

Norwegians and The Jews

By BARRY MORTON FARBER

Barry, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Farber of Greensboro and a student at the University of North Carolina, tells of an incident during his vacation, that throws some light on the age-old problem of the reaction by foreign nations, to Jews.—THE EDITOR.

NORWAY, WITH her rocky fjords and green, sloping mountains, has always held a hypnotic intrigue over me. For some strange reason this picturesque land to the north has fascinated me since I was old enough to read travelogues and I always dreamed of one day seeing this supposed paradise for myself. I always resented having no Scandinavian blood whatsoever and I frequently searched through the family album in vain trying to find some trace of blond hair and blue eyes. I devoured book after book on Norwegian customs, history and literature. I learned the Norwegian language from books when I was fifteen years old and every single newspaper clipping I could find during the war telling of activities of the Norwegian Underground are faithfully preserved in a leather-bound scrapbook. Still I had never once spoken to nor even laid eyes upon a real Norwegian.

I found myself without an interesting job and I remembered having seen a Norwegian Seaman's Home in one of our east coast ports. I figured that if I went there and told everything to the right people, maybe, just maybe I could get a job on a Norwegian ship. At any rate, I'd meet Norwegians and brush up on my language. So, early



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the next morning I packed a suitcase and began hitch-hiking northward. My luck was pretty fair and by midnight I had arrived.

They were very helpful at the Seamen's Home in Baltimore, and soon I was on the right track. There were no jobs available at that time and to make a long story short it took three trips northward and many bales of red tape before I was able to sign on as a messboy. She was a tanker, 16,000 tons built in America and then bought and commissioned by the Norwegian Government. She was to remain in drydock for three days and then head south to Venezuela. I had never been near a ship before but my shipmates were patient and I soon learned where everything was. Since we were in drydock we were allowed to go into town every night

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after our chores were done. At first they were a little hesitant to do more than answer my inquiries because the Russians kept telling them that Americans were out only for money and they weren't to be trusted. After they saw that I had a genuine interest in their country and people instead of the usual American ridicule, we all became old friends at once.

I was the only American on board; naturally I was the only Jew; and out of the entire crew of 55 I and two brothers were the only ones with brown eyes. I was regarded as a novelty and after mess we'd sit around the tables and have hilarious sessions of yarn-swapping. They insisted I teach them to jitterbug and I complied as best I could. Every morning at 10:30 we'd hold English lessons on the poop-deck. Those Norskies seem to love everything about our country. Our music, sports, food, and Democracy are held in high admiration in Scandinavia.

I had been on board four days and we were scheduled to leave drydock two days later when the first mate posted a bulletin in the mess hall. We had received a change of sailing orders from Norway and instead of going to Venezuela we were to go to Palestine and the Middle East. Nobody on board had the slightest idea that I was Jewish. My hair was peroxide-blond and they knew I was of Polish descent. I guess it just never occurred to them to inquire further. I was most pleased with the reaction of those boys to the new Republic of Israel. They had nothing but admiration for the new Homeland hewn out of solid impossibility and they were respectful of the Jewish Religion as a whole.

Naturally this feeling was not 100 per cent. Drydock workers frequently come to the galley for coffee and the day after our change of destination two men, Americans, stepped into the dining hall and pulled off their hot welding masks. A huge Dane was sitting there having his morning coffee. This particular fellow said he was leaving America for good. He was an

American citizen but he was voluntarily revoking his citizenship. He was the most avid Communist I've ever met. He said all that matters in this country is money. He wanted to return to his little Denmark where, 'if you don't make it today you make it tomorrow.' I served the welders coffee and stood by while they chatted.

"Well, I see you're going to Jew Land instead of South America," said one of the welders to the Danish Communist.

"Yeah, I'm afraid you're right," answered he. He cracked a corny joke about the Jews and the others laughed merrily.

"You know," began welder number 2. "If Hitler had stuck to stripping the Jews of all they stole from the German people after the first World War he would have gone down in history as a great benefactor of mankind." He stumbled over the last phrase.

"You said it," snapped his partner. "It's a shame more people don't realize the Jews are ruling this country. Hey, Slim," he called to me. "Tell these Norwegians how the Jews are running our country."

I replied lightly that some of my best friends were Jewish and as far as I knew Congress, under the dictates of the Constitution, ran the country.

"The hell you say," snapped the welder, rising to his feet. "You take a look at the men in the Senate and you'll find names like Stassen and Vandenberg."

"Yes siree," agreed the other. "Where did you come from, anyhow, Slim?"

"North Carolina," answered I. "Oh," said he, sympathetically. "I guess down there you spend most of your time hating the niggers."

I knew it was hopeless to talk further. There wasn't enough there to reason with. The best paint in the world won't take on a poor surface. Several seamen had gathered around to listen although few of them understood enough English to get very much of the conversation. After the welders had finished

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Norwegians and The Jews

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ed their coffee and left my Norwegian buddies quizzed me.

"Why did that man say the Jews ruled America?"

"He talks just like the Nazis did, no?"

"I thought that kind of talk didn't happen in America."

I explained as best I could that although America is a melting pot where all races and colors live harmoniously there are always those unsatisfied who would try to stir up trouble. Here in America we are free to talk as we please so many people use this right to spread their hate propaganda.

One of the deckboys named Arvid Torvund spoke up.

"My father the Germans shot for listening to the British radio. My brother the Nazis caught carrying Jews into Sweden. He had taken six truckloads before they caught him. In Norway we suffered together with Jews and everybody else. They never did anything but good. They didn't rule Norway. They didn't try. All they wanted was to be left alone."

The other boys voiced similar opinions: none were fanatical, none were hypocritical. They just recognized anti-Semitism as a disease of mankind and treated it as such. Some praised the Jews as great fighters with reference to the new State of Israel. Others admired our culture, musicians, and scientists. They presumed that I was of the same opinion as the other two Americans. They told me they were sorry I felt that way.

The Lutheran Church is the state church of Norway, but absolute freedom of religion is a well-established fact. Of Norway's 3,000,000 people, only a few thousand are Jews. It's a well known fact that Denmark saved thousands of Jews by ferrying them across the narrow strait to Sweden under the watchful eyes of the Nazis. Sweden will long be remembered for providing a haven for all Jews escaping from occupied territories. Racial tolerance has always been a Scandinavian trait. It's nice to know we have such good friends to the north.

On the day we were to sail engine trouble wrecked one of the boilers and the skipper told me that would mean several more weeks of dry-dock. I didn't want to miss school so I had to sign off. My Norwegian buddies were sorry to see me go. They showered me with all sort of gifts: three bracelets from Egypt, a Syrian cigarette holder, a box of Norwegian flat bread, pictures of Norwegian pin-up girls, a beautiful Egyptian camel-skin stationery holder, and a knife with which my cabin mate had killed two Nazis. Although I had been on board only five days I felt like I was saying goodbye to a group of fraternity brothers. Actually we were fraternity brothers:

brothers in the great fraternity of democratic nations whose duty it is to see that the world doesn't undergo a third World War with its armies of occupation and religious and racial purges.

I cannot say that I have presented the universay Scandinavian feeling toward anti-Semitism. I wish I could say that I had. I have had, as earlier explained, only a limited opportunity to mix with Norwegians in their own element and observe first hand their feelings and ideologies. However, as far as I have seen there is no racial problem in Scandinavia. They appear to like us and admire us as a people. A typical example occurred during the war when the German head of Denmark's occupation forces demanded of King Kristian that anti-Jewish laws be enacted to deal with the Jewish problem. The aged king smiled, shook his head, and replied: "We have no Jewish problem here. You see, we don't feel inferior to them."

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