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An Address

by

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before the

ANNUAL MEETING

of the

HEBREW SHELTERING AND IMMIGRANT AID SOCIETY

New York City

Hotel Astor

Sunday, March 5, 1944

Broadcast over WMCA

4 P.M., E.W.T.

I welcome this chance to speak to the members and friends of the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society, and also of talking to a wider audience on this broadcast. For sixty-three years the Society has been stretching hands of welcome to the men and women who came to our country in search of the adventure of freedom. They had torn up their roots, having determined that the new world was better than the old. Their hearts must have beaten with the excitement of the unlimited future, suddenly flowing toward them, as they stood on deck and watched the new shore line of the great harbor they were entering, or the silhouette, perhaps at dawn, of the Statue of Liberty. But their ties with all they had known and loved had been broken. In the eagerness of looking forward there was sadness in looking back. The gulf had to be bridged. Organizations such as yours helped them bridge that gap.

Tonight I want to review briefly the history of immigration to this country, and suggest some of the problems that will confront our decisions in the near future - the future immediately following the war, and during the formative post-war years.

In the year 1880, the year before this Association was founded, immigration abruptly increased from the previous five-year average of 170,000 to 450,000. It grew to five and one-quarter million during the next decade and reached its maximum of a million a year between 1905 and 1914.

The Quota Act of 1921 reduced immigration to around 300,000 annually for the next six years. Under this statute immigration from European countries was limited each year to three percent of the nationals of each foreign country in the United States according to the 1910 census.

From 1931 to 1943 the figures fluctuated under an annual total of 100,000, averaging less than 50,000 a year.

We sometimes talk rather loosely about "refugees", forgetting their pitiable plight - starvation and torture, the slow starvation of children who some day might be free and strong men and women. The terrible shock of these years has been heaped most violently against the Jews, for they were the first to suffer, and in every Axis-dominated country they have endured the most shameful indignities and repressions. We cannot realize, for we have not seen, how cruelly they have been treated. Nor on the other hand can we fully understand, except those of us who, like the members of your Association, have seen it at first hand, the touching gratitude of those who have found their way to our country, and felt around them the safety and decency of free institutions.

Two years ago I had occasion to deliver a radio address describing the alien registration act which had just gone into effect. The same day a young Radcliffe student wrote me from Cambridge, Massachusetts, expressing what refuge in this country meant to her. "I don't need to tell you," she wrote, "that we, perhaps even more than you 'real' Americans, wandering, uprooted and haunted as we have been for the last eight years, need your United States; not just as a piece of land, a material living space; for much more than that. We need America to regain our faith in living, and dying. Human beings, and above all young people, do not live by bread alone. We have the urge of being loyal to something on this earth; of pledging our allegiance to some flag. We crave to be let to love, and be at least accepted in return. We want to know why we breathe, and eat, and study; why we should work; get married, and have children. We need America to give us an answer."

And America needs these new immigrants who with their aspirations of what America means to them have built her into the greatness she has become.

Recently there has been a good deal of uninformed discussion as to the number of "refugees" coming to this country in the past few years since racial and religious persecution has become a deliberate government policy in the Axis world, particularly in Germany. As the Commissioner of Immigration has pointed out, the impression that refugees have been swarming into the United States during the past decade is without foundation in fact. I am speaking now of immigrant aliens, those admitted permanently, as distinguished from tourists and students and business visitors who come here for temporary stay or in transit.

For the ten years from 1933 to 1943 we admitted a total of 279,071 immigrant aliens, an average of less than 28,000 a year, from Axis-dominated countries. During this period 228,068 non-immigrants were admitted for temporary stay, and a large majority of them have already left the United States. Many of them of course were not refugees at all.

Traditionally we have been a generous people to the oppressed of other countries who have fled to our shores. Should we now be alarmed that during this hideous decade of the cruelest oppression that Europe has known, the victims, chiefly Jewish, sought shelter with us, in numbers far below the quota designations of their respective countries? Should we be perturbed by the admission of 28,000 refugees a year, even if all were termed "refugees", into a country of 130,000,000!

There are other countries, smaller but no less civilized than ours, which have responded far more generously. From 1939 to last November the Swedish nation admitted 41,000 refugees, of whom 12,000 were children under 16 and of whom approximately one-third were Jews. Had we furnished refuge on a similar scale and in the same proportion to our population, 850,000 refugees would have come to the United States since 1939 alone.

I make this comparison not to suggest that we have been inhuman in our immigration policies, but so that we can see them in proper perspective. We are a country of many races and of many faiths. For the major stretch of our existence we have opened our doors wide to newcomers from Europe. We have built our greatness on their vigor. For about twenty years now, conscious that we were not absorbing the new streams from abroad into our own national make-up, we have heavily restricted the flow. Already the results have begun to show. At the end of 1940 there were slightly less than five million foreigners in the United States, not by estimate but by actual count under the Alien Registration Act. Three years later there were a little over three million six hundred thousand - a drop of about 25%. This drop is mainly accounted for by the large number naturalized during those three years, about 930,000. But the point is that today the proportion of foreigners to the total population - less than 3% - is smaller than it has been for many decades.

A number of bills have been recently introduced in Congress seeking to ban all immigration after the war. In the years to come, particularly in these immediate years after the enemy is beaten and the sad countries of Europe lift their eyes to the West, I suggest that we

must not shut our doors to the needs of our fellow men. I do not know what will be the tendency, whether the newly freed people, looking to their own reconstruction, will be less tempted to immigrate to the extent they had before the war. But I sincerely hope that we will not make all migration impossible. I believe in restricted immigration. But I do not believe that it would be wise, let alone generous, to cut off all immigration as soon as the war is over. We shall be living in a more closely knit world - a world in which, if peace is to long endure, nations cannot be separated in rigid vacumms of isolation. It is too soon at this time to formulate any plan or policy looking to post-war immigration. Nor do I believe that it would be wise now to attempt to fix such a policy. We must plan for the wisest, the steadiest, and the most fruitful development of our own country. It is normal and proper that we must think first of our own people, of their growth and happiness, before we give consideration to the needs of the men and women of other countries who would come to our land.

Yet our growth and happiness, the development of this American race, cannot be thought of separately from other nations, apart from the welfare of other human beings. The war has taught us that in fact we are not isolated, socially or economically, from other peoples and other races. The lesson was not learned when we fought twenty-five years ago. But today the world is even more interdependent. And now we can see more clearly that our policies and our actions affect and are affected by what happens in other lands no longer distant in terms of travel or of communication.

It is perhaps a truism to keep repeating this dominating factor of human solidarity. But we must never forget it. It should underlie all

our thinking, all our approach to this new world as yet so formless beyond the approaching horizon of the peace. The field of immigration is but one aspect of the larger vistas. If America is to prosper it must trade with other nations. But trade is an integrated exchange involving give and take. We can live behind a tariff wall and borrow money to pay for our own exports, as we did after the last war. But that would hardly be international trade; and we have at least learned, since the last war, that we cannot, internationally speaking, have our cake and eat it.

Living in this new world will involve closer international obligations and responsibilities. More and more it will be a world of compromise of those expressions of nationalism which tend to build barriers between nations - or so at least if a lasting peace is to be attained. After the war the successful continuance of the good will between the allies is essential for the beginnings of that peace. The sudden closing of our doors to the nationals of our allies would not be calculated to ensure cooperative action by other nations in fields that we may hold essential for the foundations of peace. That we are fully aware of the vital role that immigration plays in international relations is shown by the recent action of the Congress in repealing the Chinese Exclusion laws. The actual effect of the repeal of the old laws in terms of the number of Chinese who might enter this country was negligible. It has been calculated that under the new legislation hardly more than a hundred Chinese a year could be admitted. But the moral effect, the human result of our action

was of incalculable importance. We removed a barrier that for years had been a source of irritation to a great and friendly nation whose courage and endurance through so many desperate years of fighting an enemy, now threatening the safety of both nations, was thus publicly recognized as entitling them to receive the dignity of treatment that we extended to other countries.

We should not, as I have said, change our laws to permit unrestricted immigration. Although there is today in our country, proportionately to our population, a smaller percentage of foreigners and of foreign born that at any time in the past hundred years or more, we have not yet achieved the full national unity and coordination which marks a sturdy and a mature people. The selective process must go on for many years to come. But in our growth to that ultimate condition we should not neglect the gradual enrichment that comes from the fresh streams of newcomers who have always fed our national life. These cannot be cut off without stultifying the sources of our democratic impulses, which in the past have fed on the variety of many cultures and many ways of thinking. Yet the process must be one of gradual absorption, so as not to sacrifice that national unity which, partly as a result of our more recent immigration laws, largely because of the strong pull of the free American environment - the melting pot in which the newcomers are forged and tested - we have now begun to achieve.

I suggest that our future controls may, however, be made even more selective. It is too early to determine what forms that choice may take. Probably no long term policy can be outlined until we see what direction - politically and economically - the post-war years will take. Our policies will be guided primarily by our own needs. But those needs will necessarily be influenced, and to an extent defined, by our relation to other countries of the world. Occupations might be considered in making our determinations. Should we also take into account some form of geographic control, such as the admission of immigrants most fitted to build the development of thinly inhabited regions such as Alaska? Is it possible to devise and to administer laws of which the effect would be to direct the newcomers away from the areas of congestion and toward areas where population is sparse and development may be suffering for want of sufficient manpower? I do not know; I simply present the questions.

There are other aspects of this intricate problem which must also be considered. Our experience has shown which races can be more readily assimilated. This is a consideration that should not be overlooked.

Our moral and physical standards have been greatly improved by legislation for many years. This screening process has particularly emphasized standards to protect the public health. Such measures have taken the form of quarantine laws, the regulation of sanitary conditions on shipboard, provision for medical inspection on landing and the exclusion of persons suffering from communicable disease. Paupers are excluded, and invalids; and, more recently, those in such special categories as contract labor; illiterates and mental defectives; criminals; and those

belonging to subversive groups. Should these standards be in any way changed or tightened to meet the end that we have in view - the admission of newcomers who will make useful American citizens? And, finally, consideration might well be given to a requirement that those coming here for permanent residence, should, within a given time, apply for citizenship.

Among the powers given to the Congress in the Constitution is the power prescribing a uniform rule of naturalization. The first naturalization statute was enacted in 1790; and the law of 1795 added the requirements of good moral character, attachment to the principles of the Constitution of the United States, and favorable disposition toward the good order and happiness of our country. The latter act also required that the applicant for citizenship renounce all allegiances to foreign sovereignty, and that he swear to support the Constitution of the United States. Although throughout the years changes have been made, for nearly 150 years these qualifications have remained the law.

The language of the statutes is broad, and therefore subject to construction. Men can be expected to differ on what conduct and what beliefs constitute an attachment to our Constitutional principles. Last June, for instance, the Supreme Court of the United States differed on this very issue in the famous Schneiderman case. Schneiderman, an avowed Communist, was naturalized. The Government, upon discovering his own personal views and affiliations at the time of his naturalization, moved, twelve years later, to have his citizenship set aside because he was not then - at the time of naturalization - attached to the principles of the Constitution and did not bear true faith and allegiance. Five members of the Court held that he could not be denied the status previously granted

him because, they thought, the evidence of lack of attachment to the Constitution was not clear and convincing. The Chief Justice led a vigorous dissent of the other three members (Mr. Justice Jackson did not sit.). He said: "It might as well be said that . . . it could not be inferred that a man is a Nazi and consequently not attached to constitutional principles who, for more than five years, had diligently circulated the doctrines of Mein Kampf."

The reasoning of the majority is not altogether clear. But the logic of their conclusion is less important than the underlying principles which seem to have swayed them, reiterated in two concurring opinions. Citizenship, they held, should not be lightly removed, once acquired. Here the Government moved after a long lapse of time, and its proof should be unequivocal. The evidence that Schneiderman was a Communist, and active in the Party cause and testified that he believed in the principles of the Party, was held not enough to support a finding of "fraud" or "illegality."

These denaturalization proceedings are instituted under an Act of Congress authorizing the cancellation of citizenship procured illegally or fraudulently. The analogy of the Chief Justice to the case of a naturalized Nazi is important, in view of the fact that at the instance of the Department of Justice the United States Courts have recently denaturalized several hundred naturalized Germans for their activities in the Bund. Within the past two weeks we have announced denaturalization proceedings against two members of the Spanish Falange on similar grounds. It will be interesting to see whether the Supreme Court will apply the same reasoning to such cases, and reach the same results as in the Schneiderman case.

American Communists are deeply resentful of the Government's attitude toward them in deportation and denaturalization proceedings. They profess to be unable to see how we can fight side by side with Russia, admiring her magnificent courage and tenacity, and at the same time object to the spreading of Communist ideas in this country. Yet we would certainly raise no objection to Russia's preventing the spread of American political ideas in her own great land; we would regard that as Russia's own business.

We want to be left to develop in our own way; and simply because we do not by law prevent the circulation of political and social ideas which most of us believe to be false and harmful to our own democratic growth, we can hardly be criticized if we refuse to reward by citizenship the individuals who cherish a philosophy contrary to our constitutional principles of liberty. Today we fight shoulder to shoulder with Russia as with Britain, China and all the United Nations; and we will continue to so fight until the job is done. This is one great common end and purpose. But to say that it therefore follows that each nation is seeking to create similar domestic political economies is absurd. Does Russia tell her people that her alliance with the United States involves her allegiance to the freedoms of democracy, to the theory of free competitive enterprise? Does Russia tell her people that her alliance with Great Britain involves her establishing a constitutional monarchy? Of course not.

Moreover, Russia's policy has ever been characterized by a practical realism. She does not expect, nor has she ever said, that we should give greater toleration to the spread of Communist propaganda in our country than the scope of our public opinion and our law may dictate.

Here, then, is no inconsistency, there can be none, except in the minds of American Communists, who resent and will continue to resent the determinations we make to govern our own society because such decisions may also affect their somewhat dubious status.

As our program with relation to immigration varies, and some of the suggestions that I have made are more fully considered and developed, the work of such associations as the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society will necessarily change and grow to keep pace with the national policy, to help in shaping that policy. It has not always been scientifically or even carefully considered. Plans of help and education have often lagged behind the pressure of arrivals, or have not been adequately developed for their needs. Of recent years the restricted flow has permitted a more carefully considered service to be applied. The immigrant aid societies and other social agencies have been of great help to the newcomers. Yet I believe they can be of even greater assistance. I have in mind particularly the long-term study and research necessary to answer some of the questions of policy to which I have referred. For policy does not grow only out of government experience and study; it evolves largely from the experience of those constantly dealing with the particular problems involved. I suggest that here the field be broadened, because the ultimate decisions affect so many groups, and that constant exchange of ideas be made not only with the leaders of various national groups but with the representatives of labor as well. For labor has a direct and immediate interest in immigration; and often, I am tempted to think, it is unnecessarily fearsome of the threat of immigration as affecting jobs. That fear would find little basis in a policy which integrated the flow of immigration with the needs of the domestic labor market, if such integration is feasible.

And it is interesting to note that recently two bills have been introduced in the House of Representatives seeking to link quotas with the reported volume of unemployment. These bills are perhaps intended to reduce quotas rather than to make them more flexible. But if the quotas are to be made more flexible, the volume of immigration will presumably be adjusted in some manner to meet the needs of employment.

Such associations as yours may well consider a further exchange of ideas with similar groups in other countries or with foreign experts in this field. As the Commissioner of Immigration has recently pointed out, the problems of immigration are receiving far more attention between governments. Greater cooperation is needed between the country of origin and the country of destination. Ultimate solutions will without doubt call for more intergovernmental cooperation. And this cooperation can be stimulated by the studies of private associations.

Finally, I believe that we can expend more money and greater effort on the education and training of the immigrant after he reaches this country. It is not enough to select him carefully with a view to his health and perhaps to our needs; and to afford him the opportunity to find the work for which he is fitted. When he becomes a member of our American society, presumably looking forward to the possibility of American citizenship, he should have the benefit of the training and education best calculated to develop in him a sense of responsibility to the country of his choice.