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America in 1922: A Survey and Prospect, 1922.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER,
"AMERICA IN 1922--A SURVEY AND PROSPECT"
AT THE TEMPLE - SUNDAY MORNING,
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WRHS



JOSEPH T. KRAUS
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CLEVELAND

It is well, my friends, at this season of the year, to take stock. It is well to draw up a balance sheet of our national experiences during the past year. I should like to speak this morning of some of the outstanding facts of the past year and see how many of them we can put on the credit column of our national ledger and how many on the debit column.

I spoke last week of our international relations. I do not wish to speak of them, therefore, this morning. As far as our international relations during the past year are concerned, we were rather negative and neutral; we played no decisive role or performed no decisive service to the world during the past year. Perhaps it is because we could not.

Two things we did do: we continued our fine humanitarian policy of sending relief to those who were needy and in distress. We sent relief to the thousands and the tens of thousands who were rendered homeless--refugees through criminal war instigated by the Christian nations of Europe--the war between Greece and Turkey. We saved thousands of lives through our Red Cross, through our Near East relief organizations.

One other service, if it be a service, which we rendered was in sending what we call an observer to the Lausanne Conference, which is still being held; a conference which, to my mind, has all the ear marks of the old fashioned

conferences of diplomats which either make war or patch up a temporary peace to give their respective nations a breathing spell to prepare for the next war. We have an unofficial observer--whatever that may mean--at this conference, who seems to be very vocal at times, and who is there principally for the purpose of defending the rights of American missionaries in the Near East, and of the Standard Oil Company.

There seems to be something going on in Washington at the present time. Just what it is we are not as yet permitted to know; but it seems that Washington is eager to be of service in averting what seems to be an almost inevitable collapse of the whole economic life of Europe. And it is to be hoped that the year 1923 will witness some signal service on the part of the American people which, without entangling us in the nefarious policies of European statesmen, will help to ameliorate the miserable, unhappy, heartbreaking conditions on the continent of Europe.

So much for our international balance sheet. As far as our internal conditions are concerned, there was a movement during the past year--a slight movement, it is true, but, nevertheless, a perceptible movement--towards what President Harding calls normalcy. This country enjoyed a period of comparative prosperity--comparative to that of the preceding year. We seemed to be emerging slightly from the instability, the uncertainty and the panicky condition of two years ago. And it is rather remarkable, considering that it is just four years after that terrible wrenching,

disarranging and disturbing of our entire economic life, that we are enjoying at the present time a comparative, perhaps only temporary, but, nevertheless, real, period of prosperity. There is not that terrible problem of unemployment today such as existed a year and two years ago. It is only to be hoped that this condition will be a lasting one.

But this return to normalcy was not unattended by terrible struggle. The year 1922 witnessed two major industrial conflicts, which, to my mind, are unparalleled in the history of industrial strife in the United States. I refer to the strike of the miners and to the strike of the railway men. The miners' strike was won, apparently. The strike of the maintenance of way men was either lost or settled by compromise, with the employees getting the worst of the bargain, apparently.

Both of these struggles were attended by bad blood. The railway strike led up to sabotage of all kinds and to killing, and the miners' strike culminated in the Herrin massacre, perhaps the ghastliest tragedy in the annals of American industrial life. Both strikes were futile; both strikes settled nothing; both strikes cost millions; both strikes discomfited and inconvenienced the whole of the American people. And both strikes were merely the initial movements in a more comprehensive industrial struggle that is bound to come unless more intelligent and more constructive ways and methods are discovered for avoiding struggles and

for settling them.

The intervention of the government in both of these strikes was timid and halting and therefore ineffectual. At no time was the voice of the government respected by one or the other of the contending forces; because the government apparently had no plan, nor policy, nor purpose, and it halted and hesitated, and ultimately, driven by desperation, it came out publicly as the opponent of organized labor. It resorted to government by injunction; and you have that famous (or infamous) Daugherty injunction, which, in November, caused a political upheaval which smashed the Old Guard of the Republican party and put the Progressives in power, and which promises to usher in a new epoch in American political life.

We have not yet discovered an intelligent, sane, practical way of solving our labor problems. Perhaps there are no such ways, but if there are no such ways then we must prepare for rather desperate things in the year 1923.

Politically speaking, the year 1922 has been a red letter year. November 7, 1922, will long be remembered in American political history. It may mark the beginning of a new epoch. Making full allowance for the fact that this last year was an off year in politics, and that a general back-swing of the pendulum was to be expected, it still remains a most startling and significant fact that the Old Guard in the Republican administration received a smashing blow such as it had not received in a generation.

It remains true that a new note was struck in our national campaign; it seems true that liberals and progressives--even those who were accused of radicalism, were swept into power by an overwhelming inundation of a popular protest against the old methods and the old men in our political life. A few years ago the Progressive was a timid soul and an apologetic soul. He hovered timidly in the background of Congress, even after he was elected. Today the Progressive is aggressive, insistent, very much present and very much real and very much influential. And it is perfectly astounding when you think of the come-back of a man like La Follette; one begins to realize just what a revolution has taken place in the thinking of our citizens during the past four years.

La Follette, the man who was ex-communicated because, forsooth, he dared to stand upon his senatorial rights! La Follette, who was avoided in Washington as if he were a pest; La Follette, who was subjected to all kinds of vitrolie and vicious attack, and ultimately the most destructive of opposition; he was ignored, publicly ignored. It is told that when La Follette would enter the elevator in the Senate house everyone would leave at once. It is said that when La Follette would enter a street car everyone would leave at once.

But La Follette today is the most powerful single individual in the American government, and no policy can be put through the Senate in the next few years against the

opposition of Senator La Follette. It is perfectly astounding, when one thinks of it, because the very same thing took place in England.

While it is true that the conservatives came into power during the last election, it is also true that for the first time in the history of the British Empire the Labor party is today the party of the opposition to the majesty's government. It is the second party in England today; and Ramsay McDonald, the radical, Ramsay McDonald, the pacifist, Ramsay McDonald, who was in prison because of his views concerning the war, who was regarded as dead, politically speaking, --Ramsay McDonald is now the leader of this tremendously powerful party in the British parliament. The pendulum evidently has swung back and swung back very powerfully.

Now it is premature to say whether this Progressive victory is a lasting one. It may very well be that it is sporadic. It was a protest vote; it was a vote of the disgruntled; it was a negative vote, and it may not at all mean that the American people has embarked definitely upon a program of liberalism. But the Progressives, wisely enough, are beginning to consolidate their forces; they are beginning to organize so as to make their will effective in the administration of our government..

On December 1st a Progressive bloc was formed in Washington, and on December 11th a people's bloc was formed right here in the city of Cleveland. It seems that all the

elements that are what is known in American political parlance as stand-patters and non-partisan leagues, the independent vote, the familiar labor vote,--these elements are beginning to organize, to solidify, to unify their strength, so that they will in the days to come be able to nominate their people at the various primaries, so as to make sure that the right people are elected to office.

The policy seems to be away from the organization of a third party--and perhaps wisely so. The policy on the part of the liberals, both in the Democratic party and the Republican party, seems to be this: to transfuse the existing parties, to transmute them, to translate the parties that already exist by organizing the liberal groups within each of the old parties and enable them to seize the reins of control rather than organize a third party. The year 1923 will see some very interesting political developments in America.

Spiritually the year 1922 is very much on the debit side of the national ledger. Spiritually the past year has seen a rampant spread of organized hate. The klans have become an actual, where a year or two years ago they were a potential, menace to the freedom and to the institution of America.

I am not given to exaggeration in matters of this kind, nor to intimidations, but we have come to a point where a governor of a great state must appeal to Washington for help; we have come to a point where another governor--

Governor Allen, of Kansas--in self-defense must come out in condemnation of the methods and the interference of these groups. The tragedy of Louisiana is but an index and a symptom and a portend of what this thing, if permitted to grow and spread and gain in power, will do in America.

I call it organized hate. Hate is bad enough, but when you organize it you are taking an impulse or an emotion which may be only momentary, and you are perpetuating it, you are creating vested interests in hate; you are beginning to incorporate animosities in institutions and in laws, and America will be destroyed if these things are permitted to gain headway.

I speak of it not because I am a Jew. As a Jew this opposition is no new thing to me; as a Jew I am reconciled to the fact that always, as long as I live, there will be here and there and everywhere certain groups who will dislike me and who will endeavor to destroy me. That has been the tragic history and that has been the superb glory of my people for two thousand years. It is neither new nor startling nor demoralizing. But I speak as an American.

It has been said that the klan is not anti-Jewish. But it is anti-Jewish if it is anti the rights of any individual. If it is anti-Catholic it is anti-American, and therefore anti-Jewish. If it is anti-Negro it is anti-American, and therefore anti-Jewish. When the rights of one group are violated the rights of the Jew are violated. You cannot trample upon right and freedom in one instance and

expect that right and that freedom to be preserved and safeguarded and held sacred in another instance. Any movement in this land that seeks to turn brother against brother, that seeks to revive medievalism and racial passions and religious animosities is anti-Jewish, and it is anti-American.

We seem to be suffering today from the hardening of our spiritual arteries. The old world seems to be encroaching upon us. It is sad, it is disillusioning, but somehow we seem to have lost the vision, the freshness, the vigor, the superb, magnificent outlook and dream of American life. All the vile reaction of passion-ridden, prejudice-laden European peoples seems to have been carried over to this country during and since the war.

I recall that marvelous phrase of Abraham Lincoln, who knew the soul of America so well. When the No-nothing party, very much like the present day klan movement, was rampant in this country, a movement directed against the Irish and the German immigrants of two or three generations ago, Lincoln said: "I am not a No-nothing, that is certain. How could I be? How can anyone who opposes the oppression of negroes be in favor of the degrading of classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation we began by declaring that all men are created equal. We now practically read it, 'All men are created equal except negroes.' When the No-nothings get control it will read, 'All men are created equal except

negroes and foreigners and Catholics.' When it comes to this I shall prefer immigrating to some country where they make no pretense of the love of liberty; to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure and without the alloy of hypocrisy."

There is the genius of America speaking. Of course that was Russia of Lincoln's day; it was not the Russia of 1922. Today in bolshevik Russia the klansman, who is there called the pogromist, he who preaches the gospel of hate, is lined up against the wall and shot; and that, to my mind, is perhaps the most effective way of solving this problem.

The Senate voted down the Dyer anti-lynching bill. I do not know whether you followed the career of this bill through Congress. You know what lynching is; you have read about it; and you know that for barbarism and cruelty and base animalism there is no institution in the whole civilized world like that institution so dear to the hearts of the Southerners--the institution of lynching.

Now the South cannot wrestle with that problem, and so a movement was inaugurated by the braver spirits of the South and the men of the North to have the federal government intervene whenever there is a lynching, and to have federal courts as courts of the first instance in such matters, and federal prosecutors and federal grand jurors to investigate cases; because local courts clearly have never convicted anyone guilty of participating in lynching.

So the House voted for the bill, but in the Senate it was killed through a filibuster carried on by Southern senators. That is, to my mind, decidedly on the debit column of our national life. It is a standing disgrace. It makes an American blush with shame whenever an European turns to him and says, "You people talk so much about humanitarianism and talk about the cruelty of the Turks: what about your own little lynching affairs?" And we are dumb because we cannot answer.

Intellectually the year 1922 has been an auspicious one. The American author is coming into his own; the American writer is beginning to find his soul; we have had better books written in the last year; we have had better plays produced in the last year. There seems to be perhaps not a rebirth but the birth of a real American literature. The American writer is no longer catering to a depraved taste, to what is called the taste of the American public. He is beginning to realize that a writer must essentially be an aristocrat, true to his own vision and to his own logic and to the God that is in him, without pandering to popular taste and to cravings for the "best seller" remuneration.

Before very long the genius will have a chance in America. Samuel Butler, the great Englishman, once said of America this rather remarkable thing: "America will have her geniuses as every other country has; in fact, she has already had one in Walt Whitman. But I do not think America is a good place in which to be a genius. A genius can never

expect to have a good time anywhere if he is the genuine article, but America is about the last place in which life will be endurable or to inspire a writer of any kind."

And I believe that up to very recently that was true. We were too much obsessed with the ideal of conformity to allow for genius. Our ideal was sameness and conformity. The ideal citizen was the man who did exactly as his fellow citizens did, and thought exactly as they thought, and spoke exactly as they spoke. There seemed to be a herd-tyranny, a tyranny of the mob, dominating American life. The man that was different we looked upon as peculiar, as a crank; we feared him because we were naive. Children fear a child who is slightly different; they look upon him with fear; they think he is a crank, or he puts on airs because he is different. And in America we try to force all people into a mould of sameness so that they will all look alike and act alike and speak alike and think alike.

But the genius is the man who does not do any of these things; the genius is the man who does not take his cue from his surroundings and from his environments and from his thoughts and convictions and faces of the people about him. He takes his cue from his inspiration, from his revelation, from his soul; he is autonomous, he is law unto himself. And so in America the genius, when we had him, was broken and crushed either through hostility on the one hand or through indifference and lack of sympathy and understanding on the other; and so Butler was right when he said

America is the last place where a man of genius could live.

But we are beginning to find ourselves; we are beginning to realize that the ideal of democracy is to protect what has been called the right of way of individual freedom. That is a marvelous phrase--the right of way of individual freedom. Democracy exists for the sake of the individual freedom of every man and woman. In democracy the ideal is the development of personality, of individuality. The ideal of democracy is not a state in which the individual is the blind, efficient cog in the machine, subjected to process, regimented and controlled, but in democracy the state exists for the sake of the individual freedom of the man and the woman to enable him or her to live their own lives, to develop the God-given gifts and potentialities of their own souls--to augment themselves, to expand themselves, to reach out and up to the higher level and the purer air.

Now the American author is beginning to see it. Some day we will see it in our political life, we will see it in our economic life; and that is something which klans and kleagles and all creatures of the night fail to see. They would like to impose their ideals, however exalted their ideals may be, and their convictions and their standards upon all. They do not realize that in endeavoring by force to put the cloak of their convictions upon other peoples they are destroying the very soul of democracy; for if democracy is to progress it will have to be through the

revelations of great leaders and great individuals.

Last Friday evening the speaker here from the forum pulpit said that one of the great needs of the world today, and especially of Europe, was the need of leaders. There seems to be a pathetic reliance upon force, whether it be the force of Bolshevik Russia or the force of Fascistic Italy. Force, and not the power of spiritual guidance and leadership, seems to be the dominant note of the world today.

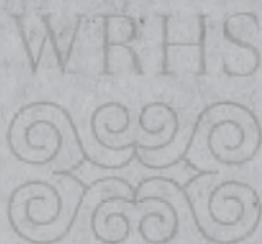
Democracy depends not upon force but upon the consent of the governed. Democracy therefore depends upon the development of leadership from the masses, upon the evoking of the gifts that may be latent among the great masses of the people. And therefore it is as essential as the air is to human life to keep the right of way of individual freedom sacred, to keep the channels free and open for the progress and the movement of human souls; not to dam them, not to estop them, but to let them flow free and unhampered to their destiny.

And that is our work during the coming year, men and women. In our economic life greater opportunity, which means greater freedom; in our political life greater liberalism--greater freedom there. Let blocs be formed, let groups organize. Why should the very political thinking of this land be forced into the groove of two political parties? Our political life is not as simplified as all that. Greater freedom and greater truth in our intellectual life, and, above all, greater love and greater sympathy and better understand-

ing in our spiritual life.

The year 1923 will bring many great problems to our door. It is bound to. The next thirty years will keep on bringing to your door tremendously difficult problems, and we shall solve them in part only as we keep these ideals before us--greater freedom, greater opportunity, greater sympathy and greater love in all the manifold relationships of our complex national life.

May the coming year bring unto you, and unto me, and unto all of us an added measure of service, of greater opportunity to work for the betterment of ourselves and our fellowmen, to rise and to raise, to help and to be helped.



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