jews found it difficult to accept. Most of the western world has still neither accepted nor understood that the Nazis intended, and almost managed, to destroy the European existence of one of the peoples of the world. Moreover, the non-assimilated Jews of East Europe were isolated from their national communities, spoke Yiddish rather than the national language, read only their own newspapers, ignored the dominant politics, concentrated on the intricacies of their own communities and relationships. These communities had also evolved traditional methods for responding to Gentile threats; they ceded responsibility for their well-being to their leaders, who went as emissaries to the hostile powers, to discover the price for peace. The traditions of accommodation, by the leadership to the outside power, and by the local inhabitants to their leadership, began in the Middle Ages, but led to the gas chambers. Similar patterned responses, developed through the centuries, resulted in an incapacity for sustained resistance throughout most of the East European Jewish community, until almost the end, when even the most passive could see that death was approaching, and that the traditional defenses would not avail. And even then . . .

In the meshing of all these traditions and social arrangements endemic to European Judaism lies the tragedy of both the Jewish leadership and the Jewish people. For that leadership shared those traditions, just as it shared a class position which would make the abandonment of a still-recognizable reality, and the leap into active resistance, difficult. Once all those social and traditional patterns are evaluated, and weighed within the prevailing definitions of Gentile persecution which tended to see the Nazis as the most gigantic of historic pogroms, the choice which the leadership might have exercised seems exceedingly difficult. But that leadership consistently made the accommodating, destructive choices, and Arendt insists on their responsibility.

To refuse to admit that the Jews contributed to their own destruction because they were Jews, particular rather than abstract eternal victims, is to forfeit the ability to learn anything from The Final Solution. "Murderers with the power to murder descended upon a defenseless people and murdered a large part of it," Norman Podhoretz declares. "What else is there to say?" To confront the Nazi extermination of the European Jews with this abstraction is to deny any meaning to the most destructive events in recent world history, to evade all questions of morality and responsibility, and to refuse to consider the human action which might prevent a repercussion. Most important, for American Jews, is the refusal to confront the changing realities and pressures involved in achieving a viable identity, and the insistence that the Jew is eternally and unchangeably — the victim.

IF THE JEWISH CRITICS' HOSTILITY to Arendt's book reflects anything of the attitudes of the American Jewish community, Jewish identity in this country is both severely threatened and intransigent. Consider the performance of the Jewish critics. Arendt attacked the conduct of the Israeli trial, argued that the Israelis could have transcended both national and tribal considerations, prosecuted Eichmann under the Genocide Convention, and established a valuable international precedent which might take us one step closer to an eventual, and inevitable, world order. The Jewish critics were unable to transcend their commitment to Israel's national policy; they were also unable to comprehend the force of Arendt's universalist vision, which once distinguished that secular international community of Jewish intellectuals. Instead, a far narrower parochialism muddled the issues or treated them as "legalistic." Arendt offered an interpretation of Eichmann as a banal functionary of mass murder; with all its flaws, the effort suggests an analysis necessary to understand the social and political situation we all begin to face as the pressures which post-industrial society mounts distort traditional morality and normal consciousness. But even those critics not prepared to argue that Eichmann was a monster refused to credit Arendt's analysis of the forces which had transformed his consciousness and secured his participation in mass murder. Arendt sug-

gested that the leadership of the European Jewish community cooperated with the perpetrators of The Final Solution, and increased the toll of Jewish destruction. The critics defended the leadership and insisted that nothing could have altered the tragedy of Jewish extermination.

Why should American Jews exhibit this moral intransigence and insist on a theory of immutable personality, even under totalitarian stress? Why should American Jews find it necessary to refuse to confront the complexity of Jewish tradition which encouraged accommodation, complicity, and submission far more than resistance? Why should it be necessary for predominantly secular, assimilated American Jews to reassert the most primitive myths about Jewish innocence and the hostile nature of the Gentile world?

The answers I have suggested are too simple. It is not enough to argue that without the bonds of religion, custom, or succoring community, the Jew is almost as rootless as most Americans. Sartre, in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, suggests that the root of Jewish identity is the experience of being defined as different by the other. No matter what extremes of non-differentiation Jewish assimilation in America reaches, a Jew will probably have some sense that he is "different." The Gentile world provides that definition, and the Nazis demonstrated its conclusion. The concentration camps provide, for the American Jew, the dangerous guarantee of his uniqueness, the surety that his difference will be maintained, no matter what he chooses. That consciousness of uniqueness is now an asset, for it defines no limits, in America, and suggests only a vague warning. More important, it grants the Jew a separateness, even an elevation, from his fellows, through his identification with a tragic ritual which transcends secular existence. Moreover, the danger which is the logical outcome of Jewish difference is counter-acted by the existence of Israel, the answer to the nagging question, What will you do if it happens here?

Sustaining those pressures, the American Jew can continue to participate in the current American celebration, convinced that he is different from, and secretly, perhaps, superior to, most Americans. His attitudes to Jewish religion, traditional patterns of belief and communal response, the meaning of his European heritage, and the current existence and policies of the State of Israel, are necessarily complex, and not rigidly circumscribed. For there are bloody realities conveniently explained by the Jewish myth. The civilized nations of the Western world would have allowed the Nazis to destroy what they could reach of the European Jewish community, provided certain national boundaries were respected. And after all the atrocities and the butchery, no nation moved to accept the Jewish refugees; had the Zionists not fought for Israel, the remnants of European Jewry would have rotted in the DP camps.

**B**UT ARENDT'S BOOK challenges all American Jews who have accepted a definition as "different" by the other, and have attempted to construct an identity from the remaining fragments of Jewish tradition. To those whose Jewish "differentness" means an identification with the millions of innocent European Jews murdered by the Nazis, she suggests that innocence and guilt must be re-defined; to those whose "differentness" means an identification with the aims of Zionism and the establishment and present policies of the State of Israel, she suggests that nationalism may well transform the Jew from victim to agent of evil. The American Jew who accepts some definition of his difference is further challenged by *Eichmann in Jerusalem* because Arendt develops a concept of the citizen responsibility necessary in every modern state to prevent the re-emergence of the totalitarian movement which ravaged Germany. But once a Jew accepts his definition, by the other, as "different", he seeks an identity commensurate with that definition which places him somewhat outside the bounds of his normal society. To the extent that the American Jew achieves that different identity, whether through a valuation of the Jewish past, particular Jewish traditions, or the current Jewish state, he diminishes his responsibility for events within America. Arendt's book not only questioned basic assumptions about the Jewish past and the State of Israel which are necessary to American Jews who must achieve a Jewish identity without religious, spiritual, or communal values. She also suggested that Jews are not exempt from the responsibility to confront their society, to maintain its freedom, and to combat any drift toward totalitarianism. To ask the American Jewish community, whose accommodation has been so swift and comprehensive, to confront, and to attempt to change, the society they have so thoroughly accepted, proved an enraging demand.

## Against the Mainstream: Interview with James Matles of the U. E.

James Matles is Secretary-Treasurer of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (Independent).

Stanley Aronowitz is an editor of *Studies on the Left*.

**ARONOWITZ:** Last year U.E. published a new manual for shop stewards in which the union took the position that grievances should be solved on the shop floor. Would you describe what's been happening to the grievance procedure on the shop floor and why you felt it was necessary to take that position?

**MATLES:** The key problem facing the rank and file workers in the shop and the trade union movement today is the destruction of the shop steward system. The shop steward system has been destroyed, undermined or neutralized through the combined efforts of employers and top union leadership. I'll explain what I mean. We have retained the right, in our national contracts, in G.E. and in Westinghouse, that after a grievance has gone through the top step, the union has the right to decide whether or not it wants to strike on that grievance. If the union decides to strike on that grievance, it is a legitimate strike. It is not a violation of the contract; it does not nullify the contract. We have found that the arbitration menace has spread all through the labor movement. Union officials have absolutely surrendered their responsibility of giving leadership to the rank and file on the job, in the only way that shop problems can be settled: between the worker and the foremen, between the workers and the management of that plant. Basically, that's where a grievance has to be settled. We don't oppose arbitration as such. We have many of our agreements that provide that we could arbitrate certain things if the company and the union wish or desire it, but we have the unqualified right after the grievance procedure has gone through, to strike on a grievance. Local leadership in many instances now is completely sucked in by arbitration. But arbitrators today are following the philosophy of management in settling cases. The courts are anti-labor. It is seldom that you find a court decision in the state courts or even in the lower Federal courts on any basic question of working conditions or contract violations that is in favor of the people in the shop. The arbitrators do exactly the same thing. This is the entire influence of Taft-Hartley. Since Taft-Hartley, the general attitudes of the courts and arbitrators is against the worker.