CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE: JEWISH COMMUNAL WELFARE IN MONTREAL

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For generations, Jewish communal welfare has been a major feature of Jewish communal life. During the Middle Ages it was an integral part of the Jewish semi-autonomous, self-governing, community. During the emancipation and post-emancipation eras, i.e., since the end of the eighteenth century, with the changes in the civic status of the Jews, Jewish communal organization changed too. The goal of concerned Jewish leaders was to cast communal organization into modern patterns, while preserving its Jewish characteristics. Jewish communal organization in general, and communal welfare in particular, encountered, in modern times, challenges such as the disintegration of the traditional Jewish society, the advent of the welfare state and the rise of professionalism in social welfare. The reactions of Jewish communal welfare to these challenges substantially transformed its structure and ways of operation. However, the function of Jewish social welfare never changed. It is, like the function of any ethnic institution, to enhance internal communication within the community and to help preserve its continuity.

In this essay, we are concerned with Jewish communal welfare in Montreal since World War II. Against the background of social welfare developments in North America, we shall examine the challenges and responses in the area of communal social welfare within the context of the Jewish community in Montreal. However, before proceeding we have to tackle two preliminary issues, namely, the functions of ethnic institutions in general, and the characteristics of Jewish communal welfare in particular.

Basically ethnic institutions have two functions: (1) to deliver specific services to the members of the ethnic community, and (2) to facilitate intra-group communications within the ethnic community. The question is how the ethnic institutions help to create and maintain the communal cohesion which is so important for its inner strength and continuity.

Breton (1968) maintains that the extent of communal cohesion depends on the degree of "institutional completeness" within the community. "In-

stitutional completeness'' is the degree of formal structure of an ethnic community which is measured by the number, type, strength and nature of activities of ethnic institutions within the community. ''Institutional completeness'' is at its extreme whenever the ethnic institutions are able to perform all the services required by the ethnic population. In this case, ethnic group members would never have to make use of services offered out of the community to satisfy their needs. Breton explains that the presence of formal organizations in the ethnic community sets out forces that have the effect of keeping the social relations of members within its boundaries. It is clear that the higher the degree of ''institutional completeness,'' the stronger is the cohesion within the ethnic community.

Bird (1979) supplements Breton's arguments by analyzing the role of ethnic institutions as a means to enhance ethnic identification. In Bird's view, the most important function of an ethnic institution is to facilitate intra-group communications. These communications are the major factors that enhance communal cohesion. Basically, there are three forms of communication which ethnic institutions help to facilitate: (1) promotion of cultural symbols in relation to which ethnic identifications are maintained and transmitted; (2) the exchange of different forms of social recognition between the ethnic group members; and (3) the establishment and distribution of power, commitments and rewards within the community.

The importance of ethnic group institutions for the emergence of communal identification and collective action is that, in varying degrees, they facilitate these communications, at least as a latent function. It is obvious that the roles and goals of a Jewish ethnic institution are basically the same as any other. Concentrating on Jewish social welfare we have to ask how a Jewish welfare institution differs from a non-Jewish welfare institution. The issue of the ''Jewishness'' of Jewish communal welfare is a crucial one. The question is ''What is the 'raison d'être' of an independent Jewish social welfare institution?'' The answer, of course, follows the preceding analysis of ethnic institutions. Posner (1965) claims that ''Jewish communal institutions and agencies must play a role in the survival and creative development of Judaism, Jewish culture and the group life of the Jewish people; this is their raison d'être.''

What, then, are the specific characteristics which help a Jewish communal welfare organization to carry out its functions as an ethnic institution? Based on analysis of historical developments in Jewish communal welfare in Montreal, interviews with communal welfare leaders and statements published by communal organizations, we have identified three characteristics of ''Jewishness'' in communal social welfare. They are: (1) Jewish constituency, which means that the welfare organization serves,

and is supported by, a Jewish population; (2) Jewish voluntarism, a basic feature of communal welfare which helps to facilitate intra-group communications between various individuals and the groups in the community; (3) Jewish cultural distinctiveness, which is manifested in the whole gamut of the organization activities and is essential in the creation of group identification.

SOCIAL WELFARE AFTER WORLD WAR II

Since World War II, with the advent of the welfare state, private and sectarian social welfare organizations confronted new risks to their independence and ethnic identity. According to the welfare state concept, which gradually advanced in western democracies, governments should assume responsibility for health and social welfare services. This approach meant, in a practical sense, the incursion of governments, by legislation and financing, into the arena of health and social welfare services which hitherto was mainly carried out by private sectarian organizations. Many of these organizations were affiliated with religious or ethnic groups. So, the advent of the welfare state bode a period of changes, and readjustment, for sectarian welfare organizations.

Jewish social welfare institutions were not, of couse, saved from the inpact of this development. For the Jewish community, traditionally experienced in the self-supply of social services, the growing involvement of government in this area could mean gradual shrinking of communal services and erosion of their Jewish characteristics and functions. There was a potential danger of losing, or weakening, a major instrument of Jewish identity and communal cohesion.

In the United States, Jewish community leaders and workers were worried that increasing public funding of sectarian welfare agencies would adversely influence the Jewish character of the communal agencies. Karl P. Zukerman (1976), a Jewish communal worker, noted that:

> For the Jewish communal agency the issue is whether the agency can take government funds and yet preserve its Jewish mission. I see its mission to be an instrument of the Jewish community to continue Jewish identity, heritage and life. So, for the Jewish agency the implication of government funding goes straight to its core, its very existence.

Elazar (1976) noted that after World War II the function of providing social services had lost some of its importance in the communal scene. This happened partly because the social services themselves had become progressively less Jewish (by servicing non-Jewish clients) and partly because the rise of the welfare state had reduced their significance in American

Jewish life. In many cases Jewish social service agencies in the United States became strictly nonsectarian, accommodating non-Jews as well as Jews. Elazar added that the fact that Jewish welfare institutions are supported only partially by Jewish funds and heavily by public funds made it difficult to preserve the exclusive Jewish representation on their governing bodies. He pointed out that Jewish welfare services accommodated themselves to the new situation in two ways: (1) by broadening their interests, usually moving into the educational-cultural sphere; and (2) by increasing attention to welfare services not covered by public funding, such as middle-class psychiatric counseling.

We shall now examine more closely how Jewish welfare services in Montreal coped with similar trends during the last few decades.

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Changes in the social welfare arena, which took place in the western democracies after World War II, did not skip Canada. Here, too, features of the welfare state were introduced through legislation in the federal parliament and the provincial legislatures. According to the British North America Act, 1867 (The Canadian Constitution), which grants authority over social welfare to the provinces, many of the social service laws had to be based on agreements between the federal government and the provincial governments. Some of these agreements included a fifty-fifty cost sharing formula. The development of social welfare policy on the federal and provincial levels, since World War II, had a very clear trend: a growing intervention of governments in the social welfare arena both by legislation and financing. It goes without saying, that these changes posed challenges to ethnic and sectarian welfare agencies. We shall concentrate on social welfare developments in Quebec and examine how Jewish communal welfare in Montreal responded to the new challenges.

In the early 1960s, with the rise to power of the Liberal Party in Quebec (after 25 years rule by the conservative Union Nationale), a spirit of reform and change engulfed the Quebec society. A "Quiet Revolution," as it was known then, precipitated a wave of liberal reforms in education, health and social welfare services. The thrust of these reforms was to place the government of Quebec in a more central and committed position with regard to the welfare and well-being of the citizens in this province. To achieve this goal, it was essential to strengthen the authority of the province over and against the ecclesiastic welfare organizations, mainly the Catholic church, which was the largest and most influential. The Liberal government, through a process of legislation, gradually transferred authority over edu-

cation, health and social welfare services from the religious and sectarian organizations to its own hand.

This policy was strongly connected with another phenomenon: the "French Fact." This was a time of soaring nationalistic feelings among French Quebecers, expressed through efforts to achieve cultural and linguistic autonomy and to improve the socio-economic conditions of the population. It was perceived by politicians, intellectuals and media people that the way to attain these goals was by continually concentrating more authority, and responsibility, with the government of the province.

In the spirit of this policy, the government of Quebec, in August 1971, presented to the National Assembly "An Act to Organize Health Services and Social Services." The Act was presented as Bill 65 and was passed by the Quebec legislature in December 1971. The thrust of the Act was to move Quebec's health and social welfare services in the direction of uniform, universal and integrated health and welfare services throughout the province. The law intended to cut across the power of the existing network of sectarian health and welfare services. It actually amounted to a nationalization of those services.

As soon as Bill 65 was presented to the National Assembly, it became clear that the Jewish community was confronting a major reform which would crucially change the nature of health and social welfare services in Quebec and would have a serious impact on Jewish communal services. Imminent massive government intervention made it imperative that the Jewish community clarify its attitudes toward the new policy.

Bill 65 stipulated that Quebec would be divided into twelve regions. In each of them all existing sectarian welfare agencies would be merged into one social service organization. The regional organization would render services to the whole population of the area on a strictly, universal and nonsectarian basis. The island of Montreal was to be one of the regions. All social welfare agencies in Montreal, Jewish, Catholic and Protestant, were to merge into one Social Service Centre (SSC).

The impending risk of losing the independence of its communal welfare stirred the Jewish community. The Jewish welfare institution, as any other ethnic institution, had a role in facilitating intra-group communication and helping to enhance communal cohesion. As we have seen, it has three major characteristics which ensure its Jewishness, namely: Jewish constituency, voluntarism and cultural distinctiveness. All these features could be lost if communal welfare were to merge into a "public establishment" fully financed by the government. Considering the notion of "institutional completeness" mentioned above it was feared that losing a central ethnic institution to the public welfare system would diminish the communal

cohesion. In the community two organizations were directly involved with this issue. They were: (1) Jewish Family Services of the Baron de Hirsch Institute, the largest social welfare agency in the community (henceforth to be referred to as JFS); and (2) Allied Jewish Community Services of Montreal, the roof organization (federation) of the major welfare, educational and recreational institutions in the community (henceforth to be referred to as AJCS).

JFS was a constituent agency of the AJCS. The budget of JFS was, then, covered by AJCS allocations and government grants. Notwithstanding substantial public (governmental) funds, the JFS maintained its operational independence.

JFS and AJCS now confronted a painstaking dilemma, that is, whether to join the public welfare system about to be established according to Bill 65. If JFS became a "public establishment" it would be fully financed by the government but could lose its independence and eventually its ethnic identity. If it did not, and remained a "private establishment", it would lose all government funds which, at that time, amounted to about half of its annual budget.

A hectic period of internal debate (within the community) and external negotiations (with the government) followed the enactment of the Bill in December 1971. At the beginning, the two organizations shared the same position and goal. The position was that a hard core of Jewish community interests must be preserved in any form of welfare reorganization. This core included three elements: (1) maintaining the Jewish character of the social welfare services; (2) maintaining communal control of these services; and (3) the continuation of government funding. The goal was to achieve the government consent for a Jewish social service centre, instead of merging into a regional one, as a way to ensure the attainment of those hard core elements. This goal was achieved in mid 1973, not only because of the pressure applied by the Jewish community, but, to a large degree, due to the demands of the French Catholic welfare agencies (there were eight French speaking agencies in Montreal out of a total of fifteen) which were reluctant to merge with the English-speaking agencies. At this stage, the government decided that, as an exception, in view of the multi-ethnic composition of the Montreal population, *three* social service centres would be established in Montreal based on cultural-linguistic criterion. These three social service centres were, Ville Marie Social Service Centre (for the English speaking population), Metropolitan Social Service Centre (for the French speaking) and Jewish Family Services - Social Service Centre (JFS-SSC).

This stage in the negotiations with the government marks the beginning

of a serious wedge between AJCS and JFS with regard to the issue of converting JFS to a "public establishment." The AJCS was content with the government approval of a Jewish social service centre and was inclined to recommend converting JFS into a "public establishment." Financial and political considerations played a role in this stand. Financially, JFS could lose all its government funds if it did not join the public welfare system. The AJCS leaders thought that by relieving them from financial commitments to JFS they could shift these funds to more pressing communal areas such as educational and cultural activities. This attitude also represented a change in the priorities perception of the community which at that time put educational and cultural goals higher in significance than social welfare needs. This reflected the improved economic conditions of the community at large.

Politically, the leaders of AJCS argued that the efforts of the provincial government to reorganize social welfare services were to be applauded because this policy was geared to benefit the population. The Jews, as a minority group, should accommodate to this trend provided that basic Jewish interests were ensured. The AJCS was satisfied that the Jewish characteristics of a Jewish social service centre would be ensured even if it belonged to the public welfare system. At least, they maintained, it should be tried. If this trial were to fail, they promised, AJCS would support JFS withdrawal from the public system and resume financial support.

However, the leaders of JFS did not share the views of AJCS. They maintained that, applied to the Jewish community, Bill 65 could have a negative effect. The characteristics of Jewish welfare could *not* be maintained even in a Jewish social service centre because by law it was obliged to render services to all clients in a given area of the city irrespective of their religious or ethnic affiliation. They feared that full public funding could bode full government control with all the ensuing results. They maintained that joining the public system would deprive hundreds of committed volunteers and threaten the Jewish ambience and ethnicity of the services. In a word, JFS as a "public establishment" would not be able to fulfill its functions as an ethnic institution. They decided not to recommend "going public."

The debate between the two organizations continued. In the view of AJCS an important consideration for "going public" was the fact that the government highly appreciated the professional standards of JFS and wanted it to participate in the public welfare system as a model of good social service management. Also, the possible saving of hundreds of thousands of dollars, which were badly needed elsewhere, could not be ignored by the leaders of AJCS. Pressure tactics, mainly related to funding,

were employed by both the government and AJCS in order to persuade the Board of JFS to change its attitude and join the public welfare system.

In January 1974, the Board of JFS reluctantly adapted a Resolution which called for the conversion of JFS into a "public establishment." With the adoption of this Resolution an end came, at least formally, to an important and crucial dispute concerning the place of Jewish welfare in a rapidly changing society. It was, also, the end of an era in Montreal Jewish social welfare and a landmark in Jewish communal organization. On April 1, 1974, Jewish Family Services of the Baron de Hirsch Institute began to operate as a "public establishment" under the name "Jewish Family Services - Social Service Centre" (JFS-SSC).

CONCLUSION

Several questions emerge: (1) Did communal welfare in Montreal remain Jewish after "going public"? (2) Did the Jewish community in Montreal, in terms of social welfare services, benefit or lose from the conversion in the status of JFS? (3) What lesson, if any, can be learned from the Montreal experience with regard to a possible similar situation in other North American Jewish communities?

Using the three criteria of Jewishness presented above, we may say that JFS-SSC still functions as a Jewish welfare agency. The dimension of "Jewish constituency" may be measured by the clientele composition of the JFS-SSC. Even though the agency is a nonsectarian "public establishment," ninety percent of the clients of all JFS-SSC services at the end of 1978, except the hospitals, were Jews. In the hospitals, which had been open to non-Jewish patients for years, the ratio was sixty Jews to every forty non-Jews. Other elements of a "Jewish constituency" are a majority of Jews in the staff (100 out of 121 in 1978) and a majority of Jewish members in the Board of the Centre (which became possible thanks to the predominantly Jewish population in the area the Centre serves).

"Jewish voluntarism" is mainly carried out by the old Jewish Family Services of the Baron de Hirsch Institute which remained a communal agency within the AJCS. This agency extends volunteer services which complement the activities of JFS-SSC. Its connection with the Centre is officially recognized by sending four representatives to the Board of JFS-SSC. "Jewish cultural distinctiveness" in the JFS-SSC is maintained by the majority of Jewish staff members and their positive attitudes towards traditional Jewish values and customs. The location of the Centre in the community building, where many other communal agencies are located, also helps to enhance the Jewish image of the agency.

Another test of the Jewishness of the Centre is its image in the eyes of the Jewish clients. In a survey of clients of Jewish Family Services held between 1975-1977, it was found that fifty percent of the respondents came to JFS-SSC because it was, in their view, a Jewish agency. The reason JFS-SSC clients felt good about the agency was due, in 75 percent of the cases, to a comfortable feeling about being understood in a Jewish environment.

As to whether it benefitted the Jewish community, communal leaders and workers are united in the opinion that it definitely did. In 1973, the year before "going public," the annual budget of JFS was $600,000, the number of staff members, 40; and average budget per capita in the Jewish community was $5.21. In 1978, the annual budget was $2.2 million, staff members, 121, and budget per capita, $20. In addition, new services were added, such as child abuse and care for the aged.

As to the question of whether the Montreal experience may be applied to other Jewish communities in North America, it is hard to tell. The experience of communal Jewish welfare in Quebec is a unique one. Nowhere in North America has a Jewish community confronted such a combination of advanced welfare state with nationalistic fervor. The fact that, notwithstanding, this communal social welfare in Montreal managed to remain Jewish under government auspice, and even to expand, can be attributed to the following reasons: (1) the deep roots and, for many years, central position of JFS within Jewish communal organizations in Montreal; (2) the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural character of the Canadian, and Quebec, societies which tolerate ethnic expressions of activities in various areas of life; (3) the recognized high standards of JFS and the respect of non-Jewish social welfare agencies to its professional achievements; and (4) the respect of the Quebec government towards the Jewish community in general and the Jewish welfare agency in particular.

The opinion of this writer is that government funding of Jewish welfare does not necessarily or inevitably lead to the loss of its Jewish character and ethnic functions. To a high degree, the Jewishness of an agency depends upon the population composition of the area it serves, the quality of the services and the insistence of communal leaders to preserve Jewish characteristics in a publicly funded agency. Altogether, we see in the Montreal experience a recurrence of a typical pattern in Jewish history. A Jewish communal organization changes its sources of funding, structure and type of services according to the demands of time and place but always maintains the core of its ethnic functions. The vehicles change, but the functions persist.

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