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One Hundred Years of World History, 1949.

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ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF WORLD HISTORY

Sunday, October 23, 1949

By Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

It is, of course, difficult, Friends, to analyze this amazing century from 1850 to 1950, perhaps the most momentous century in the whole history of mankind, certainly not in the brief compass of a single lecture. At best, we can but briefly note and comment on the major trends of this century, upon the deep and the far-sweeping tides of change which took place, upon the wide contours of the epochal events of these 100 years. We may thus be able to appraise more intelligently what is happening today and what is likely to happen tomorrow, and perhaps learn from the past what we should or should not do in the days to come.

Surely these last 100 years have been a century of revolution, not in every field in the same degree and not always for the better. Not every revolution spells progress. You can revolve backward as well as forward. But no century in recorded human history has been so full of change, has witnessed such violent breaks with the past, such a holocaust in traditional ideas and values, no century has seen so much of political conflict, of economic turmoil, of social upheaval and of scientific discoveries. Never was the map of the world so frequently deranged and rearranged. Never such world wars, never such world-shaking revolutions.

I for one do not know how the future historian will characterize this century between 1850 and 1950. I suspect that he will be inclined to characterize it as scientifically brilliant, economically dynamic and progressive, politically blundering and rather stupid, culturally second-rate, and spiritually - religiously - uninspired and recessional. It is not at all necessary, I am sure - and you will agree with me - to dwell long on the scientific miracles of these last 100 years for they have been rather breath-taking. A hundred years ago the turbine, the dynamo and combustion engine were unknown. A hundred years ago steel, gas,

oil, the incandescent lamp, the sewing machine, the linotype, the telephone were unknown, not to mention the more recent discoveries and inventions - the automobile and the wireless, the motion picture and the airplane, the radio and television, and plastics and synthetics of all kinds, and of course, the atomic bomb. Progress in all the fields of physics and chemistry and medicine have been phenomenal, and also in biology. It was in 1859 that Darwin wrote his "Origin of the Species". And in psychology. Never was such technological skill applied to physical resources of the world to produce wealth as in the last century. A radical new conception of the structure of the universe has come to mankind to be identified with the name of Albert Einstein, as well as a vision of the power resources of mankind in terms of atomic and nuclear energy. And this progress in science is still advancing at an accelerated pace. It's been an amazing century. More has been invented and discovered in the last 100 years than in the 2,000 years prior to that time, but this amazing scientific development has not prevented two of the most catastrophic wars of mankind. It has not prevented half of the world plunging into dictatorship and into the worst social unrest known in human history. Twice did our proud scientific age descend, cringing and shamefaced, into dugouts and foxholes and air-raid shelters, and was compelled to hide its face behind gasmasks. Our modern science is like a Samson which stands eyeless in Gaza, and its greatest triumph, alas, may well be the pulling down of the pillars of the Temple that all may perish together.

During the last 100 years there have been very great and very decisive steps forward in nationalism, in constitutional government all over the world, and in democracy. Europe in 1850, or in 1848, because that is a more important date than 1850, was still very much where the Congress of Vienna had left it.

The imperial and the monarchical ideas were still prevalent in Europe. The independent small state, by and large, did not exist. Countries like Poland and the Baltic States were incorporated within the Russian Empire. Balkan States like Rumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia were still within the Ottoman Empire. Hungary, Czechoslovakia were within the Austrian Empire. Italy did not complete its unification until 1870, and the German Empire was not proclaimed until 1871. The principle that a people which spoke the same language and was conscious of the ties of kinship has a right to set up its own independent government and be free was not yet recognized. It took a century of revolutions all over Europe finally to accomplish this, and it was not until the end of World War I that the principle of the self-determination of peoples was finally acknowledged.

The changes began with the year 1848, a very fateful year in the history of Europe and in world history. For that year 1848, the Revolution of 1848, saw the end of that world which the Congress of Vienna ^{sought to} ~~was~~ set up after the fall of Napoleon, the end of an age of political and social reaction which sought to undo all the achievements of the French Revolution - the age of Metternich, of the Holy Alliance. Since 1848 there was an acceleration in all the movements for the freedom of peoples, for constitutional government and for democracy. It was also toward the close of this last 100 year period of which we are speaking that the peoples of Asia began to ^{rise} ~~start~~, began to demand and began to fight for their independence and freedom. Most of this century witnessed the expansion of European colonialism, imperialism in Asia and in Africa. Industrial Europe sought foreign markets and foreign investments, foreign sources of raw materials, and the backward countries of Asia and Africa and Australia and New Zealand offered them rich opportunities, and in order to protect their investments and to control the sources of raw materials needed by their factories back home, these European countries either annexed outright these lands of the backward peoples, or established protectorates over them. Thus, Asia and Africa were carved up and divided among

the Great Powers, Great Britain getting its lion's share everywhere. The latter part of this century witnessed the great countries of India and China seething with unrest and rebellion against this foreign invasion, foreign domination, and witnessed their struggle for political independence.

This story is a long and tortuous one, and it has not yet ended. But the close of this 100 years of 1850 to 1950 records the recession of imperialism all over the world. The establishment of the independent states of India and Pakistan, the establishment of the Republic of China, and other semi-sovereign states in Southeastern Asia; also the establishment of several independent Arab states in the Near East, and progress towards independence in some parts of Africa. Imperialism, therefore, advanced and receded during this 100 years. This imperialism which brought to these backward countries something of the civilization of the West, something of its science and technology which helped to improve a bit its standard of living also brought to these backward countries fearsome exploitation, serfdom, war and grave social problems.

Nationalism likewise made tremendous strides during this period. States gained their independence; small peoples won self-determination. But this, too, was not an unmixing blessing for with the spread of nationalism in the world, there came also the fragmentization of the world, there came also the suppression of minorities within these several national states which were set up; there was a vicious chauvinism in parts of the world based on philosophies of race superiority, culminating in Naziism and Fascism.

Democracy made great strides during this period of 100 years. Democracy triumphed in Europe at the close of the First World War. There never was so much democracy in the world as there was at the close of the second decade of the 20th century. Only to suffer its most disastrous defeats at the close of this 100-year period at the hands of Fascism and Communism. In Fascism the great industrialists, the bankers, the land-owners, the middleclass abandoned democracy.

In Communism the proletariat, the working class in parts of the world, abandoned democracy, so that today one-half of the world practically has discarded government by free electorate, government through the apparatus of parliament, government of majority rule, government based upon the freedom of the individual within law. By the close of this century all of the gains of a free society, all the gains which were made after such terrible struggles ~~for~~ the individual, are in mortal danger. A new economic internationale is wiping out today national sovereignty, constitutional governments and democracy, and above all, it is dwarfing the individual, reducing his stature. The year 1950 witnesses the gravest crisis of the individual since the Renaissance. It witnesses the continuing desperate struggle between the all-absorbing state, the monolithic state or the monolithic class - coordination, collectivization - on the one hand, and the struggle of the individual to retain his freedom as a human being, his rights as a single human being in the world. And if civilization is more than bread and circuses, if civilization is more than radios and airplanes, swarming, teeming cities, if civilization is the free, joyous, creative life of people, if civilization is to be measured by the distance it is removed from chains and regimentation, inquisition and dogmatism, then our world may well be moving today towards a ~~renewed~~ Dark Age.

The last 100 years, friends, too, which saw the birth of our own religious institution and its development - this span of years from 1850 to 1950 - witnessed important trends toward the improvement of the condition of the masses and towards social justice. It may well be said that this century was ushered in by the Communist Manifesto of 1848 which was at once the banner and the battle cry of the new economics, of the new century to come.

The Industrial Revolution which began a century before '48, the age of steam and the age of the machine, produced the factory, the mill, the proletarian class of wage-earners, the concentration of the industrial workers in urban centers.

The industrial age produced all the evils of exploitation, of slums, of child labor, the labor of women, of economic insecurity, and of social maladjustments. And for more than 100 years labor fought to improve its lot. It realized early that it could do so only through organization, so the labor union came into existence. The effort of the individual laborer to improve his condition through collective organization and collective bargaining. There was violent resistance to these labor movements and labor unions on the part of industrialists and capitalists and the governments which they controlled, and the whole century is one of industrial strife, turmoil, strikes, walk-outs, but labor made hard and steady progress in these 100 years.

Out of this struggle, brought about by the Industrial Revolution, there emerged early in this century of which we are speaking the Socialist Movement, which took on a variety of political expressions. Karl Marx gave it its most thorough, extreme and dogmatic formulation. Private capital is to be abolished. All means of production are to be nationalized. Karl Marx, starting out with an elaborate, materialistic interpretation of history, and seeing in all history the economic struggle, the unsolved and unresolved class struggle, called for the destruction of the capitalistic class through revolutionary action, through the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship, preparatory to the setting up of the classless society and the ultimate withering-away of the state apparatus entirely. Not all Socialists or socialist movements were in agreement either with the metaphysics of Karl Marx or with his proposed technique of class struggle and revolution. There were other socialist movements in Europe which sought to obtain the same end, the nationalization of the means of production through the parliamentary method, through the democratic process. Marxian Socialism is today in control of the Soviet Union and of all of its satellite states, a very large section of our globe and of mankind. The other types of socialism which may be known as social democracy is today in control of Great Britain and of other countries of the world.

In our own country we are endeavoring to solve the economic problem non-socialistically with a minimum of state control over means of production. We are trying to solve it here through governmental regulation, through a progressive amelioration of the conditions of labor by legislation and otherwise.

Which of these three approaches to social justice will succeed ultimately? Whether one of the three will become universal, whether all three will continue to exist side by side as democracies and monarchies and absolutist governments existed side by side in the world for a long period of time is difficult to say. At the moment, for a variety of reasons, the most successful country in approximately solving basic economic problems has been the non-socialistic country of the United States. Here the standard of living of the working class is the highest in the world, although our own country has not yet solved basic, troubling economic problems such as recurrent depressions, strikes and discriminations in employment.

So that while it may be correctly said that the conditions of labor improved remarkably all over the world during the last 100 years - as far as working conditions are concerned - hours of labor, wages, protections in terms of pensions of one kind or another, the bitter struggle, the bitter economic struggle is raging today nevertheless, particularly between the non-Marxian and the Marxian divisions of mankind. This struggle has divided our world. On the one hand, peoples which prefer economic security to everything else and are ready to sacrifice everything else to achieve that economic security. On the other hand, those people which are not prepared to surrender all of their freedom for these putative economic securities. And this struggle, which we now call the struggle between the East and the West, may well lead mankind to disaster if some modus vivendi, some decent way of life is not found between these two divisions of mankind.

The most unprogressive feature of these 100 years has been the ghastly record of wars, the unending race for armaments. The last one-third of this century has been the bloodiest in human history. The First World War, the imperialist war of 1914 and '18, resulted in 8,000,000 soldiers killed and 18,000,000 wounded and some 17,000,000 civilians who perished through vermin, disease and massacre caused by the war. The Second World War, the Fascist war, caused 50,000,000 casualties in terms of slain and wounded and civilian dead, and our own people contributed to this casualty list 6,000,000 massacred Jews.

As far as the economic cost, it hardly can be estimated - the cost of these wars in terms of ruined economies and bankrupt countries and impoverishment of peoples. The whole world, including our own country, is staggering under a load of debt, having mortgaged the future for generations to come. Many of the countries, of course, have repudiated their national debts.

The most horrible feature of the wars of this last third of this century has been that they have been total wars - the whole of the capacity of mankind, the whole scientific capacity of mankind, not to speak of all the resources of mankind have been involved in these struggles. This century, then, may well be written down as the most unprogressive century of mankind in terms of war.

Peace efforts have been made during the last 100 years. Peace efforts were made at the conferences at The Hague in 1899, in 1907 when the Hague Tribunal was established. After the First World War the first attempt to organize the nations of the world into a League of Nations for the limitation of armament and the perpetuation of peace was made. It was a noble effort. It failed. After the Second World War a second effort has been made, and the United Nations was established to do the same thing - to save mankind from these mounting horrors of destructive war. Just as the Great Powers wrecked the first League of Nations, they seem to be going about very energetically to wreck the United Nations.

At the moment we are in a state of war - we call it the cold war - the cold war is the preparatory stage to the shooting war. These are some of the salient features of this momentous, this amazing century, a century of light and darkness, of advance and retreat, of triumph and defeat.

Some ten years ago I spoke here in the city of Cleveland at the Forum of the City Club. I made the following observations which are very pertinent to the thing which we are discussing this morning. The world was then in the midst of the Second World War. I said then:

The world stands today bewildered and disillusioned. The strong and sure foundations upon which it had builded its life have been rudely shaken. That high optimism which fed upon truly remarkable achievements in every scientific field have vanished. Marvellous have been the vistas which opened up before the eyes of men in the preceding century. Men could dream then and men did dream unabashed of a glorious and uninterrupted progress for mankind, of an unending conquest of nature and of building in a world of abundance a civilization free from all poverty, ignorance and war.

In the 19th century, wrote Victor Hugo, war will be dead, the scaffold will be dead, hatred will be dead, frontiers will be dead, royalty will be dead, dogmas will be dead, and man will begin to live.

But here we are in the 20th century and war is not dead, the scaffold is not dead, hatred is not dead, frontiers are not dead, royalty is not dead, dogmas are not dead, but man is beginning to die. The vista which stretches before our generation today ends at the edge of the wilderness. For 25 years now men have lived in a world of mounting, hate, intolerance and bigotry, of revolutions, invasions, war, the rise and fall of empires amidst the slaughter of millions of their kind. Great peoples have destroyed their liberties and enslaved themselves. Millions of men cower today in terrorized submissiveness. The wealth of nations is being drained in war and in preparations for wars which will also drain the lives of the people. The mind of man, trained and sharpened by generations of scientific education, is now applied to the perfection of the war technique so that the discoveries which science records in our day in such great numbers no longer fill the hearts of men with pride or enthusiasm. They suspect that these things will not contribute either to their happiness or their security.

The human spirit stands today frightened, weighted down with apocalyptic foreboding as if awaiting the crash of doom. The thoughtful among men have accordingly begun to search earnestly for a road away from disaster. They are seeking desperately hard to rediscover that vision which was somehow lost amidst the brilliant pageantry of scientific achievement in the last century to the hurt and sorrow of the world. They understand now what the wise men of the earth have

always known, that increased knowledge does not necessarily mean increased goodness or happiness, that facts are not in themselves blessings, that truth can make us mad as well as free, that the prolongation of human life is not the same as the improvement of human life, that the acceleration of a process does not always insure a finer product, that change does not necessarily spell progress and that democracy, as Lecky pointed out a half century ago, democracy may often destroy liberty. They realize now that the fault is not with science or education or democracy as such, but with the interpretation which men have put upon them, with the omnipotence and autonomy which they have ascribed to them and with their failure to understand that science, education and democracy are means not ends in themselves.

What has been tragically missing in our civilization is the compelling and unifying faith in the great human goals which religion and religion alone has set for mankind, and towards the attainment of which science, education and democracy should contribute if they are to fulfill their chief functions. Mankind lost sight of these goals; therefore, human progress today has no clear direction. Good material and good tools are not enough for the builder. The builder must have a plan. Every true century of man must be modeled after some heavenly archetype. To build a noble and enduring society it is not enough to have wealth, knowledge. Mankind must be possessed of the architectural plan, and not only the spiritual vision of man has design. Mankind must also have the will and the loyalty to follow that plan, and that the moral sense of mankind alone has provided. Without faith in God, the reality of the spiritual vision as well as the moral sense in man are quickly denied and rejected in the world.

And I believe that this fundamentally is what is tragically wrong, what has been tragically wrong with our civilization in the last 100 years. Scientifically brilliant, economically dynamic, productive, but politically blundering, stupid because spiritually it's been recessional. Religion has been on the decline. I don't mean the church organization. I mean the revolutionary, moral and religious spirit of man which seeks above else, justice, truth, brotherhood, freedom, peace in the world. That spirit has throughout this last 100 years been uninspired and recessional; hence, the crisis in the life of the individual today and in the life of the world.

I shall continue this bird's-eye view of this critical century next Sunday morning with a lecture on "One Hundred Years of American History", and I shall follow that with "One Hundred Years of Jewish History", then with a lecture on "One Hundred Years of the Religious History of Mankind" to be concluded with a lecture on "One Hundred Years of Our Own Temple History".