

## Future Jewish Family Agency Boards— Sectarian or Non-sectarian?

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THE Seattle Urban League and the United Good Neighbor Fund have, for the last few years, sought to determine the extent to which Blacks and other minorities are participants in the voluntary social welfare program of this community. Their studies reveal that Blacks and other minority groups have not been adequately represented in UGN agencies either as board members, as staff or as clients of these agencies. What is more, the several intervening years between their initial study and their subsequent study reveal virtually no change in that situation especially with regard to staffing and board participation. In the light of these facts which reveal the extent of "institutional racism" in our voluntary agencies, the United Fund and the Urban League have been asking the voluntary organizations to engage in some further soul-searching. It is their hope that this will bring about needed changes in representation of the Black community on the board and on the staff of the agencies who have not, as yet, moved forward in this direction. This poses the question of whether or not Blacks should serve on the board of a Jewish family agency.

Firstly, I would say that if there are Jewish Blacks interested in serving on our board they would have every right to do so, not because they are Black but because they are Jewish. However, since most Blacks are not Jewish, we must therefore address ourselves to the broader question of having a non-sectarian board including Black and White non-Jewish members.

To place one or two such individuals on the board so that we can claim to have Black representation seems to me blatantly artificial. Further, I feel that to do so would constitute the kind of tokenism to which the Black community is vigorously opposed. Their aspiration, and a very correct one, is to have meaningful representation which must include decision-making power on the boards of agencies, not simply as a device to salve the conscience of the White community.

Should there be a number of non-Jews, limited to a minority, on the board, thereby insuring a Jewish balance within the total board? I think not, for the creation of a quota system rubs most Jewish persons the wrong way. Throughout history we have been on the short end of quota systems—in too many times and too many places—for us to impose so invidious a procedure on anyone else. On the other hand, were we to promulgate an open-door policy allowing as many non-Jews, Black and White, on the Board as wished join it, we would face a real dilemma. Such a system would in time lead to a majority of non-Jewish persons on our Board and thus negate the basis of maintaining ourselves as a Jewish sponsored entity. As I see it, then, the inclusion of Black or White non-Jews on the board of a Jewish family agency, either on a limited or unrestricted basis, is clearly in conflict with the design and purposes of our continued existence as a sectarian organization.

We are living in a period where there

is growing awareness and insistence upon board representation of the groups who are the consumers of the services of voluntary agencies. In our agency, the number of non-Jewish persons who use our counseling service is substantial. We make this service available to the general community not simply because the United Good Neighbors is our major funding source. We do so because we believe that we have a dual obligation to help our fellow man, as well as our Jewish brethren, which is in keeping with the concept and tradition of Jewish charity.

Does it follow, therefore, that because we provide some of our services to the general community that it is incumbent upon us to include Black or White non-Jews on the board of our agency? Is this the only way to insure quality service to the non-Jewish users of our professional services? I do not think it would fit our unique situation to do so.

Donald Hurwitz, in a recent article dealing with the subject of sectarian services suggests that "service and participation should be open to all people where possible, practical and desirable. Policy-making and control, however, should be in Jewish hands."<sup>1</sup> One important difference between the non-sectarian voluntary agencies and the Jewish family agency which relates to the issue of the future composition of our Board is that the non-sectarian agency by purpose and design exists to serve all groups and should, therefore, have a board that is representative of the total community which it serves. In contrast, the Jewish family agency exists principally to serve its own sectarian group. That it elects to offer some of its services to the general community

does not alter what we are and whom we must serve—a Jewish agency in existence to serve the Jewish community. It seems to me that a Jewish family agency is not obliged to undermine its right to exist as a sectarian organization by including non-Jews on its Board. Rather, it should be able to function and be supported in a social and economic climate which makes possible the realization of its objectives to provide a quality service to its Jewish users, whom it is obliged to serve, and the general community which it elects to serve.

Are we being unreasonable or simply old-fashioned in our wanting, indeed insisting, upon the sectarian composition of our Board? I do not believe that because we wish to re-affirm our religious-ethnic identity that we are an anachronism in the modern world. The pages of our history as a people shout loudly and often tragically that the denial of self as a people is a fruitless direction and may well pave the road towards oblivion. The Black Revolution is similarly the expression of a people who have recognized painfully that self-affirmation, rather than self-repudiation, is their only hope for survival as real human beings.

Above all, a Jewish family service agency is not simply another casework agency among half a dozen or so other casework agencies typical of many metropolitan areas. In examining the purposes of the Jewish family agency, David Zeff poses a significant question: "How has it been possible to define a Jewish family agency as an expression of Jewish identification without seeing its organic relationship to the Jewish community in which it functions, as well as to the Jewish community in time counted in millennia?"<sup>2</sup> Mr. Zeff underscores that the

<sup>1</sup> Donald Hurwitz, "Sectarian Services in the Crossfire of Current Problems," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. XLVI, No. 4 (1970), p. 294.

<sup>2</sup> David Zeff, "The Jewish Family Agency, the Jewish Federation and the United Fund: Problems, Omens, and Opportunities," Vol. XLVI, No. 3 (1970), p. 217.

Jewish casework agency, like other institutions, is an instrument of Jewish survival. It is one expression of a particular people to maintain their religious-ethnic identity within the broader framework of the American society. Consequently, its purpose and particularly its power to direct its actions must be implanted upon a Jewish base. It can do this only when its board of directors is a Jewish body rather than a non-sectarian one. Irwin Gold states that "the instrument (the sectarian agency) is a Jewish one played by a Jewish musician and hopefully for a predominantly Jewish audience."<sup>3</sup> There is no doubt in my mind that to maintain our Jewish family agency, it is imperative that we retain the sectarian composition of our Board.

Although even an occasional informed member of the Jewish community may

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<sup>3</sup> Irwin Gold, "Sectarian Services in a Time of Crisis," *The Jewish Social Work Forum*. Vol. 7, Number 1. (Spring 1970), pp. 5-13.

express the opinion that there is a lessening need today for Jewish family agencies, the evidence to the contrary is overwhelming. The prevalence of special interest groups, whose function it is to protect and strengthen their constituents, has been a phenomenon of our nation throughout its history. There is surely nothing undemocratic about the continued existence of such groups in a culturally pluralistic America. That some special-interest groups have not always represented the common good, can hardly be denied. However, institutions can and do change as the various segments of the society demand it of them.

When we are much nearer to a utopian condition in our society, I would possibly concur with the view that sectarian and other similar types of social agencies are becoming obsolete. Meanwhile, I am firmly convinced that social agencies such as the Urban League, the Indian Center, and the Jewish family agencies ought to remain in business.