

Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

Reel	Box	Folder
145	51	7

Democracy and Food Riots, 1917.

Western Reserve Historical Society 10825 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106 (216) 721-5722 wrhs.org American Jewish Archives 3101 Clifton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45220 (513) 487-3000 AmericanJewishArchives.org Democracy and food riots

February 23, 1917

If one were to read this in a German newspaper, one could perhaps understand. If one were to read it in a newspaper of any belligerant nation one could perhaps undersath. The nations are at war. Blockades and submarines have interfered with the importation of foodstuffs. Money is scarce. Hence privation and starvation. But when one reads it in a NM newspaper of the richest city in the NMXIM richest country enjoying the richest period of prosperity, one is appalled. We have heard distant rumblings of food riots in German and Austrian and Russian towns but we had to wait until this last week for the real surprise of the war - food riots in the city of New York.

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I. Of course we KNMM realize that this condition is abnormal and very temporary. We know its causes - spetulation and greater consumption, failure of crops . That these riots are really not serious, that normal conditions will be restored but these sad affairs cast a strong light upon two startling MM shortcomings of our democracy.

II. Inequality of distribution. Beastly wealth and heastly poverty. The extremes which threaten society. During normal times vast hosts live on the verge of starvation. During times of depression, vast hordes are literally starving. During prosperity wages are higher but prices are raised out of proportion. I read where the dollar this year has the purchasing power of 14 cents two years ago. **Prosperity** benefits the wealthy out of proportion to the working man. The more prosperity the greater the gap between capital and labor. For capital has opportunity to accumulate. Labor must spend to meet high cost of living. Now we hold that **this** is inconsistent with democrady. Democracy means not only

political equality of opportunity but also economic equality of opportunity and that to starve under a democracy is no more glorious than under a monarchy. Profit sharing shemes or government regulation for industry today is vast and impersonal and government must supply the medium-personal between worker and impersonal corpopation.

III. But by fat the greatestweakness is the inefficiency of democracy in handling difficult problems. Its cumbersomeness and lack of vision. It must wait for riots to set it working. Now riots are productive of evils greater than their immediate evils. They teach men to disregard laws, to depend on force, to make reason subject to passion. Where there are riots democracy has failed for that was also the failure of monarchy. It did not respond readily to popular needs. It was not a barometer registering the people's will. Hence democracy supplanted it. But democracy fails too when it is not sensitive to popular movements. The tragedy of democracy has been that it waits for a catastrophe to act: in fact that has been the tragedy of human nature. It has to be goaded by experience instead of being urged by thoughtfulness. Fire, disease, (pure water) especially war. So in democracy. All our legislation has XX been curative, remedial, not preventive, anticipating. In medicine the new tendency is to emphasize prevention, rather than cure. In social science too. We should not wait for delinquents but XM prevent them from becoming delinquent, not wait for wrecks but prevent them by charting the sea of life for them and by piloting them safely through. In our political life too the future work must lie in the directing, anticipating legislat tion. Now the present condition will result in legislation. National food control, embargo and laws against speculation. Why did we have to (Debrew Del p? wait for riotsX.

We must study the fundamental social organization, of distribu-

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tion, of social control. That's efficiency. We must not bungle into truth but find it. Our commissions are a joke. They are created in times of stress, of popular clamor and work under difficulties in an atmosphere sharged with passion and their findings are duly noted and buried formally in that vast burial ground - the Congressional Record. If a little of that pork appropriated for the would be set aside for commissions on investigations a good deal pf suffering etc. would be prevented. We need social **XXXXXXXXXXX** preparedness, industrial preparedness. Safeguarding health and the standard fo living of citizens.



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