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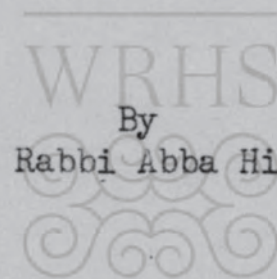
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Some impressions of the Washington scene, 1944.

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SOME IMPRESSIONS OF THE WASHINGTON SCENE



By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver



At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, February 13, 1944

In the last few months I have spent considerable time in the City of Washington, the capital of our country. In a real sense it is not only the capital of the United States. The eyes of the entire world are upon it. The decisions which are made there today, in that city on the Potomac, may affect the lives and the fortunes of the people on the outermost rims of the earth. Every human problem, every problem revolving around the reconstruction of the world after the war, all problems of national rehabilitation, relief, sooner or later, are channeled through the city of Washington. And when one stands on one of the hills overlooking the city, from the high steps of one of its monumental buildings, one is inclined to repeat the silent prayer that the pilgrims repeated when they stood on one of the hills overlooking the ancient city of Jerusalem: "Pray ye for the people of Jerusalem. May they prosper all."

Washington today is, of course, a very crowded city. It has been said that it has doubled in population due to the war. It is said to be a city of almost a million. And this rapid increase in population has of course created for the city numerous problems in transportation, housing, recreation. It is not an easy city in which to live today. It is the very nerve center of the whole vast war effort of our country, with its countless and bewildering departments, Army, Navy, Airforce, War Production, Political Warfare, Civilian Mobilization. Washington is a city of war.

And everywhere one sees men and women in uniform. And yet it is not a militarized city by any means. The dominant note of Washington is not a martial note. The capital of the United States has fortunately retained its civilian character. Its mood and quality of life is definitely that of a lay-democracy.

It is a beautiful city growing in charm and stateliness. Monumental structures are increasing almost month by month, adding to the splendor of the city. Constitution Avenue and Pennsylvania Avenue are, block after block glorious with imposing classic structures. One stands in lost admiration, almost with a

feeling of awe before the new structures built in recent months and years -- the Jefferson monument, the Mellon National Museum, the new Supreme Court/^{building} of the United States are excellent examples of classic architecture.

And yet Washington is not an over-powering city. It is not a seething industrial metropolis with towering sky-scrapers. There is no studied effort on the part of the city to be smart, or polished, or ultra-modern, or over-bearing, or cosmopolitan. There is much that is pleasant, provincial about Washington -- homespun, much that one associates with any average American City in the North, South, Midwest, or with native American ways of life.

It is, of course, a very tense and busy city today, as you may well imagine, a population working under pressure. Its life is taught with a sense of emergency.

Everyone who goes to Washington goes to Washington, or who is summoned there goes there to do something of lesser or greater importance, something related to the war effort. And to that end everything has to be speeded up and speeded up within a complex of departments or bureaucratic procedure, which frequently gets in the way and tangles things up pretty badly.

The demands of war-time tempo and ^{the} customary peace-time way of doing things frequently come into conflict with one another. Many projects undertaken of enormous, colossal size, important and critical in the world have to be done, accomplished in the quickest possible time. Many mistakes are accordingly made. Much duplication is in evidence. There is much wasted manpower, money. And it is of course perfectly proper and salutary to criticize these mistakes, duplications, wastefulness. That criticism is the very safety valve of the democratic way of life, the only way known way to . But one should not lose his sense of proportion in these critical scene.

The job of running the war, getting out production, of putting armies of millions of men in the ^{battle-}fields on all the continents of the world, of putting our

navies on the seven seas, and of putting air fleets in all the skies -- this stupendous job is being done. No government has ever had such a job on its hands of such gigantic proportions. This job, in spite of all the blunders and red-
and costly mistakes
tape, is being done. One ought not to overlook the quiet, painstaking, efficient devoted labors of the tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of men and women in the thousands of offices and bureaus and laboratories in Washington, the work of engineers, scientific experts, economists, experts and political advisors - that is what will make possible the coming victory for us and the United Nations.

Everybody who wants something, goes to Washing. Foreign Governments have there not only their vast Embassies or Ministries, but because of the war they have their added staffs and increased number of agents. Each government carries on vigorous activities -- political, economic, otherwise on its own behalf, to serve its own interests. And these interests, as you may well, understand are of interest to other governments.

The city is full of representatives of all kinds, of pressure-groups, lobbyists, of people or groups asking some special concession or preferential treatment.

Very few of these groups are really unpatriotic. They love their country and are one hundred percent for the war-effort. But each group somehow feels that the war effort would not be hurt if a little extra gain is accrued to its members, or if its members were taxed a little less, or if they were allowed to charge a little more. That is all they want. Each cause has its spokesman in Washington and every movement has its representative or headquarters there.

In the midst of this city of strain and feverish activity, there is also at work the Congress of the United States, the Legislative branch of our government. Now Congress is frequently criticized, blamed sometimes sharply, bitterly, depending on the laws which it enacts or doesn't enact, and the people who favor or disapprove of them. Some are inclined to be rather offhand and supercilious about the Congress of the United States, inclined to write off the members of Congress as

incompetent or worse. I, for one, cannot concur in such a generalization. There are, of course, among the hundreds of men in the House and Senate some legislators who are incompetent and who are unworthy, and there are a few who are really dangerous demagogues. But it is also true that the legislative procedure, the day by day fashioning of the law of our country is not always a glamorous affair, does not always match our conception of a vital democracy, its political partisanship, its machine politics. The kitchen where the food is prepared is not always an appetizing place, nor is the food which is prepared there always wholesome. But when one steps into the House or Senate and sits down and watches the apparent informality about it all, and when one has to listen at times to speeches that are neither inspired nor well-informed, one is inclined to become a little disheartened about it all. But here again one must not overlook, one must not lose sight of his perspective, one must never lose sight of that dome of the capitol against the sky which has symbolized one hundred and fifty years of government, of a free and democratic people. A Congress which is made of incompetents could not have carried through this great nation through all the triumphs and ordeals and political tension these many years to preserve this great and free country.

Most of our legislators, both in the House and in the Senate are patriotic and hard working and conscientious men. Some of them are extremely able, extremely well informed and public-spirited. It is not always easy for men in charged with the serious responsibility for making laws of the country to know what is the best policy, where decisions carry with them such enormous consequences. But the majority would never knowingly sacrifice the best interests of their country. After all is said and done, they, the legislators in Washington, reflect the American people, all of our own strength and all of our own weaknesses. And we are not all angels.

At the moment, the Congress of the United States is moving quite definitely toward the Right, not only the members of the Republican Party, but also the Southern members of the Democratic Party are anti-New Deal, so much so that the Democratic Party would like to disencumber itself of that label - New Deal - which was their battle cry only a few years ago.

On nearly all items of legislation involving the mood and temper of the New Deal, the conservatives Democrat will be found voting with the Republican -- on the food subsidy at the moment, on the Federal ballot for soldiers, on labor legislation, on taxes. And it is of interest and worthy of some consideration that while Great Britain and Canada are moving toward the Left during these war years, our country is moving toward the Right.

In the last few months, while I was in Washington off and on, the Food Subsidy Bill has been the subject of rather bitter debate. The powerful agricultural bloc wants the farmers to be able to sell their produce in a free market, a free market which means that under conditions of war there would be a sharp increase in the price of food. If food prices go up, real wages come down. This in turn must lead to increased pressure on the part of organized labor for wage increases. Thus the inflationary cycle is about to be put in motion. Were the farmer an underprivileged earner in these United States there would perhaps be some justification for this attack on the Food Subsidy Bill. But the facts are that the farmer has fared very well in the last year: Joseph F. Davis, director of of Stanford University the Food Institute/recently declared: "Per person on farms, the 1943 net income from agriculture received by persons on farms is estimated nearly three times what it averaged in 1935-36, when, I repeat, income parity as officially defined was reached... If banks, railways, public utilities, industrial corporation or organized labor were to claim that such treatment of them was just and desirable, farmers could ~~howl~~ howl to high heaven in protest."

The soldier vote has been a subject of intense discussion during recent weeks in Washington. The Republicans do not want a Federal ballot, that is to say,

most of them, and some of the Southern Democrats. The Republicans do not want it presumably on the basis of fear. They fear that the soldiers, voting through the Federal Ballot, would vote for President Roosevelt if he runs for a fourth term. Some of the southern Democrats are opposed to it vehemently because they are afraid that the negro will have a chance to vote -- through the poll tax and other forms of state legislation they can devise ways to deny the negro voter his constitutional rights. The issue of state rights has been raised as a cloak to camouflage the real issue. President Roosevelt spoke up recently and said that the state right issue invoked in this issue is a fraud on the soldiers.

The attitude of the present Congress toward Labor is also not in sympathy with the New Deal attitude. Most of the members of the present Congress would like to prohibit strikes and keep wages frozen. That wouldn't be bad. But they would let agricultural prices zoom as high as they can and war profits as large as they can with taxes held down as low as possible. These conflicting lines make the present attitude toward labor a very confusing and dubious and insincere attitude. But compromises are likely to be worked out which will not give everyone what he hopes for, but will perhaps keep things on an even keel for the duration of the war.

I have been greatly interested in the official attitude in recent months towards problems which concern me a great deal, problems which affect the destiny of the Jewish people in many parts of the world. I had been, as so many others, rather dissatisfied with the attitude of official Washington towards the very grave and serious Jewish problem which the war created, not that Washington was hostile. Not at all. But that Washington was content to do as little as possible about it. There was the danger of the terrible Jewish needs being lost in the shuffle, as it were, being overlooked. We had been receiving sweet and comforting words for a few years now from many high officials in the capital of our country. But little of a positive nature was done to help our refugees, to help some of them

escape from the hells of Europe. One conference after another was held while our people were drowned ^{in a} sea of blood and tens of thousands of them were foully put to death ~~and~~ systematically and ruthlessly, while our government ^{through} other Great Governments were content to express deep regret and to do little or nothing about it.

But, under pressure of public opinion, I am happy to say that a change has come over official Washington. Recently a War Refugee Board was created by the President of the United States, headed off by the Secretary of War, the Treasurer of the State Department, charged with the responsibility to do, and as quickly as possible, to rescue as many as can be rescue from Hitler's mass annihilation program. This War Refugee Board has gotten under way. It hopes to contact the underground movements in Nazi and Nazi Satellite countries of Europe to see how many doomed people can be smuggled out safely. It hopes to set up refugee centers for those who can be evacuated. It is on the alert now to do something - as was not the case all through these years of war. We were led to believe that great things were being done. Great things were not done. In fact the unfortunate statement recently made by Breckenridge Long which was calculated to give the impression that the United States had done enormous things for refugees in Nazi turned out, upon close scrutiny, the very reverse -- that tens of thousands of refugees could have come to the United States under the existing laws but because of red tape were denied that sanctuary and refuge.

When our troops~~x~~ landed in No. Africa, in Algeria, it was discovered that the Jews had been deprived of their French citizenship which had been given to them seventy-five years ago by Cremieux and which the Vichy Government abrogated. You would think that our Government would, under the stars and stripes, see to it that no discriminatory laws were enacted. That wasn't the case at all. All kinds of reasons were given why nothing should be done -- military considerations, fear of starting up Arabs. Only after persistent pressure not merely on our part, but on the part of the Free French, the Cremieux Law was re-instated. Rights of citizenship

were restored to the Jews of Algeria. There were no Arab uprisings. There wasn't a peep out of them.

Similarly with reference to Palestine, our Government has followed in recent years, a policy of collaborating, unofficially, of course, with the attitude of the Colonial Office with reference to Palestine -- nothing to disturb the status quo with regard to the White Paper -- because any attempt to do something about it would arouse the Arabs. In fact, some months ago, it was proposed, and about to be put into effect that an official statement should be issued by our Government and the British Government calling upon Jews to desist from discussing the whole subject as it might endanger the military of the Allied Army in the Near East. Fortunately no such statement was ever issued. As a result of pressure against the iniquitous White Paper which has already prohibited the sale of land in Palestine to Jewish settlers to an insignificant area of that small country, the attitude of the Administration in Washington has changed. It is becoming more friendly, more actively friendly -- it always has been friendly, never hostile -- but more actively cooperative in the task. As you know, resolutions have been introduced into the House and Senate calling upon the government charged with the responsibility of administering the country under the Mandate to open the doors of Palestine to Jewish immigration and colonization to the end that the Jewish Commonwealth may be ultimately reconstituted.

I was privileged to attend and participate in the hearings before the House Foreign Affairs Committee. I was greatly heartened by the number of people from all walks of life, all creeds who appeared before the House Committee to express hearty approval of this Resolution -- Jews, Christians, representatives of Labor, churches, academic life, experts of all kinds. The only people who appeared in opposition to the resolution so far were two Jews. The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee went on record with the statement that of all the telegrams received from all parts of the country only two were in opposition. He told me

who they were -- one a Syrian Jew and one was a Rabbi.

I hope that these resolutions will be approved by the House and the Senate. There are many forces working against these resolutions, behind the scenes, naturally. Attempts will be made to nullify the resolutions. It is important th t you make your own voice heard to your own Congressman and Senator. That is to exercise your your convictions privilege as an American citizen in conveying/to the representative who represents you in the Congress and in the Senate.....

Our government understands that the interests of the Jewish people which has suffered perhaps more than any other people in this war, whose casualties in the war have now run into millions, cannot be ignored or side-stepped, that in the new world which we hope to reconstruct as a result of the sacrifices which we and other people are making on the battlefields for justice and freedom and equality, the right to live, shall be made for all people. The same rights, the same freedom shall be made secure for this martyred and terribly harrassed people.

But we want action, and not merely expressions of good will. I have come away from every visit which I have made to Washington increasingly heartened by what I have seen, what I have heard, by the people with hom I contact. There are very able very competent very devoted and patriotic men in Washington who are fully aware of the grave responsibilities which rest upon them, who have the vision and the outlook and determination to do what they can do, who are determined to do all that they can possibly do for the future of America and for the future of a peaceful, orderly and just people.

1/ Last few months - ^{W. interest} capital, U.S. - World - Eyes - Hub of W. interest
Decisions made there - affect - on distant rimming of the earth.
2/ It is a crowded city - doubled its population - a million - ^{Everywhere} it is a nerve center of vast war effort - ^{bewildering} counter deficits
~~army~~ - army - navy - air force - War production - pop. warfare -
civilian mobilization. ^{Everywhere} ^{& women} ^{leading} men in uniforms.
Not a militarized city! Its dominant mental air - City of peace
Retained its civilian character - its mood & quality ^{raise} of democracy.
3/ A beautiful city - passing in changes & stateliness - House -
mentary ^{increasing} ^{in recent years} ^{members} adding to its civic
flourish of the new Jefferson Memorial - the ^{new} ^{many} ^{these} ^{magnificent} ^{with} ^{new} ^{imposing}
monument - The new Supreme Court Block - Exquisite examples
And yet it is not an overbearing city - It is not a dominating
individual metropolis - There are no towering sky-scrapers,
there is no studied effort to be smart, polished, ultra-modern,
cosmopolitan. There is much that is pleasantly pre-
university. W - Much that we associate with the average
Am. city, the N.Y.C. or mid-west + with native Am.
ways of life.
4/ It is a very busy, tense city - as you may well imagine
a ~~city~~ population working under pressure! Its life taut
with emergency.
Everybody who goes to W - or is summoned - for them to do
something - something of basic or greater importance - related to
the activities of a nation at war - & to do it quickly.
Every thing ^{has to be} speeded up - but within a complex of details.

4). It is a very busy, tense city - as you may well imagine
a ~~city~~ population working under pressure! 9 to 5 life tant
with emergency:

Everybody who goes to W - or is summoned - for them to do something - something of basic or greater importance - related to the activities of a nation at war - & to do it quickly. Every thing ~~has to be~~ speeded up - but within a complex & definite.

+ bureaucratic procedure which frequently gets in the way - and tangles up things pretty badly.

Many projects which are undertaken are colossal in size, & are fully central & important to the welfare, the nation.

Many mistakes are made. Unnecessary duplication. Much waste of money. ^{It is proper & salutary to criticize!} ^{Don. safety valve - & the way to correction}

But the job of running the war - of getting out production of putting armies in the field & moving on the seas & air fleet in the air - is being done!

No govt. has ever had such a stupendous job as this.
- & it is accomplishing it - in spite of blunders, red tape, costly mistakes

→ The quiet work of the years, thousands of human efforts - even -

5. Every body who wants something for the W.

Foreign ports - not only their embassies or consulates - added staff increased number of agents. ^{first or second, or other way}

Each carries on a most vigorous activity in its own behalf

- Town is full of representatives of pressure groups - & lobbyists - concerned ^{seek} preferential treatment -

- Few of them are really unselfish. They love their country - and are 100% for war effort. But each group feels that war effort would not be hurt - if a little extra pain accrued to its members - or its members were taxed a little less - or even allowed to charge a little more.

- Every cause has its spokesman in W. - they work hard to refer or give them.

6. In this city of charity, benevolent activity most planning and org. the houses, the V.I. is also at work. ^{global}

th. leg. Branch & our cont.

Comp. is ^{for some} ~~alternately~~ ^{both} ~~praised~~ ^{enthusiast} & ~~blamed~~ - depending upon the nature
of the laws which it enacts - & the people who favor or object to them.

— Some are inclined to be off hand & supercilious about types —
and with ^{as a body} ~~its~~ ^{whole} members as unscrupulous or ~~corrupt~~ ^{worse}.

I cannot cover in such generalizations. There are, I am, ^{among these} both weasels. ^{on} a few dangerously ^{large} mice, the big prairie - dog by dog food.

The big picture - day by day food outlet
is not always matches the ideal
dine. conception. The Kitchen where the food is prepared
is not always an appealing place - nor is the food prepared
always wholesome - Done as the other end of the road

But most ^{of} our leg. in the House & Senate, are practical, and hard-working, thorough men, some there extremely able, & public spirited. -

~~They are under heavy pressure. They~~

It is not always easy to know what is the best course
to follow, esp when decisions ^{carry with them} ~~are~~ such serious consequences
that they will not thoroughly remember. The best interests, then

But ~~that~~ they will all thoroughly represent the best interests then considered.

when all ~~is said & done~~
they reflect the Am. people - all their strength - all their weakness
- Angles - ~~unhappy~~

7/ At the moment - Congress is def. moving to the right! Not only
the Repub. but the S. Demos. are anti here Repub. -
So much so - Demos. party would like to disencumber itself
that label - which was its pride & battle slogan a few
short years ago.

On nearly all times of leg. involvement since New Deal
the conservatives I denies. will be forming votes with the blues

Joseph S. Davis, Director, the Ford Research Institute of Stanford University.

"Per person on farms, the 1943 net income from agriculture received by persons on farms is estimated nearly 3 times what it averaged in 1935-39, when, I repeat, income parity as officially defined was reached" ... "If bents, railways, public utilities, industrial cooperation or organized labor were to claim that such treatment of them was just and desirable, farmers could have to high heaven in protest"

Partly

Period Aug. 1909 - July 1914

per capita net income of individuals on farms - in relation to - not on the same utilities as

When prices are high want free markets -

There is demanding higher wages bc. cost of prod is going up

- Real wages decline if food prices go up

- During depression farmers received subsidies.

- So to middle war - squeezed but rising food prices + OPA price ceiling

1 lb. in subside will prevent 15 lb of inflationary price cost.

Subsidies losses will > real inflation

Wages in England Canada, & U.S.

On Ford Sunday - Federal Ballot for Stickers - on labor
legislation - on taxes -

It is of interest - Britain, Canada - Left - U.S. - Right

8/ The powerful agr. bloc - and Ford subsidies. They want farmers
to sell in a free market - which under conditions of war means
sharp increase in prices of all foods. ^{As food prices go up - real wages decline} This in turn must lead
to increased pressure for wage increases. And thus the inflationary
spiral is put in motion.

Farmers are no longer an underprivileged group.

Joseph S. Davis - Director, the Ford Research Institute of Stanford U. (Calif.)

9/ Soldier vote - Republicans don't want it - J. Danne - Texas -
State Rights issue - cloak, is so far in past,
"a fraud on the voters."

10/ Labor by - would like to prohibit strikes - keep wages frozen
But let agr. prices - grow as high as they can -
and use profits as large as they can, with taxes held down

11/ More action on Jew. problems - sweet talk
little for Refugees - (Long) Berman - ^{Barney} Action ^{Democracy} ^{Israel}

(a) War Refugee Fund - (a) Transfer (b) Underground (c) Refugee camps

(b) ^{Colonial} Palestine - ^{Joint State} White Paper - Jew. Commonwealth - ^{Christian} ^{6/10/43} Hearings -
non-partisan - Telegrams (2) Write to your own

(c) outcome - War Dept - Poles -

12/ When Victory came - J. people to,