



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

Featuring collections from the Western Reserve Historical Society and
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

Reel
157

Box
56

Folder
517

The Four Most Significant Events of 1936, 1936.

WRHS



THE FOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT EVENTS OF 1936

By Way of a Review of the Historic Moments in the Year Now Closing

By
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, December 27, 1936

The year 1936, the year which is now closing, was a year crowded with events, a tense year, a year of abounding crises, the kind of a year, I suppose, that newspapermen loved because it provided them with so much select copy. Many folks would rather like to see a somewhat quieter year, less hard on the nerves.

Can y u think back over the year and recall how many events that shook the world during the past year, frightened it, bewildered it. 1936 saw the denouement of the Ethiopian, shall I say tragedy?; the Hoare-Laval for the partition of Ethiopia; the imposition of sanctions upon Italy, the threat of war, the collapse of the sanctions, the conquest of Ethiopia; the abandonment of that hapless land by the nations of the world symbolized in that tragically dramatic moment when the King of Ethiopia confronted the official representatives of the nations of the world at Geneva and demanded justice for his people - and that justice was denied him.

You recall the remilitarization of the Rhineland by Germany, talk of the threat of war connected with that incident, the climax and the scrapping of the Locarno Treaty. Do you recall the Austro-Germany Treaty - rearmament of the nations of Europe; civil war in Spain which has kept the world on edge to this day; Belgium breaks her treaty pact with France and declares political independence; Poland moves out of German influence back to the sphere of French influence; a new alliance proclaimed by Germany,

Italy, Japan, ostensibly to wage war on Communism ~~in the war~~, but actually an alliance against the Soviet Union. This crusade against Communism was backed by the Pope, by all the organizations of the Catholic church.

There was the diplomatic juggling and re-arrangement of the whole political checkerboard of Europe and huge unprecedented preparedness for war in anticipation of war; new Japanese aggression in China; a new Constitution in Soviet Russia indicated somewhat a revaluation of their doctrines - a return to, at least according to the opinion of the friends of the new constitution and friends of the Soviet Union - a return to more democratic procedure; the bloody purge in Russia in which some of the greatest leaders of Bolshevism, men who were responsible for the success of the Bolshevik Union were subjected to what men would call a mock trial and were put to death; strikes and bloody riots in the Holy Land continuing for months; the abdication of the King of England, King Edward the Eighth and all the news about America's great gift to motherhood - Mrs. Simpson.

And at home a rip-roaring party contest - a national election the outcome of which was to see the country go to the dogs if the wrong party was elected, an election attended by all the traditional ballyhoo plus some new.

What a year this has been, my friends, and what a headache! Any wonder that the world today, more or less jittery, feels itself as though teetering on the brink of an abyss?

Of course all these news items occupied the front pages of our newspapers and from that, one kind of got the impression that this was the real business of the world during 1936 and that these events constituted the most significant and important events as far as the progress of mankind and the world are concerned. That would be a mistake. The real business of the world never showed up on the front pages of the newspapers. The real business was done quietly and unostentatiously in the mines, factories, stores, scientific laboratories, at the desks where quiet, faithful devoted men and women carried on their work - the scientist, the inventor, the poet, the painter, the thinker, the laborer, the businessman - these were the people who made the year 1936 - by their work, made it possible for mankind to pass on to 1937. And perhaps the most significant events of 1936 are yet unknown to the world. They may have taken place in a scientific test tube in some unknown laboratory in the world.

Yet, some great and important political and social events did the transpire, did receive a great deal of/attention of the world - and of some of these I should like to speak this morning. I cannot speak of all of them. I shall therefore endeavor to point out some four or five.

I suppose that the average person would think that the abdication of King Edward was the most important event in 1936. It was the most sensational but of little historical significance. Already half of the world has forgotten about King Edward and pretty soon the other half will lose interest. Royalty, either on or off the throne, is not of great moment in the world even on that separate Isle, Great Britain.

The world enjoys a good story, a good sensation, and the story of a king stepping off a throne, or a discovered story of a king stepping out makes good gossip, sets tongues wagging. In some aging hearts, it would rekindle the dying embers of romance for a moment and people would enjoy a vicarious thrill. What was supposed to be a storm turned out to be just a ripple on the river of life which continues to go on.

I confess that I, personally, could not get myself to become as indignant about the moral turpitude of King Edward as some Archbishops, Bishops and lesser lights in the Kingdom did. I assumed that King Edward was, perhaps more moral than four-fifths of the kings who preceded him on the throne of England who filled their palaces with mistresses whom they would not make their wives and with wives whom they decapitated because of mistresses who wanted to be their wives.

King Edward was, of course no Zadik by any means. And the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and all the other people knew it. The King simply preferred that which was of greatest interest to him - a woman he loved - to that which was of lesser interest to him the throne. When he found that he could not have both, he abdicated. What is the crime? I rather applaud his action. Of course, I could not condone the events which led up to it. If he had behaved himself he would not have had to make that decision. Though the abdication was an event of interest, entertainment, discussion in 1936, it had little if any historic significance.

The event which overshadowed all else in 1936 was Civil War in Spain which has now lasted for six months. As someone recently wrote: "In a moment when a duly elected and constitutional government was fighting, its back to the wall, to save Spanish democracy both from the onslaughts

of its enemies of the right and from the excessive demands of revolutionaries of the kind commonly called red, the privileged classes, the army and the church, to salvage their own material interests, deliberately made common cause in an attack upon the government, deliberately unloosed a reign of terror in which both sides have since had an equal share of guilt, deliberately opened the gates to the revolution of untutored and infuriated masses bent upon wiping out democratic government and establishing the supreme domination of the proletariat.

You may recall that after my return from Europe I spoke to you about Spain and said that Spain was the battlefield of Europe. In a sense that is not a Spanish war. It is a European war. Actually the number of volunteers who are fighting in Spain exceeds the number of Spaniards. All the democratic and Fascist forces of Europe have taken to civil war and on the blood drenched, blood soaked streets of Spain is being fought one of the greatest battles in modern times between the forces of Democracy and Fascism. Early last August, the French Government declared itself clearly in sympathy with the legal government in Spain but was forced, because of the insistence of Great Britain to join in a neutrality effort with all the nations of Europe not to interfere with the internal struggle in Spain. Of course, all agreed and they they all proceeded to violate their agreements. International agreements today are not worth the paper they are written on. There is no international morality left. There is no international law to back it up.

Civil war in Spain never would have taken place if the

rebels had not received support, and encouragement by the two Fascist states - Italy and Germany. These countries supplied them in the early stages with their arms, with their war planes, with their tanks, with their pilots - all under the cover of neutrality.

Fortunately, the democratic countries seeing what was happening to Spain, unofficially, likewise proceeded to give help to the legitimate government which was essentially entitled to it as the legally constituted government. And now the rebel forces, hard-pressed, have turned to their sponsors and patrons, Italy and Germany for additional support. Hitler has been applied to for sixty thousand unofficial troops. France and England are again committing a great blunder - a blunder which they have constantly committed in the last few years, thereby weakening themselves and the forces of Europe - they are proceeding to buy off racketeer countries. Italy has been bought off by their recognition of Italy's conquest of Ethiopia. England stated it would never recognize Italy's sovereignty over Ethiopia. It now proposes to buy off the Nazi government by returning all the former German colonies and perhaps by giving economic assistance to a government which is hard pressed and beginning to crack because of their crazy economic policy which they have been pursuing in the last three or four years.

England and France, because they failed to act together and act affirmatively last year in the Ethiopian situation lost prestige and made it possible for Italy to conquer Ethiopia and to scrap the Locarno agreement. And now, because it failed to act affirmatively, they have made it possible for Italy to walk off

with recognition and for Germany to get new colonies and a new loan.

This regime will continue to intimidate Europe still further and to hold democratic governments in Europe for ransom whenever it needs it.

Spain will continue to overshadow all the events in Europe for some time to come. That, I regard as the the first of the outstanding events of 1936.

The second derives from that. It is the gathering forces of democracy and their power of resistance against all that seemed the to be irresistible on sweep of reaction and Fascism in Europe. Spain was the first encouraging evidence that the democratic forces of the world have found themselves and have learned how to outplay and out maneuver the reactionary forces of Europe. In Spain democracy showed a fight. In Spain lovers of democracy gave evidence of leaders ready to lay down their lives to save those ideals precious to mankind ever since the American and French Revolution. Fascism in Italy triumphed because the democratic forces in Italy never put up a fight. In Germany, the liberals, the socialists, never put up a fight. In Spain they hit back. They hit back hard. Fascism is breaking up in Spain. This will serve notice on Fascists and on all privileged classes who will resort to Fascist tactics that it doesn't pay, that it is a serious and costly and not at all sure of success enterprise.

Something of that happened in our own country, in our own election - not that our election was a struggle between Fascist and Democracy. It was not that at all. But some of the Fascist

tactics were nevertheless employed in the last election - the red scare, stock in trade was most liberally employed during the campaign preceding the election. Great newspapers, powerful demagogues capitalized on people's natural distaste for Fascism. But it didn't work. The American masses were not beguiled. They were not stampeded. They refused to have the red herring of propaganda dragged across certain very clear issues involved in the national election.

And this new alliance between Germany and Italy and Japan plus the Catholic Church against Communism will also not work because while people hate Communism, they hate equally as much, Fascism and Nazism and forces of reaction. I regard that achievement as a significant achievement of 1936.

I should like to point to another outstanding event which is encouraging also. And that is the inter-American Conference for the maintenance of peace which recently adjourned its sessions in Argentina, a conference which was proposed by the President of the United States and which was called by the Argentine Government, a conference which, in my humble judgment, has within it the seeds, the possibilities of tremendous consequences for the peace not alone of the Americas but for the peace of the whole world. This was a great effort made by the countries of the new world to solve in a straight forward American way some of the problems which the old world has simply been unable not only to solve but to approximate a solution. The countries of South America have not been free, as you know, from war. In the last terrible war ~~was~~ which lasted three years, between Bolivia and Paraguay, one hundred thousand lives were lost. There was not

only war. There was constant trade rivalries, constant disputes about boundaries. Here an effort was made to create machinery to settle disputes among these people, to define what is neutral in case of foreign war.

At the heart of this great movement towards the peace of the whole world is this great gesture on the part of the United States to be in very truth a good neighbor, not to use the big stick as America unfortunately did on several previous occasions in its relation to Central and South America. The appearance of President Roosevelt in Buenos Aires and his remarkable, enkindling appeal to the nations of the new world for democracy and peace when the old world is shot through with war talk - that is a moment of tremendous political significance in the world.

I believe that the fourth outstanding event of 1936, especially for the people of the United States, was the return of prosperity. More people are at work. Wages have been raised. Dividends have increased. Much, of course, of this boom is due to certain artificial stimulation which has entered economic life has tended to force circulation of heretofore undistributed corporation surpluses. Nevertheless all students of economics agree that our nation has emerged from the depths of its depression. All seem confident of economic recovery.

This is, of course, something for which we, as a people, ought to be profoundly grateful. These seven long lean years have been terribly hard upon us. They broke so many of us. They brought so much of sorrow and suffering into the lives of men and women.

We and our children ought to be grateful to a kind Providence that these years are behind. And yet, if we are thoughtful people, we ought to ask ourselves and others how sure and stable and permanent is this recovery? How long will it last? Is that a preparation for another and perhaps greater one? Have we learned ^{by} our mistakes and errors in previous years? Are we sure that we know what our mistakes were? I am afraid that not many Americans think about those problems now that prosperity has begun to come back.

Now, my friends, is the time to think and to plan for the future. We have made certain strides forward because of the cruel experience of the depression years. We have, for example put on our statute books legislation for social security to protect the masses of our people against the disabilities of old age, against enforced idleness and unemployment. We have learned something in the last few years about the need for a continuous increase in the purchasing power of our people to meet any increase in production. We have learned something about the need for controlling credit expansion so as to avert ^{the} disaster of a run-a-way market. We have learned something about the need of planning beforehand for large scale program of public works whenever private industry begins to lag, to absorb unemployment. We have learned of the need of controlling the security market and speculation in stocks and foreign investments - factors which were so vital in the disaster of 1929. We have learned something about the need for controlling foreign speculation in our currency.

It remains to be seen whether there will be enough of political sagacity in Washington and enough of economic wisdom among business men, financiers, bankers in every city, town and hamlet in the United States to capitalize upon this so precious experience so that in another two, three or five years, we will not have facing us a recurrence, and perhaps a more disastrous recurrence of the things which transpired in our country in 1929.

Our prayer is that what we are experiencing is not just another business boom. There are still millions of people unemployed. However, the return ~~in~~, to a degree, of economic normalcy in the years preceding 1929, has been one of the great and important factors in the year which just closed.

I should like to say a word about one important event which particularly affects Jewish life. Of course as far as Germany is concerned, there is nothing new in 1936. The wheels which were set in motion by the Nazi barbarians have been grinding quietly but terribly effectively during the past year, reducing the hapless Jewish minority in this country to greater and greater impoverishment and forcing more and more of them into exile. History is again repeating itself in Germany. And in three short years, German economic life is beginning to give clear evidence of what happens to a country when it ruthlessly and forcibly tears out of its economic life its most productive people.

Nazi Germany is on the verge of bankruptcy. Its people must be fed and only the political maneuvering which will go on in the next few months will make it possible for Germany to borrow money which it will never pay back - to borrow to feed its people.

History never moves in leaps and bounds. The processes of history are slow. An historic people like ours can wait.

I want to refer to the strikes and riots in Palestine. There is so much confusion there that a word ought to be said about that important subject. The inner cause for the riots which cost hundreds of lives is, of course, the reawakening of national sentiments throughout the Near East today. You find it in Egypt. You find it in Palestine.

The immediate cause of the riots was occasioned by the disputes of the Legislative Council which the Arabs did not particularly want. Jewish representation in the Council would have reduced the Jewish group in Palestine to a hopeless minority whose status would have been exploited to stop the sale of land, to scrap the Balfour Declaration, to bar Jews from coming into Palestine.

There is today in Palestine a Royal Commission appointed by Great Britain to investigate conditions which led up to the riots, to settle the grievances, to make provisions for a settlement between the Jews and the Arabs.

The Jews have been presenting their case before the Royal Commission and I believe they have been doing it in a very dignified and forceful manner. They are basing the claim of the Jews not merely on the Balfour Declaration, not merely on the Mandates on which Great Britain holds sovereignty, not merely the claim that Palestine is the historic home of Israel but on the fact of the present situation as regards world Jewry which is so desperate for millions of our people, who are being rendered

homeless by the kind of thing which they are experiencing in Germany, anti-Semitic excesses in Poland, Roumania; that these millions need a home. Everywhere doors of other lands are being shut in their faces. They have come in great numbers into Palestine - 200,000 in the last four years-and by coming did not dispossess any other people but have, by being there, brought prosperity, economic development, education, civilization to a country which has been backward for more than a thousand years. In the last fourteen years, the Arab population in Palestine increased more than the Jewish population in Palestine. In the last fourteen years, the Arabs in Palestine increased from 604,000 to 960,000. All this talk about Jews dispossessing Arabs and driving them into the wilderness is just so much propaganda. Nor have the Arabs been dispossessed from their land.

The land which the Jews acquired was marshland, desert land, uncultivated land, which the Jews took and drained. They turned ~~marshland~~ a wilderness into a garden land. The Jews recently acquired a tract of land in Palestine known as Hillel, a land which for centuries has been a marshland. Not a soul lived there nor could live there. The Jews drained that land, not by Arab labor but with Jewish labor. Three or four Jews died of malaria in draining this land. And twenty percent of this land when cultivated and made habitable will be set aside for the Arabs.

The Jews who have come Palestine have made it possible for the Treasury of the Palestine Government to have a surplus of 30 million dollars. The Jews pay most of the taxes, of course. What does the

Government do with that money. Most of it is used to build hospitals for Arabs, schools, to improve the sanitary conditions for the Arab population.

Now it may be possible that the Royal Commission, after considering all the facts, will report that Jewish immigration in Palestine should not be stopped, that the sale of land should not be stopped, that land for Jewish colonization should be opened. However, it may, on the other hand, because of political exigencies, have to yield to the pressure of political necessity at a sacrifice of the Jewish cause in Palestine. That would be a tragedy not alone for the Jewish people but for all the world because it will intensify centers of unrest in all parts of the world - wherever Jews find themselves under pressure and can't get out.

The Arabs have four homelands in the Near East - Iraq, Transjordan, Syria and . The Jews ask for one place on this earth which they may call their own, a homeland where they can be a majority instead of a minority.

And so we enter the year 1937, my friends. What the year holds in store for us, no one knows. We pray that it may be a year less tense, less full of alarms of war, less replete with sensational news..... That, I am sure, is the prayer of all of us as we stand on the threshold of a new year.

- 1/ Crowded - Tense - Full of crises, sensations - Newspapers
- 2/ ① Hoare - Laval; Sanctions; War; Collapse, Abandonment, Geneva
- ② Penitence; Locarno; War;
- ③ Austria - German Treaty - Putsch, Danzig
- ④ Civil War in Spain - Kept world
- ⑤ Belgium breaks military pact
- ⑥ Poland
- ⑦ Alliance Ger - Italy - Japan - Communism - Pope
- ⑧ Diplomatic shuffling - Preparedness for war
- ⑨ Japanese aggression in China
- ⑩ a new Aust. in Soviet - Purge -
- ⑪ Struggle & Risk - Patent - Anti. excesses
- ⑫ Abdication - Anis great gift
- ⑬ At home - Rep. - many elections -

What a year! What a head-ache!

3/ Any wonder - jittery, teetering -

Real world

World like - 4-5

4/ Abdication - Sensations - 1/2 - Royalty - World enjoys -
When a King - Gossip - tongues - Aging - Vicarions -
Storm -

I confess - More moral - p133 - Simply did not work

Of course, Edward, was as p133 in any sense, the word.⁽³⁾
 The Archbishop shows it all along - and ~~was~~ ~~can't~~ ~~the~~ ~~so~~
 did every one else. ~~But~~ ~~he~~ ~~simply~~ ~~did~~ ~~not~~ ~~a~~ ~~ish~~ ~~to~~
 sacrifice what he ~~loved~~ ~~most~~ ~~for~~ ~~what~~ ~~a~~ ~~man~~ - for
 what he ~~can't~~ ~~for~~ ~~his~~ - a throne. And he abdicated
 his throne when he found that he ~~could~~ ~~not~~ ~~back~~
 to it. I rather applaud him for his decision - that
 did ~~appear~~ ~~the~~ ~~kind~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~ad~~ - which ~~but~~ ~~about~~
 the necessity to make the decision.

5. Overshadowing all - Spain ^(Just) 6 months.

You may recall - battle ground, Europe -
 but Sp. was - so-called Volunteers
 outnumber.

(1) Neutrality effort - Aug. 15 - collapsed - "do their duty,
 will under cover of respectability"

(2) For uprising would never have occurred, unless
 encouraged, financed, arms supplied by
 Germany + ~~Italy~~ ^{Italy} ~~Austria~~ -

(1) Italy - Hold on Med.

(2) Ger - Sp. ports for submarines - ^{rally held ag. Com.} Bombing fire
 Bombers - Tanks - guns - Pilots - 60,000 Germans

(3) A ghastly, bloody Civil War -
 drawing Sp - white.

(4) Buoyancy H - Italy - rejuvenation

(5) Folly - Ransom - money - Racketers - Renard crimes
 Germany - Colonies - Econ. crisis
^{Strengthened}

(6) Another chance - to break Hitler - They won't (4)

6. Gathering forces of pleasure for resistance to F.

Spain - Know how to defend pleasure.

Front Populaire - France - Bhun - "out-guess and out-manoeuvre F. conspiracies:

will go hard with F. adventures - Costly.

(a) Masses are not so easily misled by propaganda.
They think - Our own election - Certainly not a
conflict bet. Him. & F. - Here the bus - the "Red scare" was
liberally employed - Newspaper tabloids, by radio,
"conmissions" - the old F. trick to defeat democracy -
It did not work!

(b) German - Italian - Japan alliance - plus Catholic
Church - It is not working!
The world may not like Comm. - But it does
not like Fas - Nazism - Reaction - ~~any more!~~
better for it! - either!

7. Inter-Am. Conference for the Maintenance of Peace

Proposed by R. - called by Argentina -

R. speaks - historic.

Consolidate peace in her world - Remove Trade barriers to
secure peace - Continentalize Monroe Doctrine -

and define neutrality in case of Europ. War. ^{100% decided}
S.A. torn by war - ^{3/4 war but} Bohemia Moravia - Boundary disputes
Trade rivalry -

Create machinery - Set example -

America, "big stick", sets example, of good neighbor
- W. world to copy

8. Returning Prosperity

More people at work - Higher Wages - Better bus -

Due to forced distribution of unbalanced undistributed
corporation surplus - made nec. by corp. surplus
Tax - hundred millions of dollars by way of other
dividends, bonuses have found their way in to
channel, trade -

(a) all prophets are agreed - era of pros.

(b) How long? How stable? Head-long to another
depression? Will we avoid the mistakes?
Who we know what the mistakes were?

(c) Now is the time to think of plans.

(d) we have made certain strides forward as a
result of our experience

(e) Sound security measures -

(f) we have learned something about the need of
increased purchasing power to meet increased
production -

need for controlling credit expansion.
need of org. for large-scale public-works when
private industry lags -
need for counteracting foreign speculation in
currency ^{the security market &}
need for controlling stock specula. at home
and foreign investments abroad.

~~Need for~~
wise pub. leadership at Washington & Econ. Leadership
in every town, village, city, nation. are now needed
to ~~take~~ protect from exp. - to plan more ~~wisely~~,
more intelligently, more soundly for future.
- Not just another Bur. boom - with 10 m. still

9- Jewish life - unemployed

(1) Need not start - no change - wheels set in motion
are grinding our people into poverty - slowly forcing
them lower & lower -

9. reaping what she has sown.

(2) Elsewhere, too.

(3) Pal. bloody riots - 3rd since 1921
Causes - Inflamed Nat. sentiments in Near East
New ferment - stirred - Ethiopian Hr.

Occasions - blatant Legis. Council

object of Hark - (1) stoppage of Jewish
(2) land sale
(3) End of Brit. Rule.

Royal Commission

Pursued on Case

1. Claims - Bal-abe - Mandate - Hista - Resenters

2. at expense 9 arab.

Dura not arab.

664.000 - 260.000 in 14/15

3. land - redem Purchased

Redemmed - Huleh

4. Standards Living

5. Public Improvement - Taxes - 60%

(4) Room for both -

No "whitting down"

No minority

Homeland! "Civil rights rights of

Exiling non-J. com - to be suppressed -

But J. Homeland, not Arab - Mag

Hedraj - Transjordan

Judgment on Spain

IN A moment when a duly elected and constitutional government was fighting, its back to the wall, to save Spanish democracy both from the onslaughts of its enemies of the right and from the excessive demands of revolutionaries of the kind commonly called red, the privileged classes, the army and the church, to salvage their own material interests, deliberately made common cause in an attack upon the government, deliberately unloosed a reign of terror in which both sides have since had an equal share of guilt, deliberately opened the gates to the revolution of untutored and infuriated masses bent upon wiping out democratic government and establishing the supreme domination of the proletariat.

—*Foreign Affairs*, October, 1936.