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The Sins of the Allies, 1919.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER ON "THE
SINS OF THE ALLIES" AT THE TEMPLE, EAST
55th STREET AND CENTRAL AVENUE, SUNDAY
MORNING, NOVEMBER 2, 1919.

I know that it is easier to rail at the evil than to fight for the good. I am not tempted this morning to indulge in mere destructive criticism. Society has had, and has today, too much of that type of criticism. There is a type of man who delights in ferreting out the imperfections of society, gleefully and morbidly raking out every shortcoming of civilization and holding them up in great delight as evidence of his own cleverness and superiority. I think that is sophomoric wisdom; that is not constructive thinking. We know too well that, measured by absolute standards of right and wrong, we are a very sorry, sinful, and imperfect world. And yet we refuse to accept the conclusions of the mental dyspeptics; that because of these deficiencies of society we stand convicted of total depravity. People dislike the cynic, not because his conclusions are false, not because his contentions are false, but because his manner is obnoxious. Society knows that we have a long, hard and thorny road ahead of us before we reach the land of promise. And yet society wants a little encouragement at times; a little praise for the long

stretches that it has already covered.

There are men, for example, who take extreme delight and find great entertainment in pointing out the things which this war has failed to achieve. They remind us with bitter emphasis that after five years of conflict we have not perfected peace;; we have not created a higher type or religion; we have not brought the millennium about. Now, no one is more keenly and painfully aware of the things which this war has failed to achieve than those of us who threw ourselves, body and soul, into the war. No one was so impatient with and resentful of that small group of oldish men in Paris who snatched the fruits of victory for the human spirit out of our hands when they were within reach of our fingers, than those of us who believed in the regenerative possibilities of this war, in its great promises. And yet we resent this attitude of mind of the smart critics of the war. We are hurt by their insincerity and their aloofness. The war has been too tragic and its consequences too tremendous and too far-reaching to be passed over by a knowing wink or a well-turned phrase.

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I say all this/way of introduction to emphasize the thought, the motive which prompts us this morning, in speaking of the sins of the Allies, as not being a mere goulish delight in cruel criticism, not a desire to disparage or discredit the achievements of this war, or of the contributions of the Allies in this war. You have

heard me speak too frequently of these things to misinterpret the spirit of my remarks.

I believe that this war has found a turning point in the history of civilization. I believe that the effects of this war will be more apparent a generation, a century from today than they are today. I believe that this world will be finer and nobler and sweeter because of this war; and I believe that universal peace and human brotherhood and democracy and the spiritual outlook of men, in spite of the blunderings, and the stupidities and the colossal errors of the victors and the vanquished during and since the war, will be enhanced and have been enhanced by this war.

We are still in the midst of the smoke of the great conflagration and our eyes cannot see clearly. We are still in the backwash of the terrific inundation, and we cannot grasp the full scope and effect of it. Had we been able to ask the men who lived during the chaos and anarchy that followed the French Revolution, whether humanity was benefited by the French Revolution, they would have answered, I am quite sure, definitely and categorically--no.

But fifty years later the world knew how much it owed in democracy, in human rights, in greater freedom, in social intercourse to the French Revolution. Men and women have, since the armistice, frequently asked me, "Is it not true, Rabbi, that there is more hate in the

world today and more bitterness and more misery than there was in the days before the war? Is it not true that anti-semitism is today more rampant throughout the world than it was before the war?" And I say yes. And it was inevitable that it should be so. You cannot let loose during five long and terrible years all the passions of national and racial and religious hates and antipathies and have them sweep uncontrolled through the world and poison the hearts and minds of men, and then expect, with the signing of a document, that these hates will disappear as if by magic. But they will disappear; and it is because we are so eager to have this scum of the war cleared from off the surface of society, that we are tempted to speak, as cynically as we possibly can, of those things which to our minds increase the viciousness, the hostility, the hates and the passions of peoples today.

We believe in the ultimate good of this war; and yet the ultimate good is one thing, and to see the immediate abuses and injustice of those peoples who helped to win the war, and to criticize them, is another thing; and it is part of honesty, and it is part of constructive thinking to expose these sins and injustices, to denounce them and to point out the true course and the true way.

When we speak of the sins of the Allies we do not have in mind the sins committed at the peace conference. All of these we have spoken of before when we discussed the treaty of peace. We do not have in mind the cynical

disregard of the principle of no annexation, no contribution and no punitive indemnities. When we speak of the sins of the Allies we do not have in mind the deft manhandling of Wilson's fourteen principles, once the hope and now ^{the} jest of nations. We do not have in mind the theft of Shantung; we do not have in mind the spirit of vae victis--"Woe unto the vanquished"--the spirit of vengeance that dominated the treaty. We do not even have in mind the strangling of Korea, and the strangling of Egypt, and the strangling of Ireland--in the name, of course, of democracy and the right of self determination.

When we speak of the sins of the Allies we have in mind the sins perpetrated now and in recent times, and the sins for which we shall have to atone--we or the children of tomorrow. I said the sins of the Allies. I do not mean the sins of the English people, or the French people, or the Italian people, or the American people. The masses of the world are at heart honest, and though blind and blundering sometimes, they seek to do that which is right. But I have in mind those cliques of governing forces, ministries and entrenched privileged classes, individuals or groups that are controlling the foreign relations of these nations, and therefore controlling the destinies of the world. And I maintain--and, I hope, fairly, that the Allies through these entrenched political powers have sinned grievously against the higher interests of humanity by retarding the reestablishment of peace, order and

prosperity in human society, through their nefarious policies of greed and selfishness, of economic and political imperialism.

I maintain that the Allies, consciously, or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly, through the machinations of these men, have fostered wars and inspired strife and starved half of Europe. I maintain--and I hope honestly and fairly--that the Allies have returned to their old diplomatic intrigue that was the fashion in the days before the war, to policies of grafting of exploiting, of appropriating, of sacrificing the interests of weaker nations to their selfish whims. I maintain that there is a spirit of reaction that swept over the chancellories of the Allies, that bodes evil for the freedom of the world.

What is the motive that prompted France to grab Italy the Saar Valley, and the Dalmatian Coast, and Japan Shantung, and Greece Thrace, and Roumania parts of Hungary, and England a million square miles in Africa and in the Pacific? Civilization? Democracy? Rights of self determination? That superb propaganda matter! No; trade commerce, lust of power, desire for territorial aggrandizement and spherical influence.

What is now compelling France,--France, the hero of civilization, the champion of human rights, the France that we loved because of her readiness to bring sacrifices for the sake of human freedom--what is now compelling

France to crush uprisings in the Saar district? What is now compelling Italy to deport hundreds of Dalmatian leaders, to flog young men and massacre women and priests in the islands of Greece? What is compelling Roumania to institute a white terror in Hungary? What has compelled Japan to drench Korea in the blood of the freedom-loving men and women? And what compelled England to share Kronstadt and slay Russians? Civilization? Human rights? Oh, no. Colonial interests, territorial conserves, trade and commerce policies.

I believe, and I say it with a bleeding heart, that the whole spirit which controlled and dominated the acts and the policies of the Allies since the signing of the armistice has been a mockery of the heroic dead--a desecration, and a sop, and a sacrilege. What has happened in Hungary as a consequence of Allied policy? After the fall of Bela Kun, the communist, Roumania overran Hungary. Within the brief space of a few weeks Roumania looted Hungary, and out of the City of Budapest alone Roumania carried away thirty-five hundred carloads of loot--stripping, denuding, impoverishing Hungary. And then, not content with that, the brave Allied champion of democracy set about scheming to restore the Hapsburg dynasty in Budapest. The crew of Archduke Joseph failed because of the insistence of an American private citizen, but the attempt has not yet come to an end; and I am ashamed to be compelled to acknowledge that the Allies, through their controlling spokesmen, are very willing and anxious to have

monarchy restored in Hungary and Austria and Russia.

Roumania is still in Hungary, and through its tool Friedlitsch, it has instituted a white terror in comparison with which the red terror of Bela Kun was a child's play. The terrorism of Bela Kun was principally fiction and propaganda; the terrorism of Roumania was very real and very bloody and very frightful. What is happening in Austria as a result of Allied policies? In the City of Vienna today eight hundred thousand people are under-fed, and one hundred thousand are actually starving.

Let me read a sentence or two from that pathetic plea that was sent by the burgomaster to the American people. "We have been rendered absolute beggars, a city of mendicants. There is nothing but despair facing us; all of the stocks of Entente origin have been exhausted, and no new contracts have been made because this is impossible for lack of credits. Our meat ration originally was fixed at three ounces per capita per week, but even this amount is unavailable, and intervals of weeks frequently occur between meat distributions. Fresh milk is available only for infants, and only in very limited quantities. Eggs and sugar and coffee supplies have been exhausted. Clothing and shoes are a non-existent quantity for the masses; our citizens are herded like cattle, our hospitals are about to be closed; so we are prepared for a terrible death rate. The number of unemployed increases daily, and it now seems certain that within a few weeks there will be

no railway transportation whatever within our country.

Only a foreign loan can save us, and we appeal to America."

And in the face of this tragic appeal for the wherewithall to save the lives of women and children, we read that the Secretary for War George announces in the British house of commons that England has again voted the sum of seventy-five million dollars. For Austria? No. To save the lives of children in Vienna? No. To help the reactionary Denikine crush, kill and massacre in Russia.

But of all the sins of the Allies, to my mind, none is so grievous as the sin committed against Russia. From the days of Kerensky to the days of Kolchak the Allies have blundered in Russia. You might say, and say justly, what do you know about conditions in Russia? And I would say unto you, "I know little, but not because of my own fault." Why is it that we know little about conditions in Russia? Does the wireless not speak any more? Is communication impossible? No. It is because of that favorite tool of reaction and imperialism--the censorship, that we know little about what is transpiring in Russia. But we do know that what the Allies have effected in Russia has been not peace and not the satisfaction of^{the} hunger of millions, and not the saving of lives, and not the establishment of hospitals, but anarchy, and chaos, and ruin, and bloodshed.

You know my attitude towards Bolshevism and the

Bolsheviki. I have spoken of that frequently. You know that I believe, as I believe in anything, fully and sincerely, that the philosophy of Bolshevism is radically wrong, and false; that the technique of Bolshevism is abominable. You know that we have never evinced the slightest sympathy for a philosophy of class struggle. But if Bolshevism is false it will destroy itself. Bayonets will not destroy it; ideals will. The Russian people can be trusted to find a solution for their internal problems. What business is it of the Allies to meddle in the internal problems of Russia? You say the Bolsheviki are the minority; they are autocratic; they are tyrannical. But revolutions have always been instituted by minorities, and the Allies had no scruples about dealing with the autocratic and tyrannical Czar. You say they have committed atrocities. They have, and no one shall condone for these atrocities, and no one shall seek apology for them. But the atrocities of the Bolsheviki are nothing in comparison to the atrocities of Kolchak and Denikine.

Do you know what is transpiring in the Ukraine? Whole communities are being wiped out, and especially Jewish communities. Why, the champions of human freedom are Cossacks. Do you know that our people today are facing in Ukrainia absolute and complete annihilation, aided by the bayonets and the bullets of the Allies? You do not read much of that in the English press. That is not policy.

But we know that there are communities in the Ukraine

where every young man has been shot; we know that there are hundreds of communities where there is not a child under eight living, because an Allied policy forced starvation upon them.

I want to be fair; I have always tried to be fair. I believe I owe it to the spirit of America to be fair; I am not a propagandist, and I shall never, I hope, submit myself to the invidious, coercive and destructive influence of propaganda. The Allies have not been fair to soviet Russia. Soviet Russia has endeavored, time and time again to make peace, to make the most radical concessions for the sake of peace. We need not go much beyond the testimony of our own American citizen, Mr. Bullitt. Mr. Bullitt was sent by President Wilson with a peace program and project to the soviet powers. Mr. Bullitt came back with an absolute acceptance of the terms of the Allies. The soviet government promised to pay their national debt; they promised even, if necessary, to sacrifice territory in Russia, to give concessions of minerals to the Allies; they offered to cease their revolutionary propaganda in the world; they offered to make peace with the contending anti-Bolsheviki powers in Russia. They accepted every one of the demands of the Allies. It looked as though peace, and consequently the saving of millions of human lives who were being starved in the struggle, was in sight.

Through the fact that our own president was not disposed to receive Mr. Bullitt, against the advice of Mr.

Lloyd George, against the advice of Colonel House, against the advice of most of the American peace commissioners, the answer of the soviet government was never given a second thought, and soon thereafter the Allies called upon the neutral powers of Europe to make the blockade which is strangling Russia and killing women and children. Where is the spirit of fair play? .

And what is America doing in Russia? President Wilson said, "Our policy with reference to Russia will be the acid test of our honesty." What are American soldiers doing in Siberia except being flogged by the Cossacks and attacked by the Japanese? What is our policy? Have we been asked or consulted about it? How many of us would have subscribed to a policy of sending our boys in Russia to fight other people's battles? Is America assuming a new mission in life, namely, to crush revolution all over the world? Is that our God-appointed destiny? Is America going to join a new holy alliance and stifle free thought in the world and bring about a condition similar to that which followed the treaty of Vienna in 1815? Is that the glorious promise of American life? Is that the thing we citizens of America are proud of?

These are, to my mind, sins, grievous sins for which we shall have to atone. My appeal and my prayer is that the liberal minded men and women in this country, and in England, and in France, and in Italy, the right-thinking, commonsense, practical, good-natured human being,

who is sick unto death of war and political intrigues and diplomatic thievery, who is interested in humanity and in the saving of human lives,--that these men assert themselves and speak in no critical terms their determination that the ideals for which this war was fought shall not be sacrificed after we have paid for it in our blood and with our tears.

We dare not, for the sake of the generations to come, permit the clever, shrewd, diplomats to dissipate and destroy the fine fabric of civilization which we, with bleeding hands, have woven during the terrible days of the struggle. There is an infamous and invidious propaganda brought into the world that aims to enthrone reaction and privilege everywhere, and you are victimized daily by a systematic and clever propaganda through your newspapers, through your press. Let the free men of the world speak. We owe it to ourselves; we owe it to America; we owe it to the generations of tomorrow.
