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JUDAISM

JUDAISM 3.0
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Drafting Herzl for today's issues

Judaism is now under assault through the port of Zionism. Applying Herzl's frameworks can be a valuable asset in countering this and other strategic challenges.

It is always exciting and humbling to be at the President's Residence in Jerusalem. Even more so, since walking into the complex, one faces a bust of Theodor Herzl, the visionary of Israel.

For four years, Herzl meticulously studied French politics from the press box of Palais Bourbon, the French parliament. He assessed its structural flaws and crafted a vision for a better democracy in the Jewish state.

Just as Herzl observed French democracy from the balcony of Palais Bourbon in the 1890s, his bust observed Israel's vibrant democracy from the entryway to Israel's President's Residence last week as the 30 ministers of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new government arrived for the traditional government photo. Different democracies have different ceremonies to mark the transition of power. In the United States, it is the grandiose inauguration ceremony; in the United Kingdom, it is the prime minister's audience with the king. In Israel, it is the new government photo taken alongside the president.

As discussed in this column, Herzl's frameworks and insight can be applied to the gamut of today's issues: global geopolitics; debates about governance; the nature of democracy; and the battle against Jew-hatred, such as in studying Herzl's warnings against the danger of the zero tolerance to antisemitism policy. But it is not just about strategic issues. Herzl's writings are also applicable to debates that sprang up during the formation of Netanyahu's new government. For example, the debate about nominating a minister who is not a member of parliament.

Reporting for the *Neue Freie Presse* on the formation of a new government in May 1894, Herzl explained that while the rest of the government was announced, prime minister Dupuy held off on his choice for foreign minister, mentioning the two candidates. The following day, Herzl reported that it went to the one who was not a member of parliament: "It is rare that a foreign ministry civil servant gets promoted to the rank of minister," Herzl wrote, noting in another article that for reformers, the initial support for foreign minister Hanotaux was "yet another proof in favor for the appointment of non-parliamentarians as ministers - at least in areas that require a certain unity and continuity of vision, like war, naval, colonies and foreign affairs."

Eight months after the formation of that government, in January 1895, a new president, Felix Faure, was elected, and Herzl reported how the losing parties refused to accept its defeat, claiming the new president was turning France into a republic of thieves. Herzl described what transpired immediately after the vote for Faure: "Now a storm erupts: The Socialists emit angry yells, pointing their fingers at the Right and threatening them with their fists. All the yells get lost in the terrible noise. Many Socialists yell: 'Send the thieves to Mazas!'" (referring to a Parisian prison).

(Wikimedia Commons)



Herzl reported on the opposition's efforts to subvert the government's legitimacy, including a call to end the institution of the presidency. Herzl expressed his view about such a lack of acceptance: "The manifest that the Socialists distributed in Parliament is akin to declaring actual war. Faure was elected with the support of all of the Right." Herzl correlated the lack of acceptance with the degree of expectation for victory in this round, rather than with the merit of issues (throughout his writings, Herzl analyzed the concept of hope from various aspects).

'Herzl is our modern Moses'

Similarly, Herzl wrote about the balance of power between elected officials and the French civil service; the power of the press; the systemic disconnect between election promises and the interests of parliamentarians once elected; the structural corruption that exists in a governance system based on give-and-take; and many other issues that come to bear in today's Israeli and global politics.

Should there be a government minister for applying Herzl?

In his introduction to the 2019 *Jerusalem Post* special *Magazine* about Herzl, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wrote that "Herzl is our modern Moses." Indeed, Herzl has not only led the Jews' return to Israel

but, like Moses, also planted the seeds for the transformation of Judaism.

It took a long while for Moses's transformation to come to fruition (the period of the Judges was only a partial adoption of his teaching), and the same can be said about Herzl. Yet, as discussed in this column, Zionism is now becoming the anchor of Judaism (Judaism 3.0). It is, therefore, time to begin to delve into the depth of Herzl's Torah and apply it to our contemporary issues. With a government of 30 ministers, there are more ministers than portfolios (one recalls the "minister of water" a few governments ago, in an effort to address this gap). Perhaps the government should consider creating a minister for applying Herzl.

At a time of increased polarization, there is a growing need not only to elevate our uniting national figure but also to promote a "what would Herzl do" discussion as input for our complex strategic challenges. Such efforts to elevate Herzl could be spearheaded in a number of different ways, by:

- the World Zionist Organization, which last August held a ceremony and a conference in Basel, Switzerland, marking 125 years since Herzl's First Zionist Congress;
- President Isaac Herzog, who at that same ceremony and then in the introduction to the October 2022 *Jerusalem Post Magazine* titled "Is Zionism becoming the anchor of Judaism?" proclaimed that reclaiming Zionism is our mission; and,
- private initiatives, such as the Brazil Jewish Academy's new online series *Applying Herzl*; the four Herzl-related books published in 2022 alone; Herzl discussion groups, such as *Parasha and Herzl*; and articles about Herzl.

No matter which way, it is clear that there is unprecedented Herzl momentum in 2023, and this should be leveraged.

One strategic issue that Herzl could be drafted to is the battle against the rising existential threat of Israel-bashing. Herzl concluded that opposition to Judaism is chronic: "They will not leave us in peace. For a little period they manage to tolerate us and then their hostility breaks out again and again." Indeed, that little time, lasting 80 years, is over, as Judaism in the 2020s is once again under a large-scale assault.

This time, the assault on Judaism is through the port of Zionism. Hence, recognizing that we are in Judaism 3.0 and Zionism is becoming the anchor of Judaism would make it clear that anti-Zionism is anti-Judaism and Israel-bashing is Jew-bashing, which in turn would mitigate the nature of the existential threat.

Herzl left us with generous documentation of his thoughts and approaches, including through his diaries, letters, plays, essays, articles and short stories. Taken together and reading his words from the inside as he asked us to do, we can turn Herzl into our secret weapon in addressing our era's challenges. This way, it would not just be Herzl's bust that overlooks the flourishing of his brainchild but also his insight, wisdom and spirit.

The writer is the author of Judaism 3.0: Judaism's Transformation to Zionism (Judaism-Zionism.com). For his geopolitical articles, visit: EuropeAndJerusalem.com