

## DOES THE DIASPORA INFLUENCE ISRAEL ?

### THE CASE OF THE RECONSTITUTED JEWISH AGENCY

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THE question of what role and how much influence diaspora Jewry should or should not have in shaping Israel's public policy has received increasing attention in both Israeli and diaspora circles in the past few years. In point of fact, Israel has considered diaspora Jewries' needs in formulating its public policies, but they have been diaspora "needs" as defined by Israel. World Jewry has exercised very little influence on Israeli policy in the sense that it has pressured Israel into adopting policies which Israel would not have adopted in the absence of diaspora pressure.

There are various methods for attempting to understand this phenomenon. One such

method is to explore the use or lack of use by diaspora Jewry of instruments and institutions which on the surface, at least, provide the opportunity for the exercise of influence. Such an institution, *par excellence*, is the reconstituted Jewish Agency.

The Founding Assembly of the reconstituted Jewish Agency took place in June 1971. The agreement on the reconstitution was approved in February 1970 by the major participants—the Zionist General Council on behalf of the World Zionist Organizations; the United Israel Appeal Inc. (UIA), the recipient organization within the United States of funds raised for Israel through the agency of the United Jewish Appeal; and the Keren Hayesod, the major fund raising agency for Israel in countries outside the United States. In other words, the Jewish Agency represents the World Zionist Organization and the major Jewish donors to Israel. The good will and cooperation of these donors is vital to the State of Israel. But to understand what the reconstituted JA is, what it can do with respect to Israeli policy, and equally important what it does not and cannot do, we must briefly review the background of its creation.

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Nahum Goldmann's efforts to expand and broaden the JA to include non-Zionist as well as Zionist bodies met with limited success in the 1950's. Goldmann's efforts were directed primarily at enlisting the major American Jewish organizations. Although he failed to secure their participation at the political level, changes took place in the 1960's which increased American Jewish participation at the technical level. First of all, CJFWF<sup>1</sup> leaders at the national and local levels were seeking, on at least a modest scale, forms of cooperation with Israel that went beyond just "sending money". They felt they had knowledge and experience to offer Israel and they sought some framework to express their increased sense of partnership with Israel<sup>2</sup>.

There were a variety of reasons for this change of attitude. Some philanthropic leaders who were once indifferent or even antagonistic to Zionism had turned into enthusiastic sympathizers of Israel. Others were searching for new outlets and broader horizons for Jewish activity and were unsatisfied with the focus of activity which

their local community could offer. Many federation leaders were acquiring a new self-image of themselves as people responsible for initiating, planning and coordinating programs at the local level rather than simply funding ongoing programs, and they transferred this new self-image to their Israel activities. Finally, an increased confidence in their own Americanism permitted federation leaders to allow themselves the luxury of also being involved in the affairs of another country<sup>3</sup>.

A second reason for the increased participation of American fund raising leaders in WZO-JA activity at the technical level came as a consequence of American tax laws. The Internal Revenue Service of the United States Department of Treasury requires that funds raised in the United States for expenditure outside the U.S. must, in order to qualify for tax exemption, be expended under the supervision of a non-governmental agency which is controlled by the American fund raisers. The organization established in 1960 to meet the recently tightened requirements of the Treasury Department concerning American tax exempt organizations operating overseas, was the organization today known as the United Israel Appeal Inc. (UIA)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The CJFWF (Council of Jewish Federation and Welfare Funds) is the roof organization of all the local Jewish Community Federation and Welfare Funds in the U.S. Since it is the local Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds (different communities use somewhat different names), who conduct the philanthropic campaigns for Israel as well as for local and other national needs, the leaders of the CJFWF, in fact, are the leaders of American Jewish philanthropy.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Philip Bernstein, Executive vice-president of the CJFWF, March, 1973. See also Zelig Chinitz, "Reconstitution of the Jewish Agency", *Jewish Frontier*, 37 (December, 1970) p. 7.

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<sup>3</sup> This last point was suggested by Zelig Chinitz, present UIA representative in Israel; interview, September, 1972.

<sup>4</sup> The organization actually established in 1960 was the Jewish Agency for Israel Inc., an organization distinct from the Jewish Agency—American Section, which was the American Section of the Jewish Agency executive. In 1966 the UIA was formed by a merger of the Jewish Agency for Israel Inc. and the old Keren Hayesod United Israel Appeal.

As we noted, virtually every Jewish community in the United States has some form of a federation or Jewish welfare fund. These funds run combined campaigns for local, national and international Jewish needs. In the last few years roughly three quarters of this money has gone for international Jewish needs, i.e. the money has been transferred from the local federation and welfare fund campaign to the United Jewish Appeal. Only in New York City did the UJA run an independent drive, but after the Yom Kippur war the UJA of Greater New York and the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York decided to merge into a single agency serving Jews in New York and overseas. The major beneficiaries of UJA funds are the Joint Distribution Committee and the UIA. The latter receives well over two thirds of the money collected for overseas needs under a rather complicated formula that need not concern us here.

Thus, the bulk of the money collected by Jewish federation and welfare funds goes to the UIA. The UIA, in turn, transfers its funds to the Jewish Agency. However, in accordance with Internal Revenue Service requirements, the UIA cannot simply turn the money over to the JA for the latter to do with it as it wishes. First of all, the IRS requires that the American fund raising organization actually control the dispersal of funds. For that reason, the JA (i.e. the WZO-JA until the reconstitution of that organization in 1970) was designated as the agent of the UIA. Even this, however, was not sufficient because not all of the old WZO-JA expenditures were tax exempt. For example, much of its activity within the United States, such as encouraging immigration or the organiza-

tion of Zionist youth groups, was certainly not tax exempt. Consequently the UIA designated the specific programs of the WZO-JA which it was willing to fund and it sent a representative to Israel to ensure that funds were being spent in accordance with its mandate.

Thus, as early as 1960, American Jewish fund raising leaders had a large voice in the activities of the WZO-JA. This statement, however, must be qualified. First of all, Zionists were also represented on the UIA<sup>5</sup>. Secondly, the UIA did not initiate programs. It merely designated those programs in the WZO-JA budget which it was willing to support. For example, the WZO-JA activities in the United States which were not tax exempt were financed by income from countries outside the U.S. Thus, the fact that the UIA designated those programs it wanted to support had very little impact on WZO-JA programs. It is possible that without UIA supervision more money might have gone to other philanthropic enterprises in Israel, but the total impact was negligible<sup>6</sup>. What UIA involvement did do, however, was accustom American fund raising leaders to a deeper sense

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<sup>5</sup> The UIA is controlled by a 210 member board of trustees and a 27 member board of directors. One hundred trustees are designated by American Zionist Organizations, one hundred by local community leaders (the CJFWF) and ten are elected at large. The trustees elect 21 of the 27 member board of directors and the remainder are designated by the American section of the JA. Thus, theoretically the Zionists have a majority control of the UIA. This, however is purely theoretical. The UIA itself does not divide along non-Zionist lines anymore than, as we shall see, does the reconstituted JA.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Zelig Chinitz, September 1972.

of participation in WZO-JA programs. The age in which American Jews simply transferred money to Israel had come to an end, although serious institutional and structural recognition of this new relationship was not to come for another decade.

Developments within Israel itself in this period heightened the WZO-JA's sense of crisis and a search for allies. As the relative financial contribution of the WZO-JA to Israeli development declined after the first years of the State, the Government assumed partial or full responsibility for more and more of the functions that were, heretofore, the exclusive domain of the WZO-JA. Proposals to limit further its authority and functions gained momentum from the development of the *Mercaz La'Tfutzot* (Center for the Diaspora.)

The *Mercaz La'Tfutzot* was an outgrowth of a unit within the Prime Minister's office that functioned between 1961–63 and handled relationships between Israel and Jewish organizations abroad, to encourage them to initiate and develop programs in Israel, to help service these programs, and to encourage *aliyah*. The unit was expanded into the *Mercaz La'Tfutzot* and placed under the operating responsibility of the Government-JA Coordinating Committee at the suggestion of Moshe Sharett. Sharett, then Chairman of the Jewish Agency executive, hoped that the *Mercaz La'Tfutzot* would increase the Zionist awareness and orientation of Israelis as well as diaspora Jews. Sharett also intended to involve the Knesset in its operation<sup>7</sup>. There were those, however, who saw in the *Mercaz La'Tfutzot*

a possibility of eliminating the JA altogether.

In the mid-1960's there were increasing signs of Government dissatisfaction with the WZO-JA. For example, at the January 1967 sessions of the Zionist General Council, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol addressed himself to the failure of the Zionist movement to increase immigration from affluent countries and expand and intensify Zionist education and Jewish cultural activities in the diaspora. He said:

As you know, I have never been in favour of abstract debate on the meaning of Zionism and the Zionist Organization's right to exist. I have attached much greater importance to the implementation of its ideas. I would have been wholeheartedly in favour of giving it pride of place in our relations with the Jewish people. But rights imply duties as well. If there is a Charter between us—it obligates both parties to action. I believe the Government of Israel has met and is continuing to meet its obligations to the Movement—if not more. But there is no point in simply drawing attention to the Charter. If it is not backed by deeds, it loses all sense and purpose. The Government must re-examine from time to time its ties and undertakings towards the Zionist Movement on the basis of deeds—or the lack of them<sup>8</sup>.

This was a significant statement coming from Levi Eshkol who, compared to his

<sup>7</sup> On Sharett's role I am indebted to Moshe Rivlin, Director General of the JA, interview, July 1971.

<sup>8</sup> Session of the Zionist General Council, January 8–15, 1967. (Jerusalem: Organization Department of the Zionist Executive, 1967), pp. 15–16.

predecessor Ben-Gurion, was a staunch friend of the WZO-JA, a contrast to which he alludes in his statement.

Paradoxically, the dramatic increase in the financial contribution of diaspora Jewry surrounding the Six Day War of 1967 jeopardized rather than buttressed the WZO-JA autonomy<sup>9</sup>. Ernest Stock, the UIA representative in Israel for a number of years, pointed out that the first reaction of the Israeli Government was to seek a deeper involvement in the policies and operations of the organization whose income now constituted "a not inconsiderable portion of the total resources available to the Israeli economy"<sup>10</sup>. The Government's decision in 1968 to establish the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption was regarded by some, according to Stock, as the opening wedge of a more thoroughgoing take over of JA responsibilities.

The immediate threat to the WZO-JA autonomy was met with the assistance of CJFWF and UIA leader Max Fisher. Fisher told the Government that the UIA could not continue to function unless the autonomy of the WZO-JA was maintained<sup>11</sup>. These threats to the WZO-JA probably helped secure approval of a proposal at the 27th World Zionist Congress in 1968 authorizing the executive to open negotiations with fund raising and other Jewish organizations with the purpose of formalizing rela-

tionships with them. Meanwhile, since the WZO-JA was able to avert a decision to transfer its functions to the Government, the outpouring of funds on behalf of Israel by diaspora Jewry meant that the WZO-JA controlled a far more substantial budget than it had prior to the Six Day War. Its responsibility for programs within Israel increased<sup>12</sup> and the importance of the organization increased concomitantly. In addition, there was a sharp rise in immigration to Israel which meant additional burdens in the area of *aliyah* for which the WZO-JA had always assumed responsibility.

The major architect of the reconstituted Jewish Agency was Louis Pincus, Moshe Sharett's successor as chairman of the Jewish Agency executive from Sharett's death in 1965 until his own death in 1973. Pincus' counterpart in the U.S. was Max Fisher, leader of both the UIA and the CJFWF in the crucial period during which consultations took place and an agreement over the new structure was reached.

In retrospect, the decision to expand the JA through fund raising rather than other Jewish organizations seems natural enough. First of all, the UIA, as we saw, already had a relationship to the JA and sought a closer one; other organizations had rejected previous overtures. Secondly, the UIA wanted to be the sole American body represented on the JA. According to Philip Bernstein, CJFWF executive vice president, "We agreed that the UIA should be the sole instrument (in the U.S.) since it was the sole fund raising group and the JA

<sup>9</sup> Ernest Stock, "The Reconstitution of the Jewish Agency: A Political Analysis," Morris Fine and Milton Himmelfarb (eds.), *The American Jewish Year Book 1972* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1972), p. 187.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Ernest Stock to the author, April 27, 1972. Stock had personal knowledge of the events he describes.

<sup>12</sup> Primarily in the fields of welfare, health, higher education, and the housing of immigrants. Interview with Moshe Rivlin, July 1971.

the sole expenditure group"<sup>13</sup>. Thirdly, it was becoming increasingly evident in the late 1960's that leadership and even authority within the American Jewish community was increasingly concentrated in the local federation and welfare agencies—i.e. in the constituent councils of the CJFWF rather than in any formal Jewish organization or group of organizations. Certainly, the bulk of very wealthy American Jews from whom most of the contributions to Jewish philanthropy came had greater commitment to the CJFWF or local federations and welfare funds than to any other set of agencies or organizations. The UIA provided an address for the vast majority of those wealthy American Jews who were involved in Jewish philanthropy.

This decision, however, as natural as it seems in retrospect, has a number of very important consequences. It means first of all, that a very special kind of Jew represents the diaspora within the JA structure. He is either a very wealthy Jew or close to the sources of great wealth. He is also, for reasons we shall discuss below, not politically oriented in either a partisan or even policy making sense of the term.

There was, however, one obstacle to securing a greater involvement of the UIA in an expanded Jewish Agency. The bulk of WZO-JA money from all sources was expended on activity in Israel—primarily immigration and absorption of immigrants, agricultural settlement and to an increasing extent (after 1967) education (including higher education) and social welfare. However, roughly ten percent of the WZO-JA budget was expended on Zionist activity

outside Israel—activity which included preparing Jewish youth for immigration to Israel or Zionist information and propaganda. In addition to tax problems which such activities created, leaders of American Jewish philanthropy may have also had ideological objections<sup>14</sup>, although these objections declined after the Six Day War. But, for tax reasons alone, any structure that involved non-Zionist fund raisers in closer ties to Israel would have had to be one in which Zionist activity in the diaspora was distinguished from activity within Israel itself. Thus, when Pincus began his discussions with the UIA it was clear that the JA would have to be detached from the WZO<sup>15</sup>. Under the terms of the agreement, the reconstituted JA undertook responsibility for immigration to and absorption of immigrants in Israel, social welfare and health services in connection with im-

<sup>14</sup> In the early 1950's, Edward Warburg, then head of the UJA told Nahum Goldmann, then Chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive in New York, that he would resign if UJA funds were used to encourage immigration of American youth to Israel. Goldmann promised that such activities would be funded from WZO-JA income from non-American sources. See American Jewish Committee, Library of Jewish Information, *The Jewish Agency for Palestine*, Ch. II (New York: American Jewish Committee, mimeo, May, 1957), p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Philip Bernstein, March, 1973. The importance of tax considerations in the division of responsibility between the WZO and the JA is evident in the official *Agreement for the Reconstitution of the Jewish Agency for Israel*. Article 1, section D stipulates that "the functions and tasks and programs administered by the Agency or to which it may contribute funds, shall be only such as may be carried on by tax-exempt organizations."

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Philip Bernstein, March, 1973.

migration and absorption, education and research, youth care and training, absorption in agricultural settlements and immigrant housing. The WZO, now a separate organization was to retain responsibility for organization and public information, encouraging immigration from affluent countries, education in the diaspora, youth and cultural activities, and the activities of the Jewish National Fund.

The reconstituted JA has three governing bodies. There is an Assembly of 296 members, half of whom are designated by the WZO, 30 percent by the UIA, and 20 percent by the Keren Hayesod fund raising agencies outside the U.S. The Assembly meets once a year to provide general guide lines for the JA, approve the budget, and elect the Board of Governors. Representation on the Board of Governors (it now has 42 members) is distributed in the same proportion as the Assembly. It meets several times a year to manage the affairs of the JA and elect the all important Executive. The Executive is structured to give representation to the heads of the operating departments who are WZO representatives and to the fund raising agencies in more or less the same proportion as the other two governing bodies. There are 11 members on the current Executive, six of whom are WZO people and five from fund raising groups of whom four are from the U.S. and one from Great Britain. In addition, there are three associate members who may attend meetings but have no right to vote. All three associate members are professional leaders of fund raising organizations in the U.S. However, in the day to day operation of the JA it is the Israelis who are the heads of the departments in Israel, rather than dias-

pora Jews from the fund raising organizations, who determine policy execution.

There are three areas of potential influence of the reconstituted J.A. First, the JA has the authority, the legitimate power, to determine policies in that area of responsibility assigned to it under the agreement for reconstitution of the Jewish Agency to which we have already referred. Secondly, by virtue of its authority and responsibility in such fields as immigrant absorption, housing, social welfare, education, agricultural settlement, etc., the JA can influence social and economic policy in Israel since the exercise of its specific delegation of authority directly affects other policies as well. Finally, by virtue of the importance of the JA to Israel, its leaders have potential influence even over those policies for which they have no responsibility whatsoever. The governing bodies of the JA, or even its individual leaders such as Max Fisher would surely find an attentive ear in Government circles on any issue upon which they might choose to express themselves.

How much influence does the JA actually exercise? We will organize our discussion around the three areas of potential influence.

Has the JA sought to influence policy outside its area of responsibility? Has it, for example, expressed itself or sought to influence the Government in areas such as foreign policy, or religious policy? The answer is an unqualified no. There is no evidence that even in closed circles JA leaders have in any manner shape or form sought to utilize their power to influence Israeli public policy. Of course, no one can say with any assurance that such efforts may not be made in the future, but given

the composition of the JA one would not anticipate such efforts. There is, for example, no comparison in the kinds of criticisms of Israel that emanate from the World Jewish Congress and the kinds of discussions one hears at a meeting of the JA Assembly. Indeed, delegates at the Assembly meeting in 1973 did, from time to time, raise questions or issues outside the specific sphere of JA responsibility; but they were quickly called to order by the session chairman and other delegates.

The second area of potential JA influence is over policies which the JA might influence by virtue of its decisions in policy areas over which it does have direct responsibility. For example, the JA is responsible for immigrant housing. But immigrants are not housed in distinctive structures or isolated areas. Consequently decisions about location, price, size, quality, quantity, or methods of construction of immigrant housing affect the entire housing market in Israel. If the JA fully exercised its authority to make basic policy decisions with respect to immigrant housing, it would exercise an enormous influence on Israel's housing policy.

The individual most active in JA housing matters was the prominent American builder and Jewish philanthropist, Jack Weiler. Weiler chaired the Housing Committee at the first Assembly meetings in 1971. He observed that:

One of the items that was put before the Committee again and again was the question of priorities in housing, as be-

tween young couples, individuals with large families, particularly slum dwellers, and of course the new immigrants<sup>16</sup>.

But, he noted, the Committee "felt that it was not sufficiently knowledgeable to make any specific recommendations, at this time, with respect to priorities<sup>17</sup>. He went on to praise the Ministry of Housing for being "seriously concerned about all of these problems, and it intends to do its utmost to relieve the situation in all these areas"<sup>18</sup>.

The Committee recommended the establishment of a mortgage loan association to lower interest rates on housing loans and the encouragement of rental housing. The Committee acknowledged the offer of one of its members to advise the Ministry of Housing on the provision of mobile type homes in Israel and also held discussions with regard to the construction of modular type apartment buildings. The chairman expressed his hope that the Ministry of Housing would take advantage of the knowledge which prominent builders who were represented on the Housing Committee were able to offer to Israel. Finally, the Committee recommended the establishment of a standing Housing Committee to make specific recommendations on housing in Israel.

In summary, the Committee eschewed any role in formulating far-reaching housing policy. It did make recommendations with respect to financing—recommendations which, if carried out, might well have had important consequences on the availability of credit in the Israeli money market. While

<sup>16</sup> *Proceedings of the Founding Assembly of the Reconstituted Jewish Agency* (Jerusalem: Jewish Agency, 1971), p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*



these recommendations were subsequently repeated, no concrete steps have been undertaken to implement them.

One set of recommendations were of a more technical nature, involving recommendations concerning types of housing or construction. It is these kinds of recommendations which have been implemented in one form or another. TACH (Technological Advisory Committee on Housing) was established as a joint committee of the JA Housing Committee and representatives of the Ministry of Housing. Its chairman was Jack Weiler. TACH has brought a number of building experts to Israel for short periods "to work with Israeli builders in developing new methods, introducing new materials, improving the planning process and training middle management personnel—all aimed at shortening the time required to build or to bring down the cost and to provide better housing"<sup>19</sup>. TACH also made a series of recommendations to the Ministry of Housing, most of which were accepted<sup>20</sup>. But these suggestions were either of a technical nature (the reduction of duties for certain imported building products or the initiation of long term design-build contracts), or recommended measures such as long term land use and availability planning where the actual planning will remain in

the hands of the Government. Weiler, himself, engaged in a pilot construction project to demonstrate "how building processes in Israel can be expedited and the costs controlled by proper planning, effective management and the use of new materials (and to) serve as a demonstration of pre-construction difficulties and delays"<sup>21</sup>.

In terms of the publicity which the JA accords its Housing Committee, its achievements are those in which the JA takes great pride. Without minimizing in any way the important contribution of the JA Housing Committee, its direct influence has been limited to helping effect technical improvements in housing construction and planning. These improvements may have long term consequences for Israel. There have been those, after all, who argued that the introduction of the stirrup into the west had the profoundest impact on the development of modern society. But, like the stirrup, any basic policy changes that stem from the Housing Committee's efforts are the result of chance rather than intent.

The third area of potential JA influence has to do with programs for which the JA has direct funding responsibility. One example is higher education in Israel.

In the 1972-1973 fiscal year the JA provided 61 percent of the operating budgets of institutions of higher learning in Israel, and the Government provided an additional nine percent. In view of the JA's contributions to Israeli universities, it did not appear unreasonable that they establish some criteria by which universities were to

<sup>19</sup> Louis Pincus, *The Jewish Agency in Action: A Report to the Members of the Jewish Agency Assembly* (Jerusalem: Jewish Agency, 1973), p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> The Technical Advisory Committee on Housing of the Ministry of Housing and the Jewish Agency Committee on Housing, "A Progress Report," included in the binder *Annual Assembly*, prepared by the JA for the February 1973 Assembly meetings, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> *The Jewish Agency Board of Governors* (August, 1972) "Jewish Agency Committee on Housing," p. 2. (Jerusalem: Jewish Agency, 1972), p. 2.

receive assistance. In fact, the report prepared for the delegates to the second Assembly meetings listed some basic policy questions which those responsible for higher education in Israel had to answer<sup>22</sup>. They included such questions as:

1. Should higher education be reserved for an intellectual elite or be available to all?
2. Should higher education be based on learning for learning's sake or should it include technical training?
3. To what extent should there be an expansion of institutions of higher education?
4. Should the universities provide special programs or do more than is presently being done to qualify students from Asian and African origins for entrance?

Ostensibly, any body allocating money to Israeli universities might want to concern itself with these questions. Certainly it would have to have some criteria for allocating funds.

The Board of Governors established a permanent committee on higher education to "help define the criteria for allocations". Louis Pincus appeared before the Assembly's Committee on Higher Education at the 1973 meetings to urge the adoption of a recommendation that the Higher Education Committee of the Board of Governors be authorized to supervise how the universities spend the money allocated to them. Pincus noted that an independent committee was about to be established by the Government to make recommendations

concerning allocation criteria. However, Pincus stressed, it was important that the Board of Governors also be involved in this process through its Committee on Higher Education<sup>23</sup>.

At this point one delegate voiced his objection to Pincus' proposal. Diaspora Jewry should only give advice on the allocation of funds, he said, but should have no authority. Pincus replied as follows: In absorption, health, social welfare, higher education, and other functions we must show that we are not just an arm of the Government. That is why I propose that you empower the Board of Governors to act on establishing criteria for the allocation of money to institutions of higher education. You can rest assured that the JA is not going to set itself up against the Government.

In other words, despite the fact that it was the reconstituted JA and not the Government which funded the lion's share of the cost of higher education in Israel, the JA sought only that degree of policy control that the tax laws of the U.S., Great Britain and Canada thrust upon it.

This attitude reflects the desires of both the WZO representatives and the fund raising leaders themselves. Michael Sacher, a member of the JA executive and leader of the British delegation to the first Assembly, stated that diaspora fund raisers must not usurp the role of the Israeli Government. He defined the JA task as follows:

It is not my view that the diaspora mem-

<sup>22</sup> The Jewish Agency for Israel. *Annual Assembly*, op. cit., "Higher Education," p. 213.

<sup>23</sup> Reference to Committee deliberations are from the author's notes taken during the meetings. The statement by Pincus, which follows is presented, as far as was possible, in his own words.

bers of the new Agency should attempt to control the direction in which the monies are spent. But I do believe they have a function in drawing attention to areas which may have been ignored, or to more efficient ways of spending money already in the budget. We abroad cannot have a proper understanding of the main priorities<sup>24</sup>.

The reconstituted JA has acted with utmost restraint in exercising its potential for influence. Representatives of the fund raising organizations in particular have sought only to help, advise and assist. What will happen if Israel consistently rejects their offers of assistance remains to be seen. It is possible, of course, that the JA will then attempt to exercise its power. What is more likely, however, is that the JA leaders will simply lose interest in the enterprise. But Israel is unlikely to ignore the JA's offer of assistance. As we have seen in the case of housing, the Government has availed itself of this help.

The present UIA representative in Israel, commenting on this phenomenon of Israeli readiness to accept advice, noted that Israelis are more relaxed today about Israel-diaspora relations than they were in the Ben-Gurion era. They are willing to listen to the diaspora and they appreciate the fact that diaspora leaders want to do more than just write checks<sup>25</sup>. The JA meetings

have become a forum for exchanges of information and discussion of problems of housing, absorption, education and welfare. Israel recognizes the JA as the address of world Jewry<sup>26</sup>.

As we have already suggested, the long-run implications of this kind of technical advice and assistance which JA leaders offer should not be minimized. Furthermore, according to a very close observer and participant in these developments, the expertise and know-how which the JA brings to bear on Israel's problems is likely to result in an increase in its influence and authority<sup>27</sup>. Technical, administrative, and bureaucratic improvements have policy implications. Reform in one department or one ministry provides an example for others. One should not, in any way, underestimate the long run potential influence of the fund raising leaders. Their impatience with Israeli bureaucracy and many established Israeli procedures has already been felt. But these potentially important consequences do not really flow from any deliberate efforts of the reconstituted JA to shape Israel's public policy.

The other side of the coin is the fact that participation in the JA probably intensified the Jewish commitment of the non-Zionists. Max Fisher, for example, has used the JA forum to urge greater attention to Jewish education and the problem of Jewish survival in the diaspora.

<sup>24</sup> *The Jerusalem Post*, "Special Supplement" (June 21, 1971), p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, he might have added, a number of JA reports suggest that one reason the Government accepted so many of the Housing Committee recommendations is that these are recommendations which professionals with the Ministry of Housing had themselves favored.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Zelig Chinitz, September, 1972

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Philip Bernstein, March, 1973. A report on the 1972 Board of Governors meetings also suggested that fund raising leaders were seeking greater authority and the right to establish program priorities (*Ha'Aretz*, February 25, 1972, p. 14).

CONVERSATIONS with delegates to the 1973 Assembly were most enlightening with respect to the question of JA influence over Israeli policy<sup>28</sup>. Who are the delegates to the Assembly? While half represent the WZO and half non-Zionist fund raising agencies, no conflicts of interest between Zionists and non-Zionists have found expression in any JA meetings. In fact, many of the representatives of the fund raising agencies, the "non-Zionists," are actually members of Zionist organizations, while to many diaspora Zionists who represent the WZO, Zionism simply means being especially sympathetic to Israel. Furthermore, the kinds of issues which the reconstituted JA has dealt with, do not lend themselves to ideological division.

Nevertheless, among the diaspora delegates, the non-Zionists (who do not like to be called non-Zionists) set the tone. Since the issues do tend to be concrete and pragmatic, perhaps they feel more competent and comfortable in dealing with them. Some observers, including a WZO representative on the JA executive, felt that the quality of the non-Zionist representatives was higher than that of the WZO people. Finally, it is the non-Zionists who, after all, are paying the bill. While members of Zionist organizations presumably participate in fund raising campaigns on behalf of Israel, their role and contributions, at least in the United States, are admittedly a cause for concern to Zionist leaders themselves.

The delegates are all firmly committed

to Israel. Their presence at the Assembly or on the Board of Governors is, in a sense, a recognition of their accomplishments and contributions on behalf of Israel. But it is important to understand what the delegates, especially the non-Zionists who set the tone for the deliberations, are not. First of all, they are not ideologists. Their commitment is to the survival and development of Israel as Israel is today. They believe that their task is to see that the money which they provide and the programs for which they are responsible are properly managed. But because they are not ideologists they have no vision of a different Israel. Lacking such a vision, they are satisfied to accept the basic structure of programs and priorities which the Government of Israel dictates. Because they are not ideologists, they could hardly legitimate too much interference in the internal affairs of another country.

Secondly, they do not seek personal power. They are not professional politicians whose time and energy is devoted to the search for power, if not from ideological then from personal motives. They are pleased at the respect and deference with which they are treated by Israeli leaders. They are flattered by the presence of the Prime Minister and other leading ministers who come to address them and remain to answer questions and listen to their deliberations. But the last thing they want is more responsibility which would necessitate greater demands on their time. Thirdly, they do not represent group interests. By and large they are fund raising leaders in their local communities. They will bring the message of Israel and the operation of the JA back to their own communities. But what do these communities want of Israel? What

<sup>28</sup> I am relying on my conversations and interviews with a number of delegates—primarily UIA people.

special stakes or interest does Detroit or Cleveland or Philadelphia or, for that matter, Belgian, French or English Jewry have in Israel? There are no special group interests which the delegates represent; no interest, therefore which they might seek to achieve by parlaying their potential power over certain areas of the Israeli economy into influence over other areas.

Finally, the vast majority of the delegates do not live in Israel. They do not therefore, "live" its problems. Precisely for that reason they can always see "the larger picture". They are free of personal concerns. Since, therefore, it is "the larger picture" to which they are oriented they necessarily defer to the judgement of Israeli leaders—the only ones who can ever be expected really to know "the larger picture."

In June 1969, the Conference on Human Needs, a forerunner of the JA Assembly, brought together Israelis and leading fund raisers from the diaspora to assess Israel's major human needs and project long term programs to meet these needs. The President of the CJFWF at that time, Louis Fox, made this interesting statement:

We have come here to offer a more personal contribution to Israel in terms of thinking, planning and doing. We call it "involvement". Israel's leaders agree that the days have passed for us to be just silent partners. And we agree. Meaningful participation in the progress of Israel will enrich not only Israel—it will enrich our own lives, and will enrich the depth and scope of our own communities <sup>29</sup>.

Irving Blum, CJFWF president in 1972, chaired the Committee on Higher Education at the founding Assembly in 1971. His comments about representatives of Israeli institutions of higher education typify the feeling of JA delegates about Israeli leaders in general. He expressed his confidence that they

...came away with a feeling that our overseas communities have a deep and abiding interest in their problems, and that they are willing and even anxious, to be interpreters of these problems to their constituencies in a most positive and constructive way.

I earnestly hope that they will assess correctly the overseas communities as an important pool of experience available to them in the future <sup>30</sup>.

To the delegates to the reconstituted JA Assembly these are very real sentiments, not exercises in rhetoric. By "participation" the delegates from the diaspora really mean that they have something more than money to contribute to Israel — they have knowledge, expertise in technical and managerial fields, and they want Israel to avail herself of this competence. The thrust behind the demand for increased involvement and participation from diaspora Jewry, as reflected in the reconstituted JA, may be so innocent, altruistic, and even naive that the political observer may be easily deceived. But the potential for the exercise of real political influence nonetheless remains.

<sup>29</sup> Cited in Zelig Chinitz, *op. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> Proceedings of the Founding Assembly, *op. cit.*, p. 105.