Chapter Seven

Theorizing American Labor Antisemitism

American society was virtually saturated with antisemitic propaganda during the years of the Great Depression and WWII. Father Coughlin was by far the most famous and wide-reaching voice of intolerance during the 30s but within his shadow moved an army of small-time and lesser-known demagogues as well as the spontaneous creations of thousands of baleful, shop floor poets. The ISR documented some of the more colorful propaganda that circulated within factories during the summer of 1944.

**Antisemitic Propaganda in the Factories: A Review of Major Themes**

The Institute reproduced nine samples of antisemitic propaganda found in the various settings in which the study took place. Some, like the first example, the “Marine Hymn”, were found in virtually every location reproduced verbatim while others were spread less widely and in variations – embellished by whoever reproduced it.

Whether any of these leaflets are or were distributed in an organized way is not known. Outwardly, dissemination of this type of propaganda seems fortuitous. It is known, however, that some of the antisemitic poems and stories spread in this country in 1944 were almost
simultaneously broadcast over shortwave radio from Germany. It is hard to decide which is cause and which is effect. In many cases the story or doggerel may have originated with an individual who penciled it on the wall of a men’s room in an industrial plant, and later it may have been taken up and promoted by some fascist group.

None of the material found aims specifically at the workers’ mentality. Most of the stuff aims generally at people of poor educational background; it is characterized by coarseness and obscenity. Obscenity serves as…bait which makes the consumers swallow the antisemitic pill (AL: 1440–41).

Antisemitic propaganda did not “consistently follow an unmistakably fascist line.” Slander directed at Jews could be preceded by jibes at Hitler or praise for Roosevelt. “This may be a patriotic cloak for subversive propaganda. The main feature of this ‘literature’ is its cloakroom color. It seems to be a product of that particular community of men established in washrooms…. Folklore and deliberate propaganda meet in these ‘literary’ manifestations of a climate which welds together the intentions of fascist manipulators and the subconscious leanings of the washroom community” (AL: 1442–43).

The Marine Hymn

From the shores of Coney Island,
Looking eastward toward the sea
Stands a Kosher Air Raid Warden
Wearing a ‘V’ for Victory!

And the gentle breezes fill the air
With hot dogs from Nathan’s stand
Only the Christian boys are drafted
From this Coney Island sand.

Oh, we Jews are not afraid to say
We’ll stay at home and give first aid
Let the Christian saps go fight the Japs
In the uniforms we made.

If the Army and the Navy
Ever gaze on Heaven’s scenes
They’ll find us Jews selling boots and shoes
To the United States Marines.