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The Next President of the United States - What Type of Man Shall
He Be?, 1920.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER, ON
"THE NEXT PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED
STATES--WHAT TYPE OF MAN SHALL HE BE,"
SUNDAY, MAY 2nd, 1920, AT THE TEMPLE,
EAST 55th STREET AND CENTRAL AVENUE,
CLEVELAND, OHIO.

I think it was John Stewart Mill who said,
"The worth of a state is, in the long run, the
worth of the individuals who run it." Benjamin
Disraeli, the wise and astute diplomat of the last
century, makes a similar comment when he said,
"We lay too much emphasis on systems, and we look
too little to men."

Now, if other nations have been guilty of
placing too much faith in systems and in parties,
and too little faith in individuals, our land
has been doubly guilty. We are a government
practically of two parties, and we vote by parties.
It is very seldom that a man is elected without
reference to his party. In that case it is usually
commented on as rather the unusual thing. As a
result of this party loyalty and affiliation and
voting by party, we have lowered the standard of
our officials. We have, in most instances, a
group of mediocrities buzzing around some old

party pretention or some old party slogan.

It is the individual that ultimately determines the kind of government we have. It is the integrity, the sincerity, the courage of the individual official that, in the long run, determines the character of our institutions. Years ago, when there really existed significant differences between these two parties, voting by party was somewhat tolerable; but in recent years when, to the impartial and unprejudiced observer, there really have not existed, and do not at this moment exist, any vital significant differences, voting by party is the most ineffective way of expressing one's political convictions by means of a ballot.

Let us be fair; let us be honest with ourselves, for only in so far as we are courageous to face facts as they are, will we be enabled to make our political machinery really express our deepest convictions. The two great parties of our land are fighting sham battles. Neither of them has, in recent years, brought a meaning and a message that is pertinent to the needs of our present life. They are singing slogans of yesterday. They are inviting our loyalty on issues that have long since ceased to be. One party calls for a hundred per cent Americanism,

and another party calls for a hundred per cent Americanism; one party asks for Americanization, and another party asks for Americanization. One party aims to establish friendly relations between capital and labor, and another party aims to establish friendly relations between capital and labor; one party denounces the profiteer in monosyllables, and another party denounces the profiteer in polysyllables.

Both of them have so far failed to touch vitally and directly the basic and tremendous problems of social, political and industrial reconstruction that life demands. So that when one votes by party today one votes for nothing. To vote for individuals, for men of firm and definite convictions, is the only salvation of American political life; for, mind you, the next President will be faced by problems, domestic and foreign, such as no President of the United States has faced in a generation. And unless he brings to his task knowledge, experience, convictions, sympathy, he will fail miserably, and with him will the American people go down to defeat.

In other words, during the next few months the loyal American citizen must look about for that type of man to become his executive and leader

in years to come, who embodies within himself not a party loyalty only, but a set of definite ideals and convictions, a type of man who has that intellectual, that spiritual, that temperamental makeup that will fit him for the exalted and momentous task which the American people will entrust to him.

What type of a man shall he be? What type of a man shall the next president of the United States be? In the first place, he must be a man who is free of cant. One of the damning things of American political life is the unbridled cant that a political campaign lets loose. He must be fair to the American public; he must not insult the intelligence of the American public. He must not flaunt wrong sentiments surrounding the accepted and basic convictions of American democracy, the truisms of American life; he must not pander to popular fears; he must not incite any artificial dread of industrial danger. He must be honest with the American people.

In the second place, he must be the type of man that is willing to ^{face} facts as they are honestly and fearlessly. He must have some sort of an understanding of the present industrial unrest. He must be a man who realizes that present day unrest is not directly the cause or the result of

unbridled agitators. He must have been taught by experience that strikes cannot be ultimately decided by injunctions. He must be a man who has some feasible and definite economic program to meet the dangerous economic conditions of the day--the mounting cost of living. He must not be one who is content with denouncing profiteering. Our last administration has investigated and denounced and prosecuted profiteering until it has become the laughing stock of the nation. He must realize that profiteering is an effect and not a cause. He must bring, if he has to bring, a definite economic program concerning remedial methods, concerning a deflation of currency, concerning a readjustment of taxation, concerning a control of prices and profits, and he must have the courage to experiment with them if so the people decide upon them.

And if he is convinced, as some are increasingly becoming convinced of the fact, that the Federal Government can actually exert very little influence in controlling industrial conditions, in meeting the problem of the cost of living, then he must so say to the American public. There must be no illusions, there must be no pretensions.

I believe also that he must be the type of

a man who is wide awake to the new tone and the new temper of the age. He must be one who has realized that the war definitely closed one epoch and initiated a new epoch in civilization. He must realize that there are new needs and new demands and new longings afloat in the world; that the world is ablaze with new ideas and new demands, and that the soul of man is struggling to express itself in new ways and in new manners. He must have supreme sympathy for this inarticulate, and, in many ways, blind groping of the millions of men.

Now, it may be true that the Government will be unable to embody any of these new ideals. It may be that these new ideals, being principally industrial, will ultimately have to be embodied by the various industries. This is through a mutual agreement of employer and employee without any reference to Government regulation or control. But he must safeguard jealously the right of every idea, however unpleasant, however novel, however unacceptable, to a hearing in public. He must keep the traffic of thought moving. That is the function of Government--not to conserve the status quo, not to congeal and harden the things as they are, but to enable a ready and free expression of a progressive thought

and a constantly evolving idealism in the political life of the nation.

He must therein be the type of a man who is not afraid of free speech, and a free press, and free assembly. One of the most vital issues that will be fought out in the next few years will be this: does free speech mean freedom to express those ideas which are comfortable and acceptable and to the liking of the majority? Or does free speech mean the right to express an idea even if it challenges the convictions and the prejudices of the vast majority of the people? Does free speech mean freedom for the Sweets and the Lucks and the Hansons to preach under the guise of patriotism a veritable terrorism to the holy of holies of the spirit of America? And does it prohibit an equal opportunity for ideals to be heard that are less popularly current among people?

I do not think that there has taken place anything more shamefully criminal in the annals of American history in the last two generations than that shameful, disgusting thing in Albany--the man-handling of the civil liberties of the American people. The true test of freedom, my friends, is not to permit the suave, pleasant,

soporific statements of a Nicholas Murray Butler, or the ranting of a Wollbbie. The type of man who is to control the destinies of the United States in the future must be one who is not afraid of those convictions which were embodied in the constitution of the United States decades ago. He must not be terrified by a "red terror" into a black intolerance. He must believe, as we believe, that ideas ultimately will stand or fall upon their own innate truth or falsehood. If an idea is false it will be exposed in public discussion. If an idea is true, it cannot be stifled; it cannot be suppressed; it will come. It will come attended either by a calm, deliberate discussion, or it will come attended by fury and passion and all the incidental heartaches of the world.

The next president of the United States must be a man who will be in favor of repealing every suppressive measure that the war made necessary. He will have faith and confidence in a vigorous exchange of ideas in the United States. And he must be one, to my mind, who will have unbounded sympathy and a critical understanding of the vast number of immigrants in our land, and of the vast numbers that are bound to come. He must not make the immigrant the scapegoat of American life. He must not permit himself to throw upon the

shoulders of the immigrant the responsibility for all the industrial unrest and discontent in our land, because it is not true. If the immigrant in larger numbers joins the ranks of the discontented, it is solely because his conditions are a little less tolerable than the conditions of other people.

The next president of the United States must have a clear notion of what Americanization means. If he believes in an Americanization that is hasty and superficial and formal, an Americanization that is not based upon a knowledge and study of the nature and the temperament and the culture of each racial group that has come to these shores; that is not based on a slow educational process, that is not based on the truth that a gradual and constant economic improvement of the conditions of the immigrant is the first essential to Americanization, then Americanization will become a thing of intolerance, of bigotry; then Americanization will create suspicion, fear, distrust and hatred in American life.

He must realize that America is an experiment not in racial unity but in spiritual unity. He must understand that the immigrant comes here not as a receiver of alms, a beggar, but that he comes here bringing gifts, bringing a culture

from lands much older than ours, and from civilizations much more ancient than ours. He brings himself, he brings ambition, he brings devotion, he brings labor, he brings a will to rehabilitate himself, to make a new life out of an old life. He brings consecration to ideals. And unless that understanding is incorporated in our program in the next two years, Americanization will become not only a thing futile but a thing mendacious.

I also believe that the next president of the United States must have a definite international program. What does he think concerning armament? What does he think concerning compulsory military training? Does the American people wish to be subtly Prussianized now that it has destroyed the Prussian menace? Does it wish to become spiritually vanquished after it has become physically triumphant? I understand that the cost of compulsory military training would be something like six hundred and fifty million dollars a year--more than we put in all our public schools in 1915.

Is the American people willing to shackle itself with a new type of militarism, that will crush it not only financially but crush it spiritually--stifle it? Are we willing to embark

upon a competitive program of armament to have an "incomparable largest navy in the world," as some of our candidates have spoken of? Are we willing to reiterate that tragic folly of ten years ago, of a deadly, suicidal race in increasing armaments between peoples under the guise of national insurance?

The next president of the United States must have clear and definite convictions on this subject. He must be one who will understand that the American people hate militarism, of whatever kind and under whatever name. He must also have set views concerning the new type of American nationalism. Is he to be in favor of national isolation? Or is he to be in favor of international cooperation? Will he ask that our country go back to those splendid days of long ago when we were a distinct and separate unit in the world, caring little and heeding less about the opinions and the events which occurred among other peoples? Or will he be one who has realized that America today, much as it may wish it, cannot be and is not an isolated unit; that the cable and the wireless and the international commerce and the unity of the markets of the world have so knitted and drawn the world together that no one event of material significance

can take place in any land in the family of nations but what will directly and materially affect the destiny of the American people?

Will he understand the mission of America to be not alone that of service to the peoples of the world, but the actual, real necessity of identifying ourselves somehow, somewhat, with the other peoples of the earth? Will he be in favor of such a cooperation when it means merely dabbling in the affairs of other people?

I think one of the most tragic forces in American life in recent years has been the fact that we were, consciously or unconsciously, made the tool of imperialism abroad, that we were used not to bring a better understanding among the nations of the world, not to establish newer and more sacred rights among the peoples of the world, but that we were used to confirm those things which the victors in this last struggle gained only because they were victorious and not because they were morally entitled to them. We were used not to help nations gain their independence, their self-determination, but to help a trust of unscrupulous foreign offices to make good their grabs and their territorial aggrandizements, their iniquities. The moral authority of America was used to give sanction to things which

were indefensible.

Now, will the type of man who is to be our next executive favor such meddling in the destinies of other peoples, to serve the invidious purposes of triumphant imperialism? Or shall we determine to keep our hands off as long as the nations of Europe still persist in their immoral and mendacious practices of criminal grabbing and unscrupulous disregard of the rights of other peoples?

We dabbled in Russia not because we had a definite policy that was consonant with the spirit of America; we dabbled in Russia and sacrificed our own wholesome Russian policy. And why? To please other peoples. And we left Russia not in consistency with any policy of ours, but because the Allies had to get out of Russia. And we are on the verge of dabbling in the life of one of our neighbors under the guise of establishing order, ostentatiously,--to establish civilization; but really to gain trade advantages.

The next president of the United States, to my mind, must be a man who is in favor of a league of peoples--not a league of foreign offices, not a covenant attached to a criminal treaty, but a league so purged and purified that it will actually

achieve the object which it aims to achieve--
a better understanding, a greater comity, a
closer alliance between the peoples of the earth.
A league of nations with reservations? Yes.
But some embracing and unifying institution must
be evolved, or the war will have been fought in
vain.

The next president of the United States
ought to be an idealist. I am ^{not} afraid of the
word "idealist", and I do not think the American
people have ceased to be idealistic. He must
an idealist but he must not be a dreamer. He
must have visions but he must not be a visionary.
He must have convictions but he must not be
stubborn. He must be firm but he must not be
opinionated. He must be a leader but he must not
be a demagogue. He must be a statesman but he
must not be a diplomat.

Are there such men? I have heard many say
that there is an unusual paucity of great men
today--that there is a dearth of great men; there
is no such thing. There are plenty of good men
in our land who can take hold of the reins of
government successfully. It is not at all
necessary that we have a successful business man
to run our Government, or a technically trained
scientist, or an administrator of long years of

experience, because government is much more than business. The aims of government are much more exalted than the mere efficient administration of certain departments. Business is run for profit principally; government is run to yield the greatest happiness to the greatest number of men by means of increasing the freedom for self-expression and self-realization to the greatest number of citizens. Government is just as much interested in the elevation of the mind, in the purification of the soul, in spiritual values, in education, in art, in literature, in science, in religion, as it is in an efficient budget.

What is needed is a man who is simple and honest, who has the homely virtues of an American citizen; a man who is free of cant, hypocrisy or verbiage, of the loose talk that runs amuck during a political campaign; a man who is willing to face facts, to call in expert talent to deal with the facts as they are; a man who is true to the fundamental idealism of American life, who has sympathy for the struggling masses of the world, and for the new ideas that are trying to find a local habitation and a name in American life. He must be a true American, who is really, really not afraid of the exchange of ideas, not in times

of quiet but in times of stress. That is when free speech is needed--in times of duress, needs and stress. It is in the clash and conflict of ideas that the truth springs forth like a spark.

He must be a man who believes in the mission of American life--to bring light and cheer to the other nations of the earth; not by arming ourselves to the teeth, not by preaching the gospel of human brotherhood through the mouth of a cannon, not by propagating ideals at the point of the bayonet, but by a fearless acceptance of the ideal of human brotherhood, and the invitation to the peoples of the earth, collectively and gradually to disarm.

He must be a man who is in favor of a spiritual cooperation among all the peoples and nations of the earth. Among all--not among a group of triumphant and victorious powers who have become drunk with their success and have trampled rough shod over the ranks of the smaller peoples, but cooperation among all--the great and small, the strong and weak, the known and unknown peoples of the earth.

He must be in favor of a league, but a sacred league, a holy league, a purified League of Nations.

There are such men and many of them. The question is only this: has the American people the courage and the machinery to bring such men to the

front and make them its leaders? Or will the old story repeat itself again, and the wire-pulling, the compromises and the lobbying of party machinery ultimately give us a man who stands for nothing, an insipid, suave, complaisant individual, who says little and means less?

The American people--you--must determine that.

