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Zionist Organization of America, 1961.

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AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BY DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER
at the
ZIONIST CONVENTION OF AMERICA

Saturday Evening, September 2, 1961

In the thirteen prologue years of its existence, the State of Israel has clearly indicated the basic design of its national life and the unfolding lines of its future development.

By its faithful allegiance to the democratic processes, by the development of its educational system and its institutions of higher learning, by its advanced social legislation, by the aid which it has extended to less developed nations of Africa and Asia, and by the maintenance of peace, in the face of boycott, blockade and the menacing contrivances of its un-reconciled neighbors, Israel has announced the ground-tone of its chosen way of life, its fundamental purposes and its dominant interests as a nation. All this is in complete accord with the ancient and noble traditions of our people. And it is this which makes us rejoice today as Israel completes its thirteen prologue years of testing and probation, even more than its extraordinary material progress.

What now of the future?

It would be nice if we could "dip into the future and see the visions of the world and all the wonders that would be", but we cannot do it. No one can guarantee the future of a people, or of the human race, but God Himself, and He has evidently chosen to keep us guessing. He seems to have said to us, though not in so many words, keep working and have faith. The men in the past who had faith and kept working in despite of all uncertainty and discouragement, won through. The very success of our movement and the notable achievements in Israel are supreme triumphs of faith; for everything pointed to certain failure and defeat.

2

The days to come will make even greater demands upon our faith and our perseverance than ever before. Israel will not be able to escape the political tensions and pressures of the world of which it is, and will be, a part. Grave, unsolved problems -- internal and external -- still remain. Danger lurks upon its borders. The timid among us and those who are not inured to the hard pull and the long stretch will fall away. The brave of heart, those who have faith in Israel, in Israel's destiny, in themselves and in the endless resources of the human spirit, will carry on, and will score rewarding victories in the exciting days which lie ahead. Faith will be the bridge which will carry us over.

The two foremost world powers today, the United States and the Soviet Union, have both played a role in the formative years of the State of Israel, though their roles have not been of equal weight and importance. Both will continue to play a role in the future of the State, whether positive or negative.

The Soviet Union was the first member of the United Nations to speak up in May, 1947 for an independent Jewish state in Palestine. The act was momentous. The Soviet Union was the second of the great powers to grant recognition to the State of Israel two days after it was established. In his message conveying the official recognition of his government, Foreign Minister Molotov expressed "its confidence in the successful development of friendly relations between the U.S.S.R. and the State of Israel". That, too, was of vital importance to Israel. Since then, the Soviet Union's attitude towards Israel has undergone a steady decline in friendliness. The cold war which has engulfed the East and the West, and the feverish hunt for allies, regardless of cost, has set the Soviet Union courting the Arab states, even as the United States has been courting them. It was a foregone conclusion that these states would prove a broken reed to lean on, both for the East and the West. The West was the first to experience the

inevitable disillusionments and now the Soviet Union is beginning to taste the bitterness of Arab unreliability. Perhaps the Soviet Union will, before long, see the need to re-appraise its position in the Middle East, and will take another look at Nasser and his alleged pro-Soviet sympathies.

There is no reason why the Soviet Union, in its compelling drive for co-existence, should not find it possible to co-exist in friendship with the State of Israel, in spite of the fact that Israel is a democracy and wishes to remain so. Israel harbors no ill will towards the Soviet Union. It would gladly trade with it and live in friendship with it. Certainly Israel represents no threat to its security....

I was in the Soviet Union recently. From what I saw and from what I heard, I was confirmed in the position which I have maintained right along. I have always believed in co-existence of the two systems, ours and theirs, and have for years advocated it. The Russians have adopted a way of life which is theirs. I would not choose it for myself or for America. To us it has stark and basic defects which we cannot ignore even as it has merits, which we should not underestimate. But their way of life is theirs, and whatever is wrong with it they themselves will have to correct in the future.

It has not been demonstrated that the two systems cannot exist side by side. There is much that each can learn from the other, though neither at the moment seems to be inclined to acknowledge it. Neither system has said the last word. Both have undergone change in the past, and undoubtedly will do so in the future. Life may bring them much closer together, even though their dogmas and ideologies seem to be irreconcilable.

Certainly their differences cannot be resolved by the sword. The problem before the world today is not which system is the better, but how the two can keep from destroying one another -- and mankind. Both are strongly entrenched

and sufficiently powerful that one cannot destroy the other without destroying itself. The question is then not which will bury the other, but whether a war, once un-leashed between the East and the West, will not bury them both.

We must learn to live on the same globe with the Soviet people and they with us. Neither they nor we are always in the right. The leaders of both countries must try to reduce tensions. The peoples of the world are waiting for signs of a new and inspired statesmanship both in the Kremlin and the White House. The old has led us nowhere, only from one crisis to another. Let them not be afraid to trade with each other in goods or in ideas. Let them compete in only one way -- which system can do more for its people.

It is, therefore, not as enemies of the Soviet Union or in order to increase tensions that I and others draw attention to the unfavorable position in which the Jewish people, as a nationality group, finds itself in the Soviet Union today. As individuals, Jews fare no better and no worse there than all other Soviet citizens. It would, of course, be idle to suggest that all anti-Semitism has been eradicated there. This would be a Utopian assumption even for the United States. But cultural and religious discriminations are undoubtedly being practiced against the Jewish minority. The fundamental law of the U.S.S.R. grants cultural autonomy and equality to all nationality groups. They have a right to their own language, schools, press and other cultural activities. This has been one of the honorable and proud boasts of the Soviet Union. The Jewish nationality group, however, because it is an extra-territorial community, so to speak, not centered in any one territory or region of the Union, has, in fact, been denied such rights. Those who wish or wished to enjoy such privileges, it is argued, should or should have migrated to the autonomous Jewish region of Birobidjan which the Soviet established. This, of course, ignores the historic realities of

the Jewish position in Russia. Jews, though widely scattered over the country, always constituted a separate, ethnic and cultural group. The argument also overlooks the fiasco of Birobidjan which should have been foreseen. Nor were the motives which prompted the Soviet authorities in 1927 to set up Birobidjan as an autonomous Jewish region, bound up with the hope of stamping out all Jewish cultural activities in other parts of the Soviet Union where Jews would remain in considerable numbers.

Under Lenin, and for a time thereafter, Jewish nationality rights were not only recognized but implemented. The teaching of Yiddish and Hebrew was not interdicted. There was a Yiddish press and a Yiddish and Hebrew theatre, and in localities where Jews were predominant, there were Jewish Soviets and courts of law whose business was conducted in Yiddish. There were Yiddish schools attended by tens of thousands of Jewish children. Under Stalin, these rights were brutally abrogated and a campaign of persecution tainted with a thinly-veiled anti-Semitism set in. All Yiddish cultural institutions were outlawed. Yiddish writers were liquidated and Yiddish schools were closed. Many obstacles were placed in the way of those Jews who wished to practice their religion. Not only was the number of synagogues sharply restricted, but prayer-books and prayer-shawls, Jewish calendars and ritual objects generally, could not be replaced.

With the death of Stalin and his official "depreciation" at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, the situation eased somewhat, though many of the obnoxious practices still remain. Yiddish writers who had been executed under the Stalin terror and purges have been re-instated and some of their works have been recently published. The works of Sholom Aleichem, Mendele Mocher Seforim and I.L. Peretz have also been published. The myth that there exists no Yiddish reading public in the Soviet Union has been exposed. A half-million Jews still

claim Yiddish as their mother-tongue. A few days ago, the very first Yiddish periodical since 1948, a bi-monthly literary review, made its appearance in Moscow.

But much still remains to be corrected. I had occasion to discuss these matters at great length with some important Soviet officials. I am inclined to the belief that further progress in the direction of granting the Jewish minority in the Soviet Union the same cultural and religious considerations which are accorded all other nationality and religious groups can still be made, given a friendly and insistent world Jewish opinion.

I share the opinion of the former Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Mr. George F. Kennan, who wrote in his recent book, "Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin":

"I am inclined to ascribe deep and encouraging significance to some of the changes in the character and structure of the Soviet regime that have taken place since Stalin's death. The drastic alteration in the role of the police has constituted a basic change in the nature and spirit of the Soviet society. It has also altered somewhat the character of the political process, particularly in the senior echelons of the Party, away from the horror of unadulterated police intrigue and in the direction of a rudimentary parliamentarism, at least within the Central Committee....The relaxation of the Iron Curtain has, to date, remained within modest limits. But I think it has gone so far that it would not be easy to bottle up again the intellectual and cultural life of this talented people as it was bottled up under Stalin."

I do not believe that Russian Jewry should be written off. Many have undoubtedly been assimilated in the past forty years, having been denied Jewish cultural and religious education, and having been cut off from contact with world Jewry. In some instances this assimilation was eager and self-willed. But many have retained an unshaken racial loyalty and an historic attachment, which, though not vocal, are strong and unmistakable.

The United States has played a major role in the formative years of the State of Israel and it has been consistently friendly, though at times vague, hesitant and involved. Because of this lack of precision, it has, on occasion, disturbed even friends who never questioned its fundamental good-will. In troubled times, indefiniteness in matters of national policy may lead to international misunderstandings and, at times, to action, or lack of action, which was never intended.

It was hoped that the new administration would be less vague and hesitant in matters which affected justice, peace and security in the Middle East. I recall the magnificent address which J.F. Kennedy, then the Democratic candidate for the Presidency of the United States, delivered before the convention of the Zionist Organization of America just a year ago and the enthusiasm and approval with which it was greeted. In the course of that major, policy address, he declared:

"There has been enough rhetoric in recent years about free transit through the Suez Canal to float every boat through it -- but there has been no leadership. Our policy in Washington and in the United Nations has permitted defiance of our 1956 pledge with impunity -- indeed, with economic reward.

"If America's word to the world is to have any meaning -- if the decisions and resolutions of the United Nations are to be binding on all parties -- if the Mutual Security Amendment which I co-sponsored with Senator Douglas is to have meaning -- if the clear thoughtful language of the Democratic platform is to have meaning -- the influence of this nation and other maritime powers must be brought to bear on a just solution that removes all discrimination from the Suez Canal.

"The Israelis surrendered their 1956 victory only because the United States and the United Nations committed themselves to the fulfillment of a pledge of free transit in the Suez Canal. So this is a United Nations resolution in which we have a particular moral obligation."

Unfortunately, the influence of our nation has as yet not been brought to bear to remove the outrageous discriminations against Israel in the Suez Canal.

Mr. Kennedy further declared in his address:

"We have also had much rhetoric in recent years about the arms race in the Middle East. I propose that an international effort be made to limit an arms race in the Middle East with a realization that if this is not accomplished, we shall not permit an imbalance to exist which threatens the right of any country to self-defense."

The arms race in the Middle East has not been limited and a dangerous imbalance, threatening the security of Israel and its right to self-defense, has been permitted not only to exist but to develop even more ominously.

Further, Mr. Kennedy proposed:

"that all the authority of the White House be used to call into conference the leaders of Israel and the Arab states to consider privately their common problems, assuring that we support in full their aspirations for peace, unity, independence and a better life -- and that we are prepared to back up this moral commitment with economic and technical assistance.

"The offer should be made with equal frankness to both sides; and all the world would be watching the response of each side. I sincerely believe that an American presidential initiative, honestly intended and resolutely pursued, would not be lightly rejected by either side, unless that side was prepared to bear the burden of breaking the peace and I promise to waste no time in taking that initiative."

The press has reported that the President did contact the heads of the Arab states and of Israel. What has been the reaction of the Arab governments

and of Israel to this presidential initiative? Who accepted his good offices and who rejected them? Which government was cynically prepared to bear the burden of breaking the peace? And will the unsolved problem now be allowed to rest there?

And what of the Arab boycott against American firms trading with Israel which is continuing unabated while our government submits supinely to Arab discrimination practiced against American citizens? The Arab League continues to dictate to our State Department the conditions under which American companies shall carry on their commercial activities abroad, which American ships shall be allowed to call at Israeli ports, and whether Jewish service-men can serve at American service bases abroad. A government which can defy the might of the Soviet in defense of the rights of German citizens in West Berlin, finds it inadvisable to defend the rights of its own citizens in Saudi Arabia.... Is this the price which we are required to pay for Arab votes in the United Nations -- votes which indeed are seldom forth-coming?

I believe that in these matters, too, things are likely to change for the better, if a friendly and persistent public opinion makes itself heard in the councils of government. The good-will and good intentions of President Kennedy and his administration are beyond question. But, as the President himself put it, "there has been enough rhetoric in recent years". Action is now eagerly awaited.

Let me conclude with the words with which I began: "Faith will be the bridge which will carry us over." These are grave, uncertain, and, in a sense, dangerous times for all nations and for Israel. But the last thirteen years have also marked a wonderful new beginning for our people.

Our ancient prophets looked back upon the period of the Exodus from Egypt and the sojourn in the wilderness as upon the bright, early morning of their race, the golden period in the history of their people. They spoke of it with deep love

and nostalgia. "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of His harvest". Amos, Micah, Ezekiel, and the later Isaiah, all recall with tenderness and affection the days of Israel's youth, the days of freedom, selection and marvelous promise. The first Shir -- a song of glorious rejoicing in God -- was sung, said the rabbis, not by any of the Patriarchs, but by Moses and the Children of Israel after they escaped from Egypt.

These prophets knew, of course, how often the people had sinned during their wanderings in the wilderness, the worship of the Golden Calf, and of Baal-pe'or. They knew of their endless contentiousness and murmurings. They knew also of the bitter physical privations and sufferings of the people in their wanderings through "that great and terrible wilderness".

Nevertheless, they looked back upon those days of great new beginnings as glorious and creative days when Israel set out upon its career as a nation.

Our generation, too, has been privileged to witness an Exodus and to enjoy the bright, early morning of national re-birth. A great and terrible wilderness, where millions of our people perished, led us at long last to freedom and to re-born hopes. A glorious radiance will always shine over the heads of this generation. Future ages will look back upon this period of Jewish history with pride, and nostalgia. They will be moved to say - Hadesh Yamenu ke-Kedem - renew our days with the courage and grandeur of the days of old....

May we, of this favored generation, prove ourselves worthy of our privileged destiny.

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NUMBER 1

In this Issue

Israel Still Faces Grave Problems

Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

Agenda for American Jews

Rabbi William Berkowitz

Right or Duty?

Judge Daniel Gutman

First hand Report of Eichmann Trial

Rabbi Shephard Baum

Major Policy Resolutions

New Nassi Presents Program

52nd ANNUAL CONVENTION REVIEW

Israel Still Faces Grave Problems

by Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

THE first thirteen years in the life of a state are, in a sense, a prologue. In classic drama, the prologue served to acquaint the audience with the dramatic situation of the play and to forecast in broad outline what was to follow.

In the prologue years of its existence, the State of Israel has clearly indicated the basic design of its national life and the unfolding lines of its future development. Israel intends to build a free, open and democratic society. It has linked its political destiny with that of the free peoples of the earth.

Israel intends to build a progressive society. Reverent of the past, it will move resolutely into the future. It will foster education, science, research and the institutions which advance the frontiers of the human mind.

Israel intends to build a just society, free from exploitation, poverty and discrimination, wherein the rights and dignity of man will be safe-guarded. Israel intends to become a helpful member of the international community and to share with the less developed nations its experience and its knowledge. Israel intends to be a peaceful society, seeking peace and pursuing it.

In the past thirteen years, Israel has announced, by its faithful allegiance to the free world, the development of its educational system and its institutions of higher learning, its advanced social legislation, the aid which it has extended to less developed nations of Africa and Asia, and the maintenance of peace, in the face of boycott, blockade and the



Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

menacing contrivances of its unreconciled neighbors, the ground-tone of its chosen way of life, its fundamental purposes and dominant interests as a nation.

All this is in complete accord with the ancient and noble traditions of our people. This is what makes us rejoice today as Israel completes its thirteen prologue years of testing and probation, even more than its extraordinary material progress.

EVERY one who has had a hand in helping to bring Israel into being and in assisting in its growth—as you have assisted through the purchase of Bonds for Israel and in other ways—may feel proud and deeply gratified. Especially may our people's pioneers who fought so valiantly and built so well in Israel. Theirs is the exaltation of men who have sown in tears and have reaped in song.

The Jewish people has come through these thirteen searching years, vindicated in its loyalty, confirmed in the solidarity, strengthened in spirit, and with increased dignity and confidence. It rose to the chal-

lenge of the hour. It did not let itself down. It did not miss its great historic moment. It might have done more, and I believe that it will assuredly do more in the future, but no people in history, so widely scattered, so varied and so ramified, has ever done as much.

WHAT now of the future?

It would be nice if we could "dip into the future and see the visions of the world and all the wonders that would be," but we cannot do it. No one can guarantee the future of a people, or of the human race, but God Himself, and He has evidently chosen to keep us guessing. He seems to have said to us, though not in so many words, keep working and have faith. Those in the past who had faith and worked despite all uncertainty and discouragement, won through. The very success of our movement and the notable achievements in Israel are supreme triumphs of faith; for everything pointed to certain failure and defeat. The days to come will make even greater demands upon our faith and perseverance than ever before. Israel will not be able to escape the political tensions and pressures of the world of which it is a part. Grave, unsolved problems—internal and external—still remain. Danger lurks upon its borders. "Death to Israel," is still the chief slogan of every Arab politician who wishes to ride into power in his country. The timid among us and those who are not inured to the long, hard pull and the difficult stretch will fall away. The brave of heart, those who have faith in Israel, in Israel's destiny, in themselves and in the endless resources of the human spirit, will carry on, and will score rewarding victories in the exciting days

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which lie ahead. Faith will be the bridge which will carry us over.

I note that even in this thirteenth year of Israel's existence, there are still some Jews who are concerned about the political relationship between the State of Israel and Jews who live in other lands.

Dual allegiance was never a fact in Jewish experience. It exists only in the arsenal of the anti-Semite and in the minds of the frightened and insecure Jew. Jews have always been loyal citizens in the lands of their adoption, just as the English, French or Italians, who found new homes in other countries.

IT should be clear to every right-thinking man that no one in Israel can commit the Jews of America any more than the Jews in America can dictate to the State of Israel. If certain American Jews feel insecure in their citizenship, this insecurity existed long before the establishment of the State of Israel, which, by common consent, has rather raised the status and fortified the position of the Jews in the eyes of the American people.

The only way Israel can embarrass the Jews of the United States is by not living up to its promise of a free and just society. The only way the Jews of the world can embarrass Israel is by withholding from the pioneers the tools which they require to build the State. It is in this sense, and in this sense only, that our fortunes comprehend each other. Only good will, voluntary cooperation, trust and discretion can serve as a permanent two-way bridge between Israel and the Diaspora. Whatever obligations the Jews of the world assume towards Israel are self-imposed. They are part of our obligations to the Jewish people. They are the obligations of historic kinship, of members of a community pledged to mutual assistance. The Jews of the

world cannot, and will not remain mere neutral spectators to the heroic drama of Israel re-born.

This is not the occasion to review what the American Jewish community contributed to the reestablishment of the State of Israel. This is the work for future historians whose conclusions will not be slanted, I am sure, or guided by jaundiced party interests. But I believe, and I believe that you will agree with me, that without the remarkable rallying of the forces of American Jews in the critical years which preceded the establishment of the State, without their monumental activities in arousing and marshalling public opinion in this country, without their forceful political activity, and without their generous outpouring of substance and financial support, the State of Israel would not have been established.

This is not to say that the entire credit for this heroic achievement is to be given to the American Jewish community—far from it. Many important forces merged in the final achievement, and in the first instance the heroic self-sacrifice on the part of the fighting Jews of Palestine. But the fact remains that the great political victories which culminated in the decision of the United Nations, and in the recognition of the State of Israel by the American Government, were due, in a very large measure, to the activities of the American Jewish community.

APART from the inveterate opposition to the State of Israel on the part of Arab governments—which may in time be attenuated—there are still some Jews and some non-Jews who are very unhappy about its very existence. Professor Arnold Toynbee, the fair haired boy of the American Council for Judaism, is a case in point. Israel and Zionism are his particular burden and parable.

Zionism and anti-Semitism are, in his view, expressions of an identical point of view. The watchword of anti-Semitism is "Back to the medieval ghetto." Zionism simply seeks to gather all the far-flung ghettos in the world into one single consolidated ghetto in Israel.

You will recall that this same Professor declared not long ago that Judaism survived through the centuries "only as a fossil," and that the Jews were among the relics of the Syriac civilization. He has since reconsidered his views about Judaism. Judaism is now a unique and quite exalted religion which, if it could only be separated from the Jews, would have a great future in the world. Professor Toynbee is now all out for Judaism, but without Jews!

In a recent article in the anti-Zionist publication, "The Jewish Newsletter," its editor writes: "While Jewish nationalism in the Diaspora is certainly bound to disappear in the Western world, particularly in the United States, it is not at all certain that American Jews will turn to Jewish religion in any form to take the place of nationalism. Modern Judaism has nothing to offer to the Christian or Jewish world. There is more prophetic Judaism in Quakerism, Unitarianism and other liberal Protestant or even Catholic groups than in the whole of modern Judaism, including the Reform movement. As for modern Jews, if they hunger and thirst for religion, it is certainly not for Jewish tribalism and its ideological front, known as Judaism."

But what is in the minds of these deceived prophets and Jewish escapist shall never come to pass. Others before them had tried, by sword or pen, to extirpate Jew or Judaism, or both. Because of them, Israel has suffered much, but it has nevertheless survived.