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162

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58

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802

One Hundred Years of American History, 1949.

725
ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF AMERICAN HISTORY

By Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

Sunday, October 30, 1949

A hundred years ago our country was a second-rate power. Its population was some 23,000,000. By the turn of this century, at the close of the Spanish-American War, it had become a world power, and today it is the greatest world power on earth with a population of approximately 150,000,000, with an incomparable industrial capacity and output, with a national annual income of over \$200,000,000,000, with the most powerful military establishment on earth. Our country is today the richest and most influential nation on the globe. It is today the creditor nation of the world whereas as late as 1914 it was still a debtor nation. The United States today is the international, political crossroads of the world. And thus, the new world has replaced the old world as the center of political importance, just as Washington has replaced London.

And the hundred years lying ahead will undoubtedly be known in human history as the American Century. It has been a breath-taking century of growth and expansion from 1850 to 1950, the like of which the world has never seen. The pioneering impulse, the spirit of enterprise, the tempo, the inventiveness, the technological skill, the organization capacity, the courageous vision and planning which a free people poured into the exploitation of the resources of a continent and the building up of its own way of life will forever remain an epic of extraordinary challenge, of grandeur in the annals of mankind.

By 1850 the covered wagons were rolling across the prairies for gold had been discovered in California, and new trails were being blazed for new settlements and new states. At the close of the Civil War this westward movement assumed monumental strength and momentum. By 1890 pioneering America had reached its last frontier. The railroads soon spanned the continent and linked East and West and North and South with bands of steel, of trade and of travel. The first transcontinental railway was completed, as you know, in 1869. And men from all parts of the earth poured into this country, attracted

by its economic opportunities or seeking refuge from political persecution. America from its very inception a land of immigrants, but by the middle of the 19th century immigration into the United States assumed mass proportions. At the close of the 5th decade of the last century Germans and Hungarians began to come in in very large numbers as the result of the revolutions which were taking place in their countries. The Irish were coming in in enormous numbers driven by famine and by political persecution. And in the later decades of the 19th century the Polish, the Jewish and the Italian and the Slavic immigrants began to come in in vast numbers. By 1900 the annual immigration in the United States amounted to over 1,000,000. These immigrants, coming from all parts of the world, many of them - most of them - extremely poor, endured great hardships. They did not find the gold on the streets of the cities of the new country. They did not find the gold they were looking for in quantities in the mills and the mines and on the farms and in the slums and in the sweatshops. But some of their children did. And these immigrants and their children built the greatest industrial empire on earth. And there was a strange and potent alchemy in American life for these men and women coming from all parts of the world, speaking different languages, bringing with them ancient cultures, ways of life, peculiar traditions of their own - all of them were Americanized; into the great melting pot they were all poured, and out of that melting pot there came forth the American, loyal and devoted to the new land.

By the close of the 19th century American industry was producing more goods than American markets could profitably absorb, so that American business began to reach out for overseas markets. We began to expand in the last decade of the 19th century across the Pacific, in the Caribbean. We annexed Hawaii, the Phillipines and Puerto Rico, other islands. The Spanish-American War marked the beginning of what might be called American imperialism. More and more we became involved in the Asiatic world, in China and in Japan, which we opened to the world in 1853. Our investment capital began to look for profitable fields abroad especially in Latin America. American business began

to exploit our neighbors to the South, and our diplomacy became entangled in the political conflicts of that part of the Western Hemisphere. In 1903 we acquired the Canal Zone and in the last third of this century of 1850 to 1950 our political and economic weight, our gravity in world affairs, had become so decisive that we could not stay out, even though we wished to, of the European political struggles, and we became involved twice in the two greatest wars of all time.

Thus, our very growth and our economic expansion forced us into a world role and a world involvement which the American people really did not want. American fear and distaste of foreign entanglements was long and persistent and soundly motivated. Even in the 90's when we began our expansion in the Pacific there were many Americans who, in spite of the economic and strategic advantages in such expansion, opposed - vehemently opposed - our overseas expansion. They objected, for example, to the annexation of the Phillipines, and the agitation to return the Phillipines to the Phillipinos continued uninterruptedly on the part of Americans themselves for nearly a half a century until full independence was finally granted in 1946 to the Phillipines.

When the First World War broke out in 1914, Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States, called upon the American people to maintain an attitude of strict neutrality to the war, to remain impartial in thought as well as in action. President Wilson, you may recall, was re-elected in 1916 on the platform of: He kept us out of war. It was after Europe had been in the war for more than $2\frac{1}{2}$ years that America, resisting the pressure, the inevitable pressures from all sides, to enter the war, finally - and as a result largely of the unrestricted submarine campaign which Germany launched against our merchant vessels - that America finally entered into the war. And this was true also of the Second World War. America tried to keep out of it, and it did keep out of it for nearly two years. We tried to be helpful to the cause of the Allies because American democracy shuddered at the threat of Hitlerism and Fascism. We granted Great Britain, you may recall, through some form of exchange some 50 destroyers. We adopted Lend-Lease, all in effort to be helpful without becoming actually involved in

the war. But it couldn't be. We were too great, too important in the scheme of things to stay out of any embroilment in which the political destinies of a great part of the world were involved. And Pearl Harbor in December 1941 catapulted us into the Second World War.

But by and large we were content to stay at home. We didn't want to interfere in the affairs of Europe, and were determined that Europe should not interfere in the affairs of the Western Hemisphere. That was the meaning of the Monroe Doctrine. Because here in this great country we could expand without war, and we had a two-ocean security behind whose ramparts we could grow strong and great, and there were no threatening neighbors. One of the former French Ambassadors to Washington, Ambassador Jusserand, is credited with this statement, that America was fortunate among the nations. On the North she had a weak neighbor. On the South another weak neighbor. On the East, fish. On the West, fish.

And American diplomacy at its high level, at its high levels was directed principally towards these objectives of backing up the Monroe Doctrine, of maintaining the freedom of the seas towards a Good Neighbor policy with Latin America called Pan-Americanism, towards an Open Door policy in the East principally in China, and we were content to work diplomatically along these lines. But it was not to be. America had become too great for isolationism. We were bound to pull in, to be pulled in in any maelstrom of political agitation in the world. We could not stay out. So that it was clear by the time the First World War broke upon the world - and we were dragged into it - that there was but one of two solutions for future American political action in the world, for a future global American foreign policy. One, to sit by in isolationism, waiting for the inevitable crises to develop which would suck us in against our will in world struggles; or to work for a kind of world organization which would make war less likely in the world, to pool our diplomatic skill and authority with those of other

nations, to bring about a new system of international relations. And after the First World War we were instrumental in bringing into existence the League of Nations, the inspiration of President Wilson, which was responsible for the creation of the League of Nations. Many of the European nations were dragooned into it unwillingly, and it was pressure on the part of America which brought the League into existence, but we walked out on the League of Nations before very long. We wanted to assume no responsibility in a world organization. In 1918 our country was strongly isolationist, or at least the legislators of our country were. And we continued that way for years. It was as late as 1935 that the Senate of the United States defeated a resolution that America should enter the World Court.

And then came the Second World War, and another effort was made for the creation of a League of Nations, and in San Francisco the United Nations Organization was created. But here again our adherence to it, while officially wholehearted in practice, is not so. It is clear today that America has entirely abandoned the idea of isolationism. The Atlantic Pact is the great symbol of the radical new departure from the old conception of no entanglements, no foreign alliances, to the conception underlying the Atlantic Pact, with the United States actually arming half of the world against the other half and pledging to go to war if any member in this Pact is attacked. The danger today which may threaten the success of the United Nations is not that the United States will not assume any responsibility in future international affairs, but that she might be inclined to assume all responsibility, that she might be inclined to side-step the United Nations and conscious of its own tremendous power in the world, go it alone, and that would be dangerous, I believe, to the United Nations and to us. The burden may become too heavy and the responsibilities too great. The nations of the world must not come to rely upon the United States. They ^{must} come to rely upon the United Nations. And the intelligent direction of American diplomacy in the future, in my humble judgment, lies in strengthening the world organization, in arming it, in giving it power and force

and prestige to back up its decisions, and in the United States' taking the leadership in the strengthening of the United Nations, not in the creation of regional pacts.

In other words, this last 100 years has seen the radical revision of American foreign policy, the position of the United States in the world as a political power.

Our great industrial expansions, of course, brought enormous wealth to our people. That wealth was not evenly distributed. There took place during these 100 years an enormous concentration of wealth, and therefore, of economic power in the hands of the few. Huge monopolies, enormous industrial empires came into existence, and they were in the hands of relatively few dominant figures who, regardless of the shift in the political scene - this party in office and this party out of office - regardless of what party was in office, these few economic potentates on the American scene remained in control. Or as some would put it, their grip was firm, their experience was cumulative and their goal was clear. A report submitted a few years ago to the Senate of the United States indicated that the American economy was dominated by some 200 giant corporations. Of these, 98 were controlled by three families and five financial groups.

And the history of the 100 years of the American people economically is the history of the struggle against this domination of American economic life by trusts, by monopolies, by a coterie of industrialists and bankers. Generations of populists and progressives revolted against, fought against what came to be known as Big Business, or the money plutocracy, in order to protect the worker, the farmer, the small business man. And that struggle is still going on. And from time to time the political scene of the United States was agitated by these movements, and slogans were different, but actually the same - the Square Deal, the New Freedom, the Fair Deal, the New Deal. It was the outreaching of the American people to take control out of the hands of the few, place it in the hands of the many, control of their own economic destinies. Because this amazing industrial expansion which brought great wealth to the American people was not carried out without exploitation, without an amazing degree of economic insecurity

for the people, without a series - a period series of catastrophic panics and depressions - 1873, 1893 and 1908 and 1929 - almost every 15 years or 20 years the whole economic structure of America seemed to be collapsing and millions of people were hurled into unemployment and misery.

This century was a century of bitter industrial strife for the American people, strife which is still going on. As we stand here this morning the American people finds itself in the grip of two great strikes, the steel strike and the coal strike. In 1947 there were 3700 work stoppages in the United States involving over 2,000,000 people and causing a loss of over 35,000,000 man days of labor. Labor's effort to organize, to bargain collectively, was stubbornly and violently and bloodily resisted all through this last 100 years. Take the story of steel, for example. In 1892, 50 years ago, more than 50 years ago, Andrew Carnegie declared: "We oppose organized labor and will deal with our workmen only as individuals." This resulted in the bloody strike, the Homestead strike of 1892. The steel workers struck; they were defeated - disastrously defeated. Men in the steel industry struck again in 1901 and again they were defeated, and again in 1909, and following the First World War there was the prolonged steel strike of 1919, and the steel workers were again defeated, and for nearly 40 years until 1933 they had to fight for their right to organize and to bargain collectively.

And that is true in most every other large industry in the United States. And all needlessly, as events have proven - needlessly, for the organization of labor and their collective bargaining did not by an iota interfere with the economic expansion of this country or with the prosperity of our industries because this is a country blessed with plenty - there is enough to go around, if men had but the intelligence to understand it. But as a result of this endless struggle, progress was made. Labor today is organized by and large. There are 60,000,000 of them in labor unions, and marked gains have been registered in almost every field - in wages and hours of work and social security and pensions and other forms of security, unemployment insurance, child labor, protection

of women in industry. The standard of living of the American workingman today is the highest in the world. But there's a long way to go yet before the American workingman enjoys his full and just patrimony. The fairest distribution of things which this country is enabled to produce will mean the greatest stability for our economic order, and it is most interesting and most significant to observe that the American workingmen, organized American labor, are endeavoring to achieve its objectives through non-socialistic agitation. It is not programatically anti-capital, as some of the great labor movements in the Old World are. And it might well be - there is no guarantee for it - ~~it~~ it might well be that here the basic problems of the relationship between labor and management can be worked out on an American non-socialistic basis.

And so, the struggle to build in this country not only political democracy, but also economic democracy and social democracy is going on.

Significant progress was made in other directions during this 100 years. After a century of agitation women suffrage was finally voted through a Federal Amendment to the Constitution of the United States in 1920, and woman was enfranchised. And the last 100 years, more especially the last generation, has seen an amazing development in the position, in the economic position of woman in American life. They have entered business, they are occupying important executive positions.

Social progress was made in the direction in 1913 of the final legalization of the income tax, also through an amendment of the Constitution, which means the spreading of the tax burden upon the shoulders of those who are best able to bear it. That was resisted and violently fought for decades.

Progress has been made in the field of civil rights. The promise of freedom and quality for all which is found in our Declaration of Independence was never warranted by the facts of the situation even at the time when the Declaration of Independence was written. There was never full freedom and equality for American people. It is startling to realize that the century of which we are talking of 1850 to 1950 began when America

still tolerated slavery! This century began in slavery! And ~~it~~ took a bloody Civil War to destroy this horrible institution of slavery in this, our free country. But the political emancipation of the Negro did not grant him that freedom and ~~equality~~ equality to which he is entitled by the basic law, moral law of our Declaration. The Negro has been struggling hard all through these years against segregation and discrimination and the poll tax and lynching and Jim Crowism, and still is! A Negro traveling from North to South, when he reaches the capitol of the United States, today - Washington - must change to Jim Crow trains. If he decides to remain in the District of Columbia overnight, he will find that he cannot eat in a downtown restaurant or cannot attend a downtown movie or play, he cannot sleep in a downtown hotel. If he decides to stay in the District of Columbia, the capitol of the United States in 1949, he usually must find a home in an overcrowded, sub-standard and segregated area. He must^{send}/his children to inferior Jim Crow schools. He must entrust his family's health to medical agencies that give them inferior services.

Progress is being made, but not rapidly enough. The number of poll tax states is decreasing. Lynching has sharply decreased. Fair employment practice laws are being enacted, but desperately slowly in the United States. There has been marked improvement in the discrimination against the Negro in the armed forces of our country. But there's a long struggle ahead.

Waves of bigotry have frequently swept over this free country of ours. And they existed 100 years ago. Racial and religious bigotry is not an unknown or an infrequent appearance in this country of ours. In the 40's and the 50's of the last century there were violent nativist movements in the United States. They were directed not against Jews in those days; they were directed against Catholics; German, Irish were then coming into the country in very large numbers. "Know-Nothingism" became a powerful political party which in the 50's swept candidates into office in a dozen states in the United States.

That was 100 years ago! And in our own day we have the recrudescence of violent bigotry from time to time - the Ku Klux Klan and other forms of organized intolerance. That is a recurrent plague against which the American people must be on guard. Vigilance and resistance! Vigilance and resistance are the only ways which we can meet these outbreaks of organized un-Americanism.

Other forms of intolerance sweep over our country from time to time, and have in the last 100 years, and still do. Intolerance is always dictated by fear, of course. Witch-hunting, for example - political witch-hunting. When people are afraid and begin to lose faith in the strength of their own democratic institutions, ^{they} begin to adopt methods of terrorization and suppressions which democracy set out to destroy! And our current fear of Communism, for example, is driving us - is stampeding us into that mood. Red-baiting and witch-hunting!

The salvation of American democracy ever since 1789 has been that it has had a remarkable resilience, a capacity for evolution and adjustment ~~xxx~~ to new situations and to new demands of life as greater justice called for new adjustments. New ideas and the advocacy of change were very frequently the life blood of a vigorous American democracy. President Lincoln spoke of "a new birth of freedom". What has saved America is that from time to time we experienced a new birth of freedom, a widening of the horizons of freedom. And it was frequently the unorthodox and unpopular opinion which after a while proved to be the very salvation of the American democracy.

Today these simple facts are in danger of being forgotten. I read the other day a statement by Dr. Raymond B. Fosdick which admirably summarized the mood today. Dr. Fosdick wrote:

With the possible exception of John Adams' administration, there is a risk today in being a liberal that has never existed before in the history of the Republic. If you sign a petition to admit colored people to public housing developments, if you favor fair employment practices or are concerned with civil liberties, if you fight for the protection of the rights of the foreign born, if you oppose religious prejudice

and Jim Crowism, if you sanction cultural exchange with foreign countries, if you align yourself with those who are working for more effective labor unions or more adequate medical care, if you take any point of view which involves the implementation of the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal, you are apt to be suspected in some circles as a knowing participant in the Communist Front, or at the very least, as a witless dupe of Moscow's hypnotic influence.

There is hardly a progressive organization or undertaking in the country to which the adjective "communistic" has not been applied in the last few years - from the Tennessee Valley Authority and water power developments generally, all the way to farmers' and consumers' cooperatives and plans for rural electrification. Fingers are ever pointed at organizations like the YMCA, the YWCA and the defunct Epworth League. In many states teachers and college professors have been frightened into sterile silence, and even the pulpit has not been free from fear.

All this is dangerous to America. Nothing else is dangerous as much as this. It is this that we have to fear, for all else we can overcome. As long as American democracy can remain resilient, adaptive, giving free play to men's initiative, to the expressions of the free creative mind of man, so long is American democracy secure. As long as men will use the techniques and the methods of democracy for the achievements of the objectives which they may set for the American people, regardless of what these objectives may be - how unorthodox they may be at a given time, but as long as they will use only the methods and techniques and the apparatus of democracy, never resorting to force, to terrorization, to suppression - and that applies not merely to the man of capital, but to the man of labor as well. Sometimes men are so convinced that their cause is so just that any means are justified by the end. That's the death-knell of democracy. There is an inviolability and sanctity to methods in democracy without which democracy cannot exist! And as long people who talk about the free, private enterprise in industry will remember that there is such a thing as a free, private enterprise in the human mind as well and in the human spirit which must be protected, so long will our America be secure.

From time to time one hears prophets of doom, that America is finished. I came across the following in reading a book the other day:

Society (American society) has played out its last stake; it is checkmated. Young men have no hope. Adults stand like day-laborers idle in the streets. None calleth us to labor. The old wear no crown of warm life on their gray hairs. The present generation is bankrupt of principles and hope, as of property.

And this was written in 1837 by Emerson.

No, we need not listen to the prophets of doom as far as America is concerned. Wonderful horizons are beckoning the American people - wonderful horizons. And the youth of America have wonderful futures to look forward to. America can become, if the American people wish it, the great moral leader in the world, and help to bring about a world order of peace and security. America may become a moral leader in helping to establish the democratic way of life all over the world. The American people can establish on this gracious land economic justice for all within freedom and the dignity of the individual. There can be abundance for all of its people. And there can be equality for all in friendliness and in tolerance. There is nothing to make these objectives unattainable, except lack of will, lack of courage, lack of vision, lack of faith on the part of the American people. And as I look over the past 100 years and the 100 years which preceded that, I do not believe that the American people lack courage and faith and enterprise. And so I think we can face the coming century with a fair measure of confidence and hope.

Oct 30 '1949

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By the close of the 19th century American industry was producing more goods than American markets could profitably absorb, so that American business began to reach out for overseas markets. We began to expand in the last decade of the 19th century across the Pacific, ^{and} in the Carribean. We annexed Hawaii, the Phillipines and Puerto Rico, ~~and~~ other islands. The Spanish-American War marked the beginning of what might be called American imperialism. More and more we became involved in the Asiatic world, in China and in Japan, which we opened to the world in 1853. Our investment capital began to look for profitable fields abroad especially in Latin America. American business began

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nations, to bring about a new system of international relations. And after the First World War we were instrumental in bringing into existence the League of Nations, ^{through} the inspiration of President Wilson, ^{who} ~~which~~ was responsible for ^{1/3} the creation of the League of Nations. Many of the European nations were dragooned into it unwillingly, ~~and~~ It was pressure on the part of America which brought the League into existence, but we walked out on the League of Nations before very long. We wanted to assume no responsibility in a world organization. In 1918 our country was strongly isolationist, or at least the legislators of our country were. ~~And~~ ^{We} continued that way for years. ~~It was~~ As late as 1935 ~~that~~ the Senate of the United States defeated a resolution that America should enter the World Court.

~~And then came~~ ^{After} the Second World War, and another effort was made for the creation of a League of Nations, and in San Francisco the United Nations Organization was created. ~~But here again our adherence to it, while officially wholehearted in practice, is not so.~~ It is clear today that America has entirely abandoned the idea of isolationism. The Atlantic Pact is the great symbol of the radical new departure from the old conception of no entanglements, ^{and} no foreign alliances, ~~to the conception underlying~~ The Atlantic Pact, with the United States actually arming half of the world against the other half ^{pledges us} ~~and pledging~~ to go to war if any member in this Pact is attacked. The danger today which may threaten the success of the United Nations is not that the United States will not assume any responsibility in future international affairs, but that she might be inclined to assume all responsibility, that she might be inclined to side-step the United Nations and conscious of its own tremendous power in the world, ^{and} go it alone, ~~that~~ That would be dangerous ~~I believe~~ to the United Nations and to us. The burden may become too heavy and the responsibilities too great. The nations of the world must not come to rely upon the United States. They ^{must} come to rely upon the United Nations. And the intelligent direction of American diplomacy in the future, in my humble judgment, lies in strengthening the world organization, in arming it, in giving it power and force

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about a world order of peace and security. America may become a moral leader in

helping to establish the democratic way of life all over the world. The American

people can establish on this gracious land economic justice for all ^{with} ~~within~~ freedom

and ~~the~~ dignity ^{for} of the individual. There can be abundance for all of its people.

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