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American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Country Directors  
Conference. Address by Dr. Giora Josephthal. 1953.

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# UNITED JEWISH APPEAL

ON BEHALF OF UNITED ISRAEL APPEAL, JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE, UNITED SERVICE FOR NEW AMERICANS

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November 12, 1953

In accordance with the request of Mr. M. W. Beckelman, Director-General of the Joint Distribution Committee, we are pleased to send you herewith transcript of the address of Dr. Giora Josephthal which was delivered at the first session of the recent JDC Country Directors' Conference in Paris.

Melvin S. Goldstein

December 11, 12, 13, ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE Waldorf Astoria Hotel, N. Y.  
Help set the stage for a supreme effort in 1954 . . .

ADDRESS BY DR. GIORA JOSEPHTHAL

A.J.D.C. COUNTRY DIRECTORS CONFERENCE  
Paris, October 18, 1953

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen: I am very thankful to you for giving me the opportunity to report to JDC's Annual Directors' Conference about the economic and social problems of Israel today. The close cooperation between JDC, the Jewish Agency and the Government of Israel since the end of World War II in trying to bring a solution to the burning problems of suffering Jews is one of the outstanding characteristics of Jewish life today. The task of rescuing and rehabilitating Jews which has been accomplished so far by our combined efforts in the last 8 years could never have been accomplished by one of our organizations alone. I think Jewish history will give us credit for the approach of statesmanship and responsibility shown during those years of coordinated efforts. It was one of the tragedies of Jewish history during thousands of years that even in times of disaster the splitting and partisan forces were stronger than the forces of national unity and integration. Future generations will not say about us that we repeated the mistakes made during the times when the Second Temple was destroyed.

The cooperation between JDC and the Jewish Agency has to continue in many countries for many years to come. I am sure that both of our organizations will feel the responsibility and overcome minor difficulties as long as Jewish fate demands continuation of our work.

In reporting to you today I want to speak to a partner and friend who has to know achievements and failures, and maybe that in thinking together in a spirit of respect and criticism we will reduce the difficulties still in our way.

During the five years of the State's existence the Jewish population of Israel has grown by 125 percent. After the decrease of immigration in 1952 and 1953 we can see more clearly the problems still existing in connection with the economic and social task laid upon us by this increase of population. During the years of mass immigration we were like the family moving in a hurry from one flat to another, just putting the furniture somewhere in the new flat in the hope of re-arranging it by the time the pressure would be over.

Our economic problems may be expressed in two facts.

First, only one fifth of our needs in foreign currency is at present covered by our exports and we need 250 million dollars per annum.

Second, the huge discrepancy between consumption and production gives the basis to the inflationary situation in which the country finds itself today.

The slogan for the State's economy in the future is: less consumption and less imports, more production and more exports.

Technically speaking, we are in the middle of a policy of deflation decided upon by our Government in February 1952.

There is a short-term policy of deflation fought with the well tested weapons used all over the world: no treasury bills, rationing, eliminating surplus money by heavy taxation, restricting credits by demanding high liquidity from the banks.

After well over a year of deflationary policy we see some positive results: scarcity of money in circulation has resulted in a considerable shrinkage in the demand for consumer goods. In connection with this, imports have decreased considerably (by 17%) in comparison with last year.

However, one of the results of our deflationary policy is the rise in unemployment, at times of considerable proportions, though mitigated from time to time through unemployment relief works undertaken under the pressure of public opinion in contrast to the purpose of the new economic policy.

The long-term policy fighting inflation is only one: increasing production by intensive development and transforming our newcomers from consumers to producers. Last year we saw an increased effort on the part of producers and a considerable rise (20%) in industrial and other exports.

On the total, we reduced our unfavorable trade balance by nearly one third since February 1952. Increases of production must be concentrated in two fields: agriculture and industry.

It may be said that Israel's progress in the field of agriculture is greater than could be expected. There is an increase of 144% of Jews earning their living in agriculture from the beginning of the State as compared with the overall increase of population of 125%. Our progress in industry is only 76% and we cannot be satisfied with the results achieved till now in this field. It would be unjust, however, to put those two figures - 144% increase in agriculture and 76% increase in industry - before you without any explanation. Our experience in agriculture up to the beginning of the State gave us a basis for further work. Agricultural planning was developed already when the State was founded, and specially research on water resources was started by international, mostly American, experts, in 1942. Industrial research, specially research on the national resources in the Negev, was only started in 1949. Until now we cannot come to conclusions in some fields with regard to our potential mineral wealth.

During the next year or two the increase in agricultural production will be larger than the increase in industrial production, as planning is far advanced, and as less initial mistakes will be made in this field. You may say that Rebbe gelt was already paid.

Three problems of our agricultural development have to be tackled more thoroughly this year:

(1) The 366 settlements founded since the beginning of the State have to get their full budget. We hope that nearly 60 of them will earn their living by the end of 1954 and will not be dependent any more on public investments. That means mostly enlarging the irrigated area in the settlements, and to a lesser degree enlarging their living stock.

(2) Our youngest settlements, especially the 46 founded during 1953, have to increase or start the production of agricultural products which up till now have not been developed enough in our country. We have to switch from vegetables and potatoes, from poultry and dairy products which are sufficiently produced for the existing population, to sugarbeets, oil seeds, cotton and grain. These new branches of agriculture demand more water and more land, but less machinery and less investment of manpower per dunam. That means that irrigation is once more the key to the development of our new agriculture.

In the field of irrigation I think our program during 1953 was more than satisfactory. In the middle of 1952 we put before UJA and before ourselves a program of adding 100,000 dunams per year of irrigated area and take as a basis that one irrigated dunam gives enough food for one person. This year we added 120,000 and we hope that during next year we can even come up to a figure of 150,000 dunams in one year. We are working on the six district irrigation schemes which demand an investment per year of IL 20 million for three or four years to come. In the Yarkon Negev scheme, the biggest one among those, we are well ahead of schedule. The purpose of these schemes is to bring water from a distance of 10 - 30 miles from the water source to the plot to be irrigated. After finishing those six schemes we will have enough water for providing Israel's agricultural needs as seen today.

3) The third problem is agricultural manpower. We have 10,000 unemployed now. Their number may increase to 15,000 till the end of 1953. 5,000 families per year to settle on the land is the minimum needed today and we have to get volunteers for settling on the land. We cannot get them only by propaganda or administrative pressure. We have to make our new settlements attractive so that their standard of life can be compared with the standard of life in towns and older settlements, and we have to give them security. That means that non-agricultural investments in settlements (roads, fences, transport facilities) and educational services have to be increased.

Our efforts in the field of industry will be concentrated on enlarging the export industries, specially textiles, citrus fruit products and diamonds, and the development of potash production and fertilizers and chemicals in the Negev. These two branches of minerals in the Negev are already in the state of actual development. In the field of copper we are starting the first pilot plant this year; in the field of iron and oil we have still to continue with research work, and cannot add any final opinion about our natural resources.

Taking all those economic remarks together, I cannot say when we will be able to balance our foreign trade. It is no use making estimates of six or twelve years ahead at a time when we cannot be sure of getting the necessary investment capital even in the next two years.

I know that you are primarily interested in the social problems connected with the mass immigration to Israel, but social work is partly a function of the general economic situation of a country, and I thought it necessary to give a general view of the economic background before I remark upon our social problems.

The Minister of Finance in introducing the budget on behalf of the Government this year said: "We have over-expanded our services and we must freeze or even contract them during the next few years". This sentence is characteristic of the approach of deflationary policy to social expenses. The discussion is not about what is necessary, but about what we can afford.

The first problem we had to deal with was the problem of housing. When we started in the middle of 1950 to transfer the newcomers from camps in which they got the whole of their maintenance, to provisional housing facilities called 'maabarot' where they had to earn their living themselves, we had nearly 100,000 immigrants in tents. At the end of 1951, with the additional 175,000 immigrants coming during that year, we had 200,000 in tents, in aluminium and canvas huts. During the last 18 months we pulled the tents down and erected cement houses or wooden huts instead. 20,000 families were transferred from tents to those houses. We still have maabarot, but they are built without tents, and their population has decreased. The urgent housing problem today comprises 100,000 people - roughly 20,000 families who are living in canvas or aluminium huts. Last year there were 34,000 families, which means that in exactly one year we solved a bit more than one third of the problem, and according to the present rate of building we may liquidate this problem within two years. After those two years 20,000 families will still be in wooden huts, where they can live for an additional four or five years or more without endangering their health and creating additional social problems. It is the opinion of our Government that increased activities in the field of housing would mean an increase of inflation, as no trade goods for local consumption or export are created by additional houses. Urgent as this problem is, it cannot get first priority, but has to give way to the problems of enlarging agriculture and industry.

The housing problem may be divided into two: where to build and how to build.

When the State of Israel was founded, 84% of the Jewish population were on the sea shore, that means in the West of our country, leaving the Northern and Southern and Eastern borders nearly uninhabited by Jews, and 64% of the Jews were living in three big towns, Tel-Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem. It was our problem to go to the uninhabited areas and create new settlements and villages all over the land. When we will number 2 million Jews (we are coming near to it) we want 20% in the South and the Negev, and 25% in the North, for instance Galilee and the Valley of Jezreel. We have good hopes of reaching this aim as far as the South and the Negev are concerned. We are still behind schedule as far as Galilee is concerned, in spite of the increase in population there. In reducing the town population from 64% from the beginning of the State to 44% in 1955. We still cannot say that the population is well distributed, but a great deal has been achieved in this field during the past five years.

The question of how to build has only one answer: building houses with the maximum of local materials. In times of emergency we had to import wood or wooden houses in order to give the immigrant a roof over his head; there were times when we had to buy tents at very high prices. Building with local cement and local stone is the only way open to us now. It is an expensive way in local currency and it cannot bring us as quick a solution as we would have wanted.

The pressure from amongst our immigrants to improve their housing conditions is, I'm sorry to say, very small. More than 80% of the inmates of maabarot came from non-European countries and are used to a housing standard not acceptable to us. Some of them are unable and some of them unwilling to pay rents and decrease their food budget. The desire for better housing has to be developed amongst them. We know that as long as they are not properly housed, they won't feel like citizens of our country. They even enlarge the problems created by an immigration from 50 countries by the feeling that houses are for Europeans and maabarot for non-Europeans. We cannot come to a feeling of national unity as long as special social problems are connected only with special parts of the Jewish people; it is this which makes the housing problem more important than even some of our immigrants feel today.

Housing is one of the social problems of our country. The whole scope of social problems can only be seen if you bear in mind the basic social facts connected with mass immigration from backward countries. European immigrants were the first to come after the foundation of the State. Immigrants from Asia and Africa were the last ones, and this is an additional reason for the lack of actual absorption on their part. The characteristics of the immigrants from Africa and Asia were:

- (1) that it was an immigration of three generations. The whole family came together: grandparents, parents and children, and they had to be absorbed as big families with only one potential breadwinner in the average for 4 - 5 persons.
- (2) lack of professional training.
- (3) lack of Zionist education, which means education for work, especially agricultural work, Hebrew and the feeling of unity of the Jewish people.
- (4) a patriarchal family structure, which means little or no rights for the children or the women, all power being vested in the father.

These questions cannot be solved in a few years. They are a task for a generation or two. We had to find a system of educational approach in order to ensure that the second generation will reach the standards expected by every one of us.

The most important step taken was expressed in the compulsory educational law passed by the Knesset in September 1949. This law establishes universal, free and compulsory primary education for all children from the age of 5 to the age of 14.

May I give you a few figures in order to show the importance of this achievement. Kindergartens increased from 17,000 to 75,000 since the beginning of the State, which means an increase of 240%. Children in elementary schools increased from 71,000 to 215,000, which is an increase of 200%. You may imagine what a task it was for us to put an additional 140,600 children to school, and we had to find and to produce 10,000 new teachers in those five years of the existence of the State.

However, there are still deficiencies. Not all of the parents are sending their children to school despite the fines for disobeying the law. In immigrant settlements we have full control of the children, and there are nearly no absentees, but in immigrant towns like Ramleh, Lydda, Beersheba and Migdal the figure of absentees runs between 15% and 28% of the children, and we cannot provide a sufficient staff of social workers and, I must say, of police to get full control of all the children.

You may well imagine that we had to build a very large number of transitory classes, as we got children of the age of 10 or 12 who could not read or write and could not go to the classes of their age. Only 70% of the children now at school will have finished at the age of 14 eight school classes. The other 30% will have finished 5-7.

In recruiting the necessary teaching staff we had to take graduates of secondary schools, who had no or insufficient additional training. It will take an additional three years to staff all schools with certified teachers.

The social backwardness of our immigrants is expressed most strikingly by their enrollment, or I should say lack of enrollment in secondary schools. Secondary, including agricultural and professional schools provide education for one third of the youth in the appropriate age groups of Israel. Although new immigrants comprise more than half of the population of Israel, they constitute only 10% in secondary schools, 23% in professional schools, but 63% in agricultural schools. The Jewish Agency made a decisive step this year for the first time in allocating a budget for secondary school scholarships for children of new immigrants with the condition that 70% of them have to come from Asia or African countries. By promoting education for these neglected elements of the Jewish people we hope to achieve a better balance between the various cultural levels.

Still the most important activity in this field is Youth Aliyah which can speak of 34,000 graduates and 13,000 children now under training since the beginning of the State. Youth Aliyah is the basis of productive education of immigrant youth now taking a large share of its children from maabarot.

The internal structure of the immigrant family from backward countries demands special protective measures which guard the child against premature work, truancy from school and protection against the father of the family who often does not let the child even have his proper share of food. The importance of kindergartens, for example, in Israel is not that the children are under proper health conditions and acquire education and discipline, but that they get one or two meals there and have corners for themselves. The immigrants from



backward countries are not used to the idea that a child has a life of its own, and they like children to behave like grown-up people. Toys are unknown in those countries, and things natural to us are detested by them. There is a Yemenite saying: "You are lying like a child", and they cannot imagine that the children's world of imagination needs its own outlet. Bodily punishment of children is wide-spread. The Yemenite mother bringing her child to the Cheder at the age of 3 or 4, says to the Cheder teacher: "I am bringing you meat. Return to me bones".

By providing the educational framework of kindergartens and schools we are making the decisive step towards the rehabilitation of our people, but I'm sure that we have to continue learning in this field for many years to come.

We cannot make out a definite program for the coming years in this field, but I think it is a minimum to increase secondary education per year by two thousand and it is a minimum to promise a place in kindergartens and elementary schools for every child in the proper age group.

May I add a few words about health and social services. The progress in the field of health services has been very satisfactory since 1950. The situation in general hospitalization, despite the fact that we lost the big Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, improved from year to year, and Israel now has seven hospital beds per thousand of population. But we have to take into account that owing to primitive housing conditions people who normally stay in bed at home with minor diseases, have to go to hospital because they cannot be treated at home.

The outstanding achievement is the providing of hospital care for TB patients, which was carried out by Malben. I am not speaking of the activities of Malben in Israel and its part in social work as I am sure that Charlie Passman will cover this subject.

During the years of mass immigration the infant mortality rate, especially from the backward countries, was unusually high. At a time when the general infant mortality rate in Israel was 45 per 1000, we had up to 165 cases amongst the immigrants. Last year the normal death rate in Israel was 38, and the death rate among immigrants 63, which means that it is still 60% higher amongst immigrants than amongst the total population of Israel. The decrease in the mortality rate is obvious, but still not yet completely satisfactory. We have to extend the special Mother and Child services to all our new settlements, erecting 260 new stations during the next 5 years. Let me say about Malben only one word.

I cannot imagine where we would now stand without Malben. The fear of TB, the unhospitalized bedridden chronic invalids, the blind, the old-aged persons, numerous unrehabilitated invalids, in sum, the suffering of thousands of human beings in Israel would have continued had it not been for Malben. Otherwise, the State of Israel and the Jewish Agency would have to do the work and would neglect their task of colonization and education. And it is not only what Malben has done, but how it was done.

May I be allowed to pay special tribute here to Charlie Passman. I know he would not allow me to do it in Israel, but here I'm your guest and he cannot interrupt. His energy, farsightedness, devotion and organizational talent make Malben one of the finest examples of world Jewry's help.

In giving you the picture of the present situation, I wanted to stress the priority of needs existing today. Productivisation of new immigrants and education of the second generation must get first priority. The social services necessary to ease the burden on our newcomers can increase only steadily and slowly, without bringing new inflationary danger to our country. In view of the large number of social and hard core cases still not absorbed the Government of Israel and the Jewish Agency will stick to their principle of selective immigration in the near future; that means, from all the countries in which there is no imminent danger to the life of Jews, Israel will accept the healthy ones and those who have at least one able-bodied breadwinner in the family. From all the countries in which we see danger to the life or the Jewishness of our brothers, like the Communist countries and the countries of the Arab League, we will take every Jew who can only manage to reach the shores of Israel. I am happy that this line of policy was accepted all over the Jewish world.

I will refrain from any valued judgments with regard to the various ethnic groups among the new immigrants. We cannot make blanket statements to the effect that this group is "bad" or that group is "good". Each group, because of its background, has its own special problems. All that we can do is to try to understand these problems and adjust our educational technique accordingly.

In measuring the present results I may say that the best achievements were reached by the Yemenites. The whole of Yemenite immigration was 6.5% of the immigration since the beginning of the State, but they built 13% of all our new settlements. North Africans, being 12%, built 12% of the settlements, and may I say in brackets that much injustice is done to them by critics in and outside Israel. Persian immigration, which is 3.5%, built 5% of our settlements, and much credit is due to the Kurdish element. The most unsatisfactory situation is connected with Iraqi immigration till now. 17% of these immigrants built 7% of our settlements, but it is our fault no less than theirs, since at the time of their immigration we could absorb them only near the big towns and put them mostly in maabarot in the non-rural areas. Now a great part of them does not want to leave and go to the land.

In describing these special problems of Jews from backward countries you may understand their psychological difficulties. Being on a lower standard than previous immigrants, being the last ones to come, they still have a feeling of discrimination, and it is quite natural that the unsuccessful ones among them feel most strongly about it. The feeling of discrimination leads partly to emigration from Israel, and I cannot see how this can be avoided. The Jewish Agency still refuses to give special rights to people who threaten to emigrate, as the danger of blackmailing will increase if we should give way to their demands. Since the creation of the State, 34,000 emigrants have left us. Relatively speaking, they are not a sizable group - only

4.5% of the total number of immigrants. Nevertheless, the fact that they have left and others want to leave, shows that our efforts of integration have not been entirely successful.

The integration of immigrants from backward countries is threatened by a vast number of obstacles. One of these obstacles in Israel is an assumption on the part of Central and Eastern European Jews that their way of life is "right", and that the other Jew should make an adjustment to it as quickly as he can. It cannot be doubted that a Jew from an Asian or African country has as much to contribute to the new State as to receive from it, and communication with him should be, as far as possible, a two-way affair.

It is understandable, on the other hand, that every part of the Jewish people has its own conception, according to the background of their country of origin, about the way of social life they would like to see in Israel, and there is even a kind of Jewish worship of something we called once very British - of the conception of the white man's burden. The gap between the newcomer and the old settler has not yet been bridged. Our teachers, social workers, agricultural instructors, the so-called social instructor in our agricultural settlement are the bridge between the new immigrants and the old inhabitants of Israel. If I take the figure of 25,000 workers in all those fields, I hope to be near the truth. It is a tremendous task to recruit them. Our older settlements gave the best of their people and they are getting tired. During the last years we started to utilize the sons and daughters of our old settlers as instructors, and the results justify this experiment.

The most important function in this pressure cooker called Israel is done by the Israel Defence Army. Here people from all parts of the world meet on an equal basis of rights and duties, no matter how long they have been in Israel. The job done by the Army with immigrant youth during the 30 months of compulsory service cannot be valued too highly. We could not even promise the predominance of the Hebrew language in Israel if the Army would not train immigrant boys and girls in special courses.

These are the difficulties before us. We are not allowed to romanticize and over-simplify our difficulties, but we are aware that, in a youth-centered society like ours, by education and training a practical and spiritual trend will be found after a generation or two and accepted by the whole of the Nation. Our Rousseau-like belief in the healing power of contact with the soil, in the effectiveness of "go among the people", was justified. Still, there is no place in the world where a greater degree of variety of humanity is observable.

We are still at the cross-roads between Westernization and Levantinization. The social and educational services of the State of Israel, and especially of the Israel Defense Army, and the transfer from unproductive to productive work, will give results in creating the new society of Israel - but we should not expect a pre-fabricated society. States cannot be made, they must grow. There is such a process as the insensible growth of civilization by small, scarcely measurable steps. There must be roots, growth, soil. There must

be a traditional accumulation. All those causes exist in their very beginning and built the society of Israel. We have great satisfaction from this beginning. We cannot have full satisfaction if we do not continue to put all our heart and thoughts into the future development of the Israel society. More than 50 years of work in Israel gives us the right to believe that the people and the land will be created together.

