



## Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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The Russian Revolution and the Jews, 1917.



"THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND THE JEWS."

As I picked up my morning paper and turned to the war news, one of my partners at the breakfast table this morning, warned me not to read the war news concerning Russia, for she said, I might have to revise my lecture. Fortunately I shall not dwell this morning upon the Russian Revolution itself. We are too near the event, properly to judge it, we are too near the event, needlessly to dwell upon its details. I shall speak of the Russian Revolution and the Jews.

In going thru some of the earlier documents of the Russian Revolutionary movement, I came across the following letter. It was written by one about to be executed. The letter reads as follows:

"My dear dear friends and comrades:

I am not sure I shall be able to say good-bye to you. There is almost no hope. In my mind however, I have said good-bye to all of you. All this time I have deeply felt your warm, sympathetic attitude toward me. I have only a little longer to live. Let us take leave of each other, dear friends and comrades. Let our last farewell be lit by the hope of a better future for our poor, poor mother land, which lies so close to our hearts. Not one atom of power has ever been lost in the universe. Not one human life can be lost in vain. Do not deplore human life. Let the dead take care of the dead. You have a whole life ahead of you, an arduous life, sublime in communion with your suffering motherland. Do not think that your human life is lost, that it will, etc."

This letter was written in 1889, during the darkest days of Russia, when the ruthless hand of Alexander the third, was crushing every liberal aspiration in Russia. Bernstein was taken from his cell a sick man, taken in his bed to the scaffold, his head was raised and the noose slipped over it, and then the bed was removed. I read this letter as a little expression of the attitude of the Jew towards the Russian Revolution, to show how intimately established ~~was~~ <sup>with</sup> the longings of the Jew, with the longings of the great masses of the Russian people.



In 1897, 20 years ago, the Jewish Laboring Classes of Russia, organized an institution which has become known as "The Bund", an association of Jewish Working Men, whose aim was, not only amelioration of their Economic condition but moreso, to keep constantly before the minds of the Russian Jews, the ideal of a Russian Revolution, the glorious ideal of a liberated, an emancipated people. Many and many a brave son of Israel, offered his life, even as Leo Cohn Bernstein, upon the altar of Russian freedom, and the wild wastes of Siberia have known the blood of Russian Jewish exiles. The Russian Jew threw himself heart and soul into the Revolution. The Russian Revolutions of 1905 and of 1917, were both the achievements of all the Russian people, irrespective of race or creed or class, but they were moreso, the achievements of the oppressed nationalities of Russia, the Poles, the Lithuanians, and moreso were they the achievement of the most oppressed nationality, the Russian Jews, so that when the Russian Revolution finally succeeded, it was the Russian Jew that gloried in it more than any other group or class in Russia, for to him it meant a new heaven and a new earth, to him the new era meant the end of oppression, the end of discriminations, the end of political and social disabilities, for him it meant a new world rich in wonderful opportunities for him, it meant the end of poverty, for there is a ~~delusion~~ abroad in the land, that the Jew in Russia-----is prosperous. The vast numbers of the Russian Jews, were poverty-stricken paupers on the verge of constant economic ruin. The Russian Revolution came as a new dawn after a terrible night. The people that walked in darkness saw a great light, and if I could interpret the spirit of the Jew, eight months ago, it was a whole-souled prayer, "Blessed art Thou, Oh God, King of the Universe, that Thou hast permitted us to live, to exist, so that our eyes may behold this blessed hour". The Russian Jew loved the Revolution because he loved Russia. Not all the massacre, not all the persecution and oppression, not all the infamous acts of Russian bureaucracy were able to quench the fire of deepest love



for Russia in the heart of the Russian Jew. The Jew loved Russia and I am bold enough to say that Russia-----

when the Russian Revolution broke out, and provisional government was established, it was the Jew, thru his representatives, thru his labor organizations, thru his Congress of Rabbis and other men that threw and themselves back of the Provisional Government/with all their heart and soul endorsed it// fought for it. Mysteriously, the word has gone about, that the Jews of Russia are back of this last uprising of the Bolshewiki, that the Jews were instrumental in overthrowing the Kerensky Government, consequently the implication is made, that the Jews are opposed to Russia's continuation in the great struggle, that the Jews are Pro-German. The word has gone around, it is gaining in credence everywhere. Nothing more stupid and infamous was ever invented. For the Jew in Russia to be Pro-German is ludicrous in the first place, because the Russian Jew knows, as the Russian people itself know, that much that was abominable in the Russian administration was the product of the spirit of Russia. The Russian Jew knew that much of the anti-semitism that swept over Russia, had its force and main spring and to accuse the Russian Jew of being Pro-German, is the height of folly and to believe him in favor of the Bolshewicki movement is equally stupid. Half of the Russian Jews are small tradespeople, what we call capitalists. Only 3% of the Russian Jews are engaged in Agriculture. If the Bolshewicki program goes thru, the vast number of them face actual pauperization, so that from the point of view of self-interest, it would be actual suicide for the Jew to endorse the program of the Bolshewicki, and, moreover, the Bolshewicki have been proved, beyond shadow of doubt, to be in

In many of the headquarters of the Bolshewicki, among their own literature, was found an infinite number of pamphlets and leaflets urging the ignorant ones of Russia, to rise against the Jews and massacre them. The Bolshewicki have actually, and are today, carrying on a program



of Jewish prejudice as welcoming  
 the Germans into the The Bolshewiki,  
 favoring, what they call, a permanent revolution, the Bolshewiki  
 favoring riots and disturbances because they feed on it, the success  
 of their program are anxious  
 from a theoretic point of view, that Jewish riots continue in Russia,  
 so that the Russian Jew must be foolish indeed to favor the Bolshewiki.  
 The most radical Jewish organization in Russia, the organization to  
 which I referred a moment ago, "The Bund", at the convention, voted  
 the following. I hold in my hand, a clipping from a Russian paper. I  
 shall translate it. "With all the energy in our power, etc."

If you have followed the newspapers of Russia or the Russian Jewish  
 newspapers of America closely, you might have noticed where ever so  
 many followers of Zionism, etc., the first thing they did was to  
 pass a resolution of whole-hearted support of provisional government.

*They said,*

Look at Trotsky, the leader of the Bolshewiks. He is a Jew. Yes,  
 unfortunately, a Jew by birth. A deputation of Russian Jews approached  
 him some months ago in the name of Russian Jewry to  
 for they said "Should the provisional government fall, the Jew will  
 suffer terribly in consequence. Either the right shall have control  
 or the left, the extreme radicals, and then too, we shall have  
 massacres. Please stop, for the sake of your own people, this needless,  
 this groundless attack upon Kerensky and the provisional government " -  
 and Trotsky publicly and formally stated that he was not a Jew, that  
 he had no interest in Judaism, that his interest was purely a national  
 and socialistic, and that he would pursue his policy without any  
 regard to its effect on the Jews in Russia. He repudiated formally



his

It is said Lenin was a Jew just as it was said that Kerensky was a Jew.

It is now said that Lenin is a Jew in an attempt to

I was informed this week, that a speaker that holds forth from a citadel somewhere in the Statler Hotel weekly, in his omniscient, all-knowing spirit, <sup>said</sup> that the Jews of Russia are pro-German. Lenin is not a Jew. Lenin is a member of an old Russian family. His right name, if I remember correctly is

born about 1817

Of the 65 Boshewiki members sent to the preliminary Parliament summoned by Kerensky, only 5 were Jews and yet the word has gone around that the Jews were instrumental in trying to overthrow

We are the scapegoat for all times and we will be for a good many years to come, but for our own enlightenment, it is well to know and know statistically, that the Russian Jew is back of the provisional government, that the Russian Jew is opposed to Boshewiki, that the Russian Jew is moderate, that he is desirous

more than he had ever expected. He is satisfied. He is content.

The Russian Jew prays for the time when the Boshewiki power will either be overthrown or

This all for the sake of apologetics. I wish to say a word or two however, about the Russian Revolution itself and the Boshewiki movement. Now it is a very easy matter to say that the Boshewikis are pro-German, that and their leaders are agents of Germany, /thereby declared

but, for a student of history, that is a most superficial way of judging things. If the soil of Russia, the ground, were not prepared to receive the seeds of Boshewiki ideals, the Boshewiki movement, in spite of its German would have failed miserably. It is said the Boshewiki overthrew the Kerensky government. The Kerensky government ~~failed~~ fell



because of weakness. A little over six weeks ago, at the preliminary Parliament in Petrograd, summoned by Kerensky himself, a motion was introduced by a n and that motion was carried and at that moment Kerensky government proved a failure. It was at that junction the Kerensky government failed. Why? Not alone because of its weakness in handling the situation, not alone because Kerensky turned Russia into a great debating society permitting them too many liberties of speech and demonstration, not only because he was too much of a theoretist, but moreso because Kerensky failed in his foreign policy, which the Russian people wanted to see thru, and we American people might as well see the conditions as they really are. From the very moment that the Kerensky government came into power the question was put "What are we fighting for" Kerensky sent an appeal to all the allies, asking them to re-state their war aims, to convince the Russian people that they are not fighting for the imperial ambitions, but that they were actually fighting for democracy and Kerensky sent the appeal. It was never answered. He pleaded, he begged, he asked for the allies to give him that additional strength so that he could come before all striving to make the world safe for democracy. He said: "We, too, are a democratic people. We too, shall continue the struggle for democracy" but the Allies never did that, so that the people who had suffered so much, became disgruntled, became suspicious.

\*\*\*\*\* "Should we suffer more and shed more of our blood so that England or France or some other ally... ..and the Kerensky government began to weaken, until finally, without any aid from the allies, the Kerensky government was overthrown and if the Boshewiki government will be overthrown, this fact will constantly remain unchallenged, the Russian people will not fight unless it is made clear to them that they are fighting for ideals, for principles,



for democracy, and for nothing else. The Russian people are not averse to fighting.

The Russian Revolution, if you remember correctly, began as an attempt on the part of the Duma, to run the war properly.

The Russian government had thrown the country into a frightful state of disorganization. The Russian people favored the war, even during the reign of the Czar. The Russian people, first of all, meant to defend their fatherland, and secondly, the Russian people hated the Germans, who had *infested*

the highest places of Petrograd. The Russian people remembered the names of\*\*\*\*\*

The Russian people remembered General.....

The Russian people remember Colonel..... who made himself notorious through those

which followed the collapse of the Russian people in 1905. The Russian people had ~~no~~ use for the Germans

the Duma in 1916, appealed to the Czar to permit the people to organize so that they could throw the weight of a united people, the union of

Russian municipalities, the Ind — Militarism, all the organizations

~~pleaded~~ for ~~the~~ a responsible government so that the people might back

the war, but Russian autocracy looked with disfavor upon *bureaucracy*

and actually suppressed all councils, everything, until finally, after

those terrible defeats and after the conclusive evidences that treason

invaded the highest circles of the Army, the Duma took the stand and

wrested the power from the hands of Russian autocracy. I say, the

Russian Revolution began as a movement to aid the allies, but that the

allies failed to aid the Revolution. From the very earliest days of

the Revolution, the allies manifested too much of an anxiety to use the

Russian people, and the Russian people, 180,000,000 strong, refused to

permit themselves to be used. It is well, from the sheltered places

where you and I are, to criticise the Russian people, ~~We~~, who for two long



years were too proud to fight. We, who have made no sacrifices. It is mighty easy for you and me to criticise the Russian people, who have lost more lives than all the allies combined. The Russian people who retreated from Poland, leaving ten and hundreds of thousands of their sons upon the frozen plains of Poland. The Russian people, who sank by the tens of thousands into the Mis---- lakes, fighting bravely..... fighting with their fists and clubs as it were, for freedom.

Let us be a little more modest, a little more humble in our criticism of the Russian people. When the Russian Revolution broke out, Russia had

decreased 60%, the purse of the country was empty.

Hunger and starvation were facing the Russian ~~people~~ people.

*Let us* not lose our heads in a needless condemnation of the Russian people. The Russian people may yet fight for democracy if they are convinced that they are not fighting to uphold treaties such as the Russian Government has since revealed, treaties between Russia and Japan with reference to their *treatment* of China. Russian people, a true democracy today, in every sense of the word, refuses to do it. If you must expend your accumulated dissatisfaction with conditions as they exist today, do not on the Russian people. Cast your eyes west of it, and see a nation, strong and powerful, coining the tears and the blood of the world into wealth, doing nothing for this struggle. Let us think a little more of Japan and a little less of Russia, for, after all, the one great achievement of the war so far, ~~is~~ the Russian Revolution. We have failed to make the world safe for democracy. We have succeeded in making Russia democratic, and if no other beneficial result comes from this struggle, the liberation of 180,000,000 of people, of new opportunities to 180,000,000 of human beings, all the suffering of the war, all its blood, and all its tears, all its pain and sorrow, were not, I say, were not spent in vain. Russia is passing thru a night, a night of darkness, ghosts, shadows

Let us not add to their misery



to their fears, by the ruthless policy of condemnation. I am happy to note that our government in Washington is pursuing such a policy.

Russia depends, to a great measure, upon the sympathy and understanding of America, for certainly, Germany does not understand Russia and Germany is not in sympathy with Russian aspirations. Russia is bound to become, I feel it, the great arena of spiritual activities in the days to come. The Russian people are wonderfully religious and idealistic. They combine the East and the West, the religious mysticism and idealism of the East and the practicability of the West. The Russian people have given evidences that they are capable of wonderful sacrifices for ideals. The Russian people, thru their literature, have given wonderful promise. Think of it. In the early 40's, when English literature was at its lowest ebb

\*\*\*\*\*was writing in Russia. Russian literature has nothing of dishonesty, certainly it knows nothing of the insipid\*\*\*\*\* that characterizes so much of American literature. Russian literature is honest, it is real, it can analyze the human soul. Russian literature is the truest

full of love for human beings, full of love for everything that is fine and noble in civilization and the Russian people will emerge out of the night triumphant

Revolutions and counter-revolutions will sweep over that much-tried land, but Russia will come out of it all, purified by its suffering, refined by its trials ~~and xxx~~ a greater and finer people, and Russia, I believe, will lead the world in true industrial democracy, for if I understand this revolution correctly, it is more than a political revolution. At first the attempt was made to give to the revolution, a purely political tone. The Russian revolution, if I understand it correctly, has a decided Economic and Social purpose. They aim to introduce in Russia, ~~thats~~ that will raise and elevate the Russian people and the Russian people will do things on a large scale. They will dare to experiment, and you and I will profit from their experiment, so that, if my message this morning, were to



be summed up in a phrase, I would say that, at this unsettled hour, when things are rising and crumbling in actual embroglio, let us not permit our passions to run away with ~~our~~ better judgment. Let us not become prejudiced against the Russian people. It took France 100 years to <sup>establish</sup> ~~establish~~ a permanent government. It will take Russia much less than that, but it must take some time. Whatever you do, do not ~~make~~ accuse the Russian people of treachery, of turning their backs against the allies. ~~The~~ Russian people would love to shed their blood for democracy as well as we, but they have not been shown the way --they have not been shown the way.

