- Aviva Sternfeld -

Kashrus vs. United States

Government officials and federal prosecutors conspired with the unions to bring down a large kosher slaughterhouse. The owners were arrested and charged with violating laws that had never before been enforced. A biased judge cooperated with the prosecutors by convicting the Orthodox Jewish owners and delivering a harsh verdict.

Sound familiar?

This story actually took place nearly 80 years ago, long before the case of Shalom Rubashkin. Back in 1934 the accused put up a determined resistance and managed to overturn the ruling. Read how the US government tried to destroy kashrus in America, but with Hashem's help the accused emerged victorious.

After World War I, during the "Roaring Twenties," the United States enjoyed a surging economy. Optimism ran so high that the prevailing belief was that anybody could strike it rich by investing in stocks. Eventually – inevitably—the bubble burst. On October 29, 1929, "Black Tuesday," the stock market experienced the worst crash in history.

To make matters worse, the banking industry was heavily invested in these bad stocks as well. Numerous banks defaulted. People lost all their savings and were destitute. The Great Depression rushed in with full force. America would not truly emerge from it until the Second World War actualized the country's latent economic forces.

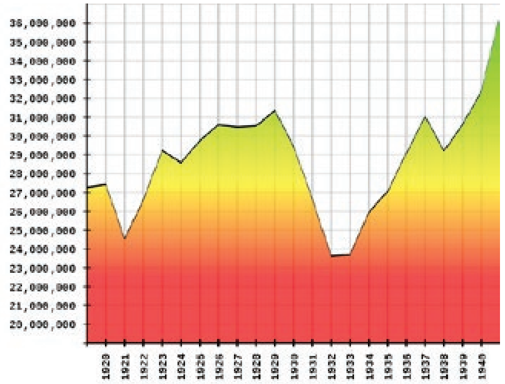
The Great Depression was far more severe than the worst point of the recent recession. In the middle of 1929, just before the crash, the unemployment rate in America was 3%. Four years later, in 1933, the rate stood at 25%! If you count only those outside of farming and agriculture, the rate was 37%!

During the same four year period, the stock market lost close to *90%* of its value. Industrial production fell 45% and home construction fell 80%. Of 25,000 banks in the US, 11,000 were drained of their assets and another 5,000 closed altogether. The average American family's income dropped 40%. People could no longer pay their mortgages or rent, and in 1932 alone 273,000 were thrown onto the streets. The homeless wandered around the land by the hundreds of thousands.

The worse the situation became the more people began looking to Washington to save them. President Herbert Hoover, who was in office at the time of the crash of 1929, had little to offer the masses. He believed it was not the place of the federal government to interfere with open markets. Welfare, in his view, would only encourage people to stop working.

Americans were quickly disillusioned with the president's inaction. Near the end of his term Hoover did sign legislation designed to improve economic conditions.

Outgoing President Herbert Hoover and incoming President Franklin Roosevelt refused to talk to each other on their way to Roosevelt's inauguration.



The number of employed in America between 1920 and 1940.

These included the Emergency Relief and Construction Act to fund public works programs and the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to extend low-interest loans to businesses. But it was too little too late.

In the presidential election of 1932, newcomer Franklin Roosevelt easily defeated Hoover. When he was inaugurated in March 1933, most Americans could not see a way out of the situation.

Roosevelt's Solution

Roosevelt did not waste any time. He was a strong progressive reformer, a liberal who had no problem trying out new ideas. To him, the only way for America to lift itself out of the Depression was through extensive government intervention.

Roosevelt set about introducing new laws to control banking and financing. One of these was the Emergency Banking Act that created the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), which guarantees funds deposited in compliant bank accounts.

Next, Roosevelt initiated a whole series of government welfare programs that are collectively known as the New Deal. The basic concept was to use a two-pronged approach to solving the economic crisis. First, the federal government sought to distribute the available jobs among a wider portion of the population. The second was to help individuals so they could buy what they needed and stimulate production.

In order to spread the jobs more evenly, the government set limits on the number of hours in the work week. This would force employers to hire more workers to meet the same number of work hours they required until now. To provide assistance on an individual basis, the government set up public works programs. These involved government-financed projects to build schools and hospitals or to improve the infrastructure. The large number of new jobs created would provide some income for the previously unemployed and introduce fresh funds into the stagnant economy.

On June 16, 1933, Roosevelt signed the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA). This was landmark legislation that encouraged, and in some cases even forced, industries to unite in accepting certain industry codes. These included agreements to protect customers, employers and competitors. Wages and prices on products were fixed, and certain safeguards were set in place to deter new competition. As we will see, the NIRA will play a crucial role in the case brought against a Jewish-owned family business that sold poultry.

The NIRA gave the president the unprecedented power to control the details of numerous industries. If he was not satisfied with them, he could institute hearings and pass his own codes that would be binding

Homeless Americans in line in 1930 to enter a hostel where they can sleep overnight.

So-called "Hoover cars," a stab at the ineffective president, created when Americans could not afford the gas to power their cars.

A worker laid off and unable to find a new job lies hungry on the ground.

Run on a bank during the Great Depression.