

# The Changing Situation in the Jewish Community and Implications for Federations\*

Sanford Solender

Executive Vice-President, Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, New York

*What if peace comes to Israel? What will be the implications of this historic happening for American Jewry and for Federations?*

*In the euphoria over the Sadat visit to Jerusalem, this question was on our lips. The impact of the subsequent reality that peace was not yet at hand did not diminish the shock effect of the original query. It invited more basic questions: Are we sufficiently sensitive to the implications of the domestic and overseas changes in the general and Jewish scenes? Are we thinking far enough ahead for the options which must be anticipated and planned for? Is a Federation social activist role on general and Jewish issues compatible with Federation's consensual non-political character?*

## The Domestic Scene

The inter-relationship of these issues requires that they be examined as a unity. It is appropriate to begin with the domestic scene and the changes which have an impact upon us here at home.

There is a steady shift in the economy of North American Jewry. Traditional fortunes are disappearing as old families drop away. Some new wealth replaces them, but there is uncertainty about our future economic base. The younger generation of the families of means often prefers careers in the professions and the academic and intellectual world, which produce a smaller net worth than if they succeeded their fathers in the family businesses. There is significant Jewish affluence upon which to base our quest for support, but the changes can affect the relative dependence of campaigns on various giving levels, the need for a broader base for advance gifts, the style of solicitation, and the sources of leadership.

With the economic ascent of the Jewish working-class and many of the Jewish poor, we are substantially a middle-class Jewish community. The giving potential of this expanding middle class is well beyond what we have tapped thus far, and is a challenge to our campaigning. Moreover, we have a special responsibility to provide agency services to the sections of the Jewish middle-class being

squeezed by inflation, unable to pay for services they need, and ineligible for government assistance.

Notwithstanding these changes, Jewish poverty persists, especially in large cities. Many of our people, most of them orthodox families and the aged, have not escaped the poverty cycle. Together with the Jewish working-poor, they require special attention in program planning: they need brokerage help to secure financial assistance, and governmental and voluntary health and welfare services. They require advocacy support, neighborhood stabilization aid, or relocation help as their circumstances dictate.

Changes in Jewish institutional patterns have consequences for Federations. Some segments of orthodoxy are growing steadily in affluence, and the orthodox group is maintaining its own institutional system and participating with reservations or not at all in the community apparatus. It often rejects community agencies out of preference for its own services. Its giving to the community campaign generally is poor, although it contributes substantially to its own institutions. The further to the right, the more the orthodox are separatists ideologically and organizationally.

An orthodox drift further away from the organized Jewish community can weaken the Jewish community. Orthodox participation in a pluralist Jewish community is necessary to the viability of Federations. What is required is a planned out-reach by Federation's

agencies to serve this clientele, appropriate involvement of orthodox persons in community leadership on Federation and agency boards, a place for their separate social institutions in the organized community structure, and their increased support of the community campaign.

The changing nature of Jewish affiliation patterns has seen the decline of many traditional Jewish organizations (landsmanchaften, fraternal orders, Jewish labor organizations, and other groups), and the emergence of a large number of Jews who are totally unaffiliated which affect opportunities for community participation and the way Federations obtain community representation. Obsolescence in Jewish organizational life suggests that representation in Federations through existing organizations may have many weaknesses. Other methods must be found to assure that Federations reach a cross-section of Jews, communicate with them, and secure their participation.

Neighborhood or community councils in large cities enlist the unaffiliated and people from indigenous groups, thus serving as a channel for reaching otherwise uninvolved persons. People at large chosen on the basis of geographical, occupational, or informal social groupings can supplement organizational representation in Federations, community councils, and agency boards.

Changing relationships with the larger community are important to Federations. The deterioration of black-Jewish relations is a disturbing development of the seventies. What happened to the common cause for human rights which united blacks and Jews in the early sixties? Affirmative action, the Bakke case, "minority rights," economic competition, and bitterness caused by deepening socio-economic problems of the blacks have changed this. Federations must evaluate this potentially explosive change even as community relations councils, Jewish organizations, and our agencies deal with it. Federations must consider the practical consequences of this situation for Jewish community policy and participate in cultivating constructive rapport with the black community.

Instability in race relations, especially where this involves Jews, influences the fate of marginal areas of Jewish residence in large cities, accelerating Jewish mobility. Jewish community planning concerns, as well as our stake in the viability of our cities, requires special Federation attention to neighborhood stabilization, inter-group association, and governmental policies and programs in these fields.

The traditional partnership between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in the social welfare universe is subject to new strains. The Protestants are less likely than in the past to go the route with our Federations in defending sectarian principles and practices in the operation of health and welfare enterprises, nor will they or the Catholics make common cause with us on affirmative action issues. Negative attitudes about Israel and the influence of Arab propaganda adversely affect both black-Jewish and interfaith relationships. The Jewish position may be more isolated than we are accustomed to believing it to be, necessitating careful strategic planning by our Federations. Added to this is our anxiety over the out-croppings of anti-semitism expressed in the Ku Klux Klan, Nazi groups, black anti-Semitism, pro-Arabism, and aggressive Christian missionary activities directed towards the Jews. Whereas in the past we have taken for granted the firmness of inter-faith relationships, we need now to be alert to areas of tension or difference, and to engage in a continuing process of cultivation.

Trends affecting the United Funds must not be overlooked. Blacks and health organizations are using legal means and community pressures to challenge the exclusive fundraising franchise of the United Funds, a strategy which can further isolate our Jewish community on the health and welfare scene. Pressure within United Funds for priority for the poor is contrary to the interests of our Jewish community with its large middle-class constituency. With financial aid and eligibility for government-financed health and welfare services restricted to the poor, a successful effort to maneuver the United Funds to preference for the lowest economic group will

\* Presented to the Summer Institute of the Large Cities' Executives, San Diego, California, July 9, 1978.

strike at non-governmental services to the working-poor and the middle-class. In light of governmental preoccupation with the poor, service to middle-income people should be a central focus of the voluntary sector.

The corporate employee base of United Fund support may provide a counter-force to this by virtue of the expectations of employee givers that they will be served by United Fund agencies. But should the pressure for emphasis on serving the poor succeed, the Jewish community and Federations will be further compromised. Federations need to assess United Fund developments, support the United Way campaign, and encourage Jewish leaders to take an active role on United Way boards. But Federations must be ready also to act defensively regarding developments which can affect Jewish community interests adversely.

Government relationships are critical for Federations and their agencies. The support of Jewish health and welfare agencies by government has made it possible for a vast Jewish human service enterprise to operate, notwithstanding fiscal constraints in the Jewish community.

Implicit in this dependence upon government are dilemmas for the Jewish community. Cost-control and cut-backs result in inadequate funding which greatly jeopardizes quality services. Jewish institutions in the health and aged services depending primarily on public funds are exposed to severe financial crises which can threaten their survival. Anti-tax, anti-poor, and anti-social services sentiments in the country, epitomized by California's adoption of Proposition 13, endanger the stability of Jewish agencies which depend upon government financing. The questioning of our right to sectarian preference in intake or to sectarian emphasis in government-funded programs if translated into operating regulations, can greatly impair our functioning.

Federations need to re-evaluate government relationship strategies. We must make common cause with a wide panoply of groups to

influence affirmatively government policies affecting public and voluntary health and welfare. We must seek relief in the courts where necessary to safeguard our right to receive public funds without compromising our position as an institutional system dedicated to serving the Jewish community.

There are the following general implications of these domestic issues for current Federation policy and practice:

1) Federations need to persist in their efforts to secure the broadest Jewish community base for Federation services, giving and leadership. Economic, religious and organizational changes are producing new constituencies which must find their place under the Federation umbrella. Sectors of the steadily expanding middle-class have greater dependence on the community than has been assumed. Their service needs merit special attention, and the fact that this is not a new task for Federation makes it no less compelling.

2) Changed conditions complicate the Federation resources picture and call for substantial Federation action. The altered Jewish economic base necessitates finding new sources of giving; the United Fund situation requires alertness and strategic defenses; and evolving governmental health and welfare policies must be influenced by active Federation initiatives.

3) In health and welfare, as in every phase of community life, Federation must make particular efforts to prevent Jewish isolation and the widening of inter-group gaps by striving to sustain long-standing action coalitions with other races and faiths.

#### The International Scene

On the international level, conditions in flux confront Federations with complex issues. The most pressing one is the relationship of North American Jewry to Israel. Tensions within the Jewish community have been generated over conflicting attitudes about Israel's response to the Sadat peace initiative and her policies on the expansion of settlements, the treatment of Arabs in occupied territories, and the response

to Arab terrorism. Some Jews have faithfully supported the Israeli government at every point. Others have challenged the expectation that there will be a catholic acceptance of Israeli policy. The tension between American Jewry and the U.S. government resulting from differences over the government's Israeli policy is a new phenomenon for American Jewry.

Just as dissent emerged in Israel, there are divergences in North American Jewry. Attitudes towards those who differ with Israel's stands range from condemnation for disloyalty to the Jewish people to fervent advocacy of the right of dissent within the context of Jewish loyalty. Federations must stand firmly for pluralism in the Jewish community and the right of people to differ. The commitment of Federation leaders and others to Israel should not be questioned because of differing views.

This has been a trying period for Federation in other respects. With Israel so basic to the campaign, and with Israeli leaders used prominently in the campaign appeal, it has not been easy to preserve the non-political character of Federation and the campaign. Campaign events are addressed by Israeli figures who are tempted to treat the occasions as rallies in defense of Israeli government policies. The involvement of Federation presidents in White House meetings is construed as Federation advocacy of Israeli government stands. As differences intensify, Federation support by people of either viewpoint can be jeopardized.

A leader in New York who is a prominent member of the board of Jewish higher education institution wrote us in May as follows: "Until a way is found to separate political activities of the UJA and its leadership from the philanthropic activities of Federation and UJA, I have regretfully decided to suspend my annual gifts to the UJA-Federation Joint Campaign." Stating that he intended to continue to contribute to Israel in other ways, and that he would refrain

from sitting in judgment on Israel's policies, he stated that he declined "to permit any part of my contributions for charitable or educational purposes to be syphoned off for the support of political activities in this country of which I deeply disapprove, or because of my membership and gifts to the Joint Campaign, to make it appear that I am among those in whose name the leaders of UJA may speak on purely political matters." He concluded that he would "be happy to contribute to the Joint Campaign again if and when the political activities supported by it are segregated, and its leaders agree not to use their titles in the campaign in support of their personal political pronouncements and lobbying efforts." Irrespective of the accuracy or inaccuracy of his judgments, these reactions were generated by our president's participation in meetings of Federation presidents in Washington and the reports to the community thereon.

This is neither an isolated response nor a common one. But it sharpens the contradiction between pressures for more politically activist Federations on the one hand, and the apolitical character of Federations on the other.

Tensions involving Israel which affect Federations are not limited to Israel's peace policy. The exclusivity of orthodox authority in Israel and the demands of the reform and conservative movements for recognition are a chronic dissonance that can spill over to Federations.

Another strain affecting Federations concerns the migration of Soviet Jews to Israel and to the United States and provocative assertions such as Leon Dulzin's recent charge that HIAS unduly influences Soviet Jews to come to the U.S. The role of political parties in the Jewish agency and World Zionist Organization and the use of funds raised in North American Federation campaigns to finance political party activity are sources of conflict. Other such issues are the right of North American Jewry to influence how the funds it raises are spent in Israel, Israeli unhappiness

about the small American *aliyah*, and resentment over the large Israeli population residing in North America.

### The Social Activism of Federations

Federations are drawn into these controversies and pressures within the Federation movement for involvement in them is understandable. Federation presidents are urged to meet with the President of the United States and other public officials as spokesmen for Jewry. Federations are asked to be the voice of the Jewish community on these matters. On issues about which there is a readily identifiable unanimity or consensus, the problem is not acute. Federations can support the right of Soviet Jews to freedom of choice of their immigration destination or of Federations to share in Jewish agency policy decisions. But it is hardly possible for Federations to advocate a particular status for reform and conservative Jewry vis-a-vis the orthodox in Israel. An inclusive, consensus-oriented, pluralistic Federation cannot take public positions on issues about which there is controversy in the Jewish community without risking harm to its capacity to fulfill its chief purposes.

The impulse for orderly conduct of Jewish affairs leads to the desire that the Jewish community speak in a single voice, especially on issues affecting Israel. But our communal pluralism frustrates this objective. Leonard Fein in the May 1978 issue of *Moment* accuses Jewish leaders of failing to involve the whole community in decision-making in order to avoid differences and to create the illusion of a single position on Israel. He charges that leaders create a "monolithic monster" which is incapable of brooking differences or altering positions as conditions require. He contends that there is prevalent a viewpoint that community divergencies should be papered over to create the impression of a single view for external consumption.

The openness of our community makes such an effort illusory. A single voice can be heard only to the extent that it reflects an almost

universal viewpoint. Our community is strong and secure enough to be free of fear that external knowledge of our differences will be injurious to the Jewish cause. To do otherwise than to respect and encourage open exchange of views would be destructive of the free spirit which is our strength. Management of the communal process must insure that the thrust for a unified community voice does not do violence to the democratic character of our community. Federations' capacity to facilitate a sound community process in dealing with differences must be applied to this aspect of community functioning, even if it involves only Federation counsel to other bodies which perform this function.

The desire to have Federations speak for the local Jewish community is more attractive in theory than in application. Federations will make a greater contribution by fostering and supporting instrumentalities for community action like community relations councils than by aspiring to be the voice of the community. To be the latter would expose Federations to the winds of ideological and political conflict, controversy and alienation which would undermine their effectiveness.

The Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations attempts to speak nationally for American Jewry. Some argue that the Conference represents mainly those who are members of organizations and that Federations have a broader community base and should become more active in this area—even try to preempt the role for themselves. The historic fact is that Federations have not elected to play this part and the Presidents' Conference *has* done so.

For Federations to aspire to a dominant position in this area would hopelessly politicize them. Even more, it would precipitate a destructive power struggle. It is more realistic for Federations to foster strong local community relations agencies which as members of the Presidents Conference provide a firm community base.

This raises the issue of the policy in some

communities of treating the local community relations agency as a department of Federation. Each local community devises arrangements which are appropriate to its history and experience. But the growing need to preserve the apolitical character of Federations may necessitate re-evaluation of this policy. Independent community relations agencies which are structured to provide systems of formal representation which in turn administer processes for taking positions are able to act without involving and committing Federations. The need for a body which can deal with sensitive social issues and advocate positions which may be subject to controversy may require Federations to put a distance between themselves and this function.

The pressures upon Federations for an activist role on social and political policies will mount. Domestically, action will be requested on governmental financing of social programs, policies regarding the poor, equal opportunity and affirmative action, civil rights and tax questions. Federations have an impressive record of action on such issues as they bear directly upon Federation and agency programs and follow consensus for established positions. The criteria of relevance and consensus has validated Federation activism in health and welfare.

But the impetus grows to extend this activism to international concerns as they affect Israel and U.S. governmental policy regarding the Mideast. Here the criteria of relevance does not provide as easy sanction as in the domestic area. The tolerance of difference is less because of emotional, ethnic, and ideological issues.

In the light of the foregoing, Federation guidelines for social activism on domestic and international matters can be stated as follows:

1. Federation's central purpose is strengthening Jewish life through community organization for planning to meet Jewish communal needs, assuring the provision of the services essential to viable Jewish life, and securing the resources to accomplish this goal. Its social activism must be consistent with this

purpose and implemented in a manner which is protective of Federation's capacity to perform these roles.

2. Federation's social activism must be directed toward policies of broad consensus. There is acceptance of an active Federation role on social policies affecting health and welfare, about which the controversy level is low and Federation expertise is acknowledged. The same can not apply to the gamut of ideological and political issues in Jewish life. Federation can not be an effective forum for debate on the range of general policy questions affecting domestic and international affairs, nor can it be the channel for action on them.

3. For Federation to serve as the general instruments for Jewish community action would divert energies from primary tasks and so diminish Federation's broad community acceptance as to impair its capacity to discharge its main functions. Such a course also might jeopardize Federation's tax exempt status and threaten the tax position of the UJA.

4. A pluralistic Jewish community can speak with a single voice on few issues and only when there is unanimity. The Jewish community must opt instead for coordinated expression by Jewish groups on issues about which there is agreement.

5. The dream that a Federation should become the single voice for the Jewish community is unrealistic and unwise. Aside from the impracticability of anyone speaking generally for the Jewish community, for Federation to try to do so would nullify overall functioning.

6. It has long been recognized that Federation's role is to identify needs and assure the provision of community services to meet them. In the large cities, Federation's function generally has not been to render services itself. Appropriate instrumentalities should be sponsored and supported by Federation as the medium for the forum and action function. The Jewish community relations councils are the most appropriate bodies to serve this purpose.

The confluence of extraordinary flux in the domestic and the overseas situations generates

an environment of instability within which Federations must operate. Conditions are changing rapidly and the circumstances under which we function are being permanently altered. Our thrust to emphasize is heavily influenced by the shifting domestic scene and events in Israel. We must view the *whole* interconnected panorama of change as the setting for Federation planning and action.

### Some General Implications

There are several general implications for Federations of these domestic and international changes.

First, greater clarity is needed about the future direction of the thrust of the campaign message. As though we fear our Israel appeal will fail if it is not war and defense oriented, missions to Israel are taken to see displays of Israel air power and tank production, and generals and other Israelis making campaign speeches stress the war thrust and defense issues. Rarely is the story properly told of what is done with our money to meet human needs in Israel. Is it not time for Federations to insist that this message can be made compelling, that the future viability of the campaign—especially in the happy event of peace—lies in making the case for building a sound society in Israel?

Second, contrasted with the late sixties and early seventies, there is a malaise in our communities. Jewish youth activism and group militancy in advocating change in Jewish community policies and priorities have diminished. Our Federations historically have carried the seeds of adaptability, and in such a period as the present an aggressive Federation initiative to identify changes and plan accommodations is essential. This should not await

the probe of a new militant activism.

Third, the changing scene has significance for community leadership. The confidence which Federations enjoy as they make difficult adaptations depends upon the quality of their leadership. Leaders must be Jewishly committed and sophisticated, able to articulate and inspire in the universe of ideas, have the statesmanship which intra and inter-community affairs require, enjoy community respect, and be capable of motivating young leaders. Leaders must be drawn from all the religious denominations, youth, women, the wealthy and the middle-class, academicians and intellectuals. Whatever the initial source of their interest, leaders must be committed to the cross-section of Federation interests. The person who starts with an Israeli orientation must learn the importance of domestic programs to Jewish survival, and vice-versa.

Finally, there is the irrepressible question: What happens if peace comes to Israel? What of the future of our campaign, which is so heavily dependent on the threat of war in the Mideast and the needs of defense in Israel? Can we build an effective community based on a commitment to a strong, viable Jewish life in America and a healthy Israel living in peace? Is it only under the threat of attack on Israel that we can unite diaspora Jewry in support of Israel and of meeting community needs? Or, stated differently: Can we unite effectively around a thrust for Jewish continuity and survival everywhere in the world?

There can be but a single answer to this question: We can indeed build our communities and our Federations on a solid foundation of commitment to advancing and sustaining creative Jewish continuity here and abroad.