

Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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League for Labor Palestine, 1933.

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Address by Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

This subtle distinction between rabbi and doctor reminds me of what an old-fashioned rabbi once said: "When Judaism was healthy and strong, its leaders were called rabbis, and as soon as they became sick, they called the rabbis doctors." (Laughter)

I want to speak to you quite informally this evening about some of the things which I saw in Palestine, and particularly about the labor movement in Palestine. During my Sabbatical year I spent a good deal of it in and about Palestine. This was my third visit to the country. My first visit was in 1919, shortly after the World War. Palestine then was still under military occupation. Addiestine then was a very empty and desolate country. Here and there you could see a Jewish settlement or colony, but it was no more than some of these flowers that you see growing up between the debris of the ruins. It showed very little promise of great things.

My second visit to Palestine was in 1927. The country had developed a great deal during those eight years. New settlements and colonies had been established. Tel Aviv had become a city of respectable size and importance. Expanding Industries and expanding. Nevertheless I felt then that all about Palestine there was still the air of something experimental and suite tentative. One did not have the feeling of permanence about the whole project. It was something definitely in the making, One did not know whether the process would not sooner or later break down. This year that feeling of uncertainty left me the minute I got into the country. The country had made such mervelous strides in these five and a belf or six years. It was an intensive and extensive, development. One had the feeling that the plant had finally sent its roots deep down into the soil and that it had become a sturdy plant which would be able to withstand almost any storm which might sweep over it. Jewish settlements had multiplied to a remarkable degree. Trade, and industry and commerce had expanded. Home building had increased. Industry and commerce had social agencies which go to make up a permanent and stable community had developed to a remarkable degree. Between 1919 and 1933 close on to 125,000 Jews had come and settled in the country.

And What particularly impressed me was the spirit of confidence that one encountered everywhere. MILL that confidence was traceable to many causes. First of all, and most evident. course, was the fact that the country was prosperous. has already been dwelt the so often that I need not elaborate on it, The rest of the world was passing thru terrific economic tribulations. The most powerful and prosperous countries had gone down into a disastrous economic decline. Palestine Little Palestine, was holding its own. There were no bankruptcies, and there were no bank failures and no unemployment, and 271100 the Government finances were sound. Palestine had never been over-capitalized or over-industrialized.

And Palestine had beginning to enjoy the consequences of five major developments which had taken place in the country in the ten preceding years, first of which was the completion of the

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Ruthenberg Project for the hydro-electrification of the Jordan. That project, which seemed to be more or less of a fable for nearly a drady ton years in Zionist and Jewish circles, a vague dream, had finally become a reality of steel and concrete. It was finished, actually built, and is now giving electric power at low rates to practically two-thirds of Palestine.

The second development which contributed to this spirit of confidence in the country was the highly successful development of the citrus industry, particularly the orange industry, in the country. Palestine was becoming an exporter of no mean proportions of granges. This was bringing capital into the country. Heretopre the which last two or three years, capital had come into the Up to the INN country feither by way of contributions or by way of investments . which private individuals, bad brought into the country. Here was capital coming into the country on the basis of what the country was producing. The citrus industry is developing so rapidly that it is expected that in 1936 Palestine will be able to export some eight or ten million crates of oranges to the various markets in Europe and in Asia Minor.

The third major development was the development of the mineral resources, the chemical resources of the Dead Sea. A G wall town has grown around the Dead Sea, which I had the pleasure of visiting. Hundrees of workingmen are now employed in extracting some of the almost limitless rich potash from the Dead Sea. That potash is now being sold in the markets of the world. It is possible that this may be the richest sources of income for Palestine in the next generation from the sources of income for Palestine

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The fourth project, which was being completed while I was there, and is now completed, was the Haifa harbor. The Haifa harbor is now one of the two or three finest <u>largest</u> harbors on the Mediterranean. It is fast becoming the point of export and import not merely for Palestine and for parts of Syria, but for the entire hinterland, for Mesopotamia, for the Iraq. Haifa is furning to become going to be the great industrial center of Palestine.

Ind the last of the five major developments which contributed to this upbuilding of the morale of the people. In stimulating this hopefulness that one senses everywhere in the country, is the completion of the pipeline which is to carry oil from the Mosul cotion, from Ireq, to the shores of the Mediterranean. 1200 miles of pipes have been laid down right across the desert, and one of the two terminal points of that pipeline is Haifa. And Chready one continue to be stored for ultimate exportation.

For a small country like Palestine five of such major enterprises completed within the space of less than a decade, are enough to send a current of hope, and with it renewed initiative and enterprise through the whole economic life of the country.

Another reason for this spirit of confidence to my mind is this - and this brings me to the subject upon which I want to dwell a bit this evening - a realization that the economic foundations which have been laid in Palestine are true and sound foundations, that the economic superstructure of the country is grounded in real things built not upon sand, but upon those facts of economic life which are durable.

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And The labor descent in Palestine to my mind is responsible for this fact. I had occasion to observe quite closely the numerous factions and groupings in Palestinian Jewry, the old settlers and the new, the young and the old. and I was persuaded from my close observation of men and movements in body Palestine that the labor group represents the most sound, the most thoughtful, the most constructive, and if I dare say it, the most conservative element in the Palestinian population, to be done in the factor of the factor of the factor of the factor will experts. They have real leaders among them, real statement, real expensive experts. They know what they are about. They are realists. They are facing their problems pragnatically, intelligently and courageously.

Let me illustrate whet I meen. You are all acquainted with the Arab problem in Palestine. Recently we had some very serious riots in Palestine. They were not the first riots. They are probably not the last rist. Now, the Arab problem is a very serious one in the country. It cannot be lightly brushed aside. by gostures, by speech. There is a large Arab population, at present the dominant majority in the country, which for one reason or another has been agitated, instigated, aroused, and which for the time being is being wielded, manipulated by a small group of very clever, politically-minded Arab leaders who are trained in all the tricks of European propaganda methods, and who also know what they are about.

New The labor group in Palestine is facing the Arab problem forthrightly and squarely. It is not blinking the issue, At is not ignoring it.

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any theatrical grandstand, grandiloquent attitudes, by any bellicose gestures, by an effort to shout them down or to outplay them in the game of propaganda, knowing full well that these tactics cannot succeed. And so They have adopted a long-range program of rapprochment, a long range program of cooperation with the Arabs, realising fully that for the time being that program is very difficult of realization. They are determined to work with the Arab, and not against him. They are reconciled to the fact that the Arab is going to remain in Palestine and will be for years and generations to come an important element in the Palestinian population.

As a means of closely approaching the Arab and estabishing a basis for union with him on the forel of (labor interests and cooperation, they are endeavoring to raise the standard of the Arab workingman. They are even encouraging the unionization of the Arabs, because they believe that as the Arab rises in the economic scale, as the Arab becomes more literate and more intelligent in an economic sense, that he will realize that the interest of Jewish labor and the interest of Arab labor are not antithetical, they are not prosed to one another, but that both natural labor groups, both national groups can cooperate in the common task mutual benefit, the upbuilding of the country.

Now, if there is any other solution the Arab problem, to ust I for one frankly dent know it. There is no way of driving them into the desert. There is certainly no way today of reducing that pppulation to the level of feudal serfs to serve the interest of a dominant Jewish group. Not only can we not ourselves permit

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any such exploitation of enother human group, but it cannot be done.

There is another subject on which the labor group in Palestine has been sound and level-headed, and that is the subject of nationalism, of the Jewish State in Palestine. Now, the working group in Palestine, like all classic Zionists, are maximum nationalists. They have not surrendered the ideal of a Jewish State in Palestine. But they realize, as all people who are practical state crafe t meet realize, that no engaged in the business of state is built in a day. They are not blatant about their ultimate objectives, they are not irritant about them, they do not fling them in the face of the Arabs. At present they are not so much concerned with ultimate objectives as they are with their present detailed rights in the country They was Want to sink the roots of Jewish life deeper and deeper in the country. They know that they must have a preponderantly large Jewish majority in the country the Jewich state before this question of premacy of the he sates group can syer the country.

They have been criticized for it. The extreme Revisionwith the charge that they are time ist group has taunted them, has ang and It is so comfortable, and d servers. opportunists. warne glow gives one such a conso of inner exaltation when he feels that he vo more "partione" and compen er than the other fellow, that his program is more extrem than that of the other fellow. But the labor leaders of Palestine who are responsible in the uphneding work , The current manor offerd Jack self- undulyeus to the temptation, They are confront ed with the have ne day by day perplexing and difficult problems of construction and upbuilding, and they are determined not to be deviated from their

task of upbuilding by any of these grandiloquent, unrealisable may from may from may from may from the present hour which an fruitless and plangerous.

These two facts alone, their attitude towards the ArabA and their attitude towards the problem of nationalism, of the National State in Palestine, been in Palestine because of the labor group being today the all-important group in Palestine, that is given to the whole upbuilding program in Palestine a certain program in Palestine a certain produced extitude reality which it would not have if the politics of the country and have for the bands today of irresponsible visionsripe, and political improduced for the bands today of irresponsible visionsripe, and political

Another factor which the Labor Party has stressed in Palestine, and which to my mind particularly at this hour is of utmost importance - it was always an important fact . has been the idea of self-work which the Chairman read out Kuster summary of the program of the Histadruth. Palestine is built up by Jewish labor, not merely by Jewish capital. Classical this, Zionism simed at the thing. If you recall the history You will remember that of the Zionist movement, At was as much aimed at reconstructing the economic life of the Jew as it was at establishing a Jewish homeland for Palestin. Classic Zionism was an effort to restore to rech by the an economic balance in Jewish life, this frightful maladjustment Theconnic like y which the Galuth had forced upon the Jewish people in volus this overcrowding at the middle class, this foreing of one the sad cendelics into business and the professions, these facts which are responsible for so much of the present tragedy of German Jewich life.

You will recall that one of the most enkindling and

infuriating arguments which the Nazis used in the last fourteen a gaunt this was years of their propaganda is just this; that the Jew is an exploiter, the Jew lives off the labor of other people. How many Jewish farmers have we in Germany, how many Jewish artisans hav way Skilled and unskilled laborers have we in Germany? The Jew Sume trading, weather to be and productivities of other peoples. Of course we know that there are historical reasons for it. But a historical reason is an explanation, not a solution.

The classic thinkers of the Zionist Movement conceived as one of the great objectives of Zionism the normalizing of the e is settled economic life of the Jew once he in his own homeland. Many Jews that go into Palestine forget this. They bring a little capital in with them and they start a business, and they are not particularly careful whether they employ & JewSin the to cuplost business or arabs. Many of them would prefer the Arab because trab represents cheaper labor. and there is the canger that we would have in the course of time in Palestine this situation, an immigrant Jewish group, largely belonging to the bourgeois class, living off and exploiting the active working peasant / and protestan an group. And that would be smadge and be smirch the whole in Palestine. That would make us an object of the thr and Curre throughout is the strut, The what will the world. That would become then the classical example of the nochivities exploiting tendency of the Jewish people.

The labor group in Palestine however has been wird much aware of this problem, and so fundamental to their philosophy is that Palestine, Jewish Palestine, at least, shall be built up by

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Jewish labor from the ground up. They are not opposed to capital, they are not opposed to Jewish businessmen, but the Jewish businessman should work with, in cooperation with, the Jewish workingman.

lesson You must remember that if there is anything clear which has come out of the last ten or fifteen years of economic unrest in the world, it is this that ultimately when all issaid and and in the life ga water dens, the final verdict lies with the people who live on the soil when with their hands. and work in the shops Today the capitalist group is on trial hadi the alles even the world over_ these states. which are sta CONSTAN tic. ative. and capi The future belongs to the people who i Palestine If we are not represented in the Soil or in industry. WOIL Palestine as tillers of the soil and as workers in industry, we will share the fate of all capitalist groups which are emploiting the working groupe of the world.

Self-work then, a great principle of the Jewish labor the Jen, st unly is Palestine group in Palestine. And I have seen them work and there is fin and uplipping about this. I do not Very something about all unit is with and all workers are eunoblish by it. mean to wax romantic, about the workingman in Palestine. Thereis as much nobility to a workingmen in Cleveland as there is to a workingman in Tol Aviv or Jorusalem or Haifa. But there is to G perhaps this distinctiveness about the Jewish workingman in Palestine. He is really not a member of what We chouse 10 0011 the proletarian class, just as the Jewish farmer cannot rightly be called a peasant. His social level is wery high. His cultural level is very high. He is literate, he is well read, Sam many of them are well-educated. Many of them have had echoge

and university training. Their minds are open to everything that is going on in the world. You gether around with them in some circle after the day's work is ever, you sit around and est with them and talk with them. Well, I have met very few such circles that which as which and as studention in Cleveland in my years of experience. They have read the finest in the world's literature. They are throughly at home in economics and sociology. Many of them have thought out for themselves a philosophy of life. It is challenging to come up with a group like that. In a way, it is humbling.

Out of this principle of self-work which Jewish labor is stressing in Palestine has come this other - I ought not to call it a principle, I should rether call it a necessity namely, the insistence on Jewish laborg The Bhat is that the Jewish employer shall employ Jewish labor and not Arab labor, not behotelity to cause th enemies of the Arabs. But den't you see the In Palestine itself and around Palestine there is an inc ible reservoir of cheap Arab labor. Their standard of living for the time being is very low. The Jewish workingman and his family cannot compete with them, He, can't, Tive on three or four Seneequently the Jewish employer - and the Jewish piasters a day. employer is no different than all other employers - will buy his labor in the cheapest market. If he is permitted to choose as between Arab and Jewish labor, he will, with a few outstanding exceptions, I suppose employ as a matter of course Arab labor, and Jewish labor will progressively be starved out. There will be no Jewish labor in Palestine. There will be no self-work in the upbuilding of the country.

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And so they have been subject to the anger and resistance on the part of other groups in Palestine, and to much on the face of it logical argumentation on the part of these other groups, who say to them "You are Socialists, you do not draw any distinction as regards labor between group and group and race and race. And here you are not consistent, you bely your own position." In spite of these logical oppositions, and in spite of the active oppositions of many groups in Palestine, Jewish labor has been compelled, and in my mind, justfied in insisting upon Jewish labor in Jewish enterprises in Palestine.

and fastly, and which that I shall be through, Jewish labor has tried to emphasize the importance of cooperative enterprise in the country of social enterprise. New That ought not to be regarded today as very startling and radical. The whole world is moving in that direction today. The day of unrestricted competitive indidividualism is drawing fast to a close. Even in such a staid and conservative land like ours we are beginning to officer would the idea of controlled industry, which inevitably leads to some form of socialized industry.

Now, In Palestine Jewish labor has maintained that rather than first build up a capitalist society with all its inherent weaknesses and evils, and then be compelled through suffering and struggle to revamp so or destroy it completely and build upon the ruins a socialized state, here a bar bar of fortunate in beginning in a new country where to don't have to destroy before to can build, here start de nove from the foundations and build up some kind of satisfying cooperative social

On a small scale, they have already doneit and economic life. have done it___ course because their capital was limited. They have done it, not as it was done in Russia through the expropriation of the properties of other people through blood and terror. They have done it through which they thewselves a their own efforts, their own capital, and what friends and kronded. sympathizers the world over have given them. And there are Now some very beautiful and model Jewish colonies in Palestine where the old prophetic ideal of a real human society has been built realized gist when Cooperative groups of one type or another pooled their and pooled their resources, have pooled their enthusiasms labor, be rost heer people without sacrificing their individualition or their personal

freedom.

I don't know anywheres in the world today where this fype of bloodless unforced, voluntary experiment in a socialized community is going on, no place in the world except in Palestine. and In that sense Palestine is becoming on a small scale a sort of a proving ground for mankind, a sert of a test laboratory for hereful the cooperative commonwealth of tomorrow.

ind for these reasons, I go back to what I said at the beginning, that the labor group in Palestine represents in my. judgment the soundest, element the most constructive element, the most conservative element in the literal sense of the term, and the most promising element in Palestine.

I met some of their leaders, the unforgettable and much arlosonthe Truly a remarkable man. I was with him the night before he left for Berlin, and the next I heard of him was that he had been assassinated. Arlow roff represented the high type of Western European Jew, for he had been educated at the same time his in Western European ways of thought, and yet he also represented the finest traditions and the highest ideals of Israel. He was a man of keen mentality, he understood not only movements and abstract ideas, but what is infinitely more important, he understood people. If that is why he was chosen to be the head of the Political Department of the Zionist Executive in Palestine. And We made friends among the British officials. We made friends among the important sections of the Palestinian population. We was struck down in the midst of his youth and his career, and his great possibilities. It is a tragic loss to the movement, in To Palestine and to Israel.

I met Benfwi, I met Rubaschoff, Katzanelensen, many other of the leaders of the labor group, and they increased still more my confidence in this group, in whose hands, by the may, the fortunes of Palestine today likeweat.

Let me close with this other side of the picture. For one reason or another the labor group has not been able to capture lange sections of the imagination of the youth of Palestine, not all of the youth, but large sections of the youth The youth of Palestine, at least shall I say the most vocal section of it, tends very decidedly to the extreme right, just as the youth of the control European Fascist angle of zionism. They also like their We call it the Ziniju va also like their uniforms, and They like ship: they are captural they also like the martial ways of a party wish demands maximum, even if it can achieve less than the minimum.

I suppose the reason for this fact is this, that the Socialism of today is no longer is movement of daring and danger that it was a generation ago. A generation ago Socialism represented the ultimate extreme to the imagination of young people. which is embindled by the hereism, The danger which is involved in being identified with an extreme movement unknobed their ander and for untrid them. There are today extremes beyond Socialism, On the one

hand in Communism, on the other hand the other extreme, which also brings with it a measure of daring and gesture. It is Fascism. Socialism has become more or less of a conservative worknund more like demoncracy concelly and liberalism. and Unfortunately today democracy and liberalism cannot capture the imagination of young people. and that is one of the reasons for the defeat of democracy and liberalism terms with a

I saw the youth in Italy. I say the youth in Germany. I saw the youth in France, and other countries of Europe. They are attracted almost irresistibly by the parties of the extreme. They have nothing but a smile of contempt, shall we say, or indifference to this thing we call democracy and liberalism, and now I believe we can also include Socialism.

How to get around that in Palestine I don't know but for the series of the encount and a greatering Palestine you the first a series problem. The encount and a greatering has led to serious riots in the Palestine emong lews, and I suppose directly and indirectly and indirectly and indirectly and indirectly and indirectly and indirectly and in the assassination of an any more than I know how we can get around it I don't the aroused to a high pitch of devotion and enthusiasm for democratic ideals, which a generation or two ago were

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able to set fire to a nation and raise tt to a high pitch of sacrifice. That is one of the great problems in Palestine.

Perhaps as the mood of the age changes, perhaps as life becomes a little more quiet and settled these extreme movements will disappear of themseleves, and these solid constructive tendencies will again gain ascendency in human life, and Pales tive's youth will again rally to them.

I think that is all I want to say this evening, and I thank you very much. (Applause)



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