

EVALUATION OF RESOURCES FOR CENTER PROGRAMMING ON ISRAEL*

by DAVID KUSELEWITZ

Educational Consultant, Department of Education and Culture of the Jewish Agency for Palestine

THERE is no other subject of Jewish interest which has as many rich, varied and available resources for programming as Israel. In recent years, there has developed a constantly growing bibliography of books and pamphlets, and an expanding catalogue of films, records and other audio-visual aids. Writers and lecturers are also available in great numbers. And above all, the capacity of the subject in holding the headlines of press, radio and television, and the intense interest on the part of all sectors of the Jewish community in current Israeli events are powerful motivating factors in programming.

Nevertheless, this great abundance is not without its shortcomings to the discriminating program director. It requires a fine sense of discrimination and considerable experience to be able to choose intelligently from among all the available resources the ones which are particularly suitable for the group and the occasion.

During the days of the British Mandate, Palestine was called "the too much Promised Land." Today, one is almost tempted to say that Israel is the too much written about and spoken about, and particularly, the too much photographed land.

It is practically impossible to evaluate

most of the resources which are generally of good quality and could conceivably be useful for the great variety of educational and recreational activities that go on in the average Jewish community center. I shall therefore limit myself to the formulation of a few basic principles which may serve as guides in choosing such resources and to list some of the better resources as examples.

Speakers and Lecturers

Since most of the large organizations working for the cause of Israel in this country fall into the two major categories of political propaganda and fund-raising, it is natural that available speakers are specialists in these two areas. Such speakers are assigned by the organizations which sponsor them on the basis of the size and status of the community and its fund-raising potential. So called "name speakers" obviously will draw larger audiences. It would be foolish to discount this factor in programming. But let us bear in mind that these very well known people are overworked and their performances tend to become routinized, and on occasion insincere. I should therefore like to urge

* From a paper presented at the National Conference of the NAJOW, St. Louis, Mo., May 1956.

Journal of Jewish Communal Service

strongly that program directors who are looking for speakers seriously consider two additional categories which have been utilized thus far to a very limited degree: (a) informed local Zionist leadership and (b) visiting Israeli scientists, writers, artists and other people who are specialists in a particular area of Israeli life.

In dealing with the facts of daily life in Israel and the problems arising from them, such speakers are likely to leave the audience with a more intelligent understanding of the issues which are inherent in the situation. I am referring to such subjects as: Economic self-sufficiency and productivity; the place of religion in the life of the country; free and cooperative enterprise; acculturation and ethnic and religious minorities; education and social welfare; the relationship of Israel with Jewish communities in the Diaspora. These and other problems should become part of the basic educational program of our centers.

Israel and the Center Library

With the development of a more intensive program of study and discussion in relation to Israel, the need will arise for the acquisition by the Center library of a well selected list of books, pamphlets, audio-visual aids and realia. I would suggest that the library organize an Israel bookshelf or an Israel corner.

For general background on Zionism and Zionist history, the most up to date volumes are:

Israel—Its Role in Civilization, ed. by Moshe Davis; *Fulfillment—the Story of Zionism*; by Rufus Lears; *A New Zionism*—ed. by Mordecai Kaplan.

For a general survey of the State of Israel proper:

The Republic of Israel by Joseph Dunner; *Israel Between East and West* by Raphael Patai; *Israel* by Hal Lehrman.

In the area of biography:

Theodor Herzl—A Portrait for this Age, ed. by Ludwig Lewisohn; *Trial and Error*—The

Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann; *Ben-Gurion* by Litvinoff; *Way of Valor—a Biography of Golda Meir* by Marie Syrkin; *Jabotinsky* by Joseph Schechtman.

Not all major areas of life in Israel have been dealt with in basic studies. However, the following should prove very helpful:

The Return to the Soil by Alex Bein—a history of agricultural settlement; *Between Past and Future* by Carl Frankenstein—an analysis of immigration and absorption; *Israel Economic Survey* by Emanuel Levy; *Molding Society to Man* by Esther Tauber—a psychological and sociological study of kibbutz life; *Life in a Kibbutz* by Murray Weingarten.

In the area of culture and literature, we have the authoritative *Modern Hebrew Literature* by Simon Halkin and *Hebrew Literature Between The Two World Wars* by Benzion Benshalom.

In selecting pamphlets and brochures, one should consult the catalogue, *Pamphlets of Jewish and Zionist Interest* published by Hadassah, and the *Catalogue of Publications of the Jewish Agency for Palestine*. In this latter category, I would particularly recommend the annually revised pamphlets of the Israel Office of Information, entitled "*Israel: Facts and Figures*" and "*Israel, 1955*," and the three Hadassah pamphlets, "*The Goodly Land*" (a brief physical and economic geography of the country); "*The Government of Israel*" (a description of the structure and function of democracy in Israel) and "*The Story of Zionism*." The Jewish Agency Publications Department has available at very nominal cost a whole series of pamphlets on the current situation in many areas of life in the country which are highly informative. Problems arising out of Israel's internal political life and her international relationships are covered in a cumulative series of pamphlets issued by the Israel Office of Information. The center library should also have on reference the most useful

of the very many periodicals on Israel. The following should be included: *Midstream*, *Hadassah Newsletter*, *The American Zionist*, *The Jewish Frontier*, *Israel Horizons*, *Israel Youth Horizon*, *Israel Economic Horizon*, *Israel Digest*, *Jewish Agency Digest of News and Events*, *Israel Fotofacts*, and for young readers, *Israel Among the Nations*.

For younger readers and children, there is unfortunately very little to recommend by way of literature, particularly in the area of fiction and periodicals. The following textbooks may be used with youngsters on a descending order of age level:

The Story of Modern Israel by Dorothy Zeligs (12 year olds and up); *The Land and the People of Israel* by Gail Hoffman (age 9-12); *Children of the Emek* by Libbie Braverman (age 7-9); *First Book of Israel* by Nora B. Kubie (age 6-7).

There are, however, plans afoot to alleviate this serious discrepancy in the near future.

Films and Other Audio-Visual Aids

To justify the remark made previously that Israel is becoming "the too much photographed country," I can point to a list of over 150 films contained in the catalogue "*Films on Israel*" published by the Jewish Agency last year. Since most of them were produced by fund-raising organizations, they suffer from the two faults inevitable in such productions: a lack of human interest and an exaggeration of the role of the organization sponsoring the films. In the last few years, however, there has been a gradual and welcome departure from this pattern on the part of film producers. In recent films such as "*Faces of Israel*" (Israel Labor Campaign), "*Deadline for Danny*" (U. J. A.) and particularly such films as "*Letter to Ronnie*," "*The Negev*," and "*Israel, 1955-56*" (Israel Office of Information), a successful attempt is made to present

various aspects of life in Israel in dramatic human terms with artistic skill and without appeals for funds and tedious emphasis on the contributions of the sponsoring organizations.

While the film is still the most effective audio-visual medium for large audiences, the program director should not overlook the lesser media such as filmstrips, records, etc. which are perhaps more suitable for smaller groups. The Jewish Agency has just released the first two in a series of seven color filmstrips "*Israel—the Land and Its People*" which are descriptive of various regions in the country. In choosing recordings, you may consult the comprehensive "*Phonograph Records of Jewish Interest*" by Joseph Gale (B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation) or a "*Review of Selective Recordings of Jewish Music*" (National Jewish Music Council of the J. W. B.).

We are all aware that children are interested in stamp collections and indeed, many adults as well. The *Jewish Agency* has therefore seen fit to establish an *Israel Stamp Department* which has available catalogues and stamp exhibits as well as descriptive material on Israeli stamps.

An interesting project may also be built around an exhibit of Israeli art objects and of packaged industrial and agricultural products. The material for such exhibits may be purchased or ordered on consignment from a number of commercial and non-commercial agencies listed in the pamphlet "*Directory of Israel Products in the United States*" published by the Consulate General of Israel, N. Y.

The best source for attractive posters, travel folders, maps, etc. which may be used in decorating an exhibit room or library is the *Israel Tourist Office*, 351 5th Ave., N. Y. C., or the El Al Israel Airline office in N. Y. Of course, the U. J. A., the J. N. F. and other Israel fund-raising agencies have an ever-

ready supply of pictorial and leaflet materials of this type.

Resources for Self-Activity

Israel should, of course, be integrated in the activity program of the Jewish Community Center by way of special projects in the areas of dramatics, music, the dance, arts and crafts and sports. Nearly all books, pamphlets and handbooks published by the various Jewish educational agencies in this country contain special sections on Israel. There is also a specialized literature in English published in Israel and made available through the Publication Department of the Jewish Agency and the various Zionist organizations.

It would be highly fitting for each center to dedicate at least one major function every year to Israel, either an all-center celebration of Israel Independence Day or a Field Day in the form of a "Maccabiada." On such occasions, the center should seek the cooperation of all Jewish groups in town and fulfill its traditional function as the over-all coordinating agency for Jewish affairs.

Leadership Training

I am well aware of the fact that the professional and volunteer staff members of the Jewish Community Center are perhaps not as well informed about and not as ardently committed to Israel as other professional workers in the Jewish community. Many center workers are still troubled by unresolved conflicts and doubts about the role of Israel as

a factor in the American Jewish community and its particular significance to the individual American Jew. It is therefore difficult for them to accept Israel as a major subject of educational activity and programming, and to find the proper means of integrating it into the work of the groups which they lead. This calls for a limited but effective program of in-service training of which this Workshop might be the beginning. Undoubtedly, the most effective approach to the problem of training center workers for work in this area is by enabling them to visit the country and to study it at first hand. A beginning in this direction was made last year by the Israel Seminar of the National Conference for Jewish Communal Service and the Jewish Agency. It is regrettable that this very successful project is not being continued this summer. Let us hope that it will be revived next year and will, in the future, be made available to the rank and file of center workers.

Perhaps it is true that most of what we hear and see about Israel in this country may properly be labelled propaganda, but propaganda is not inherently uneducational. I am sure that we are all aware that the cause of Israel is basically just, and vital for a vigorous creative Jewish life in this country and upon coming closer and closer to the subject and particularly upon seeing the land with one's own eyes, one may feel like the erstwhile propagandist for Israel in America, who stated on his first visit to Israel: "I am beginning to realize that all the lies which I have been telling for years are really true!"