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What is Europe Fighting for?, 1940.

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WHAT IS EUROPE FIGHTING FOR?
What Will Happen if France and England Lose the War?



By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, February 4, 1940

This war has been called by many names. Mussolini has called it an "absurd war" for it is a war which does not involve territorial gain. His war on Ethiopia and Albania was not an absurd war because it was motivated by the prospect of territorial loot. Others, too, have thought this war an "absurd war". Seemingly the Allied nations stumbled into it, not because they wanted the war. It was possibly true.

On the other hand, it is also true that the North and the South stumbled into the Civil War, neither side wanting it really, and that the real issue in the war - the preservation of the Union - was really not the ultimate issue, and Lincoln was ready to compromise, even as Chamberlain and Daladier had been compromising, on the ultimate issues which finally became the driving power behind this war.

Some have called it a "phoney war" because it was slow in getting started on the Western Front, and some people couldn't believe that men like Chamberlain and Daladier were responsible for "Munich" and for that entire policy of disastrous "appeasement" and were really in earnest about the war which they were finally forced to declare on Hitler's Reich because of his invasion of Poland. And that this was a "phoney war" was also popularized by some people in this country who were interested in defeating the effort which was being made to repeal the embargo on shipping goods and munitions to belligerents. They said there was need to change the Neutrality Laws because this was a "phoney war" and would not really last long.

Some have called this war an "imperialist war", particularly the Communists in Russia and their agents in Russia and elsewhere. They began to call this an imperialist war after the Nazi-Soviet pact was signed. Before

that time, the war on Hitler was a "Holy War". Before that time, the slogan was a united front against the Fascists and the Nazis. But as soon as the red dictator, Stalin, signed up with Hitler, then a war against the Nazis became an "imperialist war" and all those who sided with France and England were war mongers.

Others have called this war a "criminal war". That name is a favorite one among the Nazis. They call everyone and everything which crosses their purpose and interferes with their plans, "criminal". That is a favorite term. The Austrians who refused to be coordinated were "criminal". The Czechs who wished to retain their independence were also "criminal". The Poles who sought to save their country from invasion were, of course, "criminal". And so were the Communists before they swung into the orbit of the Reich's political interests. They were arch "criminals" not to speak of the Jews who, being born Jews, and who wanted to live on earth - for that crime they were "criminals". And now, the English and the French, because they finally called a halt to Nazi strangulation and bloody assassination of weaker nations - now the French and the English are arch "criminals" of all times. Here is this mission-dowered, Herrenrasse of the earth, the chosen and superior "volk" of all mankind - here they were getting along very nicely, smoothly and judiciously, creating for themselves a new order in Central Europe, giving to the German people such a spacious " " in other peoples' territories, and feeling their nation of warriors with such heart-warming and blood-less victories one after another - and now perfidious Albion must stick its nose in, interfere with its beautiful program - that mongrel race of degenerate Frenchmen! What criminals they must be! What war-mongers! And what aggressors! And, my good friends, this war is not now an "absurd war"

or a "phoney war", nor an "imperialist war", or a "criminal war". It is a tragic war whose full full tragic implications in terms of human suffering, cost and casualties, no one can fortell. It is an unnecessary war in the sense that it could have been averted. It could have been rendered un-necessary by a wiser and more generous statesmanship, by more courageous leadership in all the countries now at war. It is certainly an unwanted war, an unwelcome war everywhere. But unfortunately, taking into account the failure of Europe to recover economically and spiritually from the last war - this war was an inevitable one. The twenty years between the last war and this war were only twenty years of troubled truce and armistice. There never was peace in the world. The economic collapse of 1929 not merely in this country, but throughout the world paved the way for the triumph of Nazism in Germany, thereby adding a third dictatorship to the growing list of forces in Europe determined on radical economic and political change. That change might have come about peacefully, if the authority of the League of Nations had been preserved, but with the repudiation of that authority in 1932 by England and France in the case of Manchukuo. This repudiation served notice that the League of Nations had broken down and it was the "go" signal for these aggressor dictatorships.

What following since 1932 was the predictable relapse of Europe and Asia the pre-war imperialist adventures of the stronger nations on the part of the weaker nations, and that clamor for continental and colonial revisionism. This called for rapid rearmament, offensively on the part of the aggressor nations , defensively on the part of all others. And since that time, step by step, the nations of the earth have been led from one war-fraught situation to another, from one almost-fatal crisis to another.

It has led from one union to another until the inevitable took place, namely, a larger war involving the major powers of the world.

There is no point, of course, in dwelling at this late date on the mistakes made, or on what should or should not have been done, or on blaming this or that individual. It is far better to look ahead and see whether in reconstructing the world, when this war ends, whether it will be possible for men, for nations, for statesmen to avoid the tragic mistakes which gave us twenty years of troubled truce, and whether it will not be possible for us to build a wiser and juster world order.

When one discounts the immediate provocations of this war, when one looks at the basic factors which led irresistibly to this major war, one discovers two factors: one the collapse of the League of Nations; and secondly, the rise of totalitarian dictatorships in the world. The collapse of the League paved the way for aggression. The rise of totalitarian dictatorship provided the dynamics for aggression, the motive power for it.

If, after the close of this war, these two factors are not taken into consideration, this war, too, will have proved one of the most tragically futile in history. If, after this war, totalitarian dictatorship remains, or if an indeterminate peace is patched up, as some suspect and others advocate, then this war will again prove one of the most senseless and purposeless in history.

This is beginning to dawn upon the minds of the statesmen who were led into the war against their will, who blundered into it. For some years now some of us have been aware that this world cannot remain half free and half slave. From this pulpit this word has been repeated like a refrain: "The world cannot endure as long as Europe is divided into two ideological, hostile camps, in one democracy, freedom, rights of human beings, peace, and in the other dictatorship, suppression of all human liberties, war mongering, war

preparing, aggression and conquest. Would that the leaders of England and France had realized it years ago before they permitted these slave-states to grow so strong.

Yesterday, in his first public speech as secretary of state for war, Oliver Stanley of Great Britain stated: "Hitler's ideas challenge ours. His standards are set against our...one or the other must prevail. The world cannot survive half slave and half free, and we are determined that we shall be free."

Following this war, if the Allies win - and that is not at all certain - there must be first and foremost a re-affirmation of the inalienable rights of man, a new declaration of freedom for the individual, a new charter of human liberties which will for all times protect the individual human being against the tyranny of the state, the inalienable freedom of the individual, of the minority and of the nation. One cannot exist without the other.

There must be re-established on the continent of Europe and throughout the world the rule of law against the rule of men, and there must be constitutional guarantees which will tie the hands forever of would-be dictatorial saviors of mankind. In other words there must be the re-establishment in the world of civil liberty for all men regardless of race, creed, nationality. The world must return to thinking of a human being - his rights, his security, his dignity. That is the democratic liberal tradition.

That means that dictators must go. There can never be peace with dictatorship in the world because these dictators cannot live, and have no excuse for living in a peaceful world. They thrive only in a war motif. They are born out of conflict, and can survive in comfort only in war. Not a single democracy has endangered the peace of the world since the World War, but Italy has, and Japan has, and Germany has, and now Russia. That must be the first outcome of the war. Secondly, there must be a re-establishment of an

international organization for collective security. Whether it is to be an amended or re-organized League of Nations, which in my judgment is most logical, amended to make its procedure more dependable, speedier in its procedure, quicker to act in defense of weaker nations against stronger, less possibility for sabotage, to keep it from imposing military sanctions on nations, or whether it be a federation of Europe modelled after the pattern of the United States, or whether it be a federation of regional unions made up of nations who live in geographic proximity, and are economically inter-dependent, there must be set up some effective and implemented agency in the world to take the place of the present order of international anarchy, competitive armaments and imperialistic gangsterism.

The American people have been looking ahead. They have been talking a great deal and writing a great deal about the peace which is to follow this war. And round table discussions are being held in every large community in the United States. This is all very well. But the American people ought to bear in mind this one truth: that it cannot and dare not commit the same unpardonable sin which it committed twenty years ago when it sired and begot the League of Nations and then left it on the doorstep of Europe and cut and ran away. It is well to counsel Europe and to give good advice. They have plenty of that. What Europe needs is not for us to tell them what to do, but what Europe needs is for us to help them achieve that which is good and desirable in the world for them and for us. That is to say, we must be prepared to assume responsibility for any plan of international reconstruction and we must be ready to assume our share of the risks of war, or we should have the decency of keeping quiet altogether.

Recently there appeared in our press a rather bitter comment by an important Englishman in London. Let me read it to you. It is not very pleasant to receive this reproach, but unfortunately it is justified. He said in a speech

before the Press Club: "Let America do what she will about the war but for God's sake, don't let her have anything to do with the peace. The last time she left us with a large baby called the League of Nations.

"I understand that she now is engaged busily in dressing up its poor little corpse and calling it a federal union. I have no doubt that once again, after the war, she will pop off home the moment the child begins to yell. No, siree."

I am not advocating a messianic role of international savior for America, even of leadership for the American people, but I am advocating, and in all fairness to the position which we occupy in the world, a role of equal partner with all other nations in the responsible undertaking for collective security in the world - and that, my friends, is the inevitable idea in the world. There is no substitute. When you will have collective security - a strong international organization which will give all nations a sense of protection, when you will have provided the opportunities for the amicable discussions for an international conference, each nation confident that it can get justice at an impartial tribunal, the problem of armament will take care of itself. No nation wants to drain off the life blood of its people in this unremunerative machinery of war. That is one of the things that I should like the American people to learn.

When we assume to offer advice touching the peace which is to follow the war, let us remember that in so doing, we should be ready and willing, when the proper time comes, to assume our full share of the obligations and responsibilities involved in any scheme for international organization. If you don't want America to meddle in that terrible mess over there, if you feel that America can retain its freedom and security regardless of what happens over there, if you continue to repeat Washington's advice against entanglement with foreign nations forgetting that Washington was not averse to having thousands of

French soldiers help him to win the war, you ought not to presume to offer advice to the warring nations of Europe.

This other thing we ought to remember - that all these peace plans are valid only if the Allies win. The talk of a new international order based on peace, and to talk of collective security after a war in which the Nazis will emerge victorious is to utter unspeakable nonsense. Why the Nazis withdrew from the League as did all the totalitarian states. Russia was finally evicted from the League. These people hate and balk at the idea of world union. They are out to create a new world order to suit their own purposes and at the expense of other nations.

If England and France are defeated in this war and their Empires are destroyed, there will set in Europe a hundred years of international anarchy. There will be the bloodiest tooth and claw scramble for the rich spoils, and there will be a ravaging of countries and people by the surviving dictatorships who will then proceed to war among themselves for the spoils. I believe there will be such a bloody conflict and conquest for loot as mankind has not witnessed since the days of the collapse of the Roman Empire which was also brought about by the German barbarians.

All these lovers of peace, therefore, who in their laudable eagerness to preserve peace and to keep America out of war, who refuse to see anything in this war but just another struggle for war politics, and who maintain an attitude of utter indifference as to the outcome of the war, are in my judgment living in a world of tragic ~~illusion~~ illusion.

A German-Nazi victory will increase a hundred-fold, and repeat a hundred-fold the stress of the Nazi victory in Poland. A Nazi victory in this war will spell the doom peace, of law, of freedom, of human decencies in the world for centuries to come.

There are some peace-loving souls in this country who indulge themselves in a delightful attitude of absolute neutrality, of being indifferent to what is going on abroad, but who secretly, in their heart of hearts hope for an Allied victory. But we ought to be honest with ourselves, we ought to face the real issues. What if the Allies do not win?

Therefore, in my humble judgment, the proper attitude of all lovers of civilization in these critical times - I mean for Americans who love America and love the things for which America stands - the proper attitude in this grave hour of decision, give those who is to fight for the things we believe in, for our way of life - all maximum support short of war. Then when victory does fall to the Allies, we shall then cooperate in helping to build a better order.

It does not follow, and I would not have you assume that a victory of the Allies will automatically insure a better world order. It didn't in 1918. But a victory of the Allies may pave the way, may offer another opportunity for mankind to try again to do better and more enduringly that which they tried to do less successfully following the first world war. Peace must not be a vindictive peace. It must express itself in international organization which will make the rise of dictators forever impossible, and the role of aggressor dictatorships forever impossible for Europe.

In other words there must come the defeat of the Nazis - the Prussians - for that is another name for the same barbarians responsible for the first World War.

People have said that the Nazis government must not be overthrown because if it is, then Germany will go Communist, and that argument has been used to make the Nazis secure in every crime which they committed in the last six years. When they invaded Austria, when they invaded Czecho-slovakia,

argument was heard. Do nothing to undermine the power of the Nazis in Germany, because if they go, Germany will become Communist. In my humble judgment a Communist Germany would be far preferable to a Nazi Germany, and far less of a menace to the peace of the world than a Nazi Germany. But it does not follow that Germany will go Communist. A defeat of the Allies will do far more for the spread of Communism in the world than a defeat of the Nazis.

What is Europe fighting for? The soldiers that fought in the Civil War didn't know at first what they were fighting for, and many statesmen including Abraham Lincoln thought they were fighting for the preservation of the Union...As the War went on and the sacrifices increased, men began to see more clearly what it was all about. And as a result of the war, as an indirect result of the war, there came about the emancipation of the slaves. This present war was not entered into for idealistic purposes. Interests today are not clear in the eyes of warring nations. But as the war will carry on and the sacrifices of human beings will increase, and as more eyes become washed by tears, we will begin to see more clearly, there will emerge crystal clear the one goal which alone can sanctify or justify such a final crushing of barbarism, medievalism, of brutality in the heart of Europe and the resumption of that great tradition of human liberties which was proclaimed long ago, that man is created in the image of God, all men are equal, and all men should be brothers.

ABSTRACT OF ADDRESS DELIVERED BY DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER AT THE TEMPLE,
ANSEL ROAD AND EAST 105TH STREET ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1940

WHAT IS EUROPE FIGHTING FOR?

This is neither an "absurd war", a "phoney war", an "imperialist war", nor a "criminal war". It is a tragic war whose full toll of human suffering no one can foretell. It could have been averted by wiser and more generous statesmanship or more courageous leadership in all the countries now at war. But lacking that, it was an inevitable war.

After discounting the immediate provocations of this war, one finds two basic factors which made it inevitable: the collapse of the League of Nations and the rights of totalitarian dictatorships. The first cleared the way for aggression. The second provided the dynamics.

If, after the war, totalitarian dictatorships remain, or if an indeterminate peace is patched up, as some suspect and others advocate, this war will again prove one of the most senseless and futile in history. It has finally dawned upon the responsible statesmen in the democratic countries of Europe that dictatorship is not an "internal affair" merely, and that Europe cannot permanently remain half free states and half slave states.

Following this war there must be a universal reaffirmation of the rights of man, a new charter of inalienable human liberties. The interdependent freedom of individuals, minorities and nations, and government by law rather than government by man must be re-established.

There will never be peace as long as dictators control the destinies of great nations. These dictators can not live - have no excuse for living - in a peaceful world. They are born out of conflict and they can survive only in conflict and conquest.

Following this war there must be a new international organization for collective security. Whether it be an amended League of Nations which, in my judgment, is the most logical, amended to make its procedure more dependable, swifter and less amenable to sabotage, or whether it be a federation of Europe modelled after the pattern of the United States, or a federation of regional unions made up of nations who live in geographic proximity, and are economically inter-depedent, there must be set up some effective and implemented agency in the world to take the place of the present order of international anarchy, competitive armaments and imperialistic gangsterism.

This international order must insure the exploitation of all colonies first and foremost in the interest of their own inhabitants, and must insure free access for all nations to their raw materials.

The American people have been talking and writing about the peace which is to follow this war. Round table discussions are popular in American cities, and many plans are devised for the salvation of Europe. But let us not comm it the same unpardonable act of twenty years ago when we sired and begot a League of Nations and left it on the doorstep of Europe. Europe has plenty of good plans. They do not need us to tell them what is good and desirable. They need us to help them achieve what is good and desirable for them and for us. If we are not ready to assume responsibility, a share in the burdens and the risks in any plan of international reconstruction, we ought to have the grace of keeping quiet.

I am not advocating a messianic role of international savior for America, but the assumption of the obligation of an equal partner with all other nations in responsible undertakings for collective security.

The American people should also remember that all the peace plans which are being discussed by them have a chance only if England and France win this war.

To talk of collective security and of a new world order based on law and the freedom of men, and of nations, following a war in which the Nazis will be victorious, is to utter unspeakable nonsense. The Nazis are out to create new world orders to suit themselves, and at the expense of other nations. They hate and scoff at the idea of a world organization under law and in freedom.

If England and France are defeated in this war and their empires are destroyed, there will set in the bloodiest tooth-and-claw scramble for the rich spoils on the part of surviving dictatorships, and a ravaging of countries and peoples such as mankind has not witnessed since the days following the collapse of the Roman Empire which was also overthrown by German barbarians. A Nazi victory will do for Western Europe what a Nazi victory has done for Poland. It will spell the doom of peace, law and freedom in the world for a hundred years to come. To be sure, France and England blundered into the war. So did the North and South in the Civil War. The real issues then and now were not the ultimate issues, but as war progresses, the ultimate issues assert themselves.

The lovers of peace in our country who in their laudable desire to keep America out of war, refuse to see anything more in this war than another struggle of power politics and who maintain an attitude of utter indifference as to the outcome of the war, ^{are} ~~will~~ in my judgment, living in a world of tragic illusions. I know that some of these good people secretly expect and hope for an allied victory, but keep their public record for idealism~~ism~~ and pacifism straight by not expressing any preference. They would like to eat the cake of neutrality and at the same time enjoy the confidence of an allied victory. But in this grave hour, people must be more forthright and consistent in their thinking.

An allied victory will not automatically insure a new and better world order. The mistakes which were made after the last war may be repeated again. But only

an Allied victory can offer mankind the opportunity to try again to do more wisely and more enduringly that which it did less successfully twenty years ago.

But first and foremost must come the defeat of the Nazis - of Prussianism, - of that military barbarism which has plagued Europe for generations. The fear of a possible spread of Communism in Germany following the defeat of the Nazis has been exploited by the Nazis to perpetrate one international crime after another in the heart of Europe. It does not follow that a Communist regime will succeed a Nazi regime in Germany, and one can not imagine that a Communist Germany would be a greater menace to the people of Europe than a Nazi Germany has been.

