



## 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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Labor and the War, 1918.



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The observance of a National Labor Loyalty Week is a beautiful and a significant event - beautiful because of its dignity and spontaneity, significant because it bespeaks a unity of purpose and an unanimity of opinion as to the righteousness of America's cause in the war ----not that labor needed an occasion to demonstrate its loyalty. The loyalty of labor was never called into question. The ~~thot~~ which prompted the Loyalty Week, I take it, is the desire, on the part of labor, to ~~bind~~ to the Government that added inspiration and support which come from a knowledge and a conviction that labor fully realizes the motive and the object of this war, that labor fully appreciates the high motive which gave rise to the high ~~result~~<sup>resolve</sup>. The ~~thot~~ which prompted this Loyalty week, I take it, is the desire of labor to emphasize, among its own constituency, and thru the nation at large, those convictions concerning this struggle, that are already entertained by a vast majority of working men but ~~that~~ perhaps ~~they have not as~~<sup>as they ought to be</sup> clearly, as compellingly, as convincingly entertained by same.

I take it that the purpose of this Labor Loyalty Week is to emphasize three things about this war: First of all, that this war has come to be a war of convictions and principles, a war of ~~contradictory~~ and mutually exclusive (?) doctrines of life and civilization - that this war is not a war of capitalists, in which ~~xxxx~~ the working man is the blind pawn - that this war, which was prompted originally by motives of selfishness and crass materialism, has assumed a new purpose and a new tendency, that the fell purposes which prompted this war, have, by their own viciousness, been consumed, and that a new motive has come into it, that the war, thru a process of moral ~~appertion~~<sup>attrition</sup> has been reduced to this one issue -- the struggle of light against darkness - the hosts of progress arrayed against the ~~\*\*\*\*~~<sup>serried</sup> ranks of re-action, the beauty of tomorrow against the ugliness of yesterday - the promise of the future against the decay of the past - humanity's progress thru the wilderness of its way, to the



promised land has been challenged by the Amalakites of today - and the struggle is long and bitter and humanity will win the day only as long as its hands are upheld by the two great forces of present day society - capital and labor. That, I take it, is the first ~~thot~~, ~~that~~ —


This observance of Labor Loyalty Week endeavors to emphasize the sacredness, the holy purposefulness of this struggle, not a struggle of classes, not a war for colonies or markets or spheres of influence, but a war for a re-assertion of the age-old, fundamental purpose of civilization, a war for principle -- and the second ~~thot~~, I believe, is this -- that labor has most at stake in this struggle, not only because labor will be called upon to make the greatest sacrifices, not only because labor will ultimately bear the brunt of this terrific struggle, but because the issues involved in this struggle apply ~~against~~ most directly to the destiny and to the well-being of the working men. Industrial Enfranchisement has always gone hand in hand with political ~~enfranchisement~~ and democracy has been the Guardian Angel of labor, while autocracy has been its deadliest enemy. If this war will result in gain for democracy and for the principles of democracy in the world, it will inevitably also result in greater opportunity and greater Industrial justice for the working men, ~~for~~, believe me, friends, perhaps, (perhaps, I say), the intrinsic value of this struggle and its results will be, not a political alteration of society, not a change of the map of Europe, but an industrial re-arrangement of society, <sup>and</sup> that will be brot about, not by the working men alone, but by society at large. The working man, having seen the follies of a political organization which was not of his making, will ~~xxx~~ begin to question the wisdom of an Economic organization which is not of his making; the working man, observing the enormous expenditures of human wealth on work of destruction, will begin to ask this all-pertinent question - "Why part of this wealth is not set aside for work of construction, why part of that wealth is not set aside for the relief of physical suffering and the amelioration of\*\*\*\*\* are being discarded, will ask himself and society why some old economic



institutions which have been encumbered with evils ~~unpardonable~~ unspeakable, are not being discarded - why society will not wage a war upon the deadliest enemy of civilization - poverty - Working men will speak in accents ~~firm and resolute~~ firm and resolute and in terms unmistakable and society will listen unto him because society will have realized that the labor problem is the social problem, that the labor problem is not a class problem - that it concerns the interest of society at large, that society will see to it that a people will not be swept into classes. Society will see to it that after the war nothing will be done that will encourage a philosophy that will make for class struggle and class war. The interest of every group of society, if they are honest and just, are the interests of society at large, and society will deal with them frankly, justly and honestly. I say that, after the war, a new spirit will come into our Industrial organization -- mind you - I do not say a new industrial order, not because I prostrate myself in awe and reverence before any industrial order -- ~~industrial~~ Economic organizations have no sanctity, no validity, no divinity of their own. If they serve the best interests of the greatest number they are valuable, they are good, they should be kept. If they are found wanting, they must be discarded - but I speak not of a program of economic reform, I speak not of a technique, I speak of a new spirit that will permeate our Industrial life, of new standards that will evaluate all our industrial conditions. I cannot offer to you any panacea, any catholicon to cure all <sup>the</sup> evils of society, I am not presenting to you an elaborately wrought economic philosophy, for life, in the first place, has a knack of making all such beautiful and perfectly constructed philosophies ultimately ridiculous - all such programs are inevitably limited by the conditions of the age in which they are promulgated. I am not offering a program but I am preaching a gospel - I am preaching a gospel of <sup>an</sup> industrial reconstruction, based upon a principle of absolute justice; and when I speak of justice, friends, I hope that by now you have come to realize that we are speaking, not of Utopias or dreams or even futile hopes, When we speak about



justice and industrial re-organization along lines of justice, we have in our mind, before our eyes, a pressing and immediate problem which you must face, a problem with which you must wrestle but the problem will swamp you. You have no choice - it is either that or the avalanche.

I speak of a new ideal. Whatever the means this new ideal will find for its self expression will be satisfactory, whether it be Government ownership of some utilities, Government regulation of others, Government control of still others, unrestricted competition of still others, taxation as a means of distributing\*\*\*\*whatever the means which social engineers will devise - that is not my concern. My concern, the concern of religion in this great crisis is to see that labor, at the end of the struggle shall come forth with real, concrete, definite gain, that greater opportunity be its, that greater prosperity belong unto it, -- that, I take it, is the second ~~that~~ that Labor Loyalty Week emphasizes, and the third would be this: This is a war - not of armies but of people, this is a war of nations and the soldiers must be found, not only on the firing line but in every department of the national life. To win this war we need the soldier of the plow and the soldier of  the pick, the soldier of the pen and the soldier of the play. To win this war we need the army of the field and the forest and the mill, the army of the mine. The blow for democracy must be struck with the concentrated force of a whole people or the hosts of darkness will never yield. Now these three things are generally recognized by laboring men, yet sometimes labor seems to forget it and lapses into acts so anti-social and unpatriotic as to cast doubt upon its ability fully to understand the significance of this struggle. Now I hold that labor should not, must not, need not\*\*\*\*\* I hold that labor should not, must not, need not expect any special indulgence. The demands of labor must be based on grounds of absolute justice or society will not entertain them. The interests of labor are not paramount neither are the interests of capital -- it is the interest of the people



of all people, the wage earners and the salary men, professors, small tradesmen, farmers, merchants\*\*\*\*\*the interest of a nation engaged upon a tremendous undertaking - that is paramount -- and no men and no group of men are infallible and labor has given evidence of a most discouraging fallibility in some instances. No group or class of men should be allowed to enforce their wilfulness upon society and society must be <sup>as</sup> ready to condemn any evidence of egotism of wealth of arbitrariness in the ranks of labor as it would be ready to condemn them in the ranks of capital. Now it is true that labor ~~xxx~~ is far from having come into its own, it is true that labor, in many cases, is still being mulct and exploited. It is true that labor will demand much more in the days to come\*\*\*\*\*but I hold that in some instances, powerful labor organizations today, during the war, have endeavored to win by threat and intimidation, those things which perhaps justice and equity would deny, and it ~~is my~~ <sup>is</sup> whole-hearted concern for its welfare that prompts me to make this criticism, because acts of such glaring selfishness cannot but be harmful to the noble cause of labor. Just during this week, when the nation is celebrating Labor Loyalty Week, ~~some things~~ <sup>have</sup> happened which have dampened the enthusiasm of devotees of labor.

Do you know what I have in mind? Those working men engaged in that most pressing service of today, the building of ships for the nation -- striking without warning, without waiting for an impartial tribunal to pass upon the justice of their demands. Now I do not know whether their demands are just or unjust. I am not thoroughly familiar with their work or their scale of wages. I do not say that they ~~xxx~~ were not justified in asking for increased remuneration for their services, but I do say that to strike at a time as critical as this, when the whole world is prayerfully watching every bolt and every rivet which is put into a ship that is to carry a new hope to a struggling world -- food and ammunition for our boys in France -- ~~xxxxxx~~ to strike at such a time as this, without warning, without



without giving the Government an opportunity to \*\*\*\*without waiting for a decision-  
 I say ~~xxxx~~ without hesitancy that acts such as these, are not only unpatriotic  
 but dangerously criminal, ~~Mind~~ you, - Were these men on the verge of starvation,  
 were their conditions so hopelessly \*\*\*\*\*even then, their appeal should have  
 been to the public sentiment, to the people at large, to the Government  
 but these men are well provided, their wage is far above <sup>the</sup> normal of wages and  
 while their claim for advance might have been a thoroughly just one, the  
 method which they adopted is a most reprehensible one and one that must meet  
 with the condemnation of every patriotic American citizen and every devoted  
 lover of the cause of labor.

Now for the obverse side of the coin. I believe that  
 much of this anti-social sentiment which exists in some ranks of labor, is due  
 to an anti-social sentiment which exists in some spheres and ranks of capital.  
 Somehow war is looked upon by the commercially brutalized \*\*\*\*\*as a swill  
 bucket for himself, the trough of enormous national expenditures has proved  
 a most inviting place for the ugly snout of every human hog. What the carcass  
 is to the vulture, so war has been to the profiteer. There are always men  
 on hand, great and small, the Lord high chancellor and the clerk of the  
 grocery store. There are always men on hand, ready to coin the bitter needs  
 of a faithful struggle, for selfish, personal gain. I say that they are  
 the ~~x~~ ghouls preying upon the graves of humanity and I say that these  
 unscrupulous, rapacious individuals are, today, the most dangerous traitors  
 in America -- for, mind you, my friends, it is not the irresponsible  
~~pacifist~~ pacifist who is a menace to humanity, nor is it the class-maddened  
 industrial workers of the world who ~~is~~ <sup>are</sup> \*\*\*\*\*It is this profiteer -  
 it is ~~the~~ this group of individuals who ~~xxxxx~~ dampen the enthusiasm of the  
 nation, who cast suspicion upon a Nation's holy cause. It is these men who  
<sup>the</sup> are traitors of America and it is these men who should be interned by all  
 means, if not summoned to face the firing squad -- society at large, must  
~~condemn~~ condemn such persons whether they be found in the ranks of labor or



in the ranks of capital. At this hour, America must ~~determine~~ demand of every group and of every individual, unselfishness, whole-hearted devotion, a surrendering of self, a giving-up of every thing to the cause of labor because our young men are giving up every thing and we cannot, we shall not permit those who remain behind to retain anything profitable out of this war unto themselves. Were I a business man, I should be ashamed if, after the war, I shall have more in wealth, in possessions, than I had before the war. If I were a business man I should give, give, give to the war, to the many causes of the war; everything, everything, everything for America needs everything.

These thoughts come to one's mind during a Labor Loyalty Week, labor is loyal for labor realizes the import and the significance of the struggle, for labor knows that as a result of this war, a new epic will be written in the days to come and that new epic that has been so aptly re-marked, will be ~~a~~ not the epic of "Arms and the man" but the epic of ~~xxx~~ "tools and the man" - that after this great struggle, the world will be nearer that great ideal, which is this: That the whole world of men be turned into one vast workshop, where great, happy and high-minded sons of God, either with their brain or with their brawn, will do the tasks which God has assigned unto them, all laboring in the cause of civilization, all doing a man's work in a man's world. Labor hopes for this, labor strives for this and labor is ready to fight for this. Labor Loyalty Week - a beautiful, a significant event, beautiful because of its dignity and spontaneity, significant because it bespeaks a unity of purpose and a unanimity of opinion as to the righteousness of America's cause in this great war-----Amen.