

In My Opinion

When Is a Refugee No Longer a Refugee and Other Post-Resettlement Observations

ROBERT HYFLER, PH.D.

Director of Budget and Planning, UJA Federation of Greater Washington, Rockville, Maryland

The starting assumption of this article is that the historic times we live in will have a profound impact on our federation system and will create permanent changes in the rules and circumstances under which we conduct our communal affairs. One is tempted to begin and end with the following quick question and answer.

Q. When is a refugee no longer a refugee?

A. When they substitute Bar and Bat Mitzvah for Jewish education; when their children intermarry and they stop feeling guilty about it; when they only vaguely know the difference between the JCC, the Jewish Family Service, and the federation; and when they feel no shame in turning down a Super Sunday campaign solicitor.

There is seriousness in this whimsy. We could restate the question and answer as follows:

Q. When is a refugee no longer a refugee?

A. When the community stops looking at the refugee as a mythically perfect Amer-

ican Jew—a laboratory case for all our communal fantasies—and begins seeing the Soviet Jew as one segment of the continuum of community need.

My first observation is, therefore, that we are trying to do right by Soviet Jews in a manner in which we have never served our domestic population. Every Soviet will not be a good Jewish citizen; every Soviet will not stay within our agency orbit.

However, because we will probably be more successful with the Soviets than with domestic Jews, we should consciously start asking what it is we are doing so well and how we can transfer over new-found efficacies to other areas.

To gain a better sense of what the future will hold, allow me to inventory various resettlement services and see where they may or may not take us 5 years down the road—both in terms of our resettlement programs and the impact of resettlement on other things we do.

The Soviet immigrant will, in all likelihood, follow a typical immigrant's journey. Her or his economic success will probably be linked to general economic trends as much as to what assistance we do or do not offer. The Holocaust survivor generation of Jewish immigrants did well because they benefited from the post-World War II boom economy. In contrast, pre-World War II immigrant generations took longer to realize the American dream; indeed, turn-of-the-century European immigrants experienced a significant declassé phenomenon as solidly middle-class Central and Eastern Europeans were instantly proletarianized. If good times prevail in the 1990s the transition of the Soviet immigrant will be smoother and the impact on our system will be less great.

Presented at the Council of Jewish Federations Planners' Institute, West Palm Beach, Florida, January 14, 1991.

However, given a less than dynamic economy, we may be looking at a generation of Jews at the margin, who will strain our family and vocational services and place consistent demands on our system. Under such circumstances, we will not be talking of mainstreaming Soviet Jews into our regular services, but of creating (or returning to) different types of mainstream services.

It is worth noting that, unlike other marginal Jewish groups who are alienated from our system and are often invisible, the needs of the New American have been actively integrated into our system. As their needs change or intensify, they will actively turn to the system for support, and for all the right reasons we will not be able to ignore their demands.

Consider these few examples:

- *Counseling services:* Such services have been losing their ethnic dimension for years. However, will there be a need for a new ethnic-oriented family counselor who can help Soviet families accustomed to an authoritarian culture cope with an American society that ranges from the libertarian to the anomic?
- *Chaplaincy and free burial:* Soviet Jews do not join synagogues or buy cemetery plots on the installment plan. Geographically dislocated populations breed severely isolated and dislocated individuals. They need particular help in times of crisis.
- *Crime and delinquency and its impact on family and community:* How far down the road are we from a new Jewish gangster movie starring our Soviet population with supporting roles for Israelis and Iranians? But "crime" is a function of class structure, and therefore, to phrase the issue less dramatically, will the issue of class, long submerged in late 20th-century American Jewry, re-emerge? My gut impression is that Montreal and their experience with Sephardim and that of Los Angeles with Israelis would offer insight.
- *Service to the elderly:* The confluence of aging and cultural dislocation and uniqueness will re-emerge. We need to better understand how aging was handled in Soviet society and realize that many Jewish aging services in the year 2000 might bear more of a resemblance to those of 1950 than to those of 1980.
- *JCCs and cultural and recreational programs:* Here we start making the transition from bread to roses—from the basic physical needs of a population to the cultural and spiritual needs that make human life worth living.

Soviets are much more serious about culture than we Americans. Adult education that is corrupted by the 20-second sound bite, superficial curriculum, kitschy topics, and trendy issues are not sufficient. I am struck by a recent conversation I had with a very articulate, English-proficient Soviet who expressed her great dismay at having difficulty reading Hemingway in English and wondered (now that she was beginning to learn Hebrew) whether she would ever be able to read and understand modern Hebrew poetry.

Do our Soviet Jews need protected time and space—their own "centers" or centers within centers? Although my Soviet Jewish contacts tell me not to worry, I continue to be distressed by the lack of self-organization within some of our immigrant communities. Will the Soviets, as do American olim, seek instant integration into domestic structures against their own interests?

- *Jewish education:* In this area of service, the potential of transference of policy and practice from the Soviets to the general population is greatest. Day school aside, do we mainstream Soviet children into rotting supplemental school structures, or do we create innovative approaches to Jewish education for new Americans and then move our domestic youngsters into those programs? The typical domestic Jewish child and his or

her family are as Jewishly dysfunctional (or more so) than their Soviet counterparts. We are going to spend a great deal of time and money on the Jewish acculturation of those we settle—let us do it in a way that is transferable to the larger problem.

- *Jewish identity*: In this area I have some very positive observations. As an unreconstructed ethnic, I am impressed by the strong Jewish ethnicity among Soviets. At a time when a segment of our intelligentsia is assimilating themselves into a very Protestant notion of Jewish spirituality, the Soviet Jew knows that Jewishness is not so much G-d talk as it is a matter of history, culture, language, and fate. It is my observation that there is more gut Zionism in our Soviet brothers and sisters than in our domestic brethren. In fact, I see Soviet Jews as a critical link to Israel in the coming decade. Remember, by the next decade 50% of their families may be in Israel, and the remainder will be divided between the former Soviet Union and the United States. Their ties to Israel—personal, familial, and emotional—may be just the right corrective to the de-Zionization taking place in some Jewish circles. More than American Jewry has saved Soviet Jewry—Soviet Jewry may save us.

Let me elaborate on the impact that this whole resettlement endeavor is having on the rest of what we are about. I think we have created entitlements for Soviet Jews that may have transferability to our domestic population, particularly in the area of Jewish acculturation and education. Simply stated, we might define an entitlement as a good to be delivered to a person or group by virtue of who they are or under what circumstances they exist. We have backed into the principle and policy that those whom history and fate have denied Jewishness and middle-class status are entitled to be the beneficiaries of special, affirmative action policies. These policies

are established to compensate for past suffering and circumstances.

Many of our domestic children, particularly the 80% to 90% who do not attend day schools, are just as much victims of history and fate. Their “Stalin” was the 20th-century immigrant experience and the struggle for upward economic mobility. They suffer today from the false consciousness of their parents. Yet, through affordable services and programs that help them do what they cannot or will not do by themselves, we can liberate many children and parents.

Soviet Jews are a people at the margin who have been brought into our system. However, there exist other Jews, equally marginal, who are not thought of or cared for as we care for our New Americans. Who invites them to synagogues or Passover seders? Where are our structures to perform small acts of compassion on their behalf? Again, have we carefully and compassionately explored the issue of affordability of services and its impact on those who are unpoor yet unrich?

This whole discussion is based on the important question of resources. How can we expand our notions of entitlements in a current climate of expanding obligations and declining philanthropic dollars? Although I offer no widescale solution, I have a few observations.

We need to aggressively maximize public funds for Jewish services, and in so doing we need to think through carefully the attitude of the Jewish community to issues of public social policy. As a constituency of the unpoor, Jews have a moral obligation to work for an expanding pool of government dollars in the area of social services lest we end up competing with much less fortunate populations for these funds. (Take the issue of government support for parochial education. Increasingly we hear, from surprisingly liberal circles, of the need to rethink our position on this issue. Clearly in many democracies the separation of church and state is much weaker, and

pluralistic freedoms do not suffer. However, only as government dollars for education expand would it be appropriate for us to seek aid for our own schools. The Jewish community should not be competing with those minorities dependent on public education for a piece of a stagnant pie.)

We also need to aggressively seek endowment funds on behalf of *existing* programs and services. Endowment fund benefactors need to understand that their dollars are needed to underwrite the proven and the essential and not simply the new and attractive.

In marketing our endowment programs and in making our case for the annual campaign, the resources and skill of the professional federation planners and their lay chairpersons need to be utilized more effectively. Today's planner is a first-hand participant in some of the most historic communal endeavors ever undertaken. Our stories and the facts at our disposal are tremendous tools for communal fund raising. In some ways we might have better success with the new-style Jewish prospect who is more comfortable with analytic as opposed to emotional appeals.

The redeployment of our resources to meet the challenge of resettlement domestically and overseas has weakened the social contract between federations and the domestic Jewish population. Quite frankly, if Exodus II is carried forward in the magnitude talked about, great schisms could erupt. As we retool and retrench our system to the bone, let us start talking through the problem so as to identify the points past which we dare not go.

On a positive note, the last few years have forced us to refocus on issues of priorities, efficiencies and sound operating

practices. If the bad news is that we are creating a backlog of domestic need, the good news is we are becoming more serious, less faddish, and more discerning in regard to what we are about and what we are not about. In short, we are beginning to manage our fate and not be managed by it.

I discussed earlier the issue of transferability of services from the resettlement arena to mainstream domestic services. One insight we should retain from our current experiences is that demands, needs, client groups, and problems are always much more dynamic than we ever understood. Things do change—new problems arise, and old problems go away. In an age of scarcity let us ensure that the new programs we develop have the flexibility to adapt to changing times and circumstances. Retooling and redirecting are always easier than retrenching, dismantling, and starting anew.

We should keep exploring the many ways we can make a difference with a minimum of financial outlay. Professional networking among agency professionals, volunteer coordination, and management assistance projects have the potential of generating greater dollar value than they cost. Even after domestic resettlement ends, let us not lose the skills of scrounging and making do with less.

And lastly, personally and professionally, it would be sad and unfortunate if our generation did not have its own unique Jewish challenge. What we are doing and what we need to do constitute more than a footnote in Jewish history. For all the anxieties, frustrations, and problems, we should feel privileged to live and work in these times.

Order Now

The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey Findings: What They Mean for Jewish Communal Service

The Council of Jewish Federations' 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) is the most important research study in recent years about the total American Jewish community. Its findings on Jewish continuity and intermarriage have sent shock waves through the organized Jewish world; no less important for Jewish communal professionals are its data about household size and composition, use of Jewish social service agencies, the changing demography and needs of the aging, and the economic status of American Jews.

In the Summer 1992 issue of the *Journal*, researchers (including the authors of both the 1970 and 1990 NJPS), rabbis, and leading communal professionals explore the implications of the NJPS for the field of Jewish communal service.

Research Findings

NJPS methodology and major findings—*Dr. Barry Kosmin*, CJF, New York
Why is New York different?—*Drs. Bethamie Horowitz* and *Jeffrey R.*

Solomon, UJA-Federation, New York

Need for and use of Jewish social service agencies—*Dr. J. Alan Winter*,
Connecticut College, New London, CT

Politics of research—*Dr. Fred Massarik*, UCLA, Los Angeles

Jewish Continuity—Will Our Grandchildren Be Jewish?

Barry Shrage, Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston

Steven Bayme, American Jewish Committee, New York

Rabbi Joy Levitt, Reconstructionist Synagogue of the North Shore, New York

Policy and Planning Implications

Jewish communal leadership—*Bernard Reisman*, Ph.D., Brandeis University,
Waltham, MA

Serving the aging—*Dr. Avi Glicksman*, Philadelphia Geriatric Center

Jewish family service agencies—*Bert J. Goldberg*, Association of Jewish
Family and Children's Agencies, Kendall Park, NJ

Jewish vocational service agencies—*Dr. E. F. Royfe*, Jewish Employment
and Vocational Service, Philadelphia

Jewish community relations councils—*Lawrence Sternberg*, Brandeis
University, Waltham, MA

Order additional copies of this issue for your staff and lay leadership at the special prepublication price of \$5.00 per copy (50 or more copies, \$3.50 each). Mail your order with your check payable to JCSA, to 3084 State Highway 27, Suite 9, Kendall Park, New Jersey 08824-1657.

Holocaust Studies Films and Videos From Direct Cinema



A Journey Back

Jack Garfein, now a successful Broadway producer, returns to Auschwitz to confront his past. The sole survivor of his family, he searches for the truth behind the tragedy of the camps.

Canadian Broadcasting Corp. Directed by Brian McKenna
fifth estate series

60 minutes Color 1987

16mm Sale \$895/Rental \$100 1/2" Video Sale \$350/Rental \$75



Raoul Wallenberg: Buried Alive

Canadian Academy Award 1984 Best Theatrical Documentary

Here is the true story of the young Swedish Protestant who personally saved thousands of Jews during the Nazi Holocaust, only to disappear forever into Russian prisons.

Produced by Wayne Arron and David Harel

78 minutes Color and B&W 1984

16mm Sale \$895/Rental \$125

58-minute version 1/2" Video Only Sale \$150/Rental \$50



A Special Letter

Beautifully drawn animation tells the true story of a special love between a daughter and her aging mother whose devotion and Christian faith saved her family during imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp.

National Film Board of Canada

5 minutes Color 1985

16mm Sale \$195/Rental \$25 1/2" Video Sale \$75/Rental \$25



Voices from the Attic

CINE Golden Eagle

A moving personal document of Holocaust remembrance,

Voices from the Attic is a record of the filmmaker's trip with several of her relatives to the town in Poland where her mother and fifteen family members hid in the attic of a peasant's home for two years during the Second World War.

Produced and Directed by Debbie Goodstein

58 minutes Color 1988

16mm Sale \$895/Rental \$100 1/2" Video Sale \$250/Rental \$25



You Are Free (Ihr Zent Frei!)

Academy Award Nomination 1983 Best Documentary Short

The impact of World War II concentration camps on four American soldiers who were present at the liberation is documented in this compelling short film.

A film by Ilene Landis and Dea Brokman

20 minutes Color 1984

16mm Sale \$395/Rental \$40 1/2" Video Sale \$250/Rental \$25

For sales, rental or preview information contact:

Direct Cinema Limited

P.O. Box 69799

Los Angeles, CA 90069

Phone (213) 396-4774/Telefax (213) 396-3233

For Rentals Call 1-800-FILMS-4-U


direct
cinema
limited

©1990DCL