From Fraud to Holocaust: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

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Perhaps one of the deadliest frauds and scams of recent history is a largely plagiarized document entitled *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This work comes in the form of an "initiation manual" for new members of a fictitious council of Jewish rabbinical elders, discussing their plans for secret world domination through control of the economy and banking systems. Despite the illogic of a secret society conveniently detailing their plot for world domination in a written form that could be easily disseminated, the *Protocols* have been presented as factual by a number of organizations during the last century. In each case these various groups, contrary to historical evidence regarding the fraudulent nature of the book, have presented the *Protocols* as fact in order stir religious and cultural hatred toward Jewish people to further their own goals. Across the last one hundred years, the book has been used by Tsarist Russian secret police as a means of combating reform and then Western democracies in their criticism of Bolshevik Russia. The *Protocols* may have contributed to the rise of the Nazis in Germany and the subsequent holocaust of six million European Jews, and continues to be used by some middle-Eastern governments and anti-Israeli organizations (such as Hamas) as a means of increasing hatred of and violence toward Jews and Israel. The *Protocols* present an extreme case of the misuse of information (in this case fraudulent information) by government entities. This article will discuss the history of the *Protocols*, and their impact on the history of the 20th century, as well as discuss implications that this work has on the use and misuse of information by governments and businesses today.

Origins of the Protocols

The *Protocols* are not the cause of anti-Semitism. Throughout Europe and elsewhere, persecution of Jews was pervasive and, at time, violent (Carroll, 2002). The

Protocols have their origins in some of the political and philosophical tumults of the nineteenth century. The French monarchy had recently come to a violent and spectacular end and the liberalist and revolutionary social elements that looked toward the bloody French revolution for inspiration gave the remaining European monarchies cause for great concern. Liberalist, revolutionary, anti-clerical and Marxist agitators as well as groups such as the Freemasons and Freethinkers were increasing in influence and activity. There was a feeling in many countries, from the newly united Italy, through Germany and Austria, to increasingly strife-ridden tsarist Russia that conservative monarchist powers were under assault from entities that were radical, and inherently evil.

Ironically, the major influence for the *Protocols* was an anti-governmental pamphlet entitled "Dialogues in Hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu" by Maurice Joly, whose goal seems to have been a criticism of the French emperor of the time, Napoleon III (Segel, & Levy, 1995). This writing made no mention of Jewish conspiracies but its framework of a conspiracy became the influence for a German anti-Semite named Hermann Goedsche. Goedsche was a postal worker suspected of spying for the Tsarist secret police. Goedsche appeared to enjoy Joly's Dialogues and plagiarized portions of it in developing his work, "The Jewish Cemetery in Prague and the Council of Representatives of the Twelve Tribes of Israel." This work affirmed that once every one hundred years Jewish leaders would meet in a secret location at midnight and discuss their plans for world domination. The dialogues that ensued discussed the progress over the previous one hundred years and planned for the next one hundred years. By fomenting instability in existing governments and seizing control of world economies, the fictitious Jewish conspirators hoped to rule the world. Although the effectiveness (as

well as logistical nightmare) of meeting once every hundred years in the hopes of world domination is questionable, the basic thrust of Goedsche's work was that Jewish leaders work behind the scenes to destabilize and take control of the world's governments.

The late 19th century was marked by an increase in the number of groups dedicated to overthrowing established forms of social control in Europe, including monarchical governments and the Papacy. Many of these organizations sought to establish new governments based on principles ranging from equality to atheism. During a time when many such radical, liberalist, communist and anti-clerical groups were indeed behaving in a manner directed at destabilizing or destroying existing political and religious institutions, it was tempting to consider the possibility that these various groups were, in fact, being guided secretly by the intrigues of a single group (and conveniently a group of individuals culturally and religiously distinct from the European non-Semitic majority).

 In the late 1800's and early 1900's tsarist Russia was becoming an absolute monarchy in decline. Russia, like France in the late 1700's, had stalwartly defied calls for government reform and modernization from among its own citizens and maintained a cultural and societal division that left the majority of its population poor and disenfranchised. Democratic, Marxist and anti-clerical groups were becoming more active in the country, and combined with the stubborn but ineffectual rule of their tsar, Nicholas II, the future for a stable Russia seemed increasingly bleak. The Russian secret police (the Okhrana) were charged with the unenviable task of retaining the status quo and resisting reformist movements. Noting that liberalist reformers commonly sympathized with Jewish peoples, Goedsche's anti-Semitic work became a useful tool for

the Okhrana in associating the liberalists with the Jews. The message was clear: Reform

movements are part of a secret Jewish conspiracy to overthrow rightful governments and

seize control of the world political and economic stage.

Likely, it is the spiraling out-of-control atmosphere of the last days of tsarist

Russia that allowed Goedsche's fraudulent text to gain the power that it has. The

Protocols in their "modern" form were first published publicly in 1905 following

revolution in Russia that same year (Ben-Itto, 2005). The revolutionary movement was

blamed on Jewish conspiracy and this propaganda helped the Russian secret police in

turning popular sentiment against the revolutionaries. Revolutionary sentiment continued

to simmer through Russia's disastrous performance in World War I. Dissatisfaction with

the tsarist government led to the chaotic 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, during which tsarist

forces once again used the *Protocols* to incite hatred of both the Bolsheviks and the Jews,

who were blamed for inciting the Bolshevik Revolution. Jewish people were often

summarily attacked during this period, whether they were actually involved in the

revolutionary movements or not. Many Jewish people were actively sought out and

killed, on of the many tragedies in the chaos of the Bolshevik revolution.

The Russian secret police had deliberately used a fraudulent document to take

advantage of anti-Semitism within their country to further their own political goals.

Cynically, they had proven willing to trade the lives of innocent people in furtherance of

these goals. They succeeded only in spreading misery and, ultimately, lost control of

their own propaganda. That the Russians failed in their goal of preserving the monarchy,

and that the *Protocols* were clearly recognized as forgeries soon after their release (The

London Times published a series of articles to this effect several years after the Bolshevik

Revolution) did not prevent their continued use by other groups a political propaganda.

Such was the virulent nature of the *Protocols* of the Elders of Zion, the

plagiarized and fraudulent text that had failed to preserve the tsarist Russian monarchy,

but which had promulgated anti-Semitism and singled out Jewish people for violence,

resulting in the deaths of countless Jews during the Bolshevik Revolution. The

Protocols, now beyond the control of Russian authorities, continued to be spread as a

pretext for anti-Semitism (including in a Michigan newspaper published by Henry Ford

in the United States). Of greatest concern was their influence in post-monarchical

Germany.

Use of the Protocols in Nazi Germany

Germany was defeated in World War I, but many Germans felt that this was a

surprising and unjust end. German people had been assured of imminent victory almost

until the November 11th Armistice[1] and thus couldn't understand how their country lost

the war. The German military had performed remarkably during the war, effectively

forcing the Russians to sue for peace, and holding superior numbers of Entente[2] power

soldiers at bay on multiple fronts. The combined efforts of the British naval embargo and

the entrance of the United States in the war against the Central Powers (with the US

providing the Entente powers a fresh and far more stable alternative to the loss of Russia)

made Central Power defeat all but inevitable. To many German citizens it seemed that

Germany had been deprived of its rightful victory in World War I due to the treachery of

some members of its own populace. It was into this atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust

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[1]   This was another piece of calculated misinformation that led to confusion among the German
people and may ultimately have contributed to the rise of the Nazi Party.
[2]   French, British Empire/Dominion, Belgian, Russian, Italian, and, ultimately, American

that the *Protocols* were once again brought forth and used as a means of propaganda that this time resulted in the death of millions of Jews as well as countless non-Jews.

The Nazi regime in Germany was swept into power by capitalizing on the discontent of a nation that felt it had been unjustly deprived of victory in the First World War, and subsequently forced to endure financial and social hardships and humiliation. The Nazis were able to successfully argue to the German people that the loss in World War I was due to a "fifth column" of conspirators, mainly Jews and Communists who had brought about Germany's loss as part of their plan to achieve world domination (Cohn, 1996). The Nazis were able to point to other nations where this conspiracy appeared to be active. Indeed, Russia, from where the *Protocols* had originally emerged linking the Jewish conspiracy with radical movements, had ultimately fallen to a communist revolution, inadvertently supporting concerns raised by the *Protocols* propaganda. Nazi propaganda was also able to note that Communist and other radical sympathizers appeared poised to vie for power in China (where they ultimately succeeded), Spain (where they ultimately failed) and other European nations. Thus the forces of radicalism were not entirely imagined and it may have seemed plausible to many that the underlying origin for such radicalism was due to a global conspiracy rather than widespread social and economic unrest due to income disparity.

In his infamous memoir *Mein Kampf* Adolph Hitler specifically refers to the *Protocols* as authentic evidence of a Jewish plot that swept Germany under its control. Hitler was likely exposed to the *Protocols* by Alfred Rosenberg, the Nazi ideologue responsible for many of the Nazi philosophies such as the supremacy of the Aryan "race". Hitler referred to the *Protocols* in several speeches warning of "Jewish-

Bolshevik" plans for world dominance. The *Protocols* became a popular book in

Germany as well as elsewhere in the world. As the Russian tsarists had attempted to do,

the Nazis strengthened support for their own movement (which ironically itself was

geared toward European if not world political domination) by using the *Protocols*. The

Protocols were used by the Nazis as a propaganda instrument in turning the German

people against their Jewish population. The Nazis justified their rise to power on the

Protocols' depiction of widespread Jewish conspiracy. Thus it was largely inevitable

that, upon attaining power, the Nazis would turn toward persecution of Jewish people,

using the *Protocols* as evidence of their collective cultural guilt. Once again, the

Protocols were not the cause of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany, but this book was

promoted as evidence in support of the anti-Semitic cause. The result was the death of at

least six million Jews, and countless other people (communists, homosexuals, Gypsies,

Poles, Russians, etc.) as well (Cohn, 1996).

  The Nazis' use of propaganda, in this case fraudulent and misleading information,

was initially successful as they achieved power in Germany. The *Protocols* were

successfully used to capitalize on preexisting anti-Semitism in Germany to rally the

populace to the Nazi cause. During their time in power, the Nazi's printed 23 separate

editions of the *Protocols* and the *Protocols* were used in some schools as a means of

indoctrinating students. Their use of anti-Semitism as a pillar of their own rise to power

made it all but inevitable that they would need to essentially wage war against a portion

of their own population, diverting resources that could have better served in supporting

their war effort in World War II. Their use of information that was both biased and

hateful also could have only hurt their credibility in the eyes of other world governments

(although this may have been tempered by a culture of anti-Semitism that did then and still does pervade many European and other world countries).

Post World War II:

Since World War II, most political leaders of European and Latin American nations had avoided suggestions that the *Protocols* retained any validity. With the exception of the Soviet Unions anti-Zionist campaign in the late 1960's (Sachar, 2005), most Western promotions of the *Protocols* have involved racist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, or Islamic or Palestinian groups within Western countries. Among Middle Eastern countries, discussions of the *Protocols* as factual remain common among both militant groups as established governments, particularly as a means of anti-Israeli propaganda.

Jewish immigration to Palestine had occurred in several phases between the late 1800s and 1947 (Bright, 2000) oftentimes as the result of persecution in European or Arabic countries. During this, political ownership of Palestine switched hands between the Ottoman Turks and (after World War I) the British. These migrations significantly increased the Jewish population in Palestine, with the results of increasing tensions between the Jews and indigenous Arabic peoples. Disappointed in the ability of the British to defend them from Arabic attacks, the Jewish people began forming militia groups in the 1920's such as Haganah, providing the first organizations of Jewish unity in Palestine. Tensions and violent between the Jews and Arabs of Palestine continued until 1947 when Britain decided to withdraw from the Palestine mandate. The 1947 UN Partition Plan was developed to split Palestine more or less equally between Jews and Arabs, with Jerusalem as a "free city" run by the UN. This plan was accepted by the

Jews under David Ben-Gurion, but was rejected by the Arab League. Increased tensions developed into all out warfare between the Jews (supported by the United States) and several Arabic nations, including Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon. The 1948 war resulted in a Jewish victory and the creation of the modern Israeli state. The creation of Israel led to mass expulsions of Palestinian Arabs from their homelands, as well as Jewish people from Arabic countries involved in the 1948 war.

Creation of the modern Israeli state is not the beginning point of tensions between Arabs and Israelis, but the ongoing violence between Israel and Palestinian Arabs has been a source of tension in an area that is strategically important due to the presence of large reserves of oil. Arabic countries found themselves on the losing end of wars against Israel during the 1956 Suez Canal Crisis, the 1967 Six-Day War, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, as well as numerous smaller conflicts. This frustration at the permanence of the Israeli state and the support that Israel receives from the United States may have fueled conspiracy theories in the Arab world regarding Jewish plans for regional or international dominance, theories that are supported by use of the *Protocols* as propaganda.

Some Saudi Arabian textbooks refer to the *Protocols* as factual in nature and assert conclusive evidence that the *Protocols* are not a forgery. The implication is that the *Protocols* remain a dominant force in Israeli political strategy and that Western have already been co-opted by Jewish conspiracies. Oftentimes these texts extort readers as to the necessity of eliminating the state of Israel.

Egypt has been officially at peace with Israel since the 1970's yet, discussions of the *Protocols* as factual continue to surface in Egyptian newspapers to the present day. In 2002, Egyptian television ran a miniseries entitled "Horseman Without a Horse" that was

billed as a "historical drama" based on the *Protocols*. Despite condemnation by Israel and Western nations, the series ran and proved to be popular on Arabic language television.

Iran is another nation that continually produces "factual" editions of the *Protocols* and uses the *Protocols* as part of their anti-Israeli campaign in newspapers and other media. Such appearances of support of the *Protocols* have greatly increased since 1978 Iranian Revolution which ushered in a conservative clerical Islamic regime in Iran. Recently in an 2005 appearance at a "World Without Zionism" conference, Iranian president **Ahmadinejad** stated that Islam should have as its goal, wiping Israel off the map, and reiterated the conspiracy theory of Jewish dominance over Western affairs, particularly in regards to occupation of the Middle East.

Other Middle Eastern nations and militant groups continue to promote the *Protocols* as factual. These include, but are not limited to Syria, where the Ministry of Information recently authorized an edition of the *Protocols*, Lebanon, where the *Protocols* are a best-selling book of "nonfiction" (Karsh, 2003), the Palestinian Authority, which had been teaching the *Protocols* as factual in schools until 2005 (Jewish Virtual Library, 2005), and Hamas, whose charter (Article 32) explicitly refers to the *Protocols* as factual.

Thus, although the *Protocols* continue to maintain influence among anti-Semitic groups worldwide, greatest acceptance of and attention to the *Protocols* seem currently to be focused on the Middle East. As such the potential for the *Protocols* to be involved in anti-Semitic violence appears highest in these nations.

Teaching Notes

Governments and businesses are generally in the business of selecting and managing information flow in order to further a particular political or economic agenda. It can be considered that in the case of either government or business the goal is often to "sell" a particular product (policy in the case of governments), or at very least manage the way in which the public views a product. The goal then is to maintain a positive impression of the product and improve its "sale." It must be acknowledged that a secondary goal, however, is to maintain the public's positive view of the broader business or government agency. At times, the first goal may actually interfere with the second goal. If a business or government agency is so selective in its management of information that it may subsequently be accused of providing fraudulent information, or ignoring important negative information, this may provide a short term boost to a particular product, but ultimately hurt the publics' view of the entire business. Unfortunately as both businesses and governments are concerned with short-term image management, they may prove myopic at times in their consideration of long-term consequences of information management.

Thus, following discussion points for business and political ethics are suggested for part of classroom discussions.

1.)   **Check the source of information.** In the case of the *Protocols* of the Elders of Zion, even a cursory check on the source of this document would reveal its fraudulent and misleading nature. Nonetheless, in some parts of the world it continues to be circulated as fact. The practical utility of such information is likely to be of limited value. Adopting misleading information may provide for short-term propaganda, but may only result in decreased public opinion in the long-term as more truthful information

comes to light. Perhaps of greater concern, stubborn reliance on misleading information does not allow an organization to plan adequately for practical problems and long-term strategic outcomes. If there is debate about the accuracy of information this should be acknowledged and explored, at very least internally.

2.)   **Research from unbiased sources is preferable.** Arguably, no person or organization is completely free from bias. Yet it may be helpful to ask if a particular source of information can expect a benefit from the dissemination of that information. For example, if a pharmaceutical company promotes research demonstrating the effectiveness of a given drug, can that information be regarded as fully accurate, given the expectations that the company has of profiting from the sale of that drug? If a source of information can be clearly expected to profit from that information, there is a clear risk that such information may be slanted or biased.

3.)   **Consider the Long Term.** It may be said that some companies and government agencies have adopted a strategy of profiting big in the short term, and allowing future generations of executives or politicians to clean up the inevitable mess (witness the "dot-com bubble", in which many companies being publicly traded never actually produced a product). A piece of information may have some short-term benefits, but is it likely to cause harm to the company or government in the long-term? Are scientific or informational challenges to a stubborn "party line" likely to inevitably prevail (as was the case for the cigarette industry, and may likely be the case for the petrochemical industry in their quest to deny global warming despite scientific consensus)? In such cases, the legal risk of such a strategy may be exacerbated by attempts to provide misinformation (a contrast may be drawn between the strategies of the cigarette industry and food industry,

the later which has been more successful in heading off negative legal action due in part to more honest provisions of information). If so, the potential public relations damage is of considerable concern. It may be better to acknowledge a problem once it arises and demonstrate a willingness to fix it. This may cost more in the short-term, but may increase public positive perception of a business or agency, actually increasing long-term sales. It should be noted that honest about problem products or information can damage a company's reputation, but it may be best to acknowledge problems honestly given that deception about a problem product is likely to compound the damage once the truth is brought to light. However, to what degree are such utilitarian concerns subjugated by the behavior of individuals who may be concerned only with short-term profit with the intension of leaving a company or political entity prior to the onset of long-term ramifications?

4.)   **Businesses and governments should adopt a code of ethics related to information.** Businesses naturally must provide a positive image of their products for these products to sell. So too must government officials provide positive rationale for their policies. At the same time, ethical considerations should hold some sway in discussions of how to select and disseminate information. Governments and even businesses, at times, may have to provide partial or debatable information in the public interest. This is usually in the best interest of the business or government agency, as well as the public. For example a number of cases have emerged in which businesses cynically withheld information from the public about the dangerousness of a product, because it was reasoned that settling lawsuits regarding injury or death would be cheaper than recalling or fixing the problem. Clearly this should not be regarded as ethical

behavior, is inhumane, and despite the short-term financial benefit, is likely to hurt the

company in its public perception, as well as in worker morale and turnover (not all

workers down the line may share upper management's cynical view of the dollar worth of

a human life). Information which may be valuable to the general populace concerning

the risks of a particular product or policy should not be withheld, nor should scientific

debate on a matter of product efficacy or policy be denied or glossed over. Although

exceptions may exist, generally when governments or businesses provide misinformation,

this is seldom for the public good. It may be helpful to business people and policymakers

to ask themselves if they would benefit from such information being withheld from

themselves (or their families). The temptation to misuse information in a situation when

profit (or at least short-term profit) is likely to be gained must be enormous. Without a

written code of ethics on how to select and distribute information in a manner which does

not cause harm to the general populace or to the business or government agency, abuses

of information are all but guaranteed. By adopting, agreeing upon, and making publicly

available a code of ethics for the use of information, businesses and government agencies

can help control the use of misleading or fraudulent information within their corporate

environment, and help foster public confidence in the quality of information emanating

from that agency.

 Discussion Questions:

1.) Had the *Protocols* not been published and/or promulgated by government forces,

    would the persecution of Jewish people during the 20th century been any less than

    it was, or would it have remained the same?

2.) Why would certain groups of people or certain governments ignore evidence

suggesting that their data is faulty?

3.) How do the *Protocols* relate to recent fraudulent writings in the popular press (e.g.

James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces*), journalism (e.g. Jayson Blair, Dan Rather)

and science (e.g. Hwang Woo-suk's cloning fraud)? To what degree do

publishing houses, news media and scientific journals hold the responsibility for

the veracity of information they publish?

4.) What would motivate individuals to provide fraudulent information for their beliefs

rather than to seek truthful information or to change their beliefs?

5.) To what degree are businesses responsible for fraudulent information provided by

their employees?

6.) What steps can businesses take to lessen the risk that their employees may produce

fraudulent data?

7.) What reasonable steps must businesses take when they must choose between

providing fraudulent information or truthful information that might harm the

company? What are the risks and benefits of each choice?

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