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The antisemitism of Henry Wickham Steed

ANDRE LIEBICH

ABSTRACT Henry Wickham Steed (1871–1956), then editor-in-chief of the *London Times*, adopted an ambiguous position with regard to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* when the tract first appeared in English in 1920. He neither endorsed nor rejected it but instead mused in the editorial pages of *The Times* about whether it might be authentic. The following year, when *The Times* correspondent in Istanbul brought out proof that *The Protocols* was a forgery, Steed accepted his correspondent's findings and publicly retracted his earlier ambivalent position. This incident reflects on Steed's (deserved) reputation as an antisemite but it also suggests something of the complexity of his position. Steed's denunciations of Jewish influence, discovered, by his own account, through his experience as a foreign correspondent in Vienna before the First World War, are recurrent in his writings. At the same time, Steed lent strong support to Zionist aspirations at the time of the Balfour Declaration and thereafter, and, in the 1930s, he was among the very first English critics of Hitler's antisemitism. In this article, I propose to offer some hypotheses regarding Steed's antisemitism. Strange as it may sound in the wake of the Second World War, it was Steed's visceral Germanophobia that lay at the heart of his antisemitism. Until the advent of the Third Reich, Steed identified Jews with Germans and with German interests. As an ardent exponent of the 'principle of nationality', however, Steed consistently extended his advocacy of statehood for various Eastern European nationalities to the Jewish national cause. A final factor that helps to explain Steed's suspiciousness and gullibility is that, by disposition and as a lifelong journalist, he was drawn to conspiracy theories. He created a number of sensations in his career and, to return to the example of *The Protocols*, he was loath to discount so spectacular a conspiracy story.

KEYWORDS antisemitism, Germanophobia, Henry Wickham Steed, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, *The Times*

On 8 May 1920 *The Times* (London) devoted an entire column to *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, which had recently been translated into English under the title *The Jewish Peril*.¹ This was not the first review of the pamphlet but what some took to be the imprimatur of *The Times* gave it

1 *The Jewish Peril: Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, trans. from the Russian (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode 1920).

unprecedented importance.² The anonymous article—subtitled ‘A Disturbing Pamphlet’ and ‘Call for Inquiry’, and with the pamphlet’s title in quotation marks—mused in its penultimate paragraph:

What are these Protocols? Are they authentic? If so, what malevolent assembly concocted these plans, and gloated over their exposition? Are they forgery? If so, whence comes the uncanny note of prophecy, prophecy in parts fulfilled, in parts far gone in the way of fulfilment? Have we been struggling these tragic years to blow up and extirpate the secret organization of German world dominion only to find beneath it another more dangerous because more secret? Have we, by straining every fibre of our national body, escaped a ‘Pax Germanica’ only to fall into a ‘Pax Judaeica’? The ‘Elders of Zion,’ as represented in their ‘Protocols,’ are by no means kinder taskmasters than William II and his henchmen would have been.³

Questioning rather than affirming, *The Times* took care not to endorse *The Protocols*. Indeed, the article presented itself as an effort to prompt ‘impartial and exhaustive criticism’ of a pamphlet that, so far, had been allowed to pass ‘almost unchallenged’. As the dissemination of the pamphlet was increasing and it was ‘likely to perturb the thinking public’:

We in this country, who live in good fellowship with numerous representatives of Jewry, may well ask that some authoritative criticism should deal with it, and either destroy the ugly ‘Semitic’ bogey or assign their proper place to the insidious allegations of this kind of literature.⁴

Not unsurprisingly, the article unleashed a torrent of critical reactions. One irate correspondent inveighed:

I cannot imagine that any sane person in this country of ours can possibly be disturbed by the evident twaddle contained in the ‘Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion’ discovered (or invented?) by a minor official in the department of foreign religions in Moscow.⁵

2 The pamphlet had been reviewed with studied ambiguity in the *Morning Post*, 11 February 1920, and critically in the *Jewish Guardian*, 5 March 1920 and *Nation*, 27 March 1920. See Colin Holmes, ‘New light on the “Protocols of Zion”’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 11, no. 6, 1977, 13–21 (19n6). Holmes’s research contradicts Léon Poliakov, *Histoire de l’antisémitisme: IV. L’Europe suicidaire 1870–1933* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy 1977), 232, which claims that *The Protocols* had not ‘suscité jusque-là [i.e. the article in *The Times*] le moindre écho dans la presse anglaise’.

3 [Henry Wickham Steed], ‘“The Jewish peril”, a disturbing pamphlet: call for inquiry (from a correspondent)’, *The Times*, 8 May 1920.

4 Ibid.

5 A. J. de Villiers, ‘Letters’, *The Times*, 10 May 1920. De Villiers continued: ‘Why, indeed, give all this prominence to these protocols when their true worth or credibility can so easily be ascertained from “the numerous representatives of Jewry” with whom your

Similarly, the author of the *Nation's* article on *The Protocols* to which this article had alluded declared that *The Protocols* were 'worthless'.⁶

If the anonymous author of the article hoped that by protecting himself with question marks and bemoaning the 'indiscriminate anti-Semitism' and 'race-hatred' that *The Protocols* fostered,⁷ he would himself be free of the charge of antisemitism, he was clearly mistaken. There were sufficient elements in the article to suggest that *The Times* was not dismissing *The Protocols* in its entirety.⁸ Above all, however, it was the identity of the author that confirmed suspicions that this was indeed an antisemitic article.

It was soon common knowledge that the article on *The Jewish Peril* had been written by *The Times's* editor-in-chief Henry Wickham Steed.⁹ The following year, *The Times* published proof, in a sensational exposé with an accompanying editorial by Wickham Steed—subtitled 'Truth at Last'—that *The Protocols* were indeed a fraud.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Steed's 1920 article on *The Jewish Peril* confirmed, then and for all time, his pre-existing reputation as an inveterate antisemite.¹¹ Lucien Wolf, 'foreign secretary' of the Anglo-Jewish establishment, dismissed Steed as 'quite a dangerous

correspondent lives "in good fellowship". One cannot prove the non-existence of an alleged body but the onus of proof of the existence of such a body rests upon the perpetrator and perpetrators of the lie ... Lloyd George and Clemenceau pulled by the Elders of Zion! What balderdash!

6 G. Hagberg Wright, 'Letters', *The Times*, 12 May 1920. In the same issue, Aylmer Maud, of the National Liberal Club wrote: 'It is nearer to the truth that it would perturb the "unthinking public" ... the book contains gross ineptitudes. If any Jew talked such nonsense in Paris in 1901 one wonders why he did it! But why it should have been published in Russia in 1905 is plain enough.' A rare discordant voice offered only a weak defence. Sonia E. Howe, 'Letters', *The Times*, 11 May 1920, wrote, rather pathetically: 'This is a mistranslation, it is not an anti-Semitic pamphlet.'

7 [Steed], "'The Jewish peril'".

8 For example: 'Incidentally, some of the features of the would-be Jewish programme bear an uncanny resemblance to situations and events now developing under our eyes.'

9 Colin Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1876–1939* (London: Edward Arnold 1979), 279n56, confirms what was an open secret (Holmes cites the authority of *The Times's* archivist for this confirmation).

10 [Henry Wickham Steed], 'An exposure, the source of the Protocols: truth at last', *The Times*, 16 August 1921. Three articles exposing the forgery by Philip Perceval Graves were printed in *The Times* on 16, 17 and 18 August 1921, and immediately reprinted as the pamphlet, Philip Perceval Graves, *The Truth about 'The Protocols': A Literary Forgery* (London: The Times 1921).

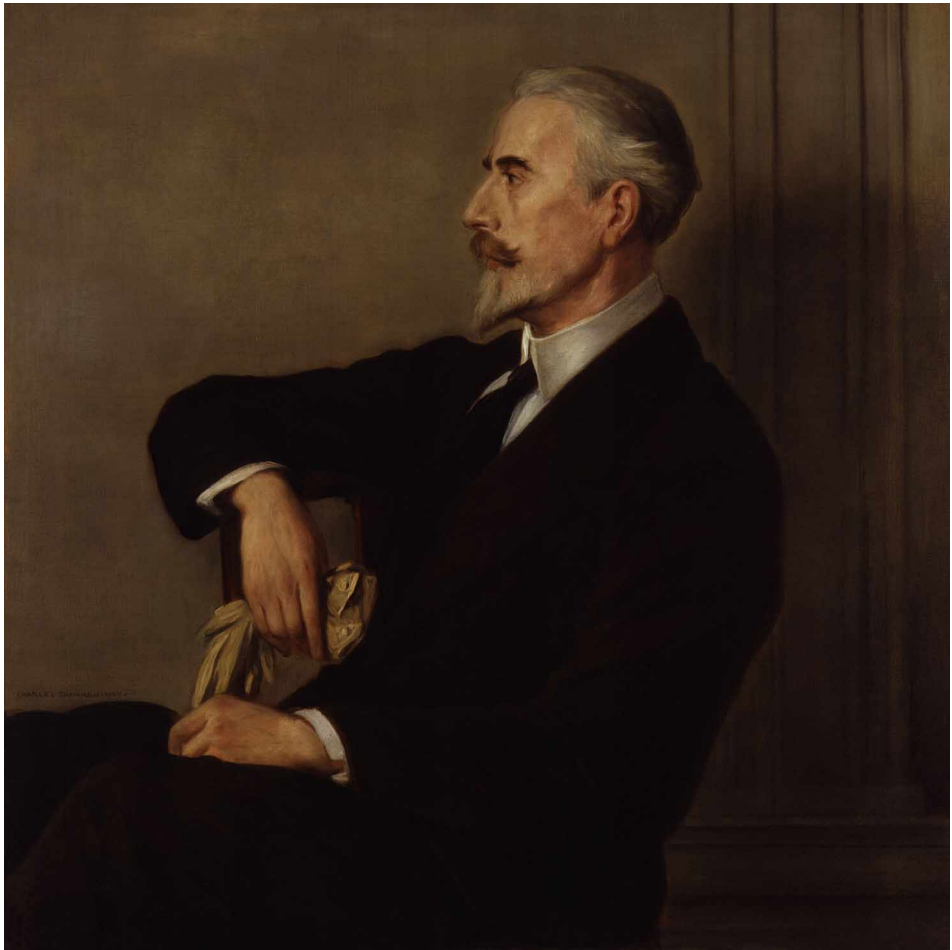
11 Salomon Poliakov, in *La Tribune juive*, 21 May 1920, wrote: 'chaque ligne de l'article trahit l'intention bien arrêtée de suggérer au lecteur que les Protocoles sont authentiques, qu'une organisation secrète des Juifs existe' (quoted in Poliakov, *Histoire de l'antisémitisme*, 232). Poliakov added, on his own account: 'Certes, le journal les citait sur le mode interrogatif plutôt que sur le mode affirmatif ... mais il ne s'agissait que d'un procédé rhétorique.' He also appears to believe that *The Jewish Peril* was the title chosen by *The Times* rather than the title of the pamphlet under review. Walter Laqueur, *Russia and Germany: A Century of Conflict* (London: Weidenfeld

anti-Semite—absolutely monomaniacal’.¹² H. A. Gwynne, editor of the high Tory *Morning Post*, would have agreed with this assessment, though from the opposite, antisemitic perspective.¹³ Steed, he asserted, was ‘quite of our way of thinking about the Jewish problem’, though, Gwynne claimed, Steed was unable to express his views because of a powerful Jewish *Times* shareholder.¹⁴ In the literature and on the Internet today, one can read that, under Steed’s editorship, *The Times* endorsed *The Protocols* and ‘called Jews the world’s greatest danger’.¹⁵

This article examines the pattern of Steed’s antisemitism. It argues that this pattern is complex because, in addition to being a journalist much prone to sensational conspiracy theories, Wickham Steed was also an ardent Zionist and one of Hitler’s earliest and fiercest critics, on anti-racist grounds among others. I suggest here that the key to Steed’s antisemitism lies in his deep-rooted Germanophobia, an explanation that requires historical reconstruction in the light of the tragic dénouement of European antisemitism in the course of the last century.

and Nicolson 1965), 312, mentions that *The Times* article was brought out by the Nazi Party as a leaflet in 1922/1923 under the title *Aufsehererregende Enthüllungen der Times über das jüdische Weltprogramm*.

- 12 Letter from Lucien Wolf to Cyrus Adler, 15 July 1920, quoted in Sharman Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews: The Anglo-Jewish Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution* (London: Frank Cass 1992), 251n37. Wolf was the longstanding leading light on the Conjoint Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Anglo-Jewish Association.
- 13 Letter from H. A. Gwynne to Lady Bathurst, owner of the *Morning Post*, 31 January 1920, quoted in Keith M. Wilson, *A Study in the History and Politics of The Morning Post, 1905–1926* (Lewiston, ME: Edwin Mellen Press 1990), 180. Gwynne was very excited by what he called ‘The Bolshevik Report’, a translation of *The Protocols* that had come into his possession the previous autumn. As *The Times* article appeared, the *Morning Post* was preparing a series of articles inspired by *The Protocols* to be published in July 1920 and immediately afterward in book form as *The Cause of World Unrest* (London: Grant Richards 1920).
- 14 Gwynne was referring to Sir John Ellerman, the second most important shareholder in *The Times* (after Lord Northcliffe) and the richest man in England. A letter by a third party written after Northcliffe’s death, quoted in *The History of The Times. Vol. IV: The 150th Anniversary and Beyond, 1912–1948*, 2 vols (London: The Times 1952), II, 711, asserts that Ellerman would ‘get rid’ of Steed but was noted for not involving himself in public affairs. The same source confirms that Ellerman saw his investment in *The Times* as nothing more than that, at least until 1922 (I, 128). The Gwynne Papers do not suggest there was any complicity or intimacy between Gwynne and Steed; on the contrary, their newspapers were competitors and their relations, notably over the Irish issue, were sour (Bodleian Library, Oxford, Gwynne Papers, Boxes 22, 24, 47).
- 15 See the *Wikipedia* entry on ‘The Times’, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Times (viewed 7 February 2012). In fact, *The Times* did not make these claims. The most recent reassertion I have found of the assertion that *The Times* published *The Protocols* is in Janet Kerekes, *Masked Ball at the White Cross Café: The Failure of Jewish Assimilation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America 2005), 270.



Charles Haslewood Shannon, *Henry Wickham Steed*, 1920, oil on canvas (National Portrait Gallery NPG 5745) © National Portrait Gallery, London

Wickham Steed as antisemite

Wickham Steed's reputation as an antisemite was well established by the time the editorial on *The Jewish Peril* appeared. It had been founded on his first, and perhaps most notable, book *The Hapsburg Monarchy*. This study was first published by Constable in 1913, just as Steed was ending a ten-year stint as correspondent for *The Times* in Vienna. The book was banned by the Austro-Hungarian authorities, a measure that, of course, only increased its notoriety. It was to go through four editions as well as appear in French translation in the following six years and, although now long out of print, it is still cited as a classic.¹⁶

16 Henry Wickham Steed, *The Hapsburg Monarchy* [1913], 4th edn (London: Constable 1919).

The Hapsburg Monarchy devoted 50 of its 300 pages to 'The Jews', making this by far the longest section in the chapter on 'The People'. Steed ended the previous section with the following comment: '... the Hapsburg Monarchy ... despite its reputation for conservatism, might with justice claim that it offers even to its humblest citizens a career open to talent especially when the talent is that of the Jew.' He began the section on 'The Jews' asserting: 'Among the peoples of Austria-Hungary the Jewish people stands first in importance.' What follows is a mixture of analysis and prejudice, defended on the grounds that one cannot 'beg' the Jewish question 'by adopting an unreasoning philo-semitic or anti-semitic attitude'.¹⁷

As in his later notorious editorial on *The Jewish Peril*, Steeds adopts a rhetorical form of interrogation. 'Are the peculiar characteristics that form at once the strength and weakness of the Jews a result of religious persecution, or have the Jews been persecuted because these characteristics have rendered them odious to the peoples that have harboured them?', he asks. Perhaps most bizarre is his reference to the 'degraded, bow-legged, repulsive type often to be found among the Ashkenazim' who, he insists, cannot be regarded 'as a product of persecution during the Christian era' since 'the same type is to be found on Egyptian and Babylonian monuments'. Admittedly, this depiction appears as a contrast to his comments on the 'more aristocratic' and altogether more admirable Sephardim.¹⁸ Here Steed is only buying, somewhat too eagerly, into a peculiar trope, already widespread in England, that opposed the 'nobility' of the Sephardim to the 'disgust' aroused by Ashkenazim.¹⁹ Such 'aesthetic disgust', though directed against Jews in general, is characteristic too of much of contemporary English literature, as Bryan Cheyette has demonstrated.²⁰

Even more conventional is Steed's explanation of antisemitism as being directly proportional in strength to the number of Jews: 'When the percentage rises above a certain point—a point determined in each case by the character of the non-Jewish population—anti-semitism makes its appearance and finds expression in ways varying from social ostracism to massacre.' Steed also brings up the familiar trope of Jewish exploitation, though he emphasizes that 'Jew exploits Jew with a remorselessness not surpassed by any Jewish exploitation of Christians'. Repeatedly, Steed refers to the authority of Werner Sombart, then an extremely influential (and, by later reputation, antisemitic) German socialist academic, although Steed believes Sombart is wrong 'to attribute to the Jews the creation of the

17 *Ibid.*, 144, 145.

18 *Ibid.*, 146, 147.

19 Ashkenazim as 'object ... of disgust', quoted from Disraeli's *Tancred* in Todd M. Endelman, 'Benjamin Disraeli and the myth of Sephardi superiority', *Jewish History*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1966, 21–35 (24).

20 Bryan Cheyette, *Constructions of 'the Jew' in English Literature and Society: Racial Representations, 1875–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993).

capitalist system as it would be to make them responsible for the present bureaucratization of finance and industry'.²¹

The *Times Literary Supplement's* reviewer of the first edition of *The Hapsburg Monarchy* called it a 'remarkable book'. The reviewer acknowledged that 'Mr. Steed is certain to be accused of anti-Semitism', but hastened to add:

But a protest should be entered against the tendency to identify the recognition of a Jewish question with the attitude of mind known as anti-Semitism . . . Surely an honest recognition of the fact that a Jewish question exists and ought to be studied is the best guarantee against those bursts of violent feeling which are justly to be deprecated.

The reviewer admitted that 'some of his [Steed's] statements and conclusions may not be accepted without reserve', although he pointed out that 'if he [Steed] is critical of Jewish influence, his condemnation of the Church is far more direct and severe'.²² Twenty years later, a prominent American educationalist was to write in a letter to an English acquaintance: 'What does Wickham Steed amount to? I have recently read his book on the Hapsburg Monarchy—a strange medley of knowledge, perspicacity and prejudice.'²³

Steed's private remarks during the 1914 July Crisis deepened his reputation as an antisemite. In the weeks leading up to the war, *The Times*, where Steed was now foreign editor, waged a relentless—and ultimately successful—campaign against the overwhelming reluctance among the British political elite and public opinion to engage in the coming confrontation. The events of those days have been described in the most minute detail but, for our purposes, what is relevant is the following incident.²⁴ The financial editor of *The Times* was invited urgently to the City of London to see the elderly Lord Rothschild and his brother who told the editor in no uncertain terms that *The Times* was 'hounding the country into war' and that its bellicose articles should cease immediately as the City 'was on the brink of a catastrophe such as the world had never seen'.²⁵ The financial editor reported to the proprietor of *The Times*, Lord Northcliffe, and to its foreign editor. Northcliffe asked Steed's opinion and the latter replied: 'It is a dirty

21 Steed, *The Hapsburg Monarchy*, 148, 149, 154.

22 [William Kidston McClure], 'The Hapsburg monarchy and peoples: the Jewish question', *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 November 1913. The review, like all reviews in the *TLS* at the time, was published anonymously.

23 Letter from Abraham Flexner to Thomas Jones, 3 August 1934, in Thomas Jones, *A Diary with Letters 1931–1950* (London: Oxford University Press 1954), 137.

24 For the briefest overview of the British press in those weeks, see D. C. Watt, 'The British reactions to the assassination at Sarajevo', *European Studies Review*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1971, 233–47.

25 *The History of The Times*. Vol. IV, I, 208. See also Henry Wickham Steed, *Through Thirty Years, 1892–1922: A Personal Narrative*, 2 vols (London: Heinemann 1924), II, 208; and Niall Ferguson, *The House of Rothschild: The World's Banker 1849–1999* (New York: Viking 1999), 433.

German-Jewish international financial attempt to bully us into advocating neutrality.²⁶

Steed's utterance has been cited repeatedly.²⁷ To be sure, its original source, Steed's memoirs, didn't appear for ten years but the tenor of his statement and perhaps even the exact words would have circulated quickly throughout Fleet Street and beyond. They were only re-enforced by the positions *The Times* took during the First World War, when it was accused of using the terms 'German' and 'Jew' interchangeably.²⁸ The favour that Northcliffe bestowed upon Steed, appointing him as editor-in-chief of the paper in 1919, was rightly interpreted as indicating a meeting of minds, particularly concerning Germany but also with respect to the Jews, in regard to whom Northcliffe had shown his antisemitic prejudices on taking over *The Times*.²⁹

Wickham Steed as Zionist

The question of Steed's attitude to the Jews is hardly exhausted with the aspects discussed above. If we return to *The Times* of 8 May 1920, we find, side by side with the piece on *The Jewish Peril*, another article entitled 'Zionist Aspirations' and subtitled 'Dr. Weizmann on Future of Palestine'. The article states the Zionist leader's position at length and uncritically, as well it might since it begins by quoting Weizmann's 'appreciation and that of his fellow Zionists for the assistance rendered to their cause by *The Times*'.³⁰ This assistance was almost single-handedly supplied by Henry Wickham Steed. In 1917 Steed, as foreign editor of *The Times*, had been given a free hand with respect to policy on Zionism, as the editor was uninterested in the matter and the proprietor, Lord Northcliffe, was away in the United States. Steed

26 Steed, *Through Thirty Years*, II, 9.

27 Quoted twice in Ferguson, *The House of Rothschild*, 411, 434; see also, for example, Reginald Pound and Geoffrey Harmsworth, *Northcliffe* (London: Cassell 1959), 462.

28 Most of the literature accepts these accusations, citing the *Jewish World*, 19 May 1915, and the *Jewish Chronicle*, 14 May 1915. See Poliakov, *Histoire de l'antisémitisme*, 214; C. C. Aronsfeld, 'Jewish enemy aliens in England during the First World War', *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1956, 275–83 (277); and Elkan D. Levy, 'Antisemitism in England at war, 1914–1916', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 4, no. 5, 1970, 27–30 (27). Colin Holmes demurs, claiming the accusation is an exaggeration based on two comments (Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, 122).

29 In 1913 Northcliffe fired one Jewish member of the staff, D. D. Braham, the assistant foreign editor, and demoted another, David Cowan, who had been chief foreign subeditor. Northcliffe's purpose may well have been to place Steed in position as foreign editor. Steed himself writes that Northcliffe told him some time later that he had acted because 'Northcliffe thought all Jews were pro-German and one could not have two of them in key positions' (letter from Wickham Steed to Evelyn Wrench, 23 April 1953: British Library, London, Steed Papers, Add. MS 74122).

30 'Zionist aspirations: Dr Weizmann on future of Palestine', *The Times*, 8 May 1920.

took full advantage of this latitude.³¹ As Chaim Weizmann recounts in his autobiography, in May 1917 he called on Steed to hand in a letter to the editor defending the Zionist position against the 'assimilationists' and was (pleasantly) surprised by Steed's reaction: 'He [Steed] received me with the utmost cordiality. I found him not only interested in our movement but quite well informed on it . . . For a good hour or so we discussed the kind of leader which was likely to make the best appeal to the British public.'³²

The Times published Weizmann's letter and followed it the next day with a leader entitled 'The Future of the Jews'.³³ The leader summarized the argument of the Conjoint Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Anglo-Jewish Association, according to which Jews regarded themselves 'primarily as a religious community', and the 'establishment of a Jewish nationality in Palestine' would 'undermine the very principle [of political and religious equality] which Jews have invoked to secure their emancipation'. In response, *The Times* wrote that, '... in attempting to define Jewish nationality in terms of religion the Committee come dangerously near to begging the question which they raise'. It approvingly quoted Weizmann's letter of the previous day:

it may possibly be inconvenient to certain individual Jews that the Jews do constitute a nationality. The question is one of fact, not of argument, and the fact that the Jews are a nationality is attested by the conviction of the overwhelming majority of Jews throughout all ages.

Invoking further the authority of both the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain and Lord Rothschild, *The Times* affirmed: 'We believe it [Zionism] in fact to embody the feelings of the great bulk of Jewry everywhere.' The rest of the leader was a hymn to Zionism:

it has fired with a new ideal millions of poverty-stricken Jews cooped up in the ghettos of the Old World and the New. It has tended to make Jews proud of their race and to claim recognition, as Jews, in virtue of the eminent services rendered by Jewry to the religious development and civilization of mankind.

As for the claim 'that the realization of territorial Zionism, in some form, would cause Christendom to round on the Jews and say, "Now you have a land of your own, go to it!"', this was nothing but the figment of an 'imaginative nervousness'.³⁴ Chaim Weizmann himself called this

31 Transcript of a letter from Henry Wickham Steed to Lord Northcliffe, 14 October 1917: St Antony's College, Oxford, Middle East Centre Archives.

32 Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error: The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann* (London: Hamish Hamilton 1949), 255.

33 Editorial, 'The future of the Jews', *The Times*, 29 May 1917.

34 *Ibid.*

'a rather remarkable leading article' and 'a magnificent presentation of the Zionist case'.³⁵

That Steed's sentiments were not dictated by immediate circumstances may be confirmed by what he had written, with some of the same vocabulary, in *The Hapsburg Monarchy* four years earlier:

Zionism came [to Austria-Hungary] with the force of an evangel. To be a Jew and to be proud of it; to glory in the power and pertinacity of the race, its traditions, its triumphs, its sufferings, its resistance to persecution; to look the world frankly in the face, and to enjoy the luxury of moral and intellectual honesty; to feel pride in belonging to the people that gave Christendom its Divinities, that taught half the world monotheism, whose ideas have permeated civilization as never the ideas of a race before it, whose genius fashioned the whole mechanism of modern commerce and whose artists, actors, singers, and writers have filled a larger place in the cultured universe than those of any other people: this, or something like this, was the train of thought fired in youthful Jewish minds by the Zionist spark.³⁶

Rarely does Steed wax as poetic as he does here:

To attend a Zionist gathering in the Leopoldstadt, the Jewish quarter of Vienna, is an enlightening experience to those who have seen the filth and misery of the Ghettos where Jew exploits Jew and where contempt for the Gentile does duty for self-respect. Hundreds, sometimes thousands of well-washed youths and trim maidens, with a large sprinkling of Jewish working-men, may be seen listening enraptured to readings from the Scriptures. The territorial ideal, that is to say, the foundation of a Jewish state in Palestine or elsewhere, doubtless appeals to the bulk of the Zionists, but the main effect of the ideal is to give them self-confidence and the courage of their convictions. It is too much to expect that Zionism will suddenly endow all Jews with courage, tact and uprightness; but it is much that it should already have provided an intellectual and moral elite among them with an ideal capable of arousing faith and enthusiasm.³⁷

Steed's Zionism was thus a constant. In 1913 he had affirmed that 'Constitution of a Jewish State' is 'an aim with which every impartial student of the Jewish question must sympathize'. He struck the same theme in his memoirs a decade later and, indeed, maintained this position unwaveringly until his death in 1956.³⁸ In the course of the crucial year, 1917, he published

35 Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, 255.

36 Steed, *The Hapsburg Monarchy*, 175–6.

37 *Ibid.*, 176–7.

38 *Ibid.*, 179 and Steed, *Through Thirty Years*, II, 391–2. See Samuel Landman, letter to *The Times*, 19 January 1956: 'Zionists in many lands, particularly those of the older generation, have lost in Wickham Steed one of the earliest and most distinguished of their English friends.' Landman was honorary secretary of the Zionist Council of Great Britain in 1912, editor of *The Zionist* in 1914 and, later, legal advisor to the British Zionist Organization.

several other editorials that weighed heavily in favour of the Zionist cause. *The Times* came out strongly on behalf of the project of a Jewish regiment, earning Steed the lasting gratitude of the project's initiator, the Zionist revisionist leader Vladimir Jabotinsky, who dismissed charges that Steed was or had ever been an antisemite.³⁹ It was Steed who checked the English of the note that Weizmann and Ahad Ha'am sent to Maurice Hankey, secretary of the British cabinet, urging it to proceed with what was to become the Balfour Declaration.⁴⁰ In the week preceding adoption of the Declaration, even as the British cabinet was struggling over the issue, *The Times* reiterated its support for the Zionist project, now adding strategic considerations to those previously invoked.⁴¹ The day after the Declaration's adoption another *Times* leader expressed satisfaction with 'the Old Testament spirit' in which government spokesmen had justified the decision.⁴²

It can be argued that support for Zionism may not be incompatible with antisemitism. Indeed, Edwin Montagu, secretary of state for India in the British cabinet at the time of the adoption of the Balfour Declaration and only the second Jew to attain cabinet rank, reacted violently to the Declaration, denouncing it as antisemitic.⁴³ Balfour himself expressed strong personal distaste for Jews, and scholars have commented on 'the juxtaposition of latent anti-Semitism and Zionist sentiment among British

39 Editorial, 'The Jewish regiment', *The Times*, 23 August 1917. Jabotinsky wrote: 'He [Steed] understood the mentality of Zionism as few Christians can understand it—the inner, spiritual, anti-assimilation aspect . . . Naturally—as with any non-Jew who talks like a Zionist—many Jews accused him of anti-Semitism. This tendency among my fellow Jews—to see a Haman in every Gentile who permits himself to tell a Jewish anecdote (and his anecdote is usually a sugary compliment compared to those we tell against ourselves)—has always been a complete mystery to me'; Vladimir Jabotinsky, *The Story of the Jewish Legion*, trans. from the Russian by Samuel Katz [1929] (New York: Bernard Ackerman 1945), 80.

40 Editor's note to letter from Weizmann to Hankey, 15 October 1917, in Chaim Weizmann, *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann (Series A, Letters)*, vol. VII, ed. Leonard Stein (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press 1975). Ahad Ha'am was the founder of cultural Zionism

41 Editorial, 'The Jews and Palestine', *The Times*, 26 October 1917. See Elizabeth Monroe, 'How Balfour persuaded the cabinet: fiftieth anniversary of the declaration to the Jews', *The Times*, 2 November 1967.

42 Somewhat incongruously, the editorial was entitled 'Jew, Arab and Armenian', *The Times*, 3 December 1917. It cited an Armenian who had reminded his listeners that Armenians also claimed descent from the children of Noah.

43 Montagu circulated a memorandum entitled 'On the anti-Semitism of the present government', explaining: 'I have chosen the above title for this memorandum, not in any hostile sense, not by any means as quarrelling with an anti-Semitic view which may be held by my colleagues, not with a desire to deny that anti-Semitism can be held by rational men, not even with a view of suggesting the Government is deliberately anti-Semitic but I wish to place on record my views that the policy of HM's Government is anti-Semitic in result' (Edwin Montagu, 'On the anti-Semitism of the present government—Memorandum submitted to the British Cabinet, August, 1917', 23 August 1917: Public Record Office, Kew, Cab. 24/24).

politicians, diplomats and journalists'.⁴⁴ British Gentiles could embrace Zionism for biblical reasons, as did Lloyd George and Arthur Balfour, or for imperial reasons, as did Lord Milner and General Smuts—seeing in a British-protected Palestine an outpost of empire—or indeed for both of these reasons, as was apparently the case with Winston Churchill.⁴⁵ They might 'conceive of Jewish nationalism as an answer to excessive Jewish influence in the diaspora',⁴⁶ or even, to cite the argument that Steed had debunked in the leader that so pleased Weizmann, support it in order to be able to say, 'Now you have a land of your own, go to it'.⁴⁷

None of these explanations accounts for Steed's Zionism. Although a conventional Protestant, of Congregational background and Church of England allegiance, he was not a religious man.⁴⁸ For an Englishman of his generation, he was unusually indifferent to 'the Empire', to the detriment of his own standing among the British elite.⁴⁹ True, Steed was awed by what he perceived as Jewish influence but he saw it in tactical rather than principled terms, as something that could be enlisted on behalf of whatever cause he was championing; moreover, given Zionism's minority position within Jewish elites in Europe and the United States until a very late date, embracing Zionism was not a formula calculated to win over dominant Jewish influence on one's own behalf.⁵⁰

The key to Steed's embrace of the Zionist cause lies in his passionate crusade on behalf of 'the principle of nationality', or what was soon to be

44 Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews*, 140. In response to Balfour's disparaging remark about Jews, intended as a compliment to Weizmann, the latter replied: 'Mr. Balfour you meet the wrong kind of Jew', quoted in A. N. Wilson, *After the Victorians: The Decline of Britain in the World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2005), 104. In his *Trial and Error*, Chaim Weizmann passed over the thrust of what he had previously written: 'He [Balfour] told me how he had once had a long talk with Cosima Wagner at Bayreuth and that he shared many of her anti-Semitic postulates' (153); see also Weizmann, *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann*, VII, 81.

45 There is a considerable literature on Churchill and the Jews. For a review of recent publications, see Daniel Mandel, 'Winston Churchill: a good friend of Jews and Zionism?', *Jewish Political Studies Review*, vol. 21, no. 1–2, 2009.

46 Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews*, 140, invokes this argument specifically with reference to Wickham Steed.

47 Editorial, 'The Jews and Palestine'.

48 On Steed's personal convictions, see his memoirs *Through Thirty Years*.

49 One need only look at the numerous letters addressed to the very imperially minded Geoffrey Dawson, both Steed's predecessor (in 1919) and his successor (1922) as editor of *The Times*, to get a sense of how Steed was perceived as being indifferent to the empire (Bodleian Library, Oxford, Dawson Papers, Boxes 67ff.). On the imperialist and pro-German Dawson as something of an antithesis to Steed, see *The History of The Times*. Vol. IV, *passim*.

50 Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1972), dates 'the real upsurge in American Zionism ... only after 1936', and, given Britain's involvement in Palestine at the time, the corresponding upsurge in Britain would have come even later (549ff.).

called 'national self-determination', especially as this applied to the rights of 'small nations' and 'oppressed nationalities'.⁵¹ In the course of the First World War Steed waged a tireless campaign aimed at the destruction of the Austro-Hungarian empire with the purpose of liberating its subject peoples, in particular the Czechs and Slovaks, as well as the Croats and Slovenes, and the empire's Serbs. This epic story has been recounted a number of times, both by authors hostile to Steed's aims and those well disposed to them.⁵²

It recounts Steed's work on behalf of this cause in *The Times* as well as, when that forum proved too restricted, in such journals as the *Edinburgh Review* and, above all, in the immensely influential *New Europe*.⁵³ The story includes Steed's lobbying in Whitehall, among Britain's allies as well as his most effective efforts as *de facto* head of the Northcliffe-led Department of Propaganda in Enemy Countries near the end of the war.⁵⁴ Even those who lament the outcome must concede that it was a brilliant campaign. As a prominent historian has put it: 'Czecho-Slovakia was the child of propaganda.'⁵⁵ This could be said as well of the other new states of Central and Eastern Europe, and the leading propagandist was Henry Wickham Steed.

In contrast to many of his contemporaries, Steed never faltered in his commitment to 'small nations' as they had emerged from the First World War. Almost echoing Weizmann (though without reference to a specific

51 See J. Holland Rose, *Nationality as a Factor in Modern History* (London: Rivingtons 1916); René Johannet, *Le Principe des nationalités* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie nationale 1923); and Alfred Cobban, *National Self-Determination* (London: Oxford University Press 1945). How Steed (and others) reoriented the debate on 'small nations', meaning initially states such as Serbia and Belgium, to refer to stateless peoples such as the Czechs and Slovaks is encapsulated in a report on a public meeting in *The Times*, 20 October 1915, with a headline in thick print reading 'MR. ASQUITH'S TRIBUTE TO SERBIA' and the smaller and paler subtitle 'Prof. Masaryk on small nations'.

52 See Kenneth J. Calder, *Britain and the Origins of the New Europe, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1976); Mark Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (New York: St Martin's Press 2000); Harry Hanak, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary during the First World War: A Study in the Formation of Public Opinion* (London: Oxford University Press 1962); M. L. Sanders and Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914–1918* (London: Macmillan 1982); Peter Schuster, *Henry Wickham Steed und die Habsburgermonarchie* (Vienna: Hermann Böhlhaus 1970); and Z. A. B. Zeman, *The Break-Up of the Habsburg Empire, 1914–1918: A Study in National and Social Revolution* (London: Oxford University Press 1961).

53 See Harry Hanak, 'The New Europe, 1916–1920', *Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 39, no. 93, 1961, 370–99; and Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe: R. W. Seton-Watson and the Last Years of Austria-Hungary* (London: Methuen 1981). R. W. Seton-Watson was Steed's closest collaborator during the First World War, Steed's protégé before the war as Steed was to be his protégé after the war.

54 See Gary S. Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1992), 146; and Philip M. Taylor, 'The Foreign Office and British propaganda during the First World War', *Historical Journal*, vol. 23, no. 4, 1980, 875–98.

55 H. A. L. Fisher, *A History of Europe* (London: Edward Arnold 1961), 1155.

people), Steed wrote in 1932: 'Nationalism may be right or wrong, but so long as people—and peoples—are ready to fight and die for it, it is a real and very awkward fact.'⁵⁶ Throughout the interwar years, long after it had become accepted wisdom that the Paris Peace Settlement was deeply flawed, he defended it tooth and nail (often in the correspondence columns of *The Times*), thus subjecting himself to the derision of many a powerful public figure. Lord Allen of Hurtwood sneered at 'Mr. Wickham Steed [who] will still go on making speeches and writing articles about arming the law in the defence of permanent frontiers'.⁵⁷ And the great press baron, Lord Rothermere, addressed him as 'one of those journalistic Bourbons [who] seem to have forgotten nothing and learned nothing. You seem to think that 1938 is still 1914.'⁵⁸ In all likelihood, it was this commitment to small nations that led Steed to bring the weight of *The Times* to bear on the resolution of the Irish Question in 1921. That the once ultra-Unionist *Times* should have supported a policy that flew in the face of its history and of its readership's prejudices meant that '*The Times* can hardly have been more unpopular in England than during this period'.⁵⁹ Yet, a prominent and hostile rival editor called this 'one of the most powerful efforts in the journalism of my time'.⁶⁰ It was an effort on behalf of a 'small nation', like the Czechs and Slovaks, the Yugoslavs or the Jews.

Wickham Steed as anti-appeaser

With the Nazi assumption of power in Germany in 1933, Henry Wickham Steed, now dismissed from *The Times*, emerged as one of the earliest, most vocal and most radical of Hitler's critics. A recent study of interwar Britain argues that Hitlerism was better understood and more effectively disapproved of than many historians have been willing to admit, and it cites Steed's writings in support of that argument.⁶¹ It is true that Hitler may have been taken more seriously as a danger than Mussolini had, but the weight of evidence does not endorse the claim that Steed spoke on behalf of

56 Steed's review of Normal Angell's *Unseen Assassins*, in the *Observer*, 10 January 1932.

57 Allen of Hurtwood, 'Letters to the Editor', *The Times*, 8 June 1938.

58 Letter from Lord Rothermere to Steed, 3 August 1938: the correspondence was published in the *Daily Mail* and reproduced in the *News Chronicle*, 16 August 1938.

59 Steed, *Through Thirty Years*, II, 351.

60 J. A. Spender, editor of the *Westminster Gazette*, quoted in William Dodgson Bowman, *The Story of 'The Times'* (London: George Routledge and Sons 1931), 334. Bowman is unstinting in his praise for Steed personally with regard to this accomplishment, and his assessment is confirmed by C. L. Mowat, *Britain between the Wars 1918–1940* (London: Methuen 1955), 81, 84.

61 Steed's *The Meaning of Hitlerism* (London: Nisbet 1934), and an earlier article are cited in Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane 2009), 282.

mainstream British opinion. Ten years earlier Steed had been among the very first and very few British critics of Mussolini's dictatorship, in the name of an avowed liberalism.⁶² He now took to the lecture circuit, arousing interest to be sure but not necessarily convincing his entire audience, to warn of an even more dangerous dictator with bellicose intentions and the most radically illiberal views: 'Hitler would make war as soon as he was ready', Steed told a meeting of the League of Nations Union in November 1933.⁶³ Even earlier, he had addressed an Anglo-American audience in London in apocalyptic terms: the world was on the eve, if not in the midst, of the greatest crisis in the history of western civilization since the French Revolution of 1789. What was happening in Germany was 'the negation of Christ and the affirmation of Odin' and, he fulminated, the British prime minister had not raised a word to denounce the 'abominations against Jews, Liberals, Catholics and everybody who does not happen to think as the prevailing armed gang thinks and feels'.⁶⁴

It was in the course of this sustained and, initially, lonely campaign to denounce Hitler's regime that the contours of Steed's attitude towards the Jews came into sharp relief. As an authoritative study has shown: 'The mingling of anti-Germanism and anti-Semitism so common in the twenties', was proving unsustainable after 1933 in the face of the increasing virulence of Nazi anti-Semitism.⁶⁵ Steed did not need this new evidence to confirm his deeply rooted conviction that Germany was a fundamentally illiberal society. For the first time, however, he came to acknowledge that he had found an ally in German Jewry. Within months of Hitler's accession to power Steed delivered a series of lectures at King's College London, published the following year as a book that was to go through five editions in the following three years.⁶⁶ This was only the first of what were to be numerous publications—a second book in 1934, other books, newspaper and journal articles, prefaces and essays, and even a children's book—that dealt with Hitler's evil intentions.⁶⁷ From the outset, Hitler's racial policies were at the heart of Steed's critique. Hitlerism, he wrote, was incomprehensible without knowledge of what Steed called the 'Nordic legend'. This was a

62 Steed's immediate and unremitting denunciation of Mussolini is well documented in the texts and introductory essay in Giovanna Farrell-Vinay (ed.), *Luigi Sturzo a Londra: Carteggi e documenti (1925–1946)*, trans. from the English by Clara De Rosa (Soveria Mannelli, Catanzaro: Rubbettino 2003). On Steed's liberalism, see his leader, 'What is a Liberal?', *The Times*, 19 March 1920.

63 Steed, quoted in *The Times*, 13 November 1933.

64 Steed, quoted in *The Times*, 13 September 1933.

65 Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933–1939* (London: Constable 1980), 63.

66 Henry Wickham Steed, *Hitler: Whence and Whither?* (London: Nisbet 1934). The 5th edition came out in 1937.

67 Steed, *The Meaning of Hitlerism*. The children's book was *That Bad Man: A Tale for the Young of All Ages* (London: Macmillan 1942).

'redeeming evangel' deriving from Gobineau, Nietzsche, Wagner and Houston Stewart Chamberlain but radicalized beyond anything that these thinkers had imagined. Pursuing this theme in his second book of the same year, *The Meaning of Hitlerism*, Steed identified the 'Nordic legend' or the 'Nordic gospel' as the main source both of the 'dynamic force in Hitlerism' and of the 'hybrid mystic quality which has made of it the present working religion of the German people'.⁶⁸ The result was a perfidious and absurd ideology of 'Aryanism' that made as much sense as the notion of a 'brachycephalous dictionary'.⁶⁹ Then and later, Steed drew liberally on his own experience of Vienna in the first decade of the century to stress that this had also been the time when and place where Hitler's antisemitism had been formed. The air there and then was 'charged with noxious vapours', wrote Steed, but 'to Hitler it was the very breath of life'.⁷⁰

A recent study has pointed to Steed's contribution to the understanding of Nazism as being rooted in his early realization of the meaning that antisemitism held in National Socialist ideology.⁷¹ In contrast to most other observers of the time, Steed did not dismiss antisemitic policy as a mere 'theory', but saw in antisemitism an essential element of the regime's make-up, serving, much like its critique of capitalism, to identify an all-purpose scapegoat. According to Steed, Nazi antisemitism was a pathological expression of 'Germanism' involving a purely racial concept of 'Volkstum' that necessarily excluded the Jews and that served to foster an advanced persecution complex. Already in 1934 Steed was sure that Nazi Germany had declared war on the Jews.

Beyond using pen and pulpit to attack Hitler, Steed engaged in a number of both public and behind-the-scenes ventures directed against the Nazi regime. He drew early attention to the fate of Nazi political prisoners, notably Carl von Ossietzky, the future Nobel Peace Prize laureate.⁷² Steed did so, as he put it, 'at the urgent request of a large number of German writers and public men in exile', and indeed Steed quickly became an indispensable point of contact for German exiles in Britain. He wrote to British officials, academics and journalists on their behalf, sought to promote their writings and prefaced their books as they appeared.⁷³ Already in 1933 he had set up what he called a 'special information service of my own', a cross between a research centre and an intelligence unit devoted entirely to

68 Steed, *The Meaning of Hitlerism*, xx.

69 Steed, *Hitler: Whence and Whither?*, 132.

70 *Ibid.*, 47.

71 Jorg Später, *Vansittart: Britische Debatten über Deutsche und Nazis 1902–1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein 2003), 113.

72 Henry Wickham Steed, 'German political prisoners: the case of Carl von Ossietzky' (letter to the editor), *The Times*, 23 January 1934.

73 See, for instance, Steed's correspondence (14–27 March 1933) regarding his efforts to have the anti-Nazi caricatures of the well-known artist, Louis Raemakers, published in the British press: Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA, Raemakers Collection.

probing, with the help of the exiles, into what was going on in Germany, particularly in regard to its military capacities.⁷⁴ Steed's 'information service' functioned with no official funds; its costs were borne entirely by Steed himself and, when his money ran out, as it soon did, he was able to persuade a well-off brother to subsidize his efforts.⁷⁵ Disregarding the lack of official material or moral support, Steed nevertheless supplied his information to an unreceptive British government.⁷⁶ Practically the only sympathetic ear he did find was that of Robert Vansittart, the Foreign Office's Permanent Under-Secretary and the most senior British official to share Steed's views on the danger of Germany. 'The most important of Vansittart's brothers-in-arms' is how Vansittart's German biographer describes Steed.⁷⁷

Steed's most sustained organizational effort directed against Hitler was his involvement in a group called Focus in Defence of Freedom and Peace. Steed was the most active member, although its most prominent participant was certainly Winston Churchill, and its financier was a well-established German-Jewish émigré concerned about the fate of Jews in Germany.⁷⁸ Harold Nicolson described it sardonically as 'odd',⁷⁹ as well he might since Focus consisted of 'like-minded individuals swimming against the tide—not only of government policy but of the prevailing

Most enduring was Steed's sponsorship of Otto Lehmann-Russbuehdt, author of *Germany's Air Force*, with an introduction by Henry Wickham Steed (London: George Allen & Unwin 1935). See O. Lehmann-Russbuehdt, 'Wickham Steed's geschichtliche Bedeutung', *Deutsche Rundschau*, vol. 85, 1959, 37–41.

74 Steed is discrete in his references to this outfit but he hints at it occasionally in his writings and enters into more detail in his correspondence; see, for example, the letter from Steed to Lord Londonderry, 23 July 1940: British Library, London, Steed Papers, Add. MS 74133.

75 I am grateful to Steed's grandnephew Michael Buckmaster, who has confirmed, on the basis of his own recollections, that it was Wickham's brother Owen, a wealthy property developer in Suffolk, who gave Steed a substantial amount of money for this purpose. Personal communication to author from Michael Buckmaster, 6 March 2011.

76 See the letter from Steed to Lord Londonderry, 15 July 1940: British Library, London, Steed Papers, Add. MS 74133. See also Wesley K. Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy: British Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1933–1939* (London: I. B. Tauris 1985), 88.

77 Später, *Vansittart*, 112.

78 The financier also became the group's historian: Eugen Spier, *Focus: A Footnote to the History of the Thirties* (London: Oswald Wolff 1963), 30 (on Steed as Focus's most active member).

79 Letter from Harold Nicolson to Victoria Sackville-West, 2 March 1938: 'I went to such an odd luncheon yesterday. It is called "The Focus Group" and is one of Winston's things. It consists of Winston, Norman Angell, Wickham Steed, Walter Layton, Robert Cecil, Violet Bonham-Carter, Clynes and some other of the Labour people . . . Winston was enormously witty. He spoke of this great country nosing from door to door like a cow that has lost its calf, mooing dolefully now in Berlin and now in Rome—when all the time the tiger and the alligator wait for its undoing. Don't be worried, my darling, I am not going to become one of the Winston brigade . . .' (quoted in Harold Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters 1930–1939*, ed. Nigel Nicolson (London: Collins 1966), 327).

public attitude and mood'.⁸⁰ This was a determinedly anti-appeasement group 'denounced as "war-mongers" and also, paradoxically, as "Geneva gas bags" or "blood thirsty pacifists" rebuked by elder statesmen as unpractical idealists who wished to involve our country in a "quarrel about ideologies"'.⁸¹ Focus organized public meetings, at London's Albert Hall and in the provinces, featuring Focus members as well as the most prominent speakers it could recruit.⁸² Focus also published a manifesto, largely drafted by Steed himself. It sought press coverage for its platform, in the face of much resistance and at the cost of great frustration. It reached out overseas, to the United States, where it attracted more interest than at home, as Steed had shrewdly advised that it would.⁸³ In September 1937, after deciding that Churchill would not be a suitable emissary, Focus sent Steed to Canada and the United States on its behalf. Here he lectured at the Council of Foreign Relations, gave one interview after another, spoke privately to the most prominent members of the foreign policy elite, such as *New York Times* publisher Arthur Sulzberger, the financiers Bernard Baruch and Felix Warburg, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, as well as the former presidential candidate Al Smith and President Roosevelt himself.⁸⁴ Already well into his sixties, Steed thus proved a tireless and selfless campaigner against the Nazi menace. As in the other causes to which he was devoted, whether Zionism or the small nations of Central Europe, Steed brought an unwavering—some said an unnuanced—dedication to the cause of anti-appeasement,

80 Violet Bonham-Carter, 'Introduction', in Spier, *Focus*, 9.

81 *Ibid.*, 10.

82 The Albert Hall meeting on 3 December 1936, attended by twenty Members of Parliament and addressed by Churchill, was probably the high point of Focus, although Churchill's reputation was suffering, primarily for reasons related to his position in the abdication crisis. Steed was the principal speaker at Focus's Manchester meeting on 17 February 1937. According to Spier, Steed gave a 'brilliant and witty analysis' that 'brought [the audience] to their feet, clapping and cheering' (*Focus*, 87, 89).

83 Focus members and sympathizers were distressed at the lack of press coverage of the Albert Hall meeting. The most prominent attention given to it and to the organization itself was an article by Steed in the *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 December 1936, quoted in Spier, *Focus*, 74. Steed had been a regular contributor to the American press since the Paris Peace Conference.

84 Spier, *Focus*, 123–7. See also Ritchie Owendale's review of William R. Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt: British Foreign Policy and the United States, 1937–1940* (1988), in *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1990, 169–70 (170). On the choice of Steed over Churchill, see Naomi Wiener Cohen, 'The transatlantic connection: the American Jewish Committee and the Joint Foreign Committee in Defense of German Jews, 1933–1937', *American Jewish History*, vol. 90, no. 4, 2002, 353–84.

denouncing all and any concessions to Mussolini, Franco and, above all, Hitler.⁸⁵

In recognition of Steed's work and stance, the Jewish Historical Society of England invited him to give the third Lucien Wolf Memorial Lecture.⁸⁶ He followed in the steps of the first lecturer Lord Robert Cecil, who had spoken on 'Minorities and Peace', and the second lecturer Herbert Samuel, the first Jewish member of the British cabinet and former High Commissioner in Palestine, who had lectured on 'Great Britain and Palestine'. Steed's chosen subject, 'The Worth of Freedom', was presented as a continuation of the themes of his predecessors. Minorities without freedom were slaves, it was suggested, and the physical and spiritual freedom of the Jewish people was at the heart of his concerns.⁸⁷ In his lecture, Steed invoked the neologism 'totalitarian' to lash out at 'systems of unfreedom'—communist, fascist and Nazi—but he reserved his strongest criticism for those who acquiesced in the latter systems as 'the lesser evil'.⁸⁸ Introduced as 'beyond all, a great European', Steed was thanked effusively by the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain: 'tonight's lecturer is the doyen of British journalists, a man who, like Lucien Wolf, is a guide and educator of public opinion, a fighter for freedom, political equity, the rights of nationalities, and the *duties* of nationalities.'⁸⁹

Wickham Steed as sensationalist

Steed thus found his status among Jews transformed from that of a bogeyman into an admired ally. I would suggest, however, that some continuities in his attitudes were more significant than the reversals. To be sure, in retrospect, one may interpret Steed's role in publicizing *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* in terms other than those of his antisemitic proclivities. As a journalist, Steed could not resist a conspiracy theory. What is still known as the 'Wickham Steed affair' refers to Steed's public accusations in the 1930s that German agents were planning to plant

85 In 1937–8 Steed was chairman of the British Committee for Civil and Religious Peace in Spain, serving with the ex-communist Austrian refugee Franz Borkenau and the well-known English liberal academic Gilbert Murray, with whom Steed carried on a correspondence over many years. Their letters are in the Gilbert Murray Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

86 Henry Wickham Steed, *The Worth of Freedom*, Lucien Wolf Memorial Lecture no. 3 (London: Jewish Historical Society 1937).

87 *Ibid.*, v, 9.

88 *Ibid.*, 17–18.

89 *Ibid.*, v, introduction by Philip Guedalla and 30. Considering Lucien Wolf's opinion of Steed (see note 12 above), there is considerable irony in the choice of venue for Steed's lecture and in the rabbi's words.

biological weapons in the Paris and London subways.⁹⁰ During the First World War, Steed published an elaborate account claiming Franz Ferdinand's assassination in Sarajevo in 1914 had been carried out with the complicity of the Austrian emperor soon after the heir to the throne had plotted with the Kaiser to federate the Habsburg possessions with the German empire.⁹¹ Not all Steed's conspiracy theories were as fateful. In early 1914 he voiced suspicion about the presence of the German and Italian ambassadors at the Budapest conference on Albania. In his (by now familiar) rhetorical mode, he wrote:

Is this a coincidence or does it indicate that the whole scheme has been evolved and executed with the cognizance of all three partners in the Triple Alliance? We do not know; but if that is the case it is not, perhaps, likely to be a mere isolated act. It may be part of some much wider plan for combined interventions in Albania and in other parts of the Near East.⁹²

Throughout his career, Steed was thus prone to give credence to stories of intrigue and dark plots—scoops, in journalistic parlance—and *The Protocols* were simply too sensational a conspiracy theory to be ignored.

One may also assess Steed's ambiguous reaction to *The Protocols* by comparing his overall attitudes at the time to those of some of his contemporaries. What one historian has called the 'uncertain atmosphere of the post-war world' prompted the search for the source of threats and for culprits.⁹³ In 1920 Britain was still suffering from a 'red scare', sustained by lurid accounts of Bolshevik depravity, fed by correspondents from Russia, including *The Times's* own Robert Wilton. This long-time 'Russia hand' had just published two popular books that pointed the finger at Jews as being responsible for the murder of the imperial family.⁹⁴ According to Wilton, the

90 Steed made the inflammatory accusations in 'Aerial warfare: secret German plans', *Nineteenth Century and After*, July 1934, 1–15. They have been refuted by Martin Hugh-Jones, 'Wickham Steed and German biological warfare research', *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1992, 379–402. See also Ed Regis, *The Biology of Doom: The History of America's Secret Germ Warfare Project* (New York: Henry Holt 1999), 14–15.

91 Steed initially hinted at a conspiracy in 'The quintessence of Austria', *Edinburgh Review*, October 1915, 225–7. He claimed further evidence in 'The pact of Konopisht: Kaiser and Archduke', *Nineteenth Century and After*, February 1916, 253–73. He returned to the issue in Steed, *Through Thirty Years*, I, 394–403.

92 Steed, quoted from *The Times*, 20 May 1914, in Isabella McLaughlin Stephens, 'Henry Wickham Steed: His Work on *The Times*, 1896–1914', MA dissertation, University of Chicago, Department of History, 1941, 44.

93 Holmes, 'New light on "The Protocols of Zion"', 13.

94 Robert Wilton, *Russia's Agony* (London: Edward Arnold 1918), and Robert Wilton, *The Last Days of the Romanovs, from 15th March, 1917* (London: Butterworth 1920), translated into French the following year as *Les Derniers Jours des Romanof: le complot germano-bolchéviste, raconté par les documents* (and into Russian in 2005!).

secret of Lenin's success—and of Russia's agony—lay in 'non-Russian' sources, namely 'German gold' and the 'pseudo-Jew class'. It was Wilton too who claimed that the Bolsheviks had erected a monument to Judas Iscariot.⁹⁵ And Wilton was not the most radically anti-Bolshevik—and anti-Jewish—British journalist to have come out of Russia. The *Morning Post's* correspondent V. E. Marsden was one of the later translators of *The Protocols*.⁹⁶

The connection between 'Jews' and 'Bolsheviks' was so well established at the time that even Winston Churchill, described as 'naturally philo-Semitic',⁹⁷ gave credence to popular suspicions. In November 1919 he spoke allusively in the House of Commons of the 'most powerful sect of the world', after having inveighed against 'Lenin and Trotsky and the sinister gangs of Jewish anarchists around them' at a private meeting a few months earlier.⁹⁸ In early 1920 he published a notorious article that distinguished 'good' Jews from 'bad' Jews, writing, 'with the notable exception of Lenin, the majority of leading figures [among the Bolsheviks] are Jews. Moreover the principal inspiration and the driving power comes from Jewish leaders.'⁹⁹ In the same article, he referred respectfully to Nesta Webster, the *Morning Post's* leading conspiracy theorist, who had traced the role of Jews back to the French Revolution.¹⁰⁰ Sharman Kadish's judgement that elements of Churchill's article are 'heavily coloured with the imagery of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*' would seem to be overwrought, but that Churchill too should have latched on to such widespread beliefs does say something about the temper of the times.¹⁰¹

Steed—like Churchill, for that matter—stood in the very forefront of British anti-Bolshevik sentiment. He was proud of his success at the

95 Wilton, *Last Days of the Romanovs*, 20. The Judas Iscariot monument is a curiously recurring trope. It is mentioned today on a tourist website advertising the city of Sviyazhsk; Julia Buzykina, 'Sviyazhsk: combining incompatible', 23 February 2010, available on the *Russia-InfoCentre* website at www.russia-ic.com/travel/places/1054 (viewed 10 February 2012).

96 John S. Curtiss, *An Appraisal of The Protocols of Zion* (New York: Columbia University Press 1942), 44n. For more information on the *Morning Post* and *The Protocols*, see Keith M. Wilson, 'The Protocols of Zion and the *Morning Post* 1919–1920', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1985, 4–14.

97 Michael Makovsky, *Churchill's Promised Land: Zionism and Statecraft* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press 2007), 2.

98 Churchill, quoted in Laqueur, *Russia and Germany*, 313.

99 Winston Churchill, 'Zionism versus Bolshevism; a struggle for the soul of the Jewish people', *Illustrated Sunday Herald*, 8 February 1920.

100 Webster contributed anonymously (like all other contributors) to *The Cause of World Unrest*, a compendium of *Morning Post* articles inspired by *The Protocols* (see note 13). On Webster, see Richard M. Gilman, *Behind 'World Revolution': The Strange Career of Nesta H. Webster* (Ann Arbor, MI: Insights Books 1982).

101 Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews*, 140.

Paris Peace Conference in scuttling plans for the Prinkipo Conference and other initiatives that could have brought about Allied recognition of the Bolshevik regime.¹⁰² Moreover, Steed had long been an inveterate enemy of David Lloyd George who, as prime minister both at the Peace Conference and until the autumn of 1922, was inclined to come to terms with the Bolsheviks. Steed's animosity towards Lloyd George was not as obsessional as that of his 'boss', Lord Northcliffe, but it constituted yet another bond between the editor and his proprietor, only re-enforced by their common hostility to Jews and Bolsheviks.¹⁰³ When Lloyd George announced his intention in November 1919 to raise the blockade of Soviet Russia and open trade relations, this constituted, from Northcliffe's and Steed's perspective, yet another provocation. It may be an exaggeration to say that publication of *The Protocols* in early 1920 was intended to 'bolster a pro-intervention policy' in Soviet Russia,¹⁰⁴ but, in the circumstances, it fell on fertile ground. *The Protocols of Zion* appear to exercise a malign fascination upon almost all those who write about them. Anti-Semite and Judenfreund alike, they become curiously incapable of telling a plain story directly', wrote one commentator years later.¹⁰⁵ At no other time would Steed have been as susceptible to this 'malign fascination' as he was in 1920.

Wickham Steed as Germanophobe

Steed's antisemitism may have been exacerbated by the atmosphere of the early post-First World War era but it was anchored in an even more

102 See John M. Thompson, *Russia, Bolshevism, and the Versailles Peace* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1966), 237; and Arno J. Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles 1918–1919* (New York: A. A. Knopf 1967), 443 and *passim*. Both authors are extremely critical of Steed. Cf. Steed, *Through Thirty Years*, II, 301–7.

103 For an unflattering depiction of the bond between Northcliffe and Steed, see Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain. Vol. II: The Twentieth Century* (London: Hamish Hamilton 1984), 349. Northcliffe's vindictive campaign against Lloyd George, presumably for not having named him as an official British delegate to the Peace Conference, as Northcliffe had expected, gave rise to a memorable moment in the House of Commons, on 16 April 1919, when Lloyd George suggested, by gesture rather than words, that Northcliffe was mad; Tom Clarke, *My Northcliffe Diary* (London: Gollancz 1931), 119, and Pound and Harmsworth, *Northcliffe*, 730.

104 Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy and The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* [1967], rev. edn (London: Serif 1996), 152. Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews*: 'Indeed, the issue [Lloyd George's Russian policy] was perceived as one of a number of convenient levers with which to topple the Prime Minister and bring the coalition government to an end' (23).

105 John Gwyer, *Portraits of Mean Men: A Short History of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (London: Cobden-Sanderson 1938), 42.

fundamental ideational posture from which he never wavered. Steed was, in the first and last instance, a Germanophobe.

Steed's visceral dislike and distrust of Germany—in spite of his perfect command of the language—was by no means characteristic of his milieu. 'Noble, patient, deep, pious and old Germany' was how Thomas Carlyle affectionately referred to that country and this sentiment persisted over several generations.¹⁰⁶ Germany was the land of science and culture, the home of an industrious and orderly people with whom England had never been at war before 1914. The increasingly popular ruling dynasty was as German as it was English; indeed, both languages were at home in Queen Victoria's family. The 'insistent and ignorant pro-Germanism' of that emblematic figure of the Victorian age, Cecil Rhodes, was adopted wholesale by his many admirers and, although suppressed during the First World War, it came to the fore again in the interwar period.¹⁰⁷

Steed himself admits that he shared this prejudice in his early youth. On travelling to the continent for the first time at the age of twenty, he later wrote: 'I went first to Germany rather than to France for reasons that were characteristic of the period. Germany was regarded in England as an earnest land given to deep study and thought ... And I was terribly in earnest.'¹⁰⁸ Steed went back to Germany four years later and his mixed impressions from the first visit now turned into overwhelmingly negative ones. He returned to a country that was in the grip of an intense outburst of Anglophobia, flaunting a newly aggressive militarism and pan-Germanism shared even by Steed's earlier friends and teachers there. 'The Germany of 1896 was, in truth, different from the Germany I had known, or had thought I knew, in 1892–93', he wrote.¹⁰⁹ As one scholar commented: 'It would probably be hard to find any six months in the nineties during which a critical young Englishman could have formed out of his experiences as an observer of German affairs a more unfavourable impression.'¹¹⁰

In the following years, Steed became one of the most vocal members of a mixed cohort of journalists who warned incessantly of the German threat to peace in general and to England in particular. This group, aptly described as 'Scaremongers', included Steed's superior, *The Times's* foreign editor Valentine Chirol, as well as his *Times* contemporary George Saunders.¹¹¹ The anti-German posture was not appreciated by the head office, which lectured Steed repeatedly, both during his initial short stint,

106 Thomas Carlyle, quoted in Wilson, *After the Victorians*, 417.

107 A. L. Rowse, *All Souls and Appeasement: A Contribution to Contemporary History* (London: Macmillan 1961), 115.

108 Steed, *Through Thirty Years*, I, 9.

109 *Ibid.*, I, 66.

110 Stephens, 'Henry Wickham Steed', 7.

111 A. J. A. Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament 1896–1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1984).

in 1896, as acting *Times* correspondent in Berlin and in 1908 when there was a question of transferring him from Vienna to Berlin. The managing director wrote: '... the suggestion that you should go to Berlin raised such an outcry that I had to enquire into its reason and I find that while nobody doubts your ability you are regarded as a firebrand of the most dangerous type. Saunders who was not loved in Berlin, was regarded as an angel of peace compared to you.'¹¹² More colourfully, top British diplomats reportedly agreed that 'Steed would be a red flag to the Teutonic bull'.¹¹³ And Steed willingly concurred: '... you could hardly find an Englishman and certainly no member of our staff whose appointment to Berlin would be so obnoxious to the German Government as mine.'¹¹⁴

Steed's insistence in 1914 that England must go to war and his propaganda activities during the First World War were the logical outcome of his vision of Germany. Moreover, he remained faithful to that vision even as many contemporaries, racked by guilt at the punitive peace of 1919 or reverting to traditional Germanophilia, were discovering a newly pacific and democratic post-First World War Germany, one that had initiated the Locarno Pact, joined the League of Nations and adhered to the Kellogg-Briand Pact on the renunciation of war. Steed, by contrast, remained suspicious, even of Gustav Stresemann, eulogized as the architect of this new Germany.¹¹⁵ Hitler was merely the 'logical projection from Stresemann', Steed declared, to the surprise or indignation of his readers and listeners.¹¹⁶

But what was the connection between Steed's antisemitism and his anti-Germanism? The earliest hint of an answer is to be found in the first chapter of Steed's memoirs. Describing his experiences in Germany at the age of twenty-one, Steed recounts his discovery of the 'Jewish problem'. Puzzled by the explanations he received of the ambient antisemitism, he concludes:

Yet there remained the mystery why the Jews, who were worse treated in Germany than in Austria, France, or England, should have been and should more and more become, pro-German and pan-German. The mystery puzzled me for many a year and, in some respects, puzzles me still. As pan-German tendencies gained strength, it became one of the chief riddles of international politics.¹¹⁷

112 Letter from Moberly Bell to Steed, 10 July 1908, quoted in *The History of The Times. Vol. III: The Twentieth-century Test 1884–1912* (London: The Times 1947), 648.

113 *The History of The Times. Vol. III*, 647, referring to Sir Frank Lascelles, former British ambassador to Germany, and Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, ambassador to the United States.

114 *Ibid.*, 643.

115 Henry Wickham Steed, 'The future in Europe', *International Affairs*, vol. 12, no. 6, 1933, 744–62.

116 Wickham Steed, 'The revision of the peace treaties', *Transactions of the Grotius Society*, vol. 19, 1933, 115–36 (132).

117 Steed, *Through Thirty Years*, I, 33.

Lest it be suspected that this conclusion be a retrospective assessment, founded on a subsequent experience of the Great War, we can return to Steed's *Habsburg Monarchy*, published on the eve of that event. As one reads Steed's extensive section on 'the Jews' in Austria-Hungary, it is clear that he sees the most grievous failing of the Jews as their identification with Germany. The Ashkenazim 'feel, or profess to feel, a special devotion' to that country, describing themselves as 'German Jews' whether their country of immediate origin be Russia, Austria-Hungary or Germany, he writes, with both surprise and disapproval. Drawing on the authority of a 'learned Austrian Hebrew', Steed reports that the 'pro-German tendencies displayed by Ashkenazim Jews the world over' and their 'sentimental leaning towards Germany' are due to the fact that German was the basis of 'our jargon' (namely Yiddish), and that 'next to Palestine, Germany is the country which we regard as our home'. Steed also invokes other explanations, namely, that 'since 1870 the Jews have believed Germany to be the rising Power and have consequently striven to "back the winner"'. But this explanation does not convince him. There is 'some impulse more subtle than the expectation of immediate advantage' that drove Jews 'to pose as Germans and to associate themselves with Germanism rather than with any non-German tendency', he muses. Indeed, the bulk of the Galician and Hungarian Jews who migrate to Vienna and other parts of Austria claim German 'nationality. When authentic Germans disown them, these Jews reply that they "feel like Germans"...'¹¹⁸

Steed is perplexed by the Jews' apparently irrational but powerful adherence to a nation and ideology that disdain them. He cites the case of the Austrian liberal, Dr (Heinrich) Friedjung, who drew up a pan-German party programme and was excluded, as a Jew, from the party he had helped form. He evokes the case of the 'Jews of Bohemia [who] have pursued a purely idealist policy corresponding to their German culture, and have followed the Germans unconditionally—the worst possible tactics, judging by results', and that of the 'many cultured Jewish youths [who] sought to discard their very nature and to identify themselves completely with Germanism, accepting German political and ethical ideals and trying honestly to "feel like" Germans'. The Jews 'cannot enjoy esteem as long as they attempt to out-German the Germans in Pan-Germanism', Steed concludes, reserving particular scorn for Jewish German patriots who declare: 'On the soil of the German Fatherland we wish, as Germans, to co-operate in German civilization and to remain true to a partnership that has been hallowed by religion and history.'¹¹⁹

118 Steed, *The Hapsburg Monarchy*, 159, 160, 171–3.

119 *Ibid.*, 173, 174, 175, 177. In the last instance, Steed is citing a resolution of the Central Society of German Citizens of Jewish Faith, published in the *Neue Freie Press*, 31 March 1913. The resolution was directed against Zionists who deny 'German National (racial) sentiments' and only feel 'nationally (racially) as a Jew'.

Steed's disapproval of Jewish affinities with Germanism was most pointed with respect to one specific category of Germanophile Jews. These were the German-Jewish financiers against whom Steed railed consistently during the Great War and at the Peace Conference. Figures such as Jacob Schiff, Felix Warburg and Albert Ballin incurred his particular wrath. Of these, only Ballin was wholly German, to such an extent that he committed suicide upon learning of Germany's defeat in the First World War.¹²⁰ Schiff and Warburg were American, of German-Jewish origin, and they displayed their loyalty to the Allied cause in the course of war. Nonetheless, theirs was an agonizing choice. As Schiff put it to a Harvard friend: 'It is true, as you write, that these are sad days for Americans of German origin. In my case, because of my natural sympathies for the people from whom I am sprung and whom I continue to love.'¹²¹ Schiff declared that his allegiance (to the United States) had been determined by the 'ruthless and inhuman acts of the German Government', notably in sinking the *Lusitania*. Nevertheless, he refused to sign a patriotic American statement because it affirmed that the 'German Government had largely promoted the War'.¹²²

Steed's antipathy to German-Jewish financiers could have been the distorted expression of a repressed social radicalism.¹²³ Writing in *The Times*, the financiers who offered the easiest target for criticism may have been German-Jewish ones. However, such an explanation does not replace an enquiry into the basis of Steed's identification of Jews with Germans. Such an undertaking requires detachment from our own historical experience to look at the German-Jewish relationship before the tragic events that led up to and included the Holocaust.

As a noted historian of Zionism puts it, in late nineteenth-century Germany 'the identification of the Jews with the Germans had been closer than with any other people. They had been thoroughly Germanised well beyond Germany's borders; through the medium of language they had accepted German culture, and through culture, the German national spirit.'¹²⁴ Citing statements very much like those quoted by Steed—for instance, 'for German Jews there was no future but on German soil'—Walter Laqueur is apologetic about his own thesis, acknowledging: 'A statement like this [regarding "some affinity in the national character that attracted Jews so strongly to Germany and to the German spirit"] makes strange

120 Steed, *Through Thirty Years*, II, 17–26.

121 Letter from Jacob Schiff to C. W. Eliot, 17 March 1917, quoted in Cyrus Adler, *Jacob H. Schiff: His Life and Letters*, 2 vols (London: Heinemann 1929), II, 201.

122 Adler, *Jacob H. Schiff*, II, 202

123 Steed only gave vent to what can be described as progressive social ideas after he had left *The Times* in 1922. See, for example, Henry Wickham Steed, *A Way to Social Peace* (London: Allen and Unwin 1934).

124 Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, 30–1. On the 'Jewish-German cultural symbiosis', see also Walter Laqueur, *Weimar: A Cultural History 1918–1933* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1974), 73.

reading in the light of the Hitlerian experience. Yet for all that it was essentially correct.¹²⁵ This judgement is confirmed even by a historian of the Holocaust itself: 'More than anything else, the Jews themselves wanted to join the ranks of the German bourgeoisie; this collective "project" was undoubtedly their overriding goal', writes Saul Friedländer.¹²⁶ In short, the German-Jewish mirage, at it turned out, appeared at one time to be an established fact, and the First World War, 'it was widely believed, would finally consummate the German-Jewish symbiosis'.¹²⁷

What Heinrich Heine once described as a love marriage (though an unhappy one) between Germans and Jews ended so tragically that one is reluctant to reminisce about it. Perhaps the title of a recent history of the Jews in Germany by an Israeli intellectual—*The Pity of It All*—sums up both this outcome and this regret.¹²⁸ In the light of this history, however, it is not difficult to follow the processes by which Steed connected Jews and Germans, in his mind and in his writings, through his observations of pre-First World War Germany and Austria as well as through his experience of the Great War. Encouraged by his intercourse with Germans, Jews as well as antisemites of every ilk, in the course of the bitter confrontation between Germany and his own country, Steed's ardent Germanophobia was amplified into a shrill antisemitism.

In later years, Steed's Germanophobia remained strident. During the Second World War, when Steed was one of the BBC's principal broadcasters for its Overseas Service, an English (and anti-Nazi) woman in Germany referred to the 'Wickham Steeds' as a generic designation for those of her compatriots who, as she saw it, indulged in blind 'diatribes' against Germans and Germany and 'seemed to revel in what was happening to the German devils'.¹²⁹ She was echoing the sentiments, expressed on the eve of the war, by Eugen Spier who, even as he was working closely with Steed in the anti-Nazi Focus group, had confided ruefully to Churchill: 'I have sometimes myself experienced the effects of his [Steed's] dislike of Germans'.¹³⁰

Significantly perhaps, it does not seem to have occurred to Spier to take notice of a concomitant dislike of Jews in Steed's attitude towards him. By then, the German-Jewish connection was so irretrievably broken that antisemitism and anti-Germanism were not only no longer complementary

125 Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, 31n.

126 Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews. Vol. I: The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939* (New York: HarperCollins 1997), 80.

127 Gordon A. Craig, 'The magic circle' (review of *The Pity of It All*), *New York Review of Books*, 5 December 2002.

128 Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All: A History of Jews in Germany, 1743–1933* (New York: Metropolitan/Henry Holt 2002).

129 Christabel Bielenberg, *When I was a German 1934–1945: An Englishwoman in Nazi Germany* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1998), 241, 267.

130 Spier, *Focus*, 106.

but they were no longer compatible. To be fair to Steed, his contacts with German exiles in Britain, both Jewish and non-Jewish, and the perspective of a crushing victory over Germany in the course of the Second World War would, perhaps for the first time, raise Steed's hopes in 'another Germany', and may have inflected the Germanophobia that had characterized him for so long, and perhaps even imparted a new vision of future relations between Germans and Jews. Addressing German emigrés in London, Steed urged the exiles, including Jews, to continue to identify themselves primarily as Germans so as to take up a crucial task in a renewed post-war Germany. 'Bleiben Sie lieber gute Deutsche, denn in den kommenden Jahren wird die Welt gute Deutschen brauchen' (Remain good Germans because, in the coming years, the world is going to need good Germans).¹³¹

Friends with faults

Henry Wickham Steed's career as a journalist, author, pundit and activist spans and even extends beyond the very long first half of the twentieth century, which witnessed the momentous upheavals that he observed, recorded and commented on. In the course of these decades, Steed established an unenviable reputation as an antisemite on a variety of grounds. Significantly, he rarely concerned himself with English Jewry, perhaps implicitly confirming that he felt, along with other literary figures of his time, that Jews were to be considered a race outside the English nation. Similarly, if Steed shared the expectation that Jews could be 'modernized' and 'civilized' by a 'superior culture', this was not to be English or European culture but the ideology and practice of Zionism.¹³²

As I have tried to argue, the complex pattern of Steed's antisemitism was exacerbated by circumstances but was fundamentally inseparable from his persistent vision of Germany as a power that threatened England and, indeed, the peace of the world. In the 1930s, when the relationship between Germans and Jews, as he had seen it, was brutally sundered and Germany turned against the Jews, Steed unwaveringly embraced the cause of the latter. With regard to events beyond the Second World War, it is possible that Steed may have been prepared to lay aside his longstanding suspicion of Germany. It is certain, however, that by then he had definitively discarded

131 Steed's speech to a meeting of the Freier Deutscher Kulturbund in London, quoted in Jon Hughes, 'AJR *Information* in the context of German-language exile journal publication, 1933–1945', in Anthony Grenville (ed.), *Refugees from the Third Reich in Britain*, Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies 4 (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi 2002), 187–98 (194).

132 For these arguments concerning English literary 'semitism', I am drawing on Cheyette, *Constructions of the Jew*. It is less obvious that the sort of 'ambivalence' that Cheyette identifies in English literary 'semitism' can be attributed to Steed, whose ambivalence, whenever it occurred, was generally rhetorical.

the pattern of antisemitism with which he had been identified. This is not to ignore the prejudices and opinions that Steed so often expressed but, as his friend Eugen Spier put it to Churchill, even as he was complaining of Steed's attitudes: 'I comfort myself with the saying of one of our Jewish sages, *if you want only friends without faults, you will have no friends at all.*'¹³³

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