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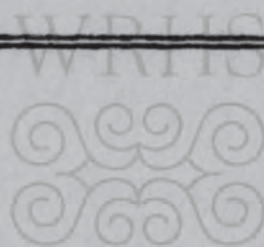
My friend, the working man, 1925.

"MY FRIEND, THE WORKINGMAN."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

NOVEMBER 8, 1925, CLEVELAND, O.



In speaking of my friend, the workingman, I should like to remind you of the line of approach that we have taken in this series of lectures on our life's calling. We are not particularly interested now in the economic problem or the sociological problem involved in a man's calling; we are in this series particularly interested in the possibilities of the spiritual growth or retardation within a man's life's vocation and calling, and outside of him. May I not remind you again of the creed which I set before you last week in discussing my friend, the business man? -- the statement concerning the ethical problems common to all men, regardless of how they earn their living.

I said then, you will recall, that I believed that to each man, whatever his portion in life may be, whatever his gifts, his talents, his handicaps in life may be, a specific task has been assigned by Providence--the task of perfecting himself. I said then, you will recall, that it is my belief that within each man and every man there are the seeds of moral and intellectual and spiritual growth, and that it is a man's primary concern in life to ripen these seeds into full fruition; that there are innate potentialities in every human being, and it is the business of a man, regardless of what his motive is, to express these potentialities to the very limits of his power. If a man is more generously endowed by his Maker, that simply imposes additional responsibilities upon him; but to the very limits of our power

we must give every aptitude of our being a chance to see the light of day. Any man who, through indolence or one-sidedness constricts his life, sins against his immortal soul.

Now that is my point of approach in my discussion of the business man, of the workingman, the professional man and the artist--of every man. To be sure, one of the first concerns of a workingman is to earn a living for himself and his family; to earn his economic competence; upon the success or failure of his efforts to earn a living; to gain for himself an economic independence and security, will depend much of his spiritual development. There have been many people who have extolled the virtues of poverty; there are many people that speak about the great disciplinary value of want. Well, want may have a certain disciplinary and salutary value if it is not hopeless want, if it is not permanent want, permanent poverty, permanent penury. There is a load and a crushing burden and a stultifying influence in the lives of nearly all men. There are certain people who court poverty; there have been certain men who have risen to self-perfection on the rungs of want, of poverty. These have been the saints of mankind. Mankind, fortunately, is not made up entirely of saints. The average man at a certain stage in his life, especially in the early stage of his life, is decidedly helped by need, by want; that is a goal; that is a driving influence. But when that want becomes permanent, hopeless of satisfaction, that want turns to poison in his

life and destroys the best that is in him.

So that the first concern of a workingman is to gain economic competence for himself and his dear ones. "If there is no bread there can be no Torah." The workingman, therefore, we all agree, ought to use all his powers to better his condition. He must do it himself; nobody can do it for him. In our competitive system of society nobody will do it for him. In a system of society in which there is no official or bureaucratic control over production, over distribution, over cost, over price, over wages, and in which people seemingly do not want any such control, the workingman will do best to organize in order to protect his interests in the economic struggle.

All the advantages which have come to the workingman in this land or elsewhere, in terms of wages, shorter hours of labor or better conditions of labor, have come to him as a result of his own efforts and struggles and battles for these goods of life. They have not come to him, sad to say, because of the generosity of the employer or the generosity of the public or the generosity of the government; they have come to him as a result of conflict. And his future continued amelioration depends entirely upon his economic strength in society today.

But as the workingman continues his historic struggle to better his lot--a legitimate and a socially desirable struggle--he ought to be mindful at all times of certain unavoidable and immovable economic facts; and I shall

speaking frankly this morning, as I believe I spoke frankly of the business man last week. The workingman ought to remember that while it is his business to protect his interests, his interests cannot be disassociated from the interests of his employer or of the consuming public, of which he himself is ultimately a part. It is true, as Lincoln said, that labor is prior to and independent of capital; it is true, as Lincoln said, that capital is only the fruit of labor and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. It is true that labor is the superior of capital and deserves much the higher consideration; but it is also true, as Lincoln said, that capital has its rights which are as worthy of protection as any other rights. And he might have added that the public has its rights which are as worthy of protection as the rights of the workingman and the rights of the business man.

The interests of the workingman cannot, under our present system of society, be separated from and disassociated from the interests of his employer or of the people who will ultimately consume the commodity which he produces. There is a point--not a constant point, but a nevertheless real point beyond which wages cannot go and below which hours of labor cannot be lessened, unless the increase in the wage and the shortening in the hours of labor are compensated for in some measure by increased efficiency and increased volume of output. There is a point, a real point, beyond which increase in wage cannot go and decrease in hours of labor

cannot go without making production unprofitable for the producer and putting the commodity beyond the reach of the consumer. When that happens, when the manufacturer will not produce because there is no profit in production, and the consumer cannot buy because his dollar cannot reach the cost of that product, the laborer is the first to suffer; for the plant will shut down and his employment will be gone.

I said under the present system of society. Of course there may be other systems of economic organization. Men have presented pictures of systems far better than ours, but, as far as I know, we are not likely to have another system of economic organization in this land for a long, long time to come. The experiments of Russia in economic ~~Utopia~~ have not proved of such unmitigated success as to induce the American workingman to tamper with them. Furthermore, the American workingman is not and never was in that desperate, downtrodden condition in which the Russian workingman found himself, and which drove him to revolutionary measures, to destroy that system which was crushing him down, and to experiment with tantalizing systems of economic perfection.

The American workingman is the most favored workingman in the world and in all history; in fact, we have no proletarian in the real sense of the word in America, just as we have no peasants in America. We have workingmen and we have farmers; and there is a world of difference between these two classes. The American workingman, while he is far from that condition wherein he should by right find him-

self, he cannot be said to be in a position of dire need and distress to warrant him in seeking release and redress in revolutionary measures. Tens of thousands of them own their homes, tens of thousands of them own automobiles, tens of thousands of them have savings of their own to protect themselves and their families. That is a condition that does not make for blind and ruthless and revolutionary passion; and as far as the facts are concerned, organized American labor has, more than once, in no unmistakable terms, given evidence of its fear and distrust of bolshevism, communism and other revolutionary measures. Evidently--this is the point I wish to make--evidently the American workingman is content to live under the present economic order. He must therefore be mindful all the time of the laws which govern our present economic order; and there is a very simple law and a primary law which eclipses all other laws, and it is this: that wages can be paid only when the producer makes a profit and when the consumer can buy the commodity. This is very frequently forgotten by labor.

Again, my friend, the workingman, should remember that men must work; that labor can never be elevated beyond the need of labor. The state has never raised one bushel of corn or one sack of potatoes. The state has no wealth whatsoever except the wealth which the people produce. Governments can print endless reams of paper currency, but that money will remain absolutely worthless unless workingmen put their sweat and their labor into that currency. In the

most perfect system of society men will have to work and mines will have to be dug and the fields will have to be plowed. There is no escape from the primeval curse--or blessing, shall I say?--"With the sweat of thy brow shall ye eat thy bread"--there is no escape from this iron law of life.

Now the man who works honestly, not excessively but honestly, adds to the wealth of the nation. The man who shirks and dawdles and soldiers on his job decreases the wealth of the nation and makes the industrious workingman pay him for his loafing; for if the state pays or the city pays or the community pays, that wealth comes out directly from the pocket of the workingman. A trade union which without real justification restricts a man's output and a man's labor is the worst enemy of labor, just as a business man who, without real justification, corners a market or restricts the output of his factory or shop, in order to raise prices, is the deadliest foe of society. They are both victimizing the public and ultimately themselves. Furthermore, the man who idles on the job lowers the standards and the dignities of real craftsmanship; he destroys his own self-respect; he cheapens himself in his own eyes; he devastates his own character; and there are distinct moral losses to be counted in a system which not only tolerates but encourages widespread dawdling and idling and soldiering during a man's hours of work. Eight hours a day are too long for a man to work, and I believe they are too long; a man should work seven

or six; but while he is working he should, to the best of his ability, work honestly. If the wages a man receives are too low--and I believe on the average they are too low--then they should be raised; but for the wages which he receives he must, in deference to himself, to his craft, to his character, to his community, give an honest man's day's work for the remuneration which he receives.

The other day I read an article by Sir Phillip Gibbs, a rather pessimistic article on the future of England. "Is England Done?" was the caption of that rather depressing article, and he speaks there about the dole system which England has been forced to introduce as a result of the widespread unemployment in the empire or in the British Isles. And he has this to say: "Where one's sympathy slumps and all one's optimism fails is in the face of two depressing facts: one is the demoralization of men who do not want to work and who refuse to work as long as they draw the dole. When the hay was being made this year some gentlemen farmers in my neighborhood," says Sir Gibbs, "went to the local labor exchange and asked a number of unemployed to give them a hand, in return for a good day's wage and free beer. Not a man accepted the offer. They asserted that hay-making was too hard a job for them. If that is the spirit of England," says the writer, "we are in a bad way, indeed."

There is perhaps one other fact which my friend, the workingman, ought to remember--and you will realize that I am not, in this lecture, at least, flattering

him or championing him. My attitudes towards labor are too well known for me to need to do that sort of thing. I want to be frank with him, as I wish to be frank with all fellow workmen in the workshop of God,--my friend the workingman ought to remember that beyond a certain point the amount of wages which he receives does not really matter, as far as his personal welfare is concerned. A minimum wage is absolutely essential for a man's welfare, but when once a man's elementary needs and comforts are satisfied, any increase in wage, however desirable, makes absolutely no difference in a man's well-being--mental, physical, spiritual, what not. There is no essential relationship between low wages and welfare. If a man instead of receiving, let us say, a dollar and a quarter or a dollar and a half an hour--which, let us assume, is sufficient for his needs and the needs of his family--receives two dollars an hour, that additional gain will not mean to him additional profit in terms of welfare. It will not make him a better citizen; it will not make him read better books or see better pictures or make better friends; it will not determine the purposes or the ideals of his life to an iota; just as much as increased prosperity to a business man has absolutely no relation to his well-being.

The workingman, like the business man, like the professional man, must look for the real goods of life, must seek the real satisfactions of life, not in the signs and the evidences of wealth, but in the inner experiences of his life--in intellectual activity, in esthetic yearning, in

the refinement of his taste, in the sensitizing of his spirit, and the beauty and the truth that are in the world.

A workingman's problem does not end when the problem of his wage or the condition of his work is solved, but it begins when that problem is solved,--the problem not of earning a living but of earning a life, of making of himself a child fabricated in the interest of God. If it is wrong for society to make of a workingman a dull beast of burden--stolid and stupid, a brother to the ox, as has been said, then it is wrong. If it is wrong for society so to exhaust a workingman so that he has no time and no energy left after a day's work except for food and sleep and some excitations in life, then it is wrong. It is equally wrong for the workingman today, who is more independent, more self-reliant, more master of his destiny than at any time in the past, to stultify himself, to restrict his own life, to keep himself, through indolence, through lack of exertion, from the upward looking in the light.

The glory of our democracy is that the sons of Martha have the same chance as the sons of Mary to gain a culture; that the workingman may, if so he wills, excel the business man or the professional man in the acquisition of the cultural values of life. Bounty has placed at the disposal of every man free schools and libraries and museums, and has also, for the first time, given the workingman leisure time and hours of rest and relaxation which he can apply, if so he wills, to self-cultivation and self-advancement. And there

are all too few, I am sad to say, even as there are all too few among the business people, who make the necessary exertion.

I am not referring now to the ambitious young man who is a workingman, who goes to night-school in order to make of himself a white-collared clerk or a dentist or a lawyer or a doctor; I am not thinking of the man who wants to get out of the class of the workingman and elevate himself into another class. My ideal of life is not to make a professional man of a workingman, or a business man of a workingman. As long as society exists it will have need of millions of workingmen. I want the workingman to become, in the fullest sense of the word, a man even while he is a workingman. I want the iron-worker and the cobbler and the mason and the miner and the stevedore to elevate themselves within their life's calling, and to improve themselves to the highest point of development.

The business man in the United States is more or less trying to do it. I see all about me springing up numerous clubs--noon-day clubs, luncheon clubs of all kinds; for the American business man, even as he eats his lunch, receives a half hour or three-quarters hour of instruction from some authority on some vital problem of life. Of course the instruction is desultory, it is sporadic, it is unrelated; and I am somewhat suspicious of that kind of instruction which combines the feeding of the mind and the feeding of the stomach at the same time; there is bound to be some indigestion

somewhere. But there is evidence there of a certain earnestness, a certain groping, a certain reaching out for knowledge and information and culture.

Now the American workingman, unfortunately, has very little of this in his life. Outside of his union or perhaps his lodge he has nothing. There are all too few study groups and reading groups and singing groups and forums and lectures among our working people in this land--all too few. There is no spiritual progress, no intellectual advancement noticeable in the American workingman, while there is a distinctive and desirable economic advancement in their condition; and where there is no progress in human life there is real sadness and tragedy.

The only thing which makes work endurable is this: first, that it enables a man, by satisfying his physical wants, to be free for those adventures of his mind and soul in other worlds after the hours of labor. You will recall my phrase of last week--a man who lived in more than one world. The sad thing is that the workingman, like the business man, lives in only one world. Work ought to enable a man, by satisfying the elementary needs of his life and of the lives of his family, to be free so many hours a day and so many hours a week for the glorious adventures of mind and soul into the undiscovered continents of the spirit,--free for the adventure of friendship, free for contact with the great minds of the past through reading, free for hours of study and meditation, free to live with Nature, free to express the

other aptitudes, the other yearnings, the other hungers of a man's life; and too few of my friends, the workingman, think of doing that.

And then another comfort and strength which may be found in work, however tedious, however hard, however routine, is this: that one can find, if one wishes, an ideal in his job. It is awfully hard to do that, I know. It was easier in the olden days when a man did his completed work so that he could see with his eyes the results of his skill and of his labor. It was his. He was, in a sense, an artist even as he was an artisan. Today that is more or less impossible to do. A distribution of work has doomed many people to do a small and uninteresting thing through almost a hopeless routine; and yet people can be fired with an enthusiasm for their work, however dull that particular job may be, just as the soldier can be fired with an enthusiasm for his work even though his particular task is very routine and very hard and very unpleasant to do. Why? Back of the soldier is an ideal; he is serving a cause--his country! And that ideal sanctifies the work, however insignificant it seems.

Now some day I believe we shall think of work with the same thrill of patriotic fervor as we today think of the soldier's calling. For the workingman is the savior of the state; the workingman produces those things which make all things possible; the workingman's service is therefore holy. It was difficult to preach this doctrine of holiness of man's

work when society surrounded that work with squalor and dirt and filth and degradation, when it underpaid and overworked the workingman; but as conditions improve, as labor is permitted to straighten up its back, to lift up its head; as labor is given independence of competence, greater and greater stress can be laid and should be laid upon the ideality and the glory of work; whether it is digging a ditch or fashioning a machine, it is the indispensable, life-giving, life-saving work of mankind.

The Rabbis say--and this is my last word--
"There is no more humbler calling in the world than that of the shepherd. All that the shepherd has in life is a staff and a wallet. Anybody can be a shepherd; it requires no special skill. There is no calling lowlier than that of the shepherd, and yet King David called God--Shepherd."

"The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want."

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1. In speaking of my friend, the working man, let me remind you of the line of approach which we set for ourselves in this series of lectures on our life's calling - We are not primarily interested (in this series) in Economics, or Sociology, but rather in the spiritual life of man as it may be developed or retarded within his profession and outside of it. Just how can a man best earn a living, but how can a man best earn life, is our theme. Let me remind you of our Credo... See - addendum
2. To be sure a working man's first and immediate concern is to earn an econ. competence for himself & his family - Upon the success or failure of his efforts to gain satisfy his essential needs, and to win competence & security will depend much of his sp. progress. Want may have a certain moral value in disciplining a man and in guiding him on. But when it is a permanent condition it is destruction, the highest social evil in man. Sp. progress looks upon rump of poverty. They are the saints of humanity. But for the masses, wanting poverty is a load and a dulling, stifling process -
3. A working man should do all in his power to better his econ. position, to advance his interests. In a competitive econ. system such as ours, he must look after his own interests. No one will do it for him. In a system such as ours in which there is no bureaucratic control over produce, a distribution, over costs and prices, and in which men evidently are opposed to any such control, the workman will do well to organize for the self-protection of his self protection. All the advantages which advantages which have come to him since the industrial revolution began 150 years ago - in houses, & labor, & roads, & labor & in remuneration, has come as a direct result of his struggles for them. - not due to generosity of employers, the sympathy, the public or the assistance of the state.

4. But even as he continues his historic struggle for higher standards
of living, for shorter hours, better wages and security against unemploy-
ment, sickness and old age ^{my friend the W. M.} he should bear in mind a few
unavoidable + unavoidable facts

1) This interest cannot be dissociated from that of other the
employee or the consumer. It cannot advance to a point where
the well being of them is destroyed. ^{from} There is a point beyond
which wages cannot go, and below which hours cannot
be shortened. It is not a constant point, but it is un-
less really real. When wages rise & hours decrease to a point
where production becomes unprofitable, and the price
and with a fit wage he produces unless compensated for by greater & voluntary the
community prohibits for the consumer. Later is the
first to suffer - for that industry will stop & he will be cut
of his job - there are, even instances when both may
happen to an appreciable degree without trying what
the attendant evils. But the W. M. ought to aware of this
simple elem. law - that ~~there can be no person~~
wages can only be paid, under our present system, unless
when the product is cheap enough for the public to buy
& profitable enough for the producer to produce it.

2) I said under the present system it is not likely
that we shall have another system in the near future.
The exp. of Russia ^{has} ~~not~~ not proved such unmitigated
success as to tempt the Am. nation to tamper with
them - The Am. W. M. is far from that step condemned.
which depresses the hunger working man already in the last
salvation in desper. revolt. measures in united
utopias - The Am. W. M. is not depr. violently unhappy
which, as depressed proletariat even as we have no parallel
far he is the most poised laborer in the world to-day. He
lives in a land, blessed & fed, where there is enough to
go around, and in a decade, when his franchise can
be used in getting what he is entitled to -
Org. labor has now than ever shown its desire to earn

It is true that labor is junior to capital. It is
true, that as Tueden said,



7 res. even ^{and upon beyond, safety & safety} content to look in the
current system, it must pay heed to its fundamental
laws - that is - that his prospects cannot increase with the
^{decline in the price of his products - in the buying power, the consumer}

3. He must also face the fact that under the most perfect
system - even must use if food & fragment & shells are to
be had - no system can do work with work with the hand
produce no wealth. No man on earth has ever
raised a potatoe or a barrel, con wealth is produced
by truly men men - who labor with hand or mind.
If they labor honestly & nature is bountiful, they will
prosper - If they shirk labor, & shirk in the job, ultimately
they will face disaster - Every man must work with
which for the non-productive men. except the wealth which the productive
men produce by their own hands. Secondly is must to pay
the lazier & the home

(A) A trade union which encourages restricted
output is the most enemy of labor - just as the cap
who restricts production is the most enemy of labor

(B) Furthermore there is a distinct moral loss to
man who loses his to tolerate slavery is to
destroy the high standard & dignity of craftsmanship,
to cheapen a man in his own eyes - to destroy
character -

(3) There is a sharp break-down in the morale of the working class
(note) in philip philip - all too many
shirking work, seeking high wages for little work -
just as men who seek big returns on small
investments -

4. W. M. should realize that beyond a certain
minimum, wages have nothing to do with welfare
- Beyond minimum, no union has nothing to do

facts can use fake currency, but they are
valuable unless men put their brains and their
sweat into it—



Labour is prior to, and independent of, Capital.
Capital is only the fruit of labour,
and could never have existed if labour
had not first existed. - Labour is the
superior of capital, and deserves much
the higher consideration - But
he also said that Capital has its
rights, which are as worthy of
protection as any other rights!

needs & leads us far from the safe, comfortable
of my other world, of that, of beauty, of romance
& poetry - when I can live intensely & dramatically
however dull & uneventful my routine job may
be -

And gives an ideal & serene

7. Again, the man who will try as far as possible to
make an art of his job - to ^{try to perfect} learn all about it -
to perfect it - to love it - to find an ideal in
it. - ^{lack of ideal} ~~Just~~ then a halo around the
troubled scene - "It is unesp. to life - It is holy."
When labor was surrounded with squalor, & poverty
& degradation, it was hard to make an ideal of it.
But among free men, indep., makes their own
will & destiny - ^{the} Worker can be glorified, even
more than the soldier.

St John's 1877 - There is no nobler
calling than that of a shepherd. All his days
he wanders about carrying a staff and a
wallet - & get ~~just~~ called - Shepherd

1. Own meathouses - modest savings - small farms
- insurance policies

