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The Revolt Against Liberty, 1939.

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THE REVOLT AGAINST LIBERTY
How Friends and Foes Alike of Liberty Unite to Destroy It

WRHS
By
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver



At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, February 26, 1939

The revolt against Liberty, my friends, in the world today is a two-fold one, one at the hands of its friends and the other at the hands of its presumptive friends; one is a conscious and the other an unconscious rebellion and it is out to destroy liberty. The other, while it is anxious to preserve Liberty, nevertheless, through the abuses of it, the improper exploitation of it, tends to destroy it. In the last analysis, the question is, which of the two is more effective.

Up to recently, the forces opposed to Liberty, freedom, were on the defensive, especially among the intellectual people. They could find no confident philosophy to rationalize their opposition to Liberty. The field was held triumphantly by Liberty, by the ideals of liberalism, the concept of the rights of man, constitutional government, democracy. They had not the courage to set up tyranny as an ideal. In the last generation or two, a philosophical voice was raised in opposition by Hegel, Neitzsche or Sorel. These voices were quickly condemned, these sour notes, as it were, off key and out of time with the dominant music of the age. All through the last centuries there were of course reactionary movements. They lacked an exalted and revolutionary character.

It is quite different now. The forces opposing Liberty today have a cause, a banner. They have a crusading zeal. They are out to rebuild the world on the new basis of anti-liberalism, anti-democracy, anti-humanitarianism. They have proclaimed the bankruptcy of the democratic ideal. The ideals which stemmed from the American and French revolutions are no longer valid. In fact, they were never valid. They were and are a snare. They are a delusion. They are false philosophically and harmful to practice. The emphasis which these ideals placed upon the importance of the individual, upon the importance of personality was a false

emphasis. Equally false was the ideal which was set up as human program, of social justice and international peace. In fact, the entire ethics stemming from ~~the~~ Judaism and Christianity has been attacked direct, and in a forthright manner. An assault has been made upon these things which we had assumed to be the unquestioning postulates of progress.

It has been maintained vigorously that Liberty of the individual must be sacrificed to the interest of the state. It is only the interest of the state which matters. It is only the destiny of the state which is important. The destiny of the state is to attain power, to increase itself through conquest. Nothing must stand in the way of this augmentation of power, which is part of the state. Consideration of right or wrong has nothing to do with the matter. An unquestioning obedience and service to the state is the supreme ideal, and the right of the individual and any thought of popular control of the policies of the state, of the administration of the state machinery, is a form of spiritual and moral degeneration, apostasy, as it were. And at the head of the state is the self-chosen, superman, the leader. And to follow him, to follow his bidding - that is the supreme privilege of the individual. which That is the supreme patriotism of the individual is capable. And the fulfillment of the life of the individual is by way of identifying himself as completely as possible with the will of the leader.

Thus a new cult of tyranny, as it were, a new cult of the negation of Liberty has been established in the Western World. For the first time in centuries a new idealism of tyranny, if you will, of what the Nazis call authoritarian romanticism has come to play a mighty role in the Western world. The revolt against Liberty today has therefore taken on the character of a holy crusade, a holy cause, a spiritual mandate, the like of which mankind never witnessed at any time in the last few

centuries.

The metaphysics of dictatorships has been worked out to its logical conclusion; in Germany, today, they have a talent for that sort of thing. But you will find it also in the heart of Italian Fascism and to a degree also in a modified form, to be sure, in Slavic Bolshevism where the emphasis of the state, however, does not receive anything like the emphasis it receives in the philosophies of Fascism and Nazism. X

The reason for it is not hard to see. Germany was defeated by three great democracies of the Western World. Its life was torn. As a reaction to that major defeat and humiliation has come this rejection of the dominant ideals of their conquerors. Furthermore, neither in Germany nor in France, certainly not in Russia was there ever a long established tradition of democracy. The Slavs passed from one tyranny to another. The absence of tyranny does not particularly hurt them. In fact the whole complex of democracy would prove irksome to them. X

In an interesting book "I Write as I Please" by Walter Duranty one of the foremost correspondents he said the following:

"As contact with the West grew easier in the 19th century, the ruling class of Russia became more Western-minded and thereby widened the breach between themselves and the mass of the nation; they "lost contact with the masses"; as the Bolsheviks say, and dallied with un-Russian ideas of democracy and parliament and freedom of speech and elections by secret ballot... whatever the Bolsheviks may have that or wanted when they seized power, one of the effects of their success was to rip to pieces the Western veneer and its shoddy un-Russian fabric of "democratic freedom" which the peoples of Europe had created for themselves by centuries of struggle, but which in backward Asiatic Russia was alien, unnatural and unwelcome to the vast majority of the nation."

And to a degree, that is true also, my friends, of Germany and Italy. There the democratic regime was of recent origin. Democratic of only short duration. You may compare the democracies of Germany,

and Italy before the coming of the totalitarian regime there, to the democracies of France, England and the United States by thinking of the bucket and the well. You pour water into a bucket. What that water is used up, the bucket is empty. But the well has its own capacity for refilling itself. The democracies of Germany and Italy may be likened to a bucket. The democracy of the United States, for example, draws its democratic strength from its underlying sources which are ever replenished and which are part of its very being. So that one can readily understand that when conditions in a country like Germany and Italy become hard, when X people become unhappy, that it is not very difficult for them to pour democratic waters out of the bucket, as it were.

In a country like the United States, France and England, that would do violence to the essential spirit of the individual, because with them, the democratic ideal has become part of their thought pattern, their psychology through generations and generations of living with democracy.

Be that as it may, the revolt against Liberty is here. The world is confronted with a missionary anti-Liberalism. The Nazis are X not content to destroy Liberty in their country alone. They send apostles and missionaries to all the world, on a crusade to undermine Liberty everywhere. So far, this new missionary anti-Liberalism has been amazingly successful. Democracy will have to meet this fact. It will have to meet this revolt, if not on the battlefield of arms, certainly on X a battlefield of ideas. It cannot assume that because those ideas seem so preposterous, mad, therefore they can be ignored and disregarded; that they can have no influence on mankind.

These intellectual pretences must be exposed. The arguments must be refuted on psychological, historical grounds. The crusade

must be made with a counter-crusade on the part of liberalism. 2

Furthermore, the ideal of liberty will have to recover for itself, rediscover for itself, something of the ardor, passion, earnestness which comes upon them which made liberty a crusading force, a conquering force in the world. Our age will have to begin to emphasize freedom, human rights, the dignity of the individual, the importance of individuality, with "annointed" eyes. We must rediscover a great love for liberty. We must revive a great hate for all forms of tyranny in the world under whatever guise, whatever facade, whatever camouflage it makes its appearance in the world. X

That, my friends, is the first revolt against liberty now very active in the world.

There is another revolt, that is at the hands of the friends of liberty. We don't like to think of those who conceive of liberty and freedom solely in terms of privilege and not in terms of responsibility, as rebels against liberty. Those who think that democratic form of government gives an individual carte-blanche for self-aggrandizement is a rebel against free government. X

Liberty, my friends, is a battlecry which should turn men into heroes. It is not a song of Circe, turning men into swine. One cannot help getting the impression, from time to time, of many people conceiving of liberty as of pigs feeding at the trough. X

That was not the dream of those who founded freedom in the Western world. When they thought of making men free, they also thought of making men noble, of establishing a society of greater justice and greater freedom on the part of individual members. X

This is not possible without a tremendous amount of self-restraint, self-sacrifice on the part of the individual. There is no meaning X

to the term "Rights of Man" unless you consider with it the "duties of man".

In the last one hundred years, in our free democracy, so many people have exploited freedom, the opportunities which a free government gave to them. They accumulated great wealth, built up vast industrial organizations with only slight regard, if any, for the rights of any others or for the commonwealth, with the result that great economic injustice has come to be present in our midst, vast unemployment, great industrial unrest in the very foundations of our government. Industrial piracy was made possible by a false concept of what freedom really is and what it should give to a citizen.

I remember reading recently of a startling reaction on the part of the people of one of the great states in the West of our country, in Oregon, on of the most progressive states in the Northwest. Many an important ideal has been enacted there by the will of the people. Recently, by a popular referendum, the most restrictive law against the rise of labor was enacted in the State of Oregon as a reaction, a popular reaction against the abuses, against the unscrupulous labor people, unnecessary judiciary disputes, division in its own ranks which victimized the people and which endangered the very privileges of free com unity life. It was all a revolt against liberty. ^{There} ~~It~~ is another form, and a dangerous form today, unconscious in many ways.

When we make increasing demands upon free government to benefit the individual these increasing demands upon it will help to shake the foundations of free government. You cannot place increasingly more obligations on the state for the benefit of individuals and at the same time try to deny that state the power

the power wherewith to deny that obligation. When you give the state increasing power to carry on increasing obligations, you are building up the state and limiting the rights of the individual. Before long you will find yourself not a citizen of a free government, but a subject of an autocratic, bureaucratic state.

To find the just balance between the collective and private control of our economic life is not an easy matter. One cannot be doctrinaire about it. In a democracy, it requires the most consummate statesmanship to discover that golden mean between these two extremes. It is clear that too few people in a democracy will try to discover that means. Rather there has been in recent years in our government, a blind stampede to government to satisfy everyone of our needs, a sort of pan-handling expedition to Washington.

Government may be very accomodating, may give you all the things that you want. But you will have to pay the price for it. The price is in the last analysis the surrender of your individual rights, because the government cannot continue to engage in economic activities to provide you with all the things which you wish and at the same time leave you in possession of the democratic machinery which can interfere with those things you demand. You can't eat your pie and have it at the same time.

There is a third revolt against liberty which is evident on all sides, and that is the frightful impatience with what appears to be the slow process of free government. People forget that democracy is essentially a slow process. It is government by trial and error, not by purges and racketeering; government by education and compromise. Those who want Kingdom Come in a hurry must submit to a dictator who, as a rule, will lead you not to Kingdom Come, but to hell. Impatience

is a form of rebellion against freedom and liberty and democracy.

There is another form of rebellion and that is perhaps more evident in a country like France than in our country, that every democracy is in danger of - and that is the fragmentization of the political life of a nation into numerous exclusive, unyielding, intransigent political parties. Instead of being satisfied with two parties, each small group with a particular platform of its own demands representation. Sometimes there are thirty or forty parties represented. You can readily see that this makes democracy impossible. France - division - as result of many parties.

One must be content to remain within a majority party - work from within, X steadily and confidently.

WRHS
AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES
This unfortunate division in the ranks of American labor, and I speak as a friend of labor, is in my judgment an act of treason to the highest interest of labor, therefore to the the highest interest of free government in the United States. Quote - Isaiah. That is the second revolt which I have in mind.

There is a religious passion, a great moral earnestness that destroyed autocracy, in the name of theocracy, in the name of God. X
Study your history of the Puritans. Study the history of Communism. Study the history of Americanism. You will see how much exalted idealism ~~and~~ there was to give people freedom in political, intellectual life. "I X
will give you a king in my wrath." That was the key-note of the champions of freedom. Men died to make this country free. Men died to keep it free. X
Exploiters, pirates ought not in the name of democracy to be permitted to use it, abuse it and undermine our treasured freedom.

If you want your children to enjoy freedom, you must remember that liberty is more a matter of giving than of taking. It is far more a matter of duties than of privileges. You must learn to stop burdening our government, stop draining our government. We must learn patience and make haste slowly, not to demand too much in too short a time, to keep in mind the importance of tempo. Time is a fourth dimension of freedom.

We must learn not to be too particularistic. We must curb our excessive individualism. We must not fragmentize our liberal forces. If we do that we will cease making these colossal blunders to our own hurt.

There is no reason under the sun why this great democracy of ours should not continue to flourish and bestow blessing untold upon us and upon those who are to follow us. The real threat of democracy did not come from its enemies. It is being written right here. It comes from friends who unconsciously become so weakened and enervated that sooner or later they surrender. It is this second form of rebellion that we ought to curb ourselves of.