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The Genoa Conference, 1922.

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LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER,

ON "THE GENOA CONFERENCE,"

AT THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

APRIL 23, 1922 - CLEVELAND, O.

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Another conference, similar to the one held not long ago in the city of Washington, is now being held in Genoa, the city of Columbus, of Mazzola, in another attempt to rectify the mistakes of Versailles. I am not a prophet of evil, and yet I venture to prophesy that this conference at Genoa, summoned as a political expediency on the part of Lloyd George, and concurred in rather unwillingly by France because of certain very vital concessions made unto her, with the agenda limited from the very outset,--I say, I venture to prophesy that this conference of Genoa will result in very little.

The conference of Genoa is essentially Lloyd George's party. England was getting ready for a new election, and Lloyd George felt it incumbent upon himself to come before the electorate of Great Britain with a program of the economic stabilization of Europe, which alone would return him to power. England, as you know, is passing through a very serious economic crisis. Because of the collapse of foreign exchange English exports have fallen off materially; the shops are idle, the factories are shut, and some two millions are out of employment, and the government has been paying unemployment pensions to these men.

Lloyd George knew, and knows now, that unless he could improve English trade by restoring Europe

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to some sort of economic normalcy, he will not be returned to office; and so he hastily summoned the Genoa conference. He asked France to come in; he asked France to consent to the coming in of Germany and Russia; but France was not so eager for the return of Germany to the concert of European powers, nor to the coming in of the Bolsheviki to the council of nations, and so France began to make certain demands.

You will recall at the Cannes conference Briand and Lloyd George agreed upon a ten year military alliance between England and France. Apparently the French Chamber of Deputies was not very much satisfied with this agreement and thought France ought to get a bit more, and so the ministry of France fell; Briand resigned, a new ministry was constituted with Poincare at its head, and a new meeting was held between Poincare and Lloyd George at Boulogne, and there England made even a greater concession: this military alliance was to extend over a period of twenty years; at this proposed conference at Genoa the Versailles treaty is not to be touched; the German reparations problem is not to be discussed; the question of disarmament was not to be brought up, and the Bolsheviki were not to receive recognition on the part of the European powers.

Lloyd George made all these concessions because he felt that the convoking of this conference was

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imperative to his own needs, and so the conference was called. But this very limitation of the agenda, this exclusion of two of the most vital subjects even from discussion, makes the success of such a conference impossible; because, to my mind, Europe faces two problems today and two problems only, as far as the reconstruction and the economic life of Europe is concerned, and these two problems are not to be at all deliberated upon at Genoa.

The first one is the problem of debts. Every nation in Europe owes money to every other nation, and no one of them can pay, no one of them expects to pay. But they all expect to receive payment. There was one Frenchman--Loucheur--who had the courage to state that France has no intentions whatsoever to pay her debts to the United States. That created, of course, a great furor. An honest man had spoken! At once the French Government found it necessary to repudiate that statement, and said that in principle France expects to pay her debt to the United States. France has no intentions to pay the United States because France cannot pay the United States. But it nevertheless expects Russia to pay France; and France expects Germany to pay her. There isn't enough gold in Germany to pay the reparation bill. Were Germany to pay her indemnity in terms of goods and commodities, she would absolutely ruin France. And France

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knows it. Were she to borrow money in order to pay the Allies, her liabilities would have to be decreased to such a point where people would loan her money.

In other words, the reparation bill, the debt, would have to be diminished radically; and France has no intention of doing that. And so there you have a universal condition where all nations are debtors and creditors, with no possibility of adjustment in sight, and yet this fact of the vast indebtedness is crushing the economic life of Europe, disorganizing and demoralizing the exchange, and nations can neither buy nor sell, and all is chaos. Now, this problem is basic and fundamental to the reconstruction of Europe. And the question of reparation and indemnity, by agreement between France and England, must not even be touched upon at the Genoa conference.

The second problem is the problem of armaments. If these debts which France and other countries owe the United States were to be cancelled, there is no surety that it would stimulate economic life in Europe. It may very well be that these credits would be used to increase the military organization of these peoples that at this very moment seem to be in the grip of an imperialistic militarism such as the world has not seen since the days of 1914.

You recall in Washington the question of

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land disarmament was quickly shunted aside, because Briand made a good speech in which he said that France cannot disarm, because there are the Bolsheviki with a highly trained and well equipped army of a million men, ready to overrun Europe. Apparently that had a great deal of weight, and the question of land disarmament was there and then relegated to the limbo. At the Genoa Conference, clear out of the sky, the representative of these Bolsheviks arises, and, in his quiet, suave manner, says, "Gentlemen, we understand that France cannot disarm because of our army. We are this day ready to scrap our entire army. Let France do likewise, and let us begin a real disarmament of Europe."

That was fair and logical, wasn't it? And what followed was a manifestation of bad temper and bad manners on the part of Barthou, the French representative, who fumed and became angry. How dare the Bolsheviks bring up the subject of disarmament at an economic conference, when it was agreed beforehand that the disarmament question shall not be brought up! And so Tchitcherin was roundly rebuked and put in his place, and disarmament was not discussed.

Now, as long as these two pointed, vital problems are not faced deliberately, honestly, by the powers of Europe, all such conferences are vague and purposeless and illusive; they can serve no good. And

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yet I believe that the Geneva Conference has negatively or indirectly accomplished something. It has, first of all, brought Germany and Russia back into the concert of European peoples. They are all sitting around a council table; they are all discussing problems common to all of them; it is no longer a case where victors are settling the fate of the world for the vanquished; it is no longer a case of friends or enemies; it is now a case of nations, troubled, perplexed, suffering, victor and vanquished alike, assembled to face a common situation.

France and England, I suppose, have realized by this time that they cannot, by a mere wave of the wand, by themselves restore Europe. And what is even more of importance is the realization of this fact which is gradually being borne in upon all peoples--that you cannot crush your enemy without crushing yourself. You can no more hurt another people in the heart of Europe and expect to escape yourself, than you can crush your hand or your foot or any limb of your body and expect that the rest of the body will remain whole and well and healthy. That is a profound conviction; and Russia, these outcasts of the world, the Bolsheviki, have been called into conference.

I have stated many times in the last three years that the Allied treatment of Russia has been shameful and cowardly and immoral. Some two and a half years ago,

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in a lecture delivered here on "The Sins of the Allies," I said of Russia and the Allies: "The Allies have not been fair to soviet Russia. Soviet Russia has endeavored time and 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 acceptance of the terms of the Allies. The soviet government promised to pay the national debt; they promised even to sacrifice territory in Russia, to give concessions of minerals and mines to the Allies; they offered to cease irrational 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." That was three years ago.

"Through the fact that our own president, Mr. Wilson, was not disposed to receive Mr. Bullitt, 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 establish a blockade which is strangling Russia and slaying women and children. Where is the spirit of fair play? 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 our American soldiers doing in Siberia except to be flogged

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by the Cossacks and attacked by the Japanese? What is our policy? Have we, the citizens, been consulted concerning it? How many of us would have subscribed to a policy of sending our men into Russia to fight other people's battles? Is America now assuming a new mission in life, namely, to crush revolutions 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?"

These sentiments I repeated time and again during the past three years. I saw, as many of us saw, that the Allied policy in Russia was suicidal, detrimental to the interests of the Russian peoples and to the interests of the world at large; and we urged and cried aloud to give Russia a chance, to let Russia work out its own destiny and its own salvation.

But these powers had plans and purposes of their own. They suddenly became the champions of democracy, and they began first to establish a blockade to strangle Russia, and then they began to finance every counter-revolutionary adventurer--Kolchak and Denekin and Udenitch,--everyone that promised to kill soviet Russia was aided and abetted and financed and instigated by England and France and the United States; and Russia was

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lied about, and a vast, ugly propaganda poisoned the minds of men and women concerning Russia. They were blood-stained murderers, these Bolsheviki, and they had no regard for anyone; they were people that no one should associate with; a cordon sanitaire should be established around Russia so that the contamination could not pass into other lands.

And then day before yesterday came Victor Emanuel, who invites Tchitcherin to have lunch with him. Times have changed. The king of Italy is now ready to meet the representative of soviet Russia even in a social way. Why have times changed? Is it because the Allies have become philanthropic? Oh, no. They have been beaten! They have lost out! I suppose that the fine army that soviet Russia managed to organize was perhaps the most determining factor in the present situation. Force! force! force! seems to be the only thing that counts in the councils of diplomats today.

Perhaps another factor changed the situation. Communism died! The Bolsheviki remain in power, but bolshevism is dead in Russia. Some of us who did not lose our balance three years ago prophesied that bolshevism will fail. It was inevitable. A peasant land like Russia, with an industrial life unorganized and undeveloped, cannot establish communism with any degree of success. The Bolsheviki remained in power because they gave the peasant his

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land; and the peasant will stand by the Bolsheviki because he wants his land, and he fears that any other government will deprive him of his land; but the peasant is no more interested in communism than you are, and he is no more interested in revolutionizing the world or communizing society than you are; he is interested in his parcel of land and the yield thereof.

That is the strength of the Bolsheviki, but that is the weakness of bolshevism. The leaders of bolshevism saw the handwriting on the wall, and they deliberately began to sacrifice their principles and their pretensions, so that today private capital is at work in Russia and foreign capital is being invited into Russia, and private banks are being opened, and private trade is going on rather lustily in Russia today. Russia is on the trend, on the path of becoming a progressive democracy. Now, when the neighbors of Russia realized there was no menace to them in the altered condition of bolshevism, the return of Russia into the councils of Europe was inevitable.

And one other factor perhaps entered into the return of Russia, and that was the little entente. A new alliance exists today in the central and southern part of Europe--that of Czecko-Slovakia and Jugoslavia and Rumania, known as the little entente, whose guiding genius is that remarkable man, Benes. These nations need

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Russia; they need the produce of Russia; they need the markets of Russia; they want to supplant Germany as the exploiting power of Russia, and they have brought their pressure to bear upon France for the return of Russia to the deliberations of Europe. That, to my mind, is a real achievement. Germany and Russia back in the heart of Europe, deliberating with other peoples, exchanging information, and jointly working for their mutual salvation, is a step deliberately in the right direction.

Much has been said concerning the so-called German-Russian alliance which was consummated last week. Whatever men may say concerning the fact that it was ill-timed or maladroit or tactless and dishonorable (as though that word had any meaning in modern diplomacy), the fact remains that the German-Russian alliance is logical and was inevitable. The Allies seem to be very much outraged over the fact, but they were outraged not because a certain technicality has been violated, or the ethics of conferences had been violated, but because the Germans, by a brilliant stroke of diplomacy, turned the tables. The peoples that are gathered in Genoa have no reason to be outraged at this act of the Germans and the Russians. England and France came to Genoa with a secret treaty in their pockets--the treaty of Bolougne. The little entente came to Genoa with a secret treaty in their pockets. And Japan! Think of Japan being present at a conference which concerns the

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economic rehabilitation of Europe, a conference in which the United States saw fit--and wisely--not to be present because it did not concern her. Japan nevertheless is present, and Japan has the audacity to sign that statement criticizing Germany for her dishonorable conduct, when Japan at this very moment, against law and against treaty and against the moral sense of the world, is stifling a whole nation in Eastern Siberia.

These nations are angry at Germany for signing a treaty without consulting them. And when not very long ago in Washington four powers assembled and signed a specific treaty which touched vitally the concerns of Russia as a specific power, they did not take the trouble to consult Russia even about it. And then on top of it all, the fact is gradually coming out that Lloyd George was not taken by surprise as much as he claimed he had been; that he had actually been informed about the negotiations a week prior to the signing of the treaty, and that five Englishmen were officially in touch with the Russian-German negotiations.

But be that as it may, what took place was an inevitable and necessary act on the part of Germany and Russia for mutual self-protection. The Allies came to Genoa with one purpose in mind--deliberately to isolate Germany. And they met together--Italy, England, France and representatives of the entente, with Russia in a

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corner, and Germany was left out in the cold. What was the object? The object was to slice up Russia and divide the spoils among themselves, to enter into some sort of an arrangement with Russia which would exclude for all time Germany. And Germany saw its very life threatened. Germany knows and the whole world knows that its salvation depends upon the opportunities of exploitation in Russia; that its hope, and because of it, the hope of the whole of Europe, depends upon the possibility of German brains and German technical knowledge and German machinery and German skill going into Russia and building up the land; and she saw herself gradually being excluded from this last hope, and she did the only thing possible under the circumstances. But she did it a littler quicker than the Allies.

Now, there is in this alliance between Germany and Russia promise of much good, and a real menace; and I am not the one to underestimate the menace in such an alliance. It is at the present time purely an economic arrangement, an arrangement for the mutual cancellation of debts, an arrangement for the facilitating of economic transactions; but if more stupid pressure is put upon these two peoples which will drive them to the point of desperation, there is a very real menace that Germany and Russia--a Germany, mind you, that still nurses a sense of hurt, that is still vindictive, and a Russia that has no

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justifiable good feelings towards the Allies,--that Germany and Russia will some day make a military alliance two hundred and twenty-five millions strong that may threaten the peace of the world.

I think that the Genoa Conference resulted then, first, indirectly in this forward step in bringing Russia and Germany into the world again; and, secondly, that it paves the way for a real conference--a real conference where economics and not politics will be discussed, a conference in which I hope America will be represented; for America must be represented in these negotiations. We may think that we can remain politically isolated; we certainly cannot remain economically isolated; for the collapse of foreign exchange has shut down your factories in Cleveland and has thrown men out of employment. We must export, and we cannot export, for the nations of Europe cannot buy. In spite of the fact that we hold today one half of the gold of the whole world, we have hundreds of thousands of unemployed; and I fear that perhaps this little wave of prosperity that we are experiencing at this moment may not be the permanent thing that we all hope for, because as long as Europe is disorganized so long will the economic life of America remain to a degree disorganized.

Genoa has paved the way for a real economic conference, and the American attitude has paved the way for

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a real economic conference. When America refused to go to Genoa, it was serving notice upon the peoples of Europe that they must get down to honest work, that they must sacrifice the prejudices and the psychologies of war, that they must face their situation honestly, that America is no longer ready to underwrite all the pretensions of the victors. The disastrous failure of Briand in Washington was the first evidence and proof to the European peoples that the American mind has changed radically in the last year, that it now challenges Europe to throw aside all the passions and the prejudices and the hates and the rivalries and the suspicions and the political tricks of yesterday, and proceed deliberately to wrestle with a life and death problem--the economic rebuilding of Europe.

I think America can exert a marvelous influence in the days to come, especially in Russia. I wish we would lose our scruples concerning Russia. We, too, blundered there so terribly, but we have, in a sense, atoned for our blunders. There isn't a word today that is as dear to the lips of the Russian as that newly coined word avra, which means the American Relief Administration. America today is supplying ninety-five per cent of all the relief that is coming into Russia to the starving millions of them, and the Russian people is grateful, deeply grateful to that generosity which was so beautifully manifested in the last year.

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There was always a spirit of kinship between the Russian people and the American people. And apart from the fact that Russia offers a marvelous opportunity to American industry and American initiative and American enterprise, it offers an opportunity for the spirit of America to work marvelously in helping this new people struggle out of its chaos and its misery to that higher level and the purer air.

We owe it to ourselves, we owe it to Russia, because Russia is the land of the future. Whether we like it or no, Russia in two or three generations will be the driving, impelling, creative people of Europe. They have the natural resources, wealth unbounded, and they have the mental equipment and the spiritual eagerness, which three factors make for a great civilization.

Russia, which has been dormant for a thousand years, will, before very long, flower forth as a mighty people in commerce, in industry, in science, in art and in literature; and may it be given unto the American people to help this struggling nation to find itself.

Europe is on the way to recovery. Europe is emerging out of the war propaganda and the war psychology and the mazes and the clouds. Europe is moving towards a new day!

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