

FEDERATION OF FEDERATIONS

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The constantly growing number of Jewish charity federations suggests the purposes underlying these organizations, to wit: the stimulation of larger individual contributions, and the equitable distribution of funds to institutions, would be greatly enhanced by federating the federations. Representatives of the various communities whose philanthropic work is organized should have a means of coming together at stated intervals for the discussion of common problems, ways and means of increasing contributions, methods of administration, and consideration of the financing of existing national institutions as well as the advisability of permitting the launching of new philanthropic enterprises. This would in no way conflict with the useful work now performed by the National Jewish Conference of Jewish Charities, which deals with problems and methods.

This is an era of multiplicity of Jewish institutions. Orphan asylums, hospitals, sanatoria, schools, immigrant shelters and distribution agencies, some local, some sectional, some national, abound. Each has at least one, most have several, representatives traveling about the country, appealing for support, or collecting pledged annual subscriptions. Each solicitor makes his appeal to the same set of individuals in each community. Some solicitors receive salaries, others commission, but whatever form the solicitor's compensation assumes, it must necessarily come out of the money contributed.

New institutions are being launched all the time. Every issue of your valued publication chronicles at least one, oftentimes more, new philanthropy. These new institutions soon clamor for support and their representatives are added to the small army already afield. Hence the federations—as a means of self-defense for the communities.

A federation of federations could render great service:

(1) By the power of sanction.

There are a not inconsiderable number of institutions of recent origin in various parts of the country that were brought into

being to satisfy the hobbies, spleen or ambitions of their founders; that are duplicating work that was being done by institutions of earlier origin, or which could have, and undoubtedly would have been done by them if proper and patient presentation of the need therefore had been made to their governing boards. These institutions cripple the resources of the older institutions, with the result that work that might have been efficiently performed by one institution is poorly done by all involved. Philanthropy and social service suffer because of someone's impatience with an existing institution, because some well-meaning people suddenly realize an existing problem and go about remedying it without first ascertaining whether or not there is not on hand an agency for that purpose, or, worst of all, because someone is ambitious to be a president, or a superintendent, or gain medical and surgical experience.

A federation of federations, while it could have no control over local incidents of this sort, could prevent the foisting of unnecessary national or sectional institutions upon the philanthropic public. By refusing to sanction a contemplated institution, it would give notice to its constituents that the project is not a necessity, and, therefore, need not be supported. If by the articles of organization, the federations were bound by the action of the central body, and no support was forthcoming, these unnecessary or unworthy projects would have to be abandoned.

(2) By equitable distribution:

In most federations, distribution of the funds is left to the wisdom of the Executive Board. This, it seems to me, is the correct method, pending the organization of a federation of federations. There are some who believe that each contributor should designate the institutions to which his money shall go. But that destroys the whole underlying idea of the federation, making of it, on the one hand, a financial agent without discretionary power, and, on the other hand, bars worthy institutions from making appeals to individuals not already contributing. (The general rule is, that where money is received from or

through federations, no direct appeal, whether by mail or in person, may be made.)

But experience has shown that some worthy institutions do not receive an equitable proportion of the funds distributed by governing boards of federations, while others receive far more than they are equitably entitled to. The chief sufferers are institutions doing constructive work. The beneficiaries of the inequity are the relief institutions. Human nature being what it is, the sentimental appeal is bound to outcry the practical appeal. Talk about a hospital, a sanitarium or an orphan asylum, your hearer's eyes grow moist with sympathy and his check-book flies open; talk about an educational institution, an immigration distribution agency, and unless your hearer is a broad-gauged, far-sighted individual with some views on social service, and—well, you have your work cut out for you. Mr. Schiff had occasion recently to comment on this bit of human psychology.

Federation boards are made up of average mortals, and the sentimental appeal plays its part in fixing appropriations. Some institutions are further blessed by the presence of advocates on these boards, men who are so puffed up with pride by having been chosen as institution representatives, that, regardless of the just needs of other institutions, they clamor the claims of their pet institution, to show its governing body "what they can do."

Again, we have to deal with human prejudices and with lack of definite knowledge. I know one institution that has been unable to secure the support of a certain federation because of one member of the board, a man of great influence, refuses to be convinced that its purpose is a necessary one, and because another obtained, somehow, the notion that its per capita cost per inmate is exactly ten times greater than it is actually, and refuses to be convinced to the contrary for fear he may have to confess his error. And, as the other members of the board are guided by the men described, there's an end to the matter.

With a federation of federations these inequities and injustices would be over-

come. National and sectional institutions would, in the first place, it seems to me, be glad to appear before such a body and explain their methods and prove that they are "making good," otherwise they would be laying themselves liable to various unfavorable conjectures. Having proved its case, an institution could present its budget and its plea for expansion. Such a body (properly constituted, of course), having a grasp of the whole situation, would view it judicially and in its proper perspective. Relief and constructive institutions—the present need and the future salvation—would be given due consideration. It would secure, for its constituencies, and, indeed, for the whole of American Jewry, accurate information concerning the various institutions and their relative importance, and it could recommend to the federation in what proportions to make distributions. It could go even a step further and coordinate and amalgamate existing institutions to secure more efficient service and eliminate duplication.

I am aware that the criticism will be made that a federation of federations with such powers as I propose for it is contrary to the democratic principle, would rob "sweet charity" of the joy of personal contact, of personal giving. My experience is that philanthropy has been robbed of its own charm by the endless procession of *schnorrers* (of which I am one); that the joy of personal contact and personal giving carries with it also a tremendous waste of time and money, and that, so far as the institutions are concerned, favoritism for some, injustice to others.

These would suffer:

(1) The paid solicitor.

(2) The honorary "representative" who could not show his institution "what he can do."

(3) The person with a grudge, a hobby or an ambition.

(4) Those who plunge into the sea of social service without looking.

I feel confident that by some such plan as I suggest, which would include the founding of a federation in every community, that even if no more money is contributed to philanthropy than now much better results would accrue for the weal of American Israel.