



as Jews; yet they are important elements of our consciousness and historical memory. The Jewish people have always been diverse, and this diversity is a source of strength, not weakness. Since Diaspora Jews are now generally not faced with persecution, the challenge is to create an open Judaism that combines pride in our cultural treasures and respect for other peoples' beliefs.

Yet Sorj also has a propensity to make absurd statements. Among the "greatest modern Jewish thinkers" in the secular humanist tradition, he bizarrely includes the painter Mark Chagall, the composer George Gershwin, the pianist Arthur Rubenstein, the novelist Franz Kafka and the anarchist Emma Goldman, but not Chaim Zhitlovsky, I.L. Peretz, Ahad Ha'am, Simon Dubnow and Sherwin Wine. Sorry Mr. Sorj, but "It ain't necessarily so." He insists that "Secular Jews...constitute the major branch within Judaism." I know he means this in the broadest sense, but it still does not hold water. A branch must be organized. As an organized movement, Secular Humanistic Judaism makes the small Reconstructionist movement look colossal. Jewish Labor "Bund schools and cultural centers...remain an important force within secular Judaism," he claims. In fact, the Bund has virtually no presence in Israel, the U.S. or Canada, three of the world's largest Jewish communities. Perhaps Sorj is referring to Latin America, but he does not say.

There are also errors of commission and omission. The Workmen's Circle's peak membership was not 210,000 in 1914, as he asserts, but less than half that size in the mid-

1920s. He lists the current Jewish population in the U.S. at 5.3 million, which is much too low. He is correct in asserting that "Yiddish culture, the socialist Bund movement, Zionism and the creation of the State of Israel were all led by secular Jews," but in proceeding to name these leaders, he names six Zionists, but not one Yiddish writer or Bundist.

Sorj's views on Israel and Zionism are fair and balanced. Israel's existence is not proof that the whole world is against us. Israel was created by the UN and has always depended on outside support—at first arms from the Soviet bloc, then France, and more recently massive military, economic and diplomatic support from the United States. Israel has been an source of Jewish pride, but also of grave concern due to its unjust treatment of its Arab Israeli minority and outright oppression of the Palestinians in the occupied territory. "Although branded by some community leaders as Jews driven by self-hatred, all who oppose the occupation, whether they are in Israel or the Diaspora—without romantic illusions about the difficulties of the peace process or the intentions of many Arab leaders—serve as an integral voice for contemporary Judaism." He also clearly understands the danger to Israeli democracy posed by the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox parties who rely on Biblical claims and Talmudic law in advocating continued domination over the Palestinians and reactionary practices that divide the Jewish people.

In discussing anti-Semitism, Sorj wisely places it in a historical context that recognizes differences in degree and kind. "Without a doubt, there is anti-Semitism that should be

denounced and fought, yet it is no help to call any remark critical of Israel anti-Semitic, suggesting that it implies hatred of Jews everywhere." Rare among Jewish commentators, he also recognizes the existence of Jewish prejudice against "*goyim*," that stigmatizes Gentiles as either real or potential anti-Semites. "...Dehumanizing *goyim*," he writes, "dehumanizes and weakens Jews as well."

Sorj ends with a stirring peroration: "Secular Humanistic Jews should value the positive aspects of the Diaspora and preserve the memory of the Holocaust without feeding paranoia or a sense of victimhood. They should absorb the best of the rabbinical tradition without submitting to anachronistic values and practices. The desire to uphold tradition should be affirmed on its own terms, not defined by xenophobia or the ghost of anti-Semitism. Secular Humanistic Jews should transform destiny into freedom, uniting tradition with renewal." But he provides no evidence that Secular Humanistic Jews are remiss in fulfilling any of these goals and, assuming they are, he fails to recommend any new departures for the movement other than the introduction of prayer! In sum, Sorj promises more than he delivers.

The authors of previous books on this subject have come from North America and Israel. They are provided in an extensive bibliography, which oddly omits Abraham Arnold's *Judaism: Myth, Legend, History and Custom, from the Religious to the Secular* (1995). It is good to learn the views of a knowledgeable secular humanistic Jew from South America, but it would have been even better to learn more. ♦