

TR-3803 Transcription

Friedman, Herbert A. and Leonard Bell. Young Leadership Cabinet
discussion. 12 February 1967.

Herbert A. Friedman: Leonard, Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, you can understand now after hearing Leonard's presentation why I worked so hard to get[the young leadership movement organized so that I could quit. He's now got it, and it's well in hand, and as he said, the view of the future is good, so I can now retire together with a man who is probably the oldest friend I have in this room in terms of number of years that we've known each other, and that's Max [Firestein?] of Los Angeles. He and I can quit together.

We began this thing 20 years ago, at least that's when I first met him. When Albert said 20 years that I've been involved in this, [01:00] in 1947 he was really the first American Jew I ever met and he introduced me to these problems. I was speaking at a meeting in Pennsylvania, just after having come back from Europe, still in uniform. I had no idea how all this money was raised in America, or why. Mr. Morgenthau was chairing that meeting. I was at his funeral in New York Thursday morning. That generation has passed now. Max stood up and said to Mr.

Morgenthau, "I've come all the way from Los Angeles to Pennsylvania to attend a meeting. I've been sitting here for two days. I haven't heard a damn thing new," -- If you know Max, you know that's how he talks -- "and what am I going to go back and tell my people in Los Angeles?" I sat and listened to this man and said, "By golly, where has he been living, on the moon?" because I had just come [02:00] 24 hours earlier from Germany, from the mud, and the sweat, and the mess, and the camps, and I couldn't understand him. So I decided that the only thing to do was to retreat behind a severe tongue lashing, and I said "Max, I don't know what you need to learn that's new in order to convince the people in Los Angeles to do something, but I'll tell you what's new as I see it," and for 30 minutes I sort of used poor Max as the butt of my anger, and the foil. When we got all through with that very exasperating and soul-searching experience, he and I became friends, which has lasted now over two long decades. I want to pay my tribute to Henry Morgenthau, who we buried three days ago, and to Max Firestein, and to that generation of men [03:00] [older?] [inaudible] in the room, and there are others of that age and that caliber who took this ball 20 and 30 and 40 years ago and carried it, and who have now deposited it, quite rightly, on the shoulders of Leonard Bell

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and the perfectly magnificent group of over 100 people from the San Francisco young adult division, who have come to the room. Those are the new faces you see, Albert. The torch is passed. If the new generation is ready to pick it up, then the future is as secure as Leonard says it is. He feels it in his bones. I feel it in mine. Max and Walter and all the rest of us can retire knowing that the work won't stop.

Each year we try to understand the same question: What's new about the situation? There is always something new just as there is something always old. [04:00] The old, the perennial, the root factors having to do with our people, and our heritage, and our tradition and our hopes for the future need not be explored in this setting. Those factors we explore in settings in which we have time to deal with history and religion and literature. The perennial timeless things. In this setting, quickly, fighting the clock, we deal with the things which are new, on top of the old; the things which are temporary, transient, different; the things with which we have to be up to date in order to understand the urgency of whatever faces us at the moment. [05:00] So I would like to try to make a quick panoramic review of the factors that face us now as we move into

1967. There are half a dozen things I would like to bring to your attention.

First of all, there's the military situation in the Near East, which is pregnant with possibility of very great danger. For a dozen years it's been fairly quiet. The balance of strength which Israel has managed to develop has served as a deterrent. The factors have shifted inside the Arab world and Egypt is no longer the threat that she was. The torch there has passed to Syria, which is bitter, brittle, aggressive, run by a series of army officers with left-wing revolutionary tendencies, not secure in their own positions at all, therefore looking for adventurism abroad, trying to take the leadership away from Egypt by being more anti-Israel even than Nasser. This [06:00] is their bid for power inside the Arab world. If Israel is the pawn on which they will rise, then that's a perfectly good pawn to use. So the border has been inflamed now for months. Israel has agreed to meet for the first time in many, many years with the Syrian Mixed Armistice Commission. Three meetings have been held in the last couple of weeks. Nothing has come out of it. General Odd Bull, the UN observer is himself growing impatient with the Syrians, who keep trying to alter the agenda and change it to something different from what was agreed upon, while at

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the same time that they're sitting and talking in these meetings, the terroristic acts continue on the border. It's not safe to go to a soccer game in Israel anymore because you can step on a land mine. Trains are cut, roads are cut, infiltration goes on day after day. [07:00] Many of you asked the question a few months ago in November, why it was that Israel hit back at Jordan. Was that an indication that she was afraid to hit back at Syria? The answer is not at all. There is no fear in the Israeli mind, nor in their state of preparedness. If they have to they are perfectly prepared to hit back at Syria as they have done in the past. Remember the episodes of last July and August, where there were air strikes against Syrian positions in the hills over the Lake of Galilee. If that has to be done again, that will be done again. Israel is not interested in starting a war.

Neither is she interested in permitting her border to be continuously vulnerable and her citizens continuously killed. No democratic government can long remain in power if it does not give its own [08:00] population the feeling of security, that it is taking care of its own defenses. The state is almost 19 years of age. In the 19 years, the neighboring countries around her have suffered 19 coup d'état and all changes of government.

Israel's government has been stable, solid, democratic; a remarkable demonstration of patience, restraint, and the working of the democratic process. That has been possible only because the people have had confidence in the government. Let the people lose confidence in the government and Israel could become as unstable as any of the countries around her. Confidence in the government is based upon the fact that the government's first responsibility is to protect the life of every citizen. That is the operating principle which you and I must keep in mind. Should there be, next week or next month, God forbid, [09:00] some eruption and large explosion, you and I must be prepared to understand the impelling motivation of why it occurred. The battle of public relations in the press and in the United Nations in New York is one in which it's easy to condemn Israel for aggression. But for the United Nations to condemn Israel for aggression, and for the government to be responsive to the needs of its citizens, are two separate things. If she has to lose the battle of public relations and win the battle of internal security inside our country, it's the latter battle that she's interested in winning. Not that she wants to lose the former, but should there ever be that choice, I want you to know how the choice will be made, and I want you to be prepared for it

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[10:00] and inoculated against any voices of doubt or confusion or lack of understanding. We therefore have to be prepared to live with a situation in which, in my judgement -- and I'm speaking quite personally and unofficially; I give you my own personal opinion only -- we have to be prepared to live in 1967 with a situation which will see constant military adventurism. That's all. The financial implications of that are horrendous. The maintenance of the balance of deterrent strength runs into the tens of millions of dollars every single month. However hard pressed she is, for all the other things which she must do, this need comes first.

Now at the same time that that occurs, as an ongoing [11:00] process, huge military expenditures and constant draining of blood every single day, she has an internal problem which in its own way is almost as severe. That is the problem of unemployment in the country. During all these years of the development of the land, new immigrants have poured in the scores of thousands, over a million and a quarter, have managed to be absorbed and put to work and earn their daily bread in greater or lesser measure. Now for the first time in these almost two decades we are faced with a massive problem of unemployment in Israel, and I want again to be perfectly clear

about this. To talk about this does not denigrate the massive progress [12:00] which has been made. The progress in which we've taken such pride, which we've enjoyed so vicariously, which we've thrilled at so much, and which has cause us to hold our heads higher than we ever did three decades ago. To say that she is going through a crisis today in which people inside Israel are hungry, which is a fact for the first time, is not in any way to take away from the tremendous accomplishments which have brought her to this present point. One fact does not obviate another fact. Progress is clear and the pride is to be enjoyed. The hunger is real on the part of people who don't have enough money to buy food. Each thing is a fact. Let there be no mystification about this. People say, "How did it occur, how did it happen?" [13:00]

Quite simply. During the course of the year 1966, a large number of huge development projects in the country, which soaked up millions of man-hours of labor, and which kept hundreds of thousands of people busy, came to an end. The first thing that came to an end was the whole construction industry. For a dozen years, the building of houses in order to put a roof over the head of the new immigrant was the prime economic fact in the country. It kept everybody busy from unskilled laborers who were

mixing cement to very highly skilled plumbers, and electricians, and architects, and engineers. After a dozen years of struggling to keep up with the pace of building so that there should be a house for every new family coming in -- and we never did catch up with [14:00] that for a dozen years -- in 1966 we caught up with it. Now there's nobody in Israel living in a tent, in a hut, in a shack, in a tin hut, in an asbestos hut. Everybody is living in permanent concrete poured housing, which meant then, that tens of thousands of people began to be laid off during 1966 in the construction trade.

Secondly, for seven or eight years that great big water project was being built. You all know, the Arabs threatened war over it many times. Water had to be taken from the Far North, the sources of the Jordan River and the Lake of Galilee. 150 miles south down to Beersheba. 150 miles of pipe, nine feet in diameter, was manufactured in Israel, every single piece of pipe. 150 miles of trench 12 feet deep was dug. [15:00] Fittings and joinings were made. Pumps, laid in underground, under rock, siphons to carry the water up and down the hills of the Galilee, massive technical engineering projects, every inch of it done by Israeli labor and ingenuity, heart, and mind. If the Negev will grow green now, south of Beersheba, it will be because eight

sweating years of work went in and hundreds of millions of dollars to bring the water from the north to the south. That's all done. Not going to build that again. That finished. The Port of Ashdod, which will be bigger than the Port of Haifa in a few years, took 10 years to build. It is all done. Item after item after item of the huge construction projects came to an end and people began to be laid off. We are going to be in [16:00] this period of unemployment and economic recession, in my judgement - - and again I give it to you personally -- for two or three years. Not less. Before Israel comes out of this and the way she will come out, is if she can turn her industry into efficient, productive manufacturing of goods at competitive prices to be sold in the European market or the African market, or Asia. Japan, with her fishing industry, can take every pound of salt that Israel can produce out of the Dead Sea, if she can produce that salt at a competitive price and ship it at a competitive price. Markets can be found if the manufacturer can be made competitive, which means greater productivity, harder work per man per hour, which the Israelis have to learn to do in spite of everything else that they've done. We are two or three years before we are going to slide out into a greater, [17:00] shining new economic era.

Meanwhile, people are in trouble. For the first time in the history of the country, I would like to announce that the decision has been made after a lot of heart-rending argument -- Israel didn't want to do it -- she's introducing a dole, on April 1st, for unemployed people. She didn't want to do it because it's socially undesirable. She fought hard against the notion of giving people a check for being unemployed, to do nothing. We accepted that a long time ago in the United States. Israel didn't want to, and yet there's no choice because people have got to have enough money to buy bread. So the dole will [go in?] on April 1st. The size of it will depend upon the capacity of the government. The size of it will depend on the capacity of our support. This is something from which you and I now do not shirk for the next year or two. [18:00] The measure of our concern for a man in Romania, or Morocco, or Iran, or wherever he lived, the measure of our concern cannot stop simply because we've moved him from that country to Israel and assumed that once he's in Israel we no longer have any concern for him. That's a non sequitur. If you were concerned about him in Morocco, you've got to be concerned about him in Israel. If he needs help to get back on his feet, he needs help. That's all there is to it.

The third thing I'd like to talk about is this problem about absorbing these people in Israel. It's a word which has no sex appeal. When you talk about saving a man's life, you start using phrases which are emotionally loaded, which send shivers up our spine, and we thrill like the fireman to the gong [19:00] and we go, "save a man's life, yes! I'll give you more money." Talk about absorbing a man in Israel, the word doesn't evoke the same emotional response. Good friends, just listen for one second. Saving a man's life does not mean putting him on an airplane from Bucharest to Vienna to Haifa and getting him off the airplane, and saying, "Well fine, we've now saved his life, we've brought him to a land of freedom." If you conceive of the process to end there then you are very short sighted. The process begins when the transportation ends. That's how we have to understand it. The process [20:00] begins when the transportation ends, and the process of absorbing him into the Israeli economy, and society, and polity, and economic life, and educational life of the country, the process is one which depends upon the capacity of the individual himself. If he's quick, and sharp, and alert, and possessed of a trade, and possessed of an ability to learn a language quickly, and possessed of not too many children burdening him down, and

possessed of a certain mobility, and no old grandmother who holds him back, and if he's possessed of certain factors with which he's "lucky," he will become absorbed quickly. Six months, eight months, 12 months he's on his feet, and he becomes enough of an earner so he pays taxes. When he becomes a tax payer in the country of Israel, he ceases becoming [21:00] an object on the relief role. He goes over from the relief role to the tax role then he's absorbed. The job is done. With some fellows it can go as quickly as eight or 12 months. With some families it takes as long as three, four, and five years. The sustaining power, the perseverance, the conviction that you are going to see the man through to the end, requires you to stick with the man for whom it will take five years for the process to be done. Don't tire easily. Military problem, general economic problem and unemployment, absorption problem of bringing these people to a degree of self-sufficiency in the face of a weak economy. Point number four? The new immigration that comes into the country at the same time that this goes on. [22:00] The new immigration that comes in, comes in slowly, steadily, non-dramatically, but powerfully! There's nothing more powerful than a man who drops in on you and says, "I'm here, I'm your new citizen, take care of me." When 2,000 such people drop in on you

every month -- that's almost 100 people every day -- you have a problem. You've got to organize it mechanically, and logistically, administratively. You've got to have the housing. Well, that's now here. There are plenty of empty houses. There are enough empty houses in Israel to take care of the six months' worth of immigrants that will come in. The jobs are short. The schools are short. The process of taking this man in and making him a well-rooted, full-fledged citizen [23:00] is something which you have to do at the same time that you've got to take care of the fellow who came in last year, and two years ago, and three years ago who still isn't absorbed. The new immigration comes now from the same sources from which the last reservoirs of Jewish population are being moved. I'd like to give you simply one figure to illustrate what I mean by the last reservoirs. This is the operative figure for us to remember. We have taken into Israel a million and three people. One million, three hundred thousand. When we take count of the stockpile, of all the Jews in all the Arab Muslim countries, and in all of the communist satellite countries -- leave out the Soviet Union -- in all those countries of need or distress, the total number of all the Jews living in all those [24:00] dozen countries, is what? Four hundred thousand. That's all there are. A million and

three we've moved already. If the whole bunch of the remainder, 100% of them, were to have to be moved -- and it will never reach that figure -- it would only be another 400,000 people. The problem is not that enormous. The problem is one which the next few years will see gradually liquidating down to nothing. The historic transmigration of the middle of the 20th century is over. The Jews are polarized now. United States, Soviet Union, Israel, -- in that order of population size -- and fourth and last France, [25:00] -- which is large because it has a whole new group of weak people who need nourishing, and who need to be rooted in -- these 400,000 left in a scattered dozen countries keep coming out, 10,000, 20,000, 30,000 a year, 40,000. It doesn't matter. Every year it continues hemorrhaging down to where finally there will be a point at which we will say, "It's done." As that process goes toward its end, the Soviet Union looms up as a new process, and while references made to it constantly -- and while I share Leonard's enthusiasm, and faith, and belief that we will see the movement of the Russian Jews in this near future period -- I don't have a hard feeling in my fingers yet as to what the rate of the flow will be or the size of the flow. The hard feeling may come in the course of this

year or next year, and we may get to know [26:00] dimensions of the problem with which we'll be grappling.

The fifth point I'd like to make is that out around these other dozen countries, let's never forget that there is a program going on that commands our diligence, and our loyalty, and our enthusiasm, because we don't concentrate only on the movement of people from someplace to Israel, we also concentrate on the maintenance of Jewish life in all of its vitality, in all of its integrity, inside the countries in which Jews still remain in any numbers. If you have, inside a group of Arab Muslim countries, 175,000 Jews living, as you are moving them out, nevertheless, during the time they still live there, [27:00] you maintain that set of services, and institutions, and care for them to which they are entitled by virtue of one simple fact: they're entitled to it because you and I define them as being our brothers. My brother is entitled to my care wherever he is. That whole magnificent panoply of services is maintained through the Joint Distribution Committee, now more than half a century old.

And here are five simple things that you should remember, quickly. In all of the Arab Muslim countries, we're spending five million dollars a year. I'm giving you the JDC budget right

on your fingertips. Arab Muslim[(inaudible)], Morocco, Iran, everything. [28:00] Five million. European countries -- France, where the Algerians are, Belgium that still needs help, Italy that still needs help -- three and a half million. Relief in transit, which is a very beautiful euphemism for work deep, deep behind the Iron Curtain in Russia and other countries in the East where thousands of Jews are reached by a program of sending them packages -- it's the only way we can get to them -- but that is such a precious lifeline of connection. It's our nexus with them. Three and a quarter million. [Malbim?] in Israel to take care of all the old victims torn, beaten, mangled, brutalized, left-over remnants of what Hitler did 20 years ago. Thousands of poor and sick and aged whom [29:00] we will support until they die, that's the only way the problem will be solved. Six and a half million. And Ort to care for 45,000 bright, shining young men and women building a new future, learning new trades: two million. Five figures. Arab Muslim countries, five million. European, three and a half. Russia, three and a quarter. Malbim, six and a half. Ort, two. That's twenty million dollars. Twenty million dollars, as lightly spoken as that, are your treasure, which represents the feelings of your heart, poured out on these hundreds of thousands of Jews scattered in

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all these countries, annually. [30:00] That's the operative word.

The last thing to remember is this: While we move people over to Israel and develop that country, and while we take care of Jews who live in other lands from which they don't move, there's a third operation -- the last one -- and that's the movement of Jews who come to the United States, who come to Canada, who come to Latin America, who go to England. A few thousands every year, five, six, three, eight, 10, every year, some thousands of Jews migrating on the face of this globe, in that ancient quest to find peace, and quiet, and roots somewhere with some family, some relative, in some new town, where they want to start all over again. We help pay for that, too, through the United HIAS Service. That's the whole rubric. [31:00] An Israel beset by war and unemployment, an Israel beset by a host of new immigrants who have to be absorbed every year, while the old ones of a year ago still represent enormous problems. A Jewish population scattered around the globe that needs these tender care ministrations that we give it, and another small number of Jews being relocated in other free countries, these are the things for which you spend your money, these are the purposes for which you are asked to give your money, these are

the reasons for which more money is required year in and year out as we battle to win history.

Because, ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion, the real thing about all this is [32:00] not just the new facts each year as I've tried to give them to you now, but the question, "Why do we bother to do this at all? What are we trying to accomplish?" What I think we are trying to accomplish is we are trying to win history. As a battle that goes on all the time in which the processes of history, according to Professor [Toynbee?] are attempting to turn us, we Jews, a fraction of 1% of the people on the face of this globe, into a final, fossilized remnant. "We are so small in numbers, we are so relatively unimportant," says he, -- and I'm not sure he says it out of malice, I think he says it out of ignorance -- "that we almost don't count for anything." Thirteen million of us [33:00] out of three billion, and by the time the century is over there are going to be six billion people on the face of this planet and we will still only be thirteen million, so if we are so small, and so unimportant than so what are we, then why don't we just roll over and die, and become the fossil which he says we are? The process of history which attempts to turn us into that is a process against which we react and fight against and we say no! We shall live.

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We shall live because we have reasons, and functions, and purposes, we have a mission, we have a sense of destiny, we have a sense of history, we have a sense of civilization, we have a sense of a prophetic vision, we believe in peace and justice, and we believe in love, and we believe, by God, we can help make the world a better place in which live. So we are stubborn, and [34:00] we are going to stay here. That's all there is to it. Each year as we try to care for those of our own, we use the weapon we know best how to use, the weapon of money, to fight against the tide of history that tries to overwhelm us. Instead, we overwhelm it, and in the struggle, which has been going on since the days of Babylonia, and Egypt, and Rome, and the crusades, and the empires that have come and gone, we've managed to win the battle.

Now on the eve of the explosion of the greatest scientific, technological, and intellectual advance which the human mind and heart may ever yet engineer, now is not the moment for us to lose any heart whatsoever, but rather to say to ourselves, "Good, we've survived up to this [35:00] point. The first three thousand and five hundred years were the hardest. The future is now unlimited." This philosophical rationale, this belief, this deep sense of purpose, this sense of historic consciousness, is

the most important reason of all why you should give more money in 1967. You tie up the grand, the transcendental, the illuminating theses and premises, with the practical, the pragmatic, the daily, the mundane. None of the grand is possible of survival. None of the enormous historical sense of purpose has any meaning if a man says, "I'm not going to give you any money." [36:00] One obliterates the other. From the days in [Yavneh?] when money kept the school going to the days today when we talk about how to improve our education, build our institutions, build our communities, money is the weapon with which we win our historic battle. And it's not dirty, and it's not ugly, it's not mundane. It simply is a necessity, it's a tool. We learn how to manipulate it. We make the bridge from the eternal to the momentary, from the millennial to the problem of tomorrow, with the instruments that we've learned to turn to our good [37:0]. We don't waste, we build creatively. So, I think inspired by the eternal verities, and aware of the temporary problems that gnaw away at us, we keep our balance between the long look and the short look, we go from year to year doing our job, feeling that it's right, standing proudly in the face of the world, building what we build, and I think now, toward the end of this twentieth century, creating a much different image

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of the Jew than we had at the beginning of the twentieth century. Hitler is over and done. Out of the ashes of that, Israel was built. Out of the glory of Israel will come a new life for Jews everywhere on the face of this planet, and should that occur, [38:00] the ultimate possibility is that a new life can come for all mankind on the face of this planet, for we serve not just ourselves alone. We are men. The fate of the race of man is our concern. I think this is a glorious enough goal for us so that it can inspire us to go on from day to day doing the things for which we've come assembled. Thank you very much.

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