

Debating Marx & antisemitism

This is a glimpse into the saner edge of sectarian Marxist politics, a three-way debate in the journal “New Politics.” Ideologically, NP is something of a legacy of the left-Shachtmanite, independent socialist tradition, sometimes known as “Third Camp,” of which Hal Draper was a leading theoretician. They are democratic socialists, opposed to all varieties of Stalinism as well as to capitalism. Too purist for my taste, NPers still return to Marx’s 19th century “scriptures” for a large measure of truth.

This online debate begins with a book review by scholar, feminist and anti-Zionist activist Sherry Gorelick (“Marx’s Mixed Legacy: Anti-Semitism and Socialism”), a response by David Finkel (editor of the socialist “Against the Current” magazine), a rejoinder to Finkel by our occasional blog and IH contributor Bennett Muraskin and a final word by Gorelick.

Finkel seems to be engaging in apologetics for Marx’s antisemitic writing and our friend, Bennett Murasakin, is calling him on this. Although I take issue with Gorelick and Finkel’s automatic anti-Zionist biases, I find Gorelick’s reference to a construct dubbed “Christianism” illuminating:

If we build on Marx’s perception, in his essay “On the Jewish Question,” that the supposedly secular State in Christian society is deeply Christian, we can begin to understand what Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz has dubbed “Christianism.” .... Kaye/Kantrowitz says “In the U.S., Christian, like white, is an unmarked category in need of marking. Christianess, a majority, dominant culture, is not only about religious practice and belief, any more than Jewishness is. As racism names the system that normalizes, honors and rewards whiteness, we need a word for what normalizes, honors and rewards Christianity,” an invisible, taken-for-granted system of domination that affects Muslims and other non-Christians as well as Jews (and, one might add, atheists and other secular people regardless of origin).

Christianism as distinguished from Christianity, the religion, refers to the entire system of cultural and institutional domination. …