



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
159

Box
57

Folder
645

What to do about strikes, 1941.

1) Country largely concerned abt strikes -

Captive coal mine strike of a few days ago - for the moment ended with issue still unresolved - served to heighten public concern and to dramatize situation.

The threatened rail strike is likewise disturbing the Am. people. In normal times such dislocations would be very grave. In these abnormal times they are alarming.

And these are abnormal times. A state of nat. emergency has been declared. In a world at war we have officially taken sides. We have abandoned neutrality. We have thus committed our actors pledged aid to the utmost to nations fighting the Axis. Those nations - G.B., Soviet - China - hard-pressed, are carrying on fight - relying upon this aid. ^(- Allies -) In the process of conveying our military material - our ships are being fired on - our sailors killed. Our navy is already fighting in the Atlantic - what else can you call it? In the Orient - Japan may at any moment resolve to force us into a Pacific war. Am. is at the crossroads of her destiny. We must be strong and strongly armed for our own sake - & for the sake of a free world. Total defence is our answer to the Total War; and Production is the key to Total defence. More and more ships - planes - tanks - guns - more & more of everything - is our way of salvation as a great, free and independent people.

The Am. people is keenly aware of all this - is sharpening itself to the utmost to build up its defence & those of its allies as powerfully and as rapidly as possible. For time is, the essence. Defence activities now claim the right of way in business and industry. Many normal econ. activities are curtailed or discontinued. Credit is re-directed and channelled into war-production. Men are dislodged from their customary trades & livelihoods to be absorbed in defence work or not to be absorbed. Heavy taxes are being imposed and a staggering nat. debt is being incurred.

2

The Am. people ^{are} ~~is~~ willing to pay the price - ^{they} ~~it~~ regards the price not too high for the liberties which they wish to save for themselves, children and mankind. They know that they will be asked to make even greater sacrifices in the future - for they suspect that the present ~~world~~ - war will be long and extremely costly. They have ~~been~~ ^{been} ~~unconvinced~~ to have their ~~sons~~ ^{sons} conscripted into military service. They will consent, if the need should arise, to send them into war.

They are ^{deliberately} ~~extremely~~ worried about strikes in defense work. ^{stopping} ~~stopping~~ the wheels of production, deliberately shutting down plants, mines, shipyards, munition works, air-plane factories, at a time when every ^{hand} ~~working~~ ^{man} and every machine is ^{needed} ~~absolutely~~ ^{needed} ~~needed~~ ^{needed} to work at maximum speed & max. efficiency - is ~~to~~ by them regarded as ^{akin to} ~~sabotage~~ ^{sabotage} - as ^{if} ~~stopping~~ ^{stopping} the whole war-effort. They have become extremely impatient with these strikes - and their anger is mounting.

Especially when they discover that many of the strikes are caused by jurisdictional disputes within labor org. and bet. labor unions - disputes which have nothing to do with improving the conditions of labor, with wages, but ^{even} the right to organize - but with strife bet. ~~G.F.~~ craft-unions and industrial union - bet. the A.F.L. & the C.I.O.

Or when they discover that the ^{recommendations} ~~findings~~ of an impartial Mediation Board set up by the govt to help iron out disputes bet. labor and management, are accepted when the record is in their favor and are rejected when they run against them - as was the case with Mr. Lewis and the capture unions. The C.I.O. members walked out as the Mediation Board and Mr. Lewis called the strike. Or as in the case with the Railway unions which have rejected the pay union recommendations, the Pres' emergency part-time Board called for by the Railway Labor Act.

Or when they are confronted by wild-cat strikes, ^{called} in defiance of their ^{own} ~~Gum's~~ officials, for no more or reasons. (3)

No wonder that "Fortune" poll - 2 out of ever 3 - believe govt should prohibit strikes in defence industries.

No wonder - in press - clamor for anti-strike legislation -

And in Congress such leg. is actually being drafted.

There is developing an hysterical hostility towards strikes which might result not only in drastic anti-strike legislation but which carry over into other anti-labor moves.

Not all who are behind this clamor are disinterested, public-spirited citizens who are thinking exclusively of their country & of winning the war for freedom.

Many professional anti-labor indiv. groups - ^{political} ~~economic~~ enemies of org. labor, of collective bargaining, of social security - have joined the line and cry - are doing their best to whip it up - and are helping to capitalize on the situation to crack down on labor generally.

2) Take the case of the Captive mines and Mr. Lewis.

L. deserves the criticism levelled at him. He should not have defied the Pres. He should not have planted the findings, the Med. Board. He was guilty of bad labor strategy, of short-sightedness. The task of a leader is to know when to drive full steam ahead, and when to apply the brakes. A desperate hour of nat. emergency is not the time to attempt to drive through a union-shop agreement when 90% of the men involved ^{in these mines} were already members, the union. He was carrying on his bus. as usual, failing to understand that no other was bus. being carried on as usual any more. Opposed to the war policy, the admin. & to the chief of the union - he refused to face the implications of the emergency created by that war policy.

But are the owners without blame? Why should not their mines be completely unmuzzed and covered by the same Appalachian way agreement which covers all other mines - and which was approved by the Nat. Defense Mechanism Board? Have they not exploited the same nat. emergency to win sympathy for their resistance to that agreement?

3). To meet the stark situation - which is real and extremely grave - the Am. people, their legislators and those who form public opinion, should approach it not with heat or prejudice, or with doctrinaire slogans and catch words. They will not achieve the goal:

We want & need a united people. We don't ^{to antagonize} ~~to antagonize~~ labor. Without its whole-hearted support the war will not be won. Any law which labor will interpret as an attack upon its rights will meet in sullen hostility. ~~For~~ It is clear that while you can prohibit strikes - you cannot prevent them - if labor feels wronged. And while army bayonets may clear the picket line - they will not dig the coal. We will ^{legislators} ~~build~~ rivet the armor plate & build the tanks.

Labor is anti-Hitler. Labor is the bulwark of anti-H. in England - which cannot be said of many other sections of England. Mr. Labor (read out the Chamberlain ^{Conservatives pleased with growth, no g. reg. inc - appointed H. PM - Conservatives destroyed France the day they} ~~gave up~~ ^{of appeasement} ~~the~~ ^{Key} ~~econ. post in Churchill's cabinet as in hands~~ ^{of British labor} ~~They know what is at stake - they may lose. They know that a Nazi - Tor. Victory spells the doom of free labor and of Trade Unionism. Mr. Labor is England's guarantee that G.B. will not succumb to a negotiated Peace with H.~~

Am. labor is rapidly coming to understand it too. It stands solidly behind Mr. R's foreign policy - which cannot be said of all or of most individuals & lab. men - many

5
whom hate R. This foreign policy and would not be anxious to do
my business with it. - The strong holds, Anti-Reg. Trade-Fas. in
our country are not the Chamber, Com. or the Union clubs,
any more & strongholds & anti-dictatorship are among the com. courts.

Am. Labor wants Hitler ruled, and will do all it can to
accomplish it. It has frequently gotten in its own way, obstructed
its own course, ^{without fully seeing the} unwittingly sabotaged its own ^{efforts}. More
& more it has been misled. What is called for is not positive
measures or restrictive formal legislation, but statesmanship
which will use this very earnest wish, Labor to defeat their
deadliest foe to win from the machinery of concentration, mechanization
and arbitration ^{in order} to prevent industrial peace and make possible
maximum war production for duration of war.

England has approximated a solution. Strikes have been out-
lawed in E. but not by ^{in force of law} a statute. Early last
year the Ministers & Labor approved a Com.-ref. c.g. Labor, Management
& the public. - to study this problem of which is relat. to nat
emergency. England was in danger. Strikes only increased that
danger. The com. mit - 3 groups of equal standing, upon study.
And they arrived unanimously at an agreement, a
statement of Industrial Policy for the duration of war.

- (1) No stoppage (2) Should any dispute arise, this-
conditions existing Trade Councils in each industry - settles
- (3) If they fail - dispute referred to a Nat. Arbitration
Council - whose decisions are binding.

It was only after this agreement was voluntarily & unanimously reached by Com - that Ernest Bevin - issued a special order which gave effect to this agreement. Strikes were thus banned by agreement - machinery perfected for adjustment of differences + ~~and~~

Strikes have occurred in spite of it - but little consequence - No. of workers involved + work-days lost ^{or the E. is actually at his} inconsequential And, the possessed, the legal right to launch strikes - Gail has never done so. It is too wise a point!

4) E. could do it more easily than we.

E. labor ~~unit~~ is far more largely org. - 6 1/4 M. altho. its white pop. is 1/3 of U.S.

~~the~~ E. is not plagued with organizational struggles, That is in the distant past.

We are paying in labor troubles in an actual loss for an failure to organize labor earlier + more completely

only 1936-7 - C.I.O. - heavy industry - (Ford) large section still
Collective Bargaining is accomplished & universally accepted fact in Eng. the more it is done - the more contentious place!

E. labor is more mature - more responsible. We are paying the price for our labor immaturity.

Most, the Unions / B. are in the Trade Union Congress

No split - No pin in between strikes.

5) Our Task is thus much more difficult - but not impossible.

No Anti-Strike legislation ^(without labor consent) The right to strike is a corner-
stone of democ. Dictatorships abolish it first! Afterwards they
abolish other rights as well. Even as they abolish Collective Barg.

No compulsory power to the Mediation Board
No compulsory arbitration - without labor consent

I note that Nat. Ass. of Man. - also opposes it. Wise men!

For ~~the~~ ^{compulsion} is opposed both to Trade Unionism
and private capitalism. It belongs to a diff. type of econ. &
system - the totalitarian ^{rather} ~~not~~ the liberal democratic. As long
as state acts only to bring groups together - to give its good
offices of mediation, to provide bases for agreement - it is a
democ. state. ^{as soon as it compels compliance with proposed}
^{govt. fixes wages & working conditions} ~~voluntarily~~ ^{neither} capital nor labor is any longer free - & the
state is launched on a total. course -

It is a diff. matter entirely when both sides volunt.
accept the offer of arbitration & vol. agree to abide by
its decision. This is the privilege of free men & free
org - & is often the highest form of wisdom & statesmanship.
This is self-discipline which makes for highest form of
democ. life.

Be it borne in mind - however - that when you
go to the Board - even tho its findings are not mandatory - a enforceable order -
there is a moral obligation to accept it - ~~that is a moral obligation~~ ^{that is a moral obligation} ~~to accept it~~ ^{to accept it} ~~that is a moral obligation~~ ^{that is a moral obligation}
6) Nor should there be a freezing of status quo - ^{that is a moral obligation} ~~that is a moral obligation~~ ^{that is a moral obligation}
Labor's progress towards unionization ^{should not be checked} ~~should not be checked~~ ^{should not be checked}
during emergency - Right to work in ^{higher level} ~~higher level~~ ^{higher level}
"No reason to suspend them ^{they keep way of expression} ~~they keep way of expression~~ ^{they keep way of expression}
Sacrifice to days rights for future benefits"
Unionization is no interference with reference program.
Rival unionization - leading to divided loyalties - banned by

lab - a line! - Divide the territory - at best for various circles - next to reckoning it is
blackest blot of ag. Am. labor. -

Even those who oppose - could be easily overruled to out-
lawy, this form, skull - it is no skull at all - a dog-
fight bet. labor unions - and industry - public or with the
unwarranted return -

Minimum state com-
pulsion - not to endanger
the very thing - fighting for -
a free society.
Unanimous.

7) Here then is - what is indicated -

A Com. ^{to propose} ~~to decide~~ ^{Displacement of} ~~Industrial Policy~~ -

- ^{Not to resort to strikes - emergency but further conciliation - negot. bet. labor management}
① ~~Stoppage~~ ^{at least 60 day cooling off period - to permit}
^{Constitution by labor dept.}
④ ~~Mediation Board~~ ^{to work} - a compulsory waiting period.
^(ref. labor relations act)
③ Voluntary Arbitration - findings binding

8. Appeal to Statesmanship - Government - Labor - Public

Erasmus Saunders - all must yield something not to lose
all. We cannot fight each other while we are fighting Hitler.

Appeal to labor not to jeopardize its world - its gains of the
past - ^{① Right to org. ② Bargain w/ ③ Strike ④ Picket} its future certain progress - by rockets, intimidation,
a penny-wise - pound-foolishness - settlers leaders in this hour when the
very life of a free society is at stake.

Here calls not for a John Lewis - Samuel Jones

- WHAT TO DO ABOUT STRIKES -

The American people are extremely worried about strikes in defense industries. The deliberate stoppage of the wheels of production at a time when every hand and every machine is needed to produce at maximum speed and efficiency is regarded as something akin to sabotage, as if some men were deliberately torpedoing the whole war effort. The anger of the American people is mounting. Especially when they discover that many of the strikes are caused by jurisdictional disputes which have nothing to do with improving the conditions of labor, or when they discover that the recommendations of ^{an} impartial Mediation Board set up by our government to iron out disputes are accepted when those recommendations favor labor and are rejected by labor when they do not.

There is developing in this country an hysterical hostility towards strikes which might result not only in drastic anti-strike legislation but which might carry over into other anti-Labor moves. Not all who are behind this clamor are distinterested ~~in~~ public-spirited citizens who are thinking exclusively of their country or of winning the war for freedom. Many professional anti-Labor individuals and groups, the traditional enemies of ~~organized~~ organized labor, collective bargaining and social security have joined the hue and cry, are doing their best to whip it up and are helping to capitalize upon the situation to crack down on labor generally.

To meet the very real and serious strike situation, the American people, their legislators, and those who form public opinion should approach it not with heat or prejudice or with slogans and catch-words. These will not achieve the desired end.

We need a united people. We cannot antagonize and alienate labor.

Without the whole-hearted support of labor, the war will not be won. Any legislation which labor will interpret as an attack upon its rights will only result in sullen hostility. You can prohibit strikes but the mere prohibition will not prevent them. You might put the strikers in jail, but they are needed not in the jails, but at their work benches. Army bayonets may clear the picket line, but they will not rivet the armor plates, or build the tanks and guns.

Labor is anti-Hitler. In England it is labor which is the bulwark of the war against the Nazis. It was British labor which forced out the Chamberlain appeasement crowd. It is British labor which is standing four-square against a negotiated peace with Hitler. They understand that a Nazi-Fascist victory ~~xxxx~~ spells the doom of free labor and trade unionism.

American labor is rapidly coming to understand it too. It stands solidly behind President Roosevelt's foreign policy. This cannot be said of all industrialists and businessmen, many of whom hate Roosevelt and his foreign policy, and would not be averse to doing business with Hitler. American labor wants Hitlerism destroyed and will do all it can to accomplish it. Because of poor leadership in some instances, because of its general immaturity, it has frequently gotten in its own way, obstructed its own course, and without fully sensing the danger, unwittingly sabotaged its own war efforts. What is called for is not punitive measures, or restrictive measures, but statesmanship of a high order which will use this earnest resolve of labor to defeat their deadliest foe -- Hitlerism,--to perfect the machinery of conciliation, mediation and arbitration.

England approximated such a solution. Strikes have been banned in England, but not by a fiat of Parliament in the face of labor opposition.

When the dangers of war became imminent, a Committee appointed by the Ministry of Labor, representing organized labor, management, and the public, was appointed to work out an industrial policy for the duration of the war. A unanimous agreement was reached voluntarily in ~~manchester~~ conference which has kept the industrial peace of England. They agreed that there be no stoppage of work during the emergency, that all disputes should be referred to the existing trade councils in each industry, and if unresolved, they were to be referred to a national arbitration council whose decisions would be binding. It was only after this agreement was voluntarily and unanimously reached by the committee that the Ministry of Labor issued a special order which gave effect to it. Strikes have occurred in England even since this agreement but both as regards the numbers of workers involved and the working days lost they have been inconsequential. The government, though possessed of the right to punish such strikers, has been too wise to do so.

Great Britain's labor problem was easier than ours. Labor there is more largely organized. Organizational strikes are a thing of the past. We in America are paying today in labor troubles for our failure to organize labor earlier and more completely. Most unions in Great Britain are members of the Trades Union Congress. There is no serious split in the ranks of labor, and there are no jurisdictional strikes.

Our task is much more difficult, but not impossible. The solution does not lie in anti-strike legislation nor in compulsory arbitration. I note that the National Association of Manufacturers is also opposed to compulsory arbitration, and properly so. Such economic compulsion is opposed both to trade unionism and to private capitalism. It belongs to a different type of political and economic system. As long as the state acts only to bring capital and management together, to offer its good services of mediation and

to provide acceptable bases of agreement, it is within the democratic tradition. As soon as it compels compliance with its own proposed solution, neither management nor labor is any longer free.

It is ^adifferent matter altogether when both sides voluntarily accept the offer of arbitration and voluntarily agree to abide by the decision. This is the privilege of free men and of free organizations of men. It is the highest form of wisdom and statesmanship. This is self-discipline which alone will insure the survival of our democratic way of life.

Nor does the solution lie in freezing the status quo with reference to the open, the union, or the closed shop. Labor's progress towards unionization should not be suspended during the emergency. Unionization need not interfere with the defense program, if management will ~~accept~~ ^{accept} not only the inevitability but the desirability of organizing American labor, and of collective bargaining.

Labor should call a halt to the jurisdictional strikes. Next to racketeering by the few irresponsible labor gangsters, the ~~jurisdictional~~ jurisdictional strike is the blackest spot on American labor. At least for the duration of the emergency, the C.I.O. and the A. F. of L. ought to agree upon a division of their organizational territory. Even those who oppose anti-strike legislation could be easily won over to agree to an outlawry of this form of strike which is no strike at all, but a dog-fight between labor unions, with industry and the public as the innocent victims.

What is called for today is a commission representing labor, management, and the public, to meet and draft a declaration of industrial policy applicable to the entire American scene for the duration of the war. This policy should include a commitment on the part of management faithfully to carry out the letter and spirit of the National Labor Relations Act which gives legal sanction to unionization and collective bargaining. Labor should agree not to resort to strikes until after every avenue of negotiation, conciliation and mediation has been thoroughly explored. When labor and

management fail to agree, a reasonable waiting period should be permitted during which the Labor Department and the Mediation Board shall have opportunity to try to bring about an agreement. If this fails, labor and ~~xxxxx~~ management should agree to voluntary arbitration, whose findings shall be binding upon both of them.

We have entered an era of sacrifice. All must yield something in order not to lose all. We cannot jeopardize its world, its gains in the past and its certain progress in the future by rashness, intransigence, and penny-wise pound-foolishness.

