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Why the Washington Conference Failed, 1922.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER,
ON "WHY THE WASHINGTON CONFERENCE FAILED,"
AT THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,
JANUARY 8th, 1922, CLEVELAND, O.



AMERICAN JEWISH
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Exactly two months ago, the week before the conference on the limitation of armaments opened in Washington, I addressed you on "Ghosts at the Conference Table; and if you recall, I said among other things, that I am not going to be discouraged as to the accomplishments of this conference because I shall not expect much. I said frankly that I was not very optimistic about the outcome; I did not want to be optimistic because I did not wish to be disillusioned again.

Well, I haven't been disappointed, and I haven't been disillusioned, although even less than I had anticipated, even less than that, was actually accomplished. I endeavored then to point out to you the ghosts that would hover over the conference table--the dead hand of the past that would keep the finer impulses of the new day from having their say at the conference. I said that the problem of disarmament is inextricably, inevitably linked with all those economic and political problems that wrecked the conference at Versailles. I said that the type of men that were sent to Washington was not the type that could wrestle with these problems any more successfully than the men who failed at Versailles, because they were the same fine, suave, polished diplomatic gentlemen of the old school, who wore frock coats admirably, who knew much of history and geography, but who had no vision;

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and a people perishes when it has no vision.

There wasn't a prophet among them that could see through the veils of past wars and past antipathies and past rivalry with the clearer light of real reconciliation. I said, also, that the real ghosts at this conference would be the ghost of economic imperialism; that the nations there assembled were not ready to disavow their imperialistic pretensions or desires, and that back of all armament is not the evil inclinations of men, not the desire to kill, but back of all armament is economic imperialism. Every thief carries about some sort of arms to protect himself; he needs them. And every nation that exploits through its monopolies and its bankers and its trusts and its corporations the possessions of another nation will need, it needs must have, machine guns, bayonets and navies to back up the claims of these exploiters.

I pointed out also that the ghosts of Japan would be there--this people that during the past three-quarters of a century has startled the world; this Prussia of the Pacific needs to expand; it feels that it must have a place in the sun, and will gain that place at the expense of its neighbors. I pointed to the ghosts of France, with her deadliest enemy just north of her; France, with her birthrate decreasing constantly, needs must have a vast army to protect herself.

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Now, these ghosts were actually present at the conference, and, to my mind, wrecked the conference. You recall what wonderful hopes this conference stirred in the hearts of men and women in this country and the world over. Six million petitions were sent to Washington by fathers and mothers prayerfully petitioning the executives of our land to effect a real disarmament and to make less certain the possibilities of war; and the press and the pulpit throughout the land waxed most eloquent over the anticipated achievements of this conference; and Washington was beautifully illumined, and a new silver dollar was ordered struck in memory of the great event. And then came that memorable day, November the 13th; a most historic day, a day of which every American may be justly proud,--when America, through its spokesman, Secretary Hughes, made known America's plan for the limitation of armament. It was startling in its comprehensive plan--a naval holiday for ten years! Sixty-six of the capital ships of the three great nations--United States, England and Japan--were to be scrapped, and a corresponding limitation on all auxiliary cruisers and destroyers.

It was magnificent! And all the other nations promptly concurred. England, France, Italy and Japan at once concurred--of course in principle; they didn't say anything about detail. Diplomats like to discuss

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principles in public; the details they prefer to discuss behind locked doors. Diplomats have a habit of promising beautiful things in principle, and then cheating like troopers in detail. One is reminded of the story of the colored man who said: "Good Lord, I have lied like the best of them, and I have cheated, and I have stolen, and I have robbed every chicken coop in the neighborhood; but I have never lost my religion."

Lloyd George said that the conference promised to be one rainbow after the storm; and our people was justly exulted; the people felt proud, first of all, that it was America that initiated and summoned this conference, and, secondly, that now the prestige which we lost in Paris and Versailles would be returned to us; we had actually achieved some tremendous gains for humanity. And we were all happy; we spied that new era, the dawn of a new day, when this burden of taxation and this constant fear and suspicion would pass away and a better day of mutual understanding and cooperation would come. It was fine.

And after this dramatic gesture was made, after the demonstration was over and the program had been accepted in principle, then came the details; and then came the ghosts. In one of the magazines this statement is found: "After a brilliant dawn, and at least a decent beginning, the afternoon and evening of the conference

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were gloomy and sordid and stormy." A beautiful dawn but a gloomy and sordid and stormy evening. The first bomb shell that shook the confidence of the people was when Mr. Briand, that beautiful orator of France, announced at one of the plenary sessions that France had no intentions of giving up its army, of limiting its army, of reducing it even to pre-war strength. They say he spoke very well; that all the diplomats sitting around judiciously applauded him at the proper time, and after the announcement was made Briand wisely, judiciously, left the country. And that was the end of the land disarmament. Not a word has been said since about demobilizing the vast army of France, which keeps the whole of the European continent in a seething ferment of unrest and discontent, which army has been used in the last two or three years to bolster up every reactionary government in Europe.

After Briand was gone his representative sent another bomb shell into the conference. It was all a question of detail, of course. France would like to have ten additional post-Jutland dreadnaughts. I don't know exactly what a post-Jutland dreadnaught is, but it seems to be the highest and the most modern type of super-dreadnaught. And this Admiral Le Bon said: "France has large coasts--three of them--to defend, and she wants a navy as large as Japan, perhaps larger. And then the

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calm of the conference began to be ruffled. Then that fine gentleman, Mr. Balfour, actually began to scold; and Schanzer, of Italy, began to fume; and Hughes began to speak rather determinedly about certain loans that should be paid. And then Mr. Briand thought the time had come to announce that ~~this~~ demand on the part of France was only a gesture, a sort of ~~a~~ peroration; that it should not be taken too seriously. A few days later one began to hear from behind the closed doors of this conference sounds, as if some of them were being gagged and robbed, and then everybody at once knew that the integrity of China was being safeguarded and protected.

Japan, England and the United States were endeavoring to protect permanently their rights in the Pacific, and France, England and Japan were endeavoring to place the seal of perpetual ownership upon those portions of China which they had taken--robbed! And as a compensation for these vast stretches, torn right out of the heart of China, they were going to return the post-offices in China. And China, strange to say, refused to accept this beneficence.

And a few days later somebody asked something about airplanes. Everybody knows that the next war will be fought in the air, and will be fought with gas and chemicals; everybody knows that super-dreadnoughts were becoming antiquated long before the conference naval

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experts were considering the advisability of scrapping their super-dreadnoughts; and yet throughout the two months of deliberation not a word was said or has been said about **surbing** the airplane, the hydroplane--the machines that in the future, controlled as they will be by wireless, carrying tons of dynamite, might be in position to destroy whole cities.

This morning I read where the nations had agreed to prohibit the use of poison gas, but with this reservation: that they are permitted to continue their research in the discovery of new formulae for more and more poisonous gases. Now the average reader may be deluded by this announcement. The actual fact is that no nation manufactures poison gas until war is actually declared; if they have the formulae for it that is all that they wish.

And, finally, what actually broke the heart of the conference, what may destroy its entire value, if it has any, was the submarine--that beast of the sea, that agency of cruel warfare that brought the United States into the war; that sneak, that pestilence, that kills in the dark--the submarine, for which Germany was so roundly and universally damned; that submarine has now become the pet hobby of the French. France is now the champion of the submarine, with the United States a close second. France not only wishes to retain her submarines, but wishes

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to build three times the number it now has.

And then all the latent hatred between France and England and Italy surged like scum to the surface; and then people began to see the rift, the chasm that lies between war and peace. Root, good American lover of peace, has tried to introduce certain resolutions that would regulate the use of the submarine. Well, these resolutions to regulate the deadliness of the submarine have as much value as an attempt made to manicure the claws of a tiger. The beast must be killed; and the submarine must be destroyed from off the face or from under the face of the sea. But that has not come to be.

And so we stand today, near the close of the conference, with very little achieved. A four-power treaty has been agreed upon, which will do nothing else but confirm these four powers--the United States, England, France and Japan--in their possessions and dominions in the Pacific, just as the greater league of nations was to confirm these great powers in their possessions the world over. And the United States takes upon itself, in case of aggression on the part of any other nation against the territorial integrity of these four powers in the Pacific,--it agrees in common with the other three nations to communicate with one another frankly and fully, in order to arrive at an understanding as to the most efficient measures to be taken, jointly or separately.

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I have tried hard to distinguish that from Article 10---that famous Article 10, the heart of the league of nations covenant; the one that drew unto itself those terrible thunderbolts of Harding and the entire Republican administration. I have tried to compare this with Article 10, and I have come to the conclusion that this is even more stringent than Article 10. The United States assumes to protect, morally bind itself to protect not alone the insular possessions of these peoples in the Pacific, but even the Japanese mainland. President Harding said it didn't mean that; Mr. Hughes said it did mean that. Mr. Harding has since changed his mind; perhaps Mr. Hughes will change his mind. Because that same group of irreconcilables in the Senate--Borah, Reed and Lafollette who defeated the Treaty of Versailles, are on the warpath again; and I believe that they will voice the sentiment of most American citizens when they do say that America does under no circumstance undertake the obligation of protecting Japan from foreign aggression.

What has been accomplished by the conference? I suppose there has been, as a result of this agreement of scrapping the capital ships of the powers, a certain saving of money on naval armament. There is a possibility, however, that this money will be appropriated for other kinds of armament. The conference has failed really to limit armament; the conference has failed to solve the

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problem of China, and as long as the problem of China is not solved there will not be peace in the Pacific; the conference has not succeeded in curbing the imperialistic passions of Japan; the conference has not succeeded in effecting a just settlement of the righteous claims of Siberia and Korea. The conference has failed in its major objectives. Why? Simply because the nations in the conference were not ready. They were driven to the conference by the clamor of the peoples, by the heavy burden of taxation, by the fear of economic disaster that was facing them; they were driven to it by the threat of anarchy and chaos and revolution. But their hearts were not in it; they did not come in a spirit of real penitence and humility, acknowledging their sins of the past and ready to atone and make amends and start anew. The men were not there and the desire was not there; the honest purpose was not there, and the real will was not there.

I have met men and women during the past week who seem to be frightfully broken up and disillusioned about what has taken place in Washington. They expected so much; they had been raised to such heights of anticipation; and they fell, and they were in the slough of despondency. And they asked of me: What are we to do now? Why, I said unto them: Our clear duty now is, as it was two months ago, as it was three years ago, simply to carry on--to carry on! Our ideal is true and workable;

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it must win ultimately. It is a question not of a day or of a year, or of one or of ten conferences. It is the question of the holy will of mankind through the generations making itself potent and effective in the policies and in the programs of the world; it is a question of the resisting of disillusionments; it is a question of being infinitely patient and strong and enduring.

This conference may have failed in its major objectives. The next conference at Cannes, and the next conference at Genoa, and the fourth and fifth conferences may fail in their major objectives, but as long as the great urge of an enlightened and insistent and clamoring public opinion is there--persistent, demanding, driving these lackeys of the old order of things, so long is there hope that ultimately, through disappointments and through disillusionments, gradually our ideals will be achieved.

What your duty and mine clearly is, is to continue our work of education, of educating public opinion. I have faith, supreme faith in the power of an enlightened public opinion. Educate them, train them. to be internationally-minded, to think in international terms, to forget that they are an isolated people; train them to realize that their destinies are irrevocably tied up with the destinies of every people; that wherever there is injustice and oppression and tyranny and exploitation,

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ultimately every people will pay the price for it in blood and tears and misery and cold and hunger.

There is no moral isolation any more than there is a physical or a financial or a commercial isolation in the world today. The world is intertwined and interlaced; train men and women to think in terms of international relationship; train them into a proper understanding of what is back of armament and back of navies and back of armies: economic imperialism! economic lust for extension and power! selfishness! monopolism! Train them into the realization that real patriotism demands of them not to back every criminally exploiting corporation because it seeks protection under the flag; train them to feel that real love of country means devotion to the great principles of truth and justice and righteousness, which must be the foundations of every land. And train them to feel, as some of us must come to feel, that the salvation of the world is not with the old but with the new; that the salvation of the world lies, my friends, with these crazy radicals, these visionaries, these men that are sneered at and held in supreme contempt for their impracticability. I say unto you that the salvation of mankind lies with them and their ideals; for the sane, safe, sound, suave, cultured, refined gentlemen of yesterday have dragged our civilization into the greatest cataclysm of the ages.

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It is these young radicals, who spin their visions and their dreams out of the gold and gossamer of love and faith and kindliness, and the will to sacrifice for a better understanding among peoples; it is with these, inexperienced as they are, unlearned in the ways of the world as they are, impractical as they are, that the hope of civilization and the hope of tomorrow lies.

Men and women must lose their sense of timidity and fear of the new and the novel. Why, there is but one way to limit armament, my friends; there is but one way to limit naval armament, and that is not by establishing a proportion of five-five-three and one and a half, but to take all the ships and all the submarines and all the destroyers and all the auxiliary cruisers right into the middle of the Atlantic and sink them all!

No nation needs an army or a navy to safeguard itself, to protect itself. Canada didn't need it; and the United States didn't need it to protect itself from Canada. And when that came into effect the United States was not a nation of ninety millions or a hundred millions, powerful and strong, but a poor people that had just come out of the war. Why, the program is simple. All that is needed is the simple passion of youth, of prophecies, of vision--call it radicalism. Radical means something that goes to the root of a thing. The prophets knew it. "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares." Not limit

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its use; not establish a proportion; not make allowances for the airplane and the submarine. But they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, and they shall learn war no more. Shut down your war colleges and scrap your armies and navies, and the exploiter that goes to China, and the exploiter that goes to Mexican oil fields, and the exploiter that goes to Mesopotamia, will know that there is no army and no navy to back him up in his nefarious purposes. And he will not do it.

I think America comes out of this conference, perhaps the only nation that ought to come out, with a sense of pride. I believe that America made an honest effort, just as it made an honest effort three years ago. I believe that in the main it has failed; but I do hope that our president, that our land, will continue to work for it, to urge it, to insist upon it. It is our duty and our obligation and our especial privilege. America must lead the world. And what I say unto you men and X women is not in terms of peroration, a eulogy: it is a fundamental conviction of my life that the whole hope of the world, if we are not to fall over the brink into anarchy and barbarism,--the whole hope of the world for reconciliation and mutual understanding and cooperation instead of competition, lies with America. We are the most powerful, we are the most prosperous, nation on God's

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earth today. We have suffered least; we have no ancient grudges and no ancient antipathies, and we have been bitten least by the lust of imperialism; and we have within these shores the whole world in miniature--a microcosm, a makeup of all the races and all the peoples. We can understand the problems of the world, and we ought to, in deep consecration of soul and mind, devote ourselves in the generations to come, for it is the task of generations and not of a day,--we ought to make that the supreme national policy of American life--peace! Perfect peace! Peace without armies; peace without navies; peace without submarines; peace without airplanes. Just simple, godly, healing peace among the peoples of the earth.

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