



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

Featuring collections from the Western Reserve Historical Society and
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.

Series I: General Correspondence, 1914-1969, undated.

Sub-series A: Alphabetical, 1914-1965, undated.

Reel
26

Box
9

Folder
572

Committee of 48 for a Conference of Liberals, 1919.

A New Political Alignment

IN a remarkable announcement published last week, a new organization named the Committee of Forty-Eight issued a call for a conference of those radical forces in America which by nature of occupation stand outside the ranks of the labor and farmer movements of the country. This proposal constitutes simply the first step in a direct and conscious effort to bring together the hand and brain workers of America on a common programme and in some common form of organization looking toward political action. It aims to correct one of the most glaring and calamitous deficiencies in American life during the war period, namely, the lack of organization of our radical intellectual forces, and hence the lack of vigor, purpose, and consistency in our radical opinion. President Wilson, with his befuddling liberalism, has made it literally impossible for American radicals to know where they stand; each time a programme of real opposition raised its head, each time a sound body of radical opinion seemed about to be effected, he advanced a fresh variant on the pious theme of his now-proverbial idealism; and the revival of hopes has resulted only in the confusion of issues. The group comprising the Committee of Forty-Eight apparently realizes that the first task for American radicals is to get themselves organized.

But over and above these initial considerations, the proposal is highly significant as an indication of present political tendencies in America. It amounts, briefly, to recognition of the fact that we are faced by a fundamental political realignment based on economic issues; that America, after her own fashion, must attack the same tremendous problems which confront the world abroad; that there is no possible escape from these problems; and that if we cannot solve them through our political machinery, our political machinery will be scrapped in revolution. "And after the war came reconstruction—as after death, the judgment." What was true of the Civil War is doubly true of the present situation. The economic exigencies of today have no safe margin to fall back on, as they had in 1865. There is no more slack left in the world's economic running gear; every rope is taut and singing under the gale that has come upon us out of the east; and if the strands begin to carry away, we shall soon be dismasted and drifting helplessly before the storm.

The framers of our Federal Constitution could not foresee the development of modern industrialized society. They could not foresee the shifting of the actual seat of government from executive chambers and legislative halls to banks, stock exchanges, schools, and newspaper offices. They could not foresee banker control of credits and industry, and hence of education and the news, and hence of public opinion, and hence of the political machinery of government itself. They provided against political autocracy; but they could not foresee the gradual decay of the old forms of political power and the gradual rise of a new economic power; hence they could not provide against industrial autocracy. The decay of the old forms of political power is written in a tacit but binding surrender. The real rule of the modern world—the power which makes or breaks a nation, which directs the creative energies of a culture, which determines the development and destiny of a people—is vested in forms economic rather than political. These constitute the invisible government which lies behind the visible government of the old

political forms; they rule the world for profit, without a social sense; they rule the world for the benefit of a special class of investors and stockholders, rather than in the interests of the whole community. The old political forms remain fundamentally unchanged. From time to time they have suffered modification, under the pressure of drastic events; but never have they failed to resist the trend of society, never have they disclosed a spirit of coöperation with human endeavor, never have they kept pace with the swift development of the new business system.

Over against these new economic forms, exercising the real governmental functions of modern society, has grown in the industrial field a system of organized check and protest, the invisible opposition, as it were. This is the political significance of the organization of workers everywhere during the rapid rise of industrialism; they recognized the necessity of an economic opposition, the inadequacy of the old political forms to furnish a proper check upon the new governmental functions; and the action was a healthy sign of man's political sagacity. For the past fifty years these lines have been deepening. If the old political forms could have been flexible enough to encompass the new economic order, to ride the tidal wave of industrialism, all would have been well; the channels of political activities would have run smoothly, the workers would have been satisfied with adequate voice and representation in the new industrial functions of government, the community instead of a special class would have been profited, and the great economic war would not have descended upon our civilization. But those in control were too selfish or too blind to render the political machinery flexible, to make the invisible government the visible and responsible government, or to conduct the economic system with any degree of social sense; and thus they forced the workers to organize, and brought about a fatal division between our political activities and the life processes of our society.

Then came the great war in Europe, as a direct result of this fatal division—as a direct result of the inability of a decadent system to control the predatory economic forces that actually ruled the world. And then, caught in the toils of its own blindness and irresponsibility, civilization was driven forward to the point of economic exhaustion—was driven far beyond that point, in fact, under the emphasis of war emotionalism—while the Governments that had brought on the holocaust were equally incapable of stopping it. The Russian revolution raised a flaming sign, but it was not heeded. The war went on; and the economic structure of society has been ruined past any redemption in terms of the old order. The bills are too staggering to be paid. The whole world is trembling on the brink of revolution. America is not immune.

And what is happening in different degree everywhere is what should have happened slowly during the past fifty years through the fundamental modification of the old political forms. The invisible government is being made the visible government. The Russian revolution led the way with a complete scrapping of the old political arrangements and the elevation of the economic control to the position of direct and responsible government. But Russia had a unique set of economic and social fundamentals; the revolution is not likely to take the same outright course elsewhere. It will be none the less an economic revolution. In England, guild socialism and the shop stewards' movement show the trend. If the old political forms resist too blindly,

labor becomes impatient and thinks of direct action; it knows now the lesson that the war brought home—that the old political forms maintain their tenancy only on sufferance, and that the real political power rests in the hands of those forces which control the life processes of the land. If Parliament were to attempt to stand against the triple labor alliance in England, Parliament would fall. Unless Parliament can find a way to open its doors to the forces represented in the great industrial conference recently called by Lloyd George, those forces very soon will take over the functions of Parliament. The situation everywhere is too pressing to admit of delay or evasion. Unless the real economic rule can be merged with the old political forms, it will set up a new politics of its own.

What happens to the world will happen to us in America; the old order cannot be maintained in the Western Hemisphere if it falls in the Eastern Hemisphere. And when we look candidly at American political life, we see that the two old parties are inadequate to the task of reconstruction. There is no inherent difference between the Democratic party and the Republican party. Both are bankrupt of constructive ideas. Elections have not for a long time been fought between them on fundamental economic issues, but rather on personalities and inconsequential details. And what is true of the two old parties is true of the political thought of the country at large. America has drifted forward into a new economic era, with the basic issues that concern its daily life undiscussed, undefined, and undetermined. But now there is no escaping these issues. Labor will not permit it. Deep and searching questions must be answered. Wrongs must be righted. Open sores must be dressed and healed. There must be clear thinking, candid

expression, wise judgment, and brave action. America's true genius for politics must find vent in a movement dedicated to sound and constructive radicalism.

So the new political alignment, based on fundamental economic issues, is bound to appear. The Bourbon Democrats and reactionary Republicans will join forces for the protection of their vested interests and economic privileges. The working classes will meet on a radical programme of economic reform. The independent fringe in the two old parties will be absorbed by one or the other of these vital new movements. For almost the first time in the history of America, there will be a political division between conservatives and radicals. For almost the first time in the history of America, elections will be fought on fundamental issues. It will be a healthy thing for the political, social, and economic life of the country.

This political realignment is already in process of formation. Led by the Chicago Federation of Labor, independent labor-party movements are springing up throughout the country. They are laying down radical economic programmes, advocating shop committees and a minimum wage, and looking toward a concrete industrial democracy. The organized farmers of the country are awake to the same set of issues; they have recently adopted a far-reaching programme of economic reform. The Nonpartisan League is steadily gaining power. The Catholic bishops have issued a radical reconstruction programme, almost wholly economic in its nature, advocating shop committees and a minimum wage, and calling for the gradual participation of labor in the management and ownership of industry. And now come the radical intellectuals with their call for a conference. These are signs of the times.

THE COMMITTEE OF FORTY-EIGHT

FOR A

CONFERENCE OF LIBERALS

15 EAST 40TH STREET, NEW YORK CITY

TELEPHONE VANDERBILT 4186

NEW YORK CITY

We are obliged to you for your signature to our Call.

Enclosed you will find a pamphlet which reprints the Call and gives a clear statement of our aims and purposes.

We are organizing this Conference of Americans to consider the facts involved in the present condition of the country.

The work of the Committee is being financed by those interested in it who are contributing monthly sums, the amount of which is dictated by their means and by their interest.

We are requesting from those who respond to the spirit and purpose of our Call the names of men and women who are known to have that stability of character which will stand the wear and tear of constructive work rather than the names of those who have gained a local reputation by capitalizing their facility in caustic criticism. Out of these groups we plan to secure delegates to this Conference, the date and place of which will be announced shortly. To the Conference will be submitted a program of reconstruction for criticism, amendment, and adoption. The Conference will then decide what form of political action, if any, should be taken in view of the facts involved and the program presented.

Of course, no one will personally be bound by any decision which the Conference may take. Those who sign our Call merely indicate in so doing that they believe a conference of Americans, by Americans, and for Americans, should be held.

Will you send us the names of any men and women who, in your judgment, would respond to the spirit and purpose of the Committee of Forty-Eight?

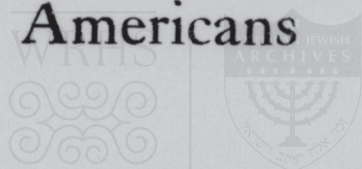
Yours sincerely,

For the Committee.



The Committee of Forty-Eight

For a Conference of
Americans



Its purposes—
and the reasons for it

ISSUED BY
The Committee of Forty-Eight
15 East 40th Street, New York City

Telephone Vanderbilt 4186

The Aims of the Committee

The Committee of Forty-Eight has been formed for the purpose of

1st—Organizing a conference of Americans interested in a thoroughgoing program of fundamental reconstruction.

2nd—Presenting to such a conference a tentative platform dealing with political, social, industrial and international reconstruction.

3rd—Discussing at the Conference the possibility of

a—Forming a political party

b—Forming a coalition with other political parties.

c—Creating an organization to translate liberal conviction into political action.

d—Accepting such other analogous suggestions as are presented by delegates to the conference.

The Reasons for the Committee

The Committee of Forty-Eight has issued the following call:—

Revolution or Reconstruction?

A Call to Americans

America has reached a turning point in her history. The time has come for all free minds to meet in concerted effort to face and shape the crisis.

Despite America's splendid success in a war waged against foreign autocracy, our country is menaced by the growing power of an autocratic and reactionary minority at home. We stand in danger of losing many of the liberties and advances won in the course of our national development. There is grave likelihood of our being left stagnant and backward in a world that for the most part is vigorously reorganizing its economic and political life.

Centralization and autocracy are increasing rapidly in the organization of government, in the control of credit, and in the determination of public opinion. The very classes whose labors in factory and field are the basis and substance of our economic power, find no effective political medium through which to express their economic demand, but by deceptive diversions of our party-system are denied their proper representation in the law-making bodies of the nation.

Criticism, competent or not, is discouraged; periodicals are suppressed with hardly a pretense of adequate hearing; public assemblies meeting under constitutional guarantees are dispersed by official force or by mob violence bred of official intolerance; our women are subjected to unwarranted delays in their campaign for the fulfilment of democracy; agricultural and labor organizers and political heretics are not only suppressed but are in many cases sent to penitentiaries for terms whose unprecedented severity would surprise even the fallen despots of Europe.

Meanwhile the cost of armaments, the orgies of profiteering, the extravagancies of administration, the expense of innumerable agencies of suppression combined with lack of any intelligent and far-sighted budget system, swell the public debt, devouring loans and revenues before they can be collected, and sending prices always beyond the reach of fifteen million families whose physical and intellectual well being are the final test of our collective development and survival.

It is the privilege of America, protected by its vestige of geographical seclusion, to profit by the experiences of Europe. Europe too has had its reactionary ruling minorities, its industrial autocrats, its financial oligarchies, its massive armaments, its hated conscription, its corrupt and futile politics, its suppression of dissent, its judicial frightfulness, its bursting budgets, its toilers broken in body and bitter of soul. And Europe has revolution.

Is this what Americans want? We do not think so.

We believe that there is intelligence enough in this country, if it will but come together, to catch control of the current of things and co-operate directly with the inevitable forces of human growth. To Reaction and Revolution we oppose Reconstruction; not as a catchword and pretense, but as an organized effort to find some new adjustment of the changing powers that constitute society.

Many of us believe that these readjustments demand a new political alignment, that the old parties are determined to withhold that which the American people are determined to have. Day by day men come to see more clearly that these organizations have lost that spirit to serve the people which was embodied once in Jefferson and at another time in Lincoln; that the shell has hardened and stifled the growth within. With exceptions lost among the instances, the politicians whom we have elected have misrepresented our desires and laughed at our hopes; they have opposed with a cynical accord all that we have set our hearts on as vital to the renovation of American life. There are times when by the vigor of a personality, the old mechanisms are driven to some efficacy and result; but the mechanism soon overcomes the man, pushes him aside, and undoes his little work. America cannot grow much more in these old skins.

Rather must reconstruction derive its impetus and direction from the political organization of the manual and mental workers of the country. The future belongs not to the inheritors and manipulators of great wealth but to the men and women who live by their work of hand or brain and know by hard experience the needs and aspirations of the common life.

It is the purpose of the Committee of Forty-Eight to summon from all parts of the country the leaders of its liberal thought and of its forward-looking citizens to meet in conference. We hope that out of this assemblage of the hitherto scattered forces of Americanism will come a flexible statement of principles and methods that will permit effective co-operation with organized Labor and Agricultural workers in the tasks of social reconstruction.

So we send out this call. It is not such an opportunity as comes with every day. The world is fluent now, and responds readily to every moulding force; but let it find a form and it will congeal again into resistance and immobility. All minds are awake today as seldom before, all hearts are astir with hopes and open to large purposes; but these minds will shrivel once more into their grooves, these hopes will lose their glow, if we miss this chance to organize the liberal intelligence of America into coherent voice and form. It may be the final opportunity of our generation.

**We need your Time, Enthusiasm, Advice
and Money.**

Among the Signers of this Call are:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| MELINDA ALEXANDER..... | Kalispell, Mont. |
| DR. C. C. BARTHOLOMEW..... | Ogdensburg, N. Y. |
| ROBERT C. BENCHLEY..... | New York, N. Y. |
| A. F. BENTLEY..... | Paoli, Ind. |
| REV. J. E. BIRD..... | Columbiana, Ala. |
| MARIE C. BREHM..... | Long Beach, Cal. |
| HARRIET BREWER..... | Whitestone, N. Y. |
| ROBERT W. BRUERE..... | New York, N. Y. |
| DR. L. E. BUNTE..... | St. Louis, Mo. |
| USHER L. BURDICK..... | Williston, N. Dak. |
| ALLEN T. BURNS..... | New York, N. Y. |
| JOHN CAIRNS..... | Manchester, Conn. |
| PROF. FRANK C. CARLTON..... | Albion, Mich. |
| DORR H. CARROLL..... | Minot, N. Dak. |
| WILLIAM F. COCHRAN..... | Baltimore, Md. |
| JOHN S. CODMAN..... | Boston, Mass. |
| LINCOLN COLCORD..... | New York, N. Y. |
| DR. ESTUS H. COLLER..... | Battle Creek, Mich. |
| MRS. GERALD A. COOPER..... | Yonkers, N. Y. |
| PROF. FREDERICK A. G. COWPER..... | Durham, N. C. |
| HERBERT CROLY..... | New York, N. Y. |
| TIMOTHY CROWLEY..... | Hartford, Conn. |
| OTTO CULLMAN..... | Chicago, Ill. |
| CLARENCE C. DILL..... | Washington, D. C. |
| WILL DURANT..... | New York, N. Y. |
| J. J. EDWARDS..... | Whitestone, N. Y. |
| THOMAS D. ELIOT..... | Tacoma, Wash. |
| WILLIAM P. EVERTS..... | Boston, Mass. |
| D. C. FINLEY..... | Kansas City, Mo. |
| PROF. LEONARD FOX..... | Durham, N. C. |
| GILSON GARDNER..... | Washington, D. C. |
| CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN..... | New York, N. Y. |
| PERCY STICKNEY GRANT..... | New York, N. Y. |
| T. R. GRESS..... | Atlanta, Ga. |
| PROF. LAURENCE E. GRIFFIN..... | Pittsburg, Pa. |
| HARRY H. GRIFFITHS..... | Des Moines, Iowa |
| LOUISE ADAMS GROUT..... | New York, N. Y. |
| CLARENCE D. HALBERT..... | St. Paul, Minn. |
| WILLIAM HARD..... | Washington, D. C. |
| DR. GEORGE RAY HARE..... | New York, N. Y. |
| PROF. ELLEN HAYES..... | Wellesley, Mass. |
| PROF. W. H. HEDGES..... | Beloit, Wis. |
| PROF. ROBERT HERRICK..... | Chicago, Ill. |
| JOHN H. HILL..... | Chicago, Ill. |
| C. G. HOAG..... | Philadelphia, Pa. |
| CHARLES F. HOFFMAN..... | New Port Richey, Fla. |
| H. B. HOFFMAN..... | New York, N. Y. |
| JOHN HAYNES HOLMES..... | New York, N. Y. |
| DR. WILLIAM L. HOLT..... | Beloit, Wis. |
| GEORGE E. HOOKER..... | Chicago, Ill. |
| J. A. H. HOPKINS..... | Morristown, N. J. |
| FREDERIC C. HOWE..... | New York, N. Y. |
| CORA HUTCHINSON..... | Washington, D. C. |
| FLORENCE SLOWN HYDE..... | Erie, Ill. |
| MARY H. INGHAM..... | Philadelphia, Pa. |
| ALVIN JOHNSON..... | New York, N. Y. |
| MARTYN JOHNSON..... | New York, N. Y. |
| MORTON L. JOHNSON..... | Chicago, Ill. |
| DR. HORACE M. KALLEN..... | Boston, Mass. |
| REV. ROBERT E. AVÉ-LALLEMANT.... | Wilson, Minn. |

PROF. KENNETH S. LATOURETTE.....Granville, Ohio
 PROF. ROBERT D. LEIGH.....Portland, Oregon
 REV. JOHN HOWARD LEVER.....St. Louis, Mo.
 RUSH H. LIMBAUGH.....Cape Girardeau, Mo.
 ROBERT MORSS LOVETT.....New York, N. Y.
 MRS. SARAH E. LYONS.....Minneapolis, Minn.
 REV. JOHN MACIVOR.....St. Louis, Mo.
 REV. WALTER MACPHERSON.....Joliet, Ill.
 JAMES G. J. MCCLURE, JR.....Fairview, N. C.
 ALLEN MCCURDY.....New York, N. Y.
 DUDLEY FIELD MALONE.....New York, N. Y.
 DR. ELIAS MARGOLIS.....Mt. Vernon, N. Y.
 ANNE MARTIN.....Reno, Nev.
 HIRAM MODERWELL.....New York, N. Y.
 H. R. MUSSEY.....New York, N. Y.
 GEORGE NASMYTH.....Boston, Mass.
 CHARLES W. NEWMAN.....Greenville, N. Y.
 ALBERT JAY NOCK.....New York, N. Y.
 PROF. WILLIAM F. OGBURN.....Washington, D. C.
 MARY PATTISON.....Colonia, N. J.
 AMOS PINCHOT.....New York, N. Y.
 REV. ORLO J. PRICE.....Lansing, Mich.
 RUTH ROBINSON.....Wakefield, R. I.
 R. P. RISLEY.....Altoona, Pa.
 GILBERT E. ROE.....New York, N. Y.
 W. B. RUBIN.....Milwaukee, Wis.
 PORTER E. SARGENT.....Boston, Mass.
 PROF. A. M. SCHLESINGER.....Ohio State University
 GEORGE SCHILLING.....Chicago, Ill.
 PROF. SAMUEL SCHMIDT.....Ithaca, N. Y.
 CHARLES D. SHARROW.....Grand Rapids, Mich.
 MARY KINGSBURY SIMKHOVITCH.....New York, N. Y.
 JOHN F. SINCLAIR.....Minneapolis, Minn.
 HARRY A. SLATTERY.....Washington, D. C.
 JAMES A. SMITH.....Salt Lake City, Utah
 W. A. SMITH.....Nashville, Mich.
 S. DODGE SQUIRES.....Fountain, Mich.
 WESTERN STARR.....Baltimore, Md.
 H. N. STOKES.....Washington, D. C.
 W. J. TAYLOR.....Merna, Neb.
 ORDWAY TEAD.....New York, N. Y.
 PROF. JAMES BISHOP THOMAS.....New York, N. Y.
 CARL D. THOMPSON.....Chicago, Ill.
 HARRIET STOKES THOMPSON.....Chicago, Ill.
 GERRIT T. THORN.....Oshkosh, Wis.
 DR. SAMUEL THURMAN.....St. Louis, Mo.
 ROBERT D. TOWNE.....Philadelphia, Pa.
 GUSTAVUS TUCKERMAN.....St. Louis, Mo.
 PROF. FRANCIS TYSON.....Pittsburg, Pa.
 HENDRIK WILLUM VAN LOAN.....New York, N. Y.
 C. C. VAN ORSDALL.....Portland, Ore.
 CLORE WARNE.....Santa Anna, Cal.
 CHARLES WEIDLER.....South Bend, Ind.
 GEORGE P. WEST.....New York, N. Y.
 WALTER E. WEYL.....New York, N. Y.
 MRS. JOHN PRATT WHITMAN.....Boston, Mass.
 JOHN PRATT WHITMAN.....Boston, Mass.
 BISHOP CHARLES D. WILLIAMS.....Detroit, Mich.
 PROF. TYRRELL WILLIAMS.....St. Louis, Mo.
 HARRY H. WILLOCK.....Pittsburg, Pa.
 BEN F. WILSON.....Berkeley, Cal.
 EDWARD M. WINSTON.....Chicago, Ill.
 JUDGE ARTHUR G. WRAY.....York, Neb.
 PROF. CHARLES ZUEBLIN.....Boston, Mass.

Will You Join Us Now?

NAME

ADDRESS



Sign yourself, secure other signatures and
return immediately to

COMMITTEE OF FORTY-EIGHT

15 EAST 40th STREET,
NEW YORK



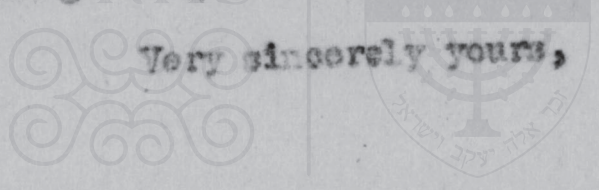
June 26th, 1919

Mr. Allen McCurdy,
Committee of 48,
15 East 40th Street,
New York City.

My dear Mr. McCurdy,

Replying to your letter
of recent date - I am deeply interested in
the work you are doing and would consider it
a privilege to join your organization.

Very sincerely yours,



THE COMMITTEE OF FORTY-EIGHT

FOR A

CONFERENCE OF LIBERALS

15 EAST 40TH STREET, NEW YORK CITY

TELEPHONE VANDERBILT 4186

NEW YORK CITY

Dear Sir or Madam:

In reply to your letter of recent date, the plans of our Committee are very simple.

We published the advertisement in order to discover whether there was any desire among the independent voters of America to get together.

The responses to our advertisement indicate that there is a very strong intelligent demand for just this sort of thing. Over one thousand signatures comprising every state in the Union have already been received. We are, therefore, going forward to the organization of the conference along the lines indicated in the call. The date and place of the conference will be shortly announced.

A sub-committee is preparing a program adapted to the vital issues in the life of the nation, which will be submitted to the conference for its consideration. This program, of course, will be economic as well as political in its nature.

The conference is a real conference; we have no relation whatever with any of the existing political parties and desire to have none. In fact, we are determined to keep this conference free from all influences of that nature.

Furthermore, we have no so-called "leader". It is our belief that any movement of this kind, if it succeeds, will have to find its own leader as it develops. Consequently, the only immediate work we have is the organization of this conference. No one who attends the conference is bound in any way by any decision which the conference itself may decide to make.

The work of the committee is being financed by those interested in it who are contributing monthly sums, the amount of which is dictated by their means and by their interest.

May we add your name to the list of signatures? Will you send us the names of any men and women who, in your judgement, would respond to the spirit and purpose of the Committee of Forty-Eight?

Very sincerely yours,

For the Committee.



JAHH:ABB