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London and Paris at Work in Washington, 1921.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER.
ON "LONDON AND PARIS AT WORK IN
WASHINGTON. " AT THE TEMPLE,
SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 3, 1921.
CLEVELAND, OHIO.

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The coming of Viviani to the United States, and the promise of or the threatened coming of others is a significant indication, to my mind, of the rather fortunate position which America has again come to hold in the council of nations. Viviani seems to be the first of what will, undoubtedly, be a veritable invasion of emissaries from various countries. England is said to be planning to send a commission to Washington; so is Poland, Italy and Japan. We shall, in all probability, witness during the coming summer the same thing that we witnessed in the spring and summer of 1917.

Just why these missions are coming to the United States is really not very difficult to understand. Officially, it is given out that these are missions of courtesy. They are coming here to express again their deep sense of gratitude for what the United States did for them and for the world during the war. This expression of gratitude is either a redundant thing or a belated thing. Altogether, it is a very suspicious thing. Nations, as a rule, are not courteous unless they have

to be.

There are real reasons for their precipitate coming to America. They come because they have to come. And this necessary and essential coming of theirs, is, to my mind, a great opportunity of America--the opportunity which we had in 1918, but which we, unfortunately, for one reason or another, lost.

You will recall that in 1918 and the early days of 1919, during the peace negotiations, that the United States held the strongest hand in the diplomatic game. We came to Europe with superb exemplary and compelling prestige. We were the champions and the spokesmen of the masses, not alone of this land but of the whole world. Our leaders commanded the attention of the world. In the second place, we held the purse strings to the purse of the world. They needed our funds, our money. We could give it to them or we could not. And in the third place we held the key to the cupboard of the world. We had the food ; we could give it to the European nations if we desired, or we could not. And in the fourth place, we had the confidence of the world; the world knew that we had no ulterior motive to serve, no selfish ends to manipulate for, that we were there for the highest interests of the world.

Now, with these four wonderful aids to deliberation and negotiation, with these four trump cards in the game, we lost. We left Europe bedraggled

in a sense beaten; our prestige was gone, our leaders were being suspected, our ideals discredited; we did not succeed in establishing peace in Europe; we left it in the same cock-pit as we found it. We were compelled to give our assent to a treaty which did not in the least represent the ideals which we set out as the goal of the war; and Shantung, and the dismemberment of Austria, the preposterous indemnity demanded of Germany, and the complete ignoring of Russia made our pretensions and contentions of little telling force in Europe.

We brought back a League of Nations for which we paid a terrible price, and then our own people rejected it. We lost the moral leadership of the world. But I believe that the opportunity has again presented itself to America to regain that leadership and that position of dominance and influence, and the coming of these emissaries, prompted by desperate need, is, to my mind, an indication or proof that the great opportunity is again at hand.

I said that Viviani and those who are to follow him are coming here because they have to. They are indebted to the United States to the tune of ten thousand million dollars. The time has come for them to pay and they cannot pay. France, England and Belgium have begun a new war in Germany and they need the moral support and co-operation of the United States. There is the danger to them of America signing a separate peace

with Germany, and as a result of that their policy of aggression and compulsion will prove a failure, and so they are very anxious to line up America with the new policy of compulsion and retaliation which they have adopted.

And, lastly, ~~the~~ United States has not yet signed the Treaty of Versailles, and there is the danger that it may refuse to sign it. And so the fear of such a prospect, the need of the moral support of America in the present enterprise of the Allies, and the need of making such arrangements whereby the creditor will not be too insistent,--these things are prompting these numerous emissaries to pay missions of courtesy to America.

Viviani has said--and I suppose all who shall come will say likewise--that his only object in coming to America is to confer with President Harding and the Senate on the possible revisions of the League of Nations so as to make it more acceptable to America. That is a smoke screen. I should like to have you realize that the French are very, very little interested in a League of Nations. They never were. They consented to a League of Nations because of the insistence of Mr. Wilson and because of the concessions which Mr. Wilson was ready to make for a League. The French could just as well do without one. In fact, they would prefer to do without one provided they could form an

alliance with England and America--a military alliance for offense and defense. If they could do this they would be more than anxious to scrap the League, because to them it is a nuisance, an interference of the small nations in the affairs of the few dominant nations whose prerogative it is to control the world.

Viviani is not anxious to have the United States enter a League of Nations, but he is anxious to have the United States sign the Treaty of Versailles and back up the almost impossible terms, economic and political, of that Treaty. What he is desirous of having is that the United States shall stand by the Allies in their demand for reparation from Germany.

The European nations are again beginning to exploit America for their own ends, and they are doing it under the subterfuge of missions of gratitude and courtesy and a possible revision of a League of Nations. In a way it hurts one to speak in such a manner of France. I believe fully that France today is the most disturbing element in Europe, and I say it with a great deal of sadness and hesitation, because we all know the wonderful role that France played during the mighty years of the struggle--of the bravery and the heroism and the spirit of self sacrifice of the French people. We admire the charm and the grace of French life; we all love France. And yet France has fallen the victim to the very thing which she endeavored to destroy during the war. France

is gradually being militarized and Prussianized, and the French foreign policy today is in the control of a small military group that is endeavoring to extend French domination over the whole of Europe. Back of the reaction in Hungary you will find France, and back of the war policies of Poland as against Russia you will find France, and back of this new invasion in Germany you will find France, and back of much of the trouble in Turkey and Syria you will find France--not the people but the Foreign Office.

It goes without saying that the French policy of annihilation as against the American policy of conciliation is not going to bring peace to the tired and tortured lands of Europe. The United States, I said, will be asked to endorse the Allies in their demands upon Germany. Germany is being asked to pay a preposterous sum of money, a sum that even the fervid imagination of man cannot conceive. Germany cannot pay that sum of money. Germany has refused to pay it. The Allies have marched into Germany and have taken military possession of a few cities on the Rhine. That will not give them that stupendous sum of money they have asked for. Germany will continue not to pay it. The Allies will be driven to more rigorous and more cruel measures-- further penetration into the country, further oppression. The money will not be forthcoming because it is not there, and the Allies

will be blindly driven into a policy not only destructive of Germany but, to my mind, almost suicidal.

Germany cannot pay any amount at all commensurate with the demand unless it burdens its people with taxes to the point of rebellion and whittles down wages to the point of Bolshevism; unless it destroys the standard of living so completely, and reduces the German workingman to the position of a pauper; then you will have not a stable government to deal with but a rebellious ridden state that may become a festering wound infecting the whole of Europe.

Granted, for the moment, that Germany can pay the amount that is demanded--some fifty odd billions of dollars. The Allies cannot receive that amount without disaster to themselves. How is Germany to pay that? Certainly not in gold; there is not that much gold in the world. If she is to pay it in commodities in goods, she will swamp the markets of England and France and United States with goods which will drug the market and shut down the factories and the mines and the mills in those countries and bring industrial disaster upon the very nations that are receiving these commodities from Germany. England has already realized that, and so has France, and they are refusing to receive beyond a certain point commodities from Germany.

What is their plan? Why, their plan is to ship those goods to the United States, the United States

to pay for those goods and Germany to turn over that money to France and England. That is the only way out of it. I doubt whether the United States will permit itself to be victimized in that way, especially since we are beginning to realize how close and how intimate economic conditions in America are with economic conditions in Europe; that the economic destruction of Germany and Austria and Hungary and Russia is shutting down our plants, our factories right here in the City of Cleveland. We can talk about political isolation and playing the lone hand all we wish to, but when it comes to economics and business there is no such thing.

Now, the United States dare not, to my mind, endorse a policy so suicidal as that which the Allies have been compelled to adopt recently. We may do it. Just as Mr. Wilson sacrificed his Fourteen Points to get a League, so we may sacrifice this thing for the sake of getting certain concessions from the Allies. At the present time we seem to be interested a great deal in Mesopotamia oil fields and in the island of Yap cable concessions. It is needed for our imperial scheme of existence, and we might trade, and I believe Viviani is ready to bargain. We might say we shall sign the Treaty and back the Allies in their stand as against Germany provided we are granted these things which we ask.

I believe that it would be disastrous to the interests of the world. I do not know whether you

men and women feel as keenly about this point, or whether you are as alert to the conditions in Europe as some of us are who have read much and followed the conditions rather closely. Europe today is in a more desperate plight than it has been since 1914. It is facing almost complete ruin, anarchy and chaos; and this grabbing from month to month, and year after year of uncertainty, is undermining the morale, physically and morally, of the whole European people.

Now, my belief is that America is facing today another challenge to assume the moral leadership of the world, first, by refusing to sign the Treaty of Versailles until the terms of that Treaty are revised and modified, until they are made sane and practical and wholesome, until the spirit writing the terms is the spirit not of revenge and not of destruction and not of annihilation, but the spirit of conciliation, the spirit of mutual give and take, the spirit of concession.

America must refuse to sign a Treaty which is palpably a betrayal of those ideas which were the clarion call for our young men to go into this struggle. We did not go to Europe, we did not send our fine, young men, millions of them, to the battle fields of Flanders to dismember Austria, or to give Shantung to Japan, or to ruin economically a hundred millions of peoples; we went to Europe to make an end of war, to establish permanent peace, to bring about reconciliations among peoples;

to usher in the new day,

I say that America's opportunity at this moment is to stand steadfast and refuse to place the seal of this land on a Treaty such as the Treaty of Versailles until it is modified and revised to meet the vision and the hope of the world. We can do it if we insist upon the payment of the debt until such time as the Treaty is revised, if we promise a cancellation of the debt when the Treaty is revised, when the demands upon the vanquished are made more reasonable and practical and humane, when the Allies consent to a program of disarmament. That is our opportunity. To cancel our debt at this moment without corresponding concessions on the part of the Allies would merely be to confirm them in their policies and to perpetuate the conditions that are now making for the gradual disruption of civilization in Europe. They will just take the moneys that will be liberated and utilize them for greater armies and greater navies.

I believe that the debt of the Allies to the United States should be canceled. First, as an economic measure. It will help the Allies to build themselves up economically. They are laboring today under a frightful burden of taxation which is crushing them, which, therefore, compels them to demand as much as they possibly can from Germany, which in turn is responsible for the military invasion of Germany, which will continue the unrest of the whole of Central Europe. Should we

cancel the debt of the Allies this will enable them to breathe a little more freely; it will enable them to be less stringent in their demands upon Germany; it will enable the whole of Europe to build itself up economically more rapidly, and it will, therefore, open up for America new markets for our surplus products. It has been truly said that the best way to collect the debt is to cancel it.

But we ought to cancel it only upon these terms: First, a complete revision of the Treaty--and it is not an impossible task, it is an essential task. Secondly, a modification of the terms imposed upon Germany to enable Germany to recover economically, and, thirdly, a cancellation of the debt which they owe one to another, and lastly, a binding agreement upon a program of mutual disarmament.

That act of America, to my mind, will be a greater contribution to civilization than the contribution which she made during the war. It will in very truth pave the way for the reconstruction of the whole of Europe, for the healing of the wound, and for the establishment of a lasting peace in the world. America can do it with a League or without a League; she can do it by herself. The important thing is that she must not permit herself, through insidious propaganda, to believe that the important thing is for the Allies to make concessions to the United States on the matter of

a League of Nations. That is not at all the important thing. We can take care of that ourselves. The important thing is to wrest from them by compulsion--that is the only thing they pay deferent to--to wrest from them by compulsion a revision of the Treaty, not of the League, and a revision of their policy with reference to the Central Powers. That is the important thing.

America will regain her leadership by adopting such a stand, and she will regain her leadership by adopting a new policy with reference to Russia. In our whole negotiations concerning Russia we have been not leaders of men but camp followers. I have spoken of this more than once. I believe we have never had a policy well defined, clear and logical, concerning that new experiment in government now going on in Russia, and concerning the people of Russia. I believe that there cannot be real lasting peace and economic prosperity in the world with Russia remaining what it is. And I do believe that there is a most imminent, lurking danger there to the whole of civilization. I believe that the time has definitely arrived for the United States to resume trade with Russia, for two reasons: First, because Russia needs it, and, secondly, because the United States needs it. Those of you who have followed up conditions in Russia know the burning misery of the people, the almost complete starvation of the population in the larger cities, the epidemics that are ravaging the

hundreds of thousands, the banditry that is sweeping through southern Russia, in the Ukraine. A hundred and forty or fifty millions of people are passing through a veritable hell as far as the elemental needs of human life are concerned. And if this thing continues much longer there will be established in Russia not a perfect democracy, and not a lovely dictatorship, and not a monarchy, but a noisesome anarchy that will destroy the last vestiges of civilization in that great Empire. And that is bound to spread; you can isolate a disease of that kind. It will infect Poland, and from Poland it will travel to France and Germany, and from there to England and from there to the United States.

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I do not mean to say that/we resume trading with Russia that we must therefore recognize the existing government of Russia. A tacit recognition will be implied. The Bolshevik Government is today the only government in Russia, a government that has succeeded in keeping itself in power for three years impeded with external and internal war-fare. Politically, Russia today is in a better position than it has been since the days of 1917. Peace has been established with Poland, Finland, Lithuania and Esthonia . Every revolution has been stamped out; a trade agreement has been established with England. Russia may be helped to recover if the United States lends its assistance.

You know what I think concerning Bolshevism.

I have given expression to my convictions more than once. I believe that as an economic philosophy it is false; I believe that its methods are destructive; I believe, and I have said more than once, that Bolshevism as such will fail, but Bolshevism is not the Russian people; it is only a temporary form of government; it is only a political organization now controlling Russia, and if we earnestly and sincerely wish to help the Russian people, there is today no other agency existing in Russia through which we can render that assistance. I believe that Bolshevism is fast evaporating in Russia. I use the word purposely. It is fast disappearing through an internal modification constantly going on--an internal transformation constantly going on. Russia is the last country on earth where Bolshevism could be successful, and it is the first country on earth where Bolshevism could be tried. It is the last country on earth where Bolshevism could be successful because Russia is an intensely agricultural country, and Bolshevism is primarily a proletarian movement, and a proletarian economic philosophy. Bolshevism may succeed, if it at all succeeds, in a highly organized industrial community, but in a country like Russia where eighty-five percent of the people are peasants, a country that has nigh onto two hundred thousand small villages, where the peasant is jealous of his rights to a piece of land which he himself cultivates, a philosophy of communism

has the least chance of all to succeed. And Lenine has recognized it. Lenine has said, sadly, more than once, "The peasant is against us." And before very long the peasant may organize himself politically so strongly that he will swamp the six or eight percent of organized proletarianism in Russia.

There is today developing in Russia what is known as non-Partyists--representatives who are sent to the Soviets with no instructions, belonging to no party. They are, as yet, afraid to come out openly against the communistic party, but they are gradually sending more and more non-Partyists. Russia is undergoing a change in its economic life and its political government. That change is bound to go on as long as peace exists there. It would have begun two years ago if the Allies had not insisted upon encouraging every brigand, every adventurer, every representative of reaction and the older aristocracy to attack the existing government. And I believe that the more trade, the more commerce with Russia, the more free exchange of commodities, of ideas, between western Europe and Russia, the quicker will the dissolution of Bolshevism take place.

Now, the United States ought to lead in this. Why should we be followers of French policy or English policy? Why should we not define our own policy

with reference to Russia? What are we afraid of? Are we really so timid about the stability of our own government and our own institutions? Do we really believe that our own economic organization is so weak, that the discontent in this country is so great, that a free exchange of trade or ideas with Russia will undermine our own government? Friends, you are underestimating the strength of American Democracy, and underestimating the satisfaction and contentment of the vast majority of our people under our present economic arrangement. The American government is sound. American Democracy has weathered storms greater than this; it has undergone internal strife and civil war and has survived. I believe firmly in the eternal worthwhileness of Democracy. I believe that it is the only possible form of political organization that makes for justice and for peace and for manhood.

I believe that no form of government which is based upon the control by a few, however beneficent and however angelic, over the many,--that no dictatorship, whether it be of the capitalist, the proletariat, or the communist, is desirable. I believe that a Democracy, in spite of its failures and its shortcomings and its weaknesses and its blunders, and the graft and stupidity that are incidental to it, is yet the only sound form of human organization and human relationship, because Democracy makes for the development of human personality.

because Democracy stimulates self expression on the part of every human being, because Democracy means opportunity for self-realization, because Democracy means freedom, because Democracy means the sweet graciousness of human life, the sweet reasonableness of human life which never existed in Russia since the days of 1917, and which cannot exist under a dictatorship of steel and iron and rigorous control of the actions and speech, and even the thought of men.

I believe in American Democracy. I believe that it is yet in its infancy, that it has yet to pass through important stages and many transfigurations before it will be the perfect form of government which the founders of our government expected it to be. But I at no time entertain the fear that any experiment such as is being tried out in Russia today can in the least destroy this Gibraltar, tested by generations of Democratic government.

I welcome the opportunity of exchanging not alone goods, but spiritual goods with Russia, because in this exchange I am confident that American ideals are bound to triumph. I am very anxious, men and women, to see this done. I believe that we dare not leave the vital decisions of the world into the hands of countries like France or England or Italy, because after all is said and done they belong to the whole world. They are

enmeshed in ancient prejudices, in ancient complications, in diplomatic agreements; they are laboring under old feuds and old grudges, and we dare not permit those nations to decide the destinies of the world in the days to come. With the people of this land embroiled in no European disputes, enmeshed in no diplomatic webs, owing nothing to anybody, we owe it to the world to assert at this critical time our determination to assume the leadership in world affairs, and we can do so because the world at this moment needs us. We must insist upon those things which we so superbly and heroically insisted upon in 1916 and 1917--those mighty Olympian phrases that came out of the soul of America.

Let us not be spiritually tired, let us not fall back complacently into the arms of reaction and say we are through with the world, we are exhausted. Let us reassert the vigor of our youth, the spirit of America and let us demand, as we can demand, concessions, revisions, modifications, disarmament, peace throughout Europe. And let us lead the world in sympathy to the great task of rebuilding that country which, to my mind, is the key-stone in the whole arch of European peace--Russia.

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