THE JEWISH COMMUNITY FACES THE GREAT SOCIETY; IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PHILOSOPHY AND PROGRAM OF JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICES *

by BENJAMIN B. ROSENBERG

Executive Director, Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, Massachusetts

THIS presentation, in spite of the currency of its title, deals with questions which in one form or another we have been asking ourselves for some time now. But they are the questions that must be asked continuously, for they relate to forces which are reshaping every facet of our society.

The rapid sequence of national and world events which pound away at our image of existence, our societal stability and our values remind us that we live in a new sort of world and that we had better keep on examining our traditional ways of doing things to see if they really fit that changed world. The problems we face and the questions that we ask are related not to quantity but to quality; not to physical survival, but to creative continuity.

Never before in our history have we had such a magnificent skyline of buildings as in this generation—hospitals, homes for the aged, community centers, seminaries, synagogues. A recent publication on synagogues of America is a truly impressive testimony of institutionalized religious expression of an affluent society.¹

The population explosion and the continuing expansion of life's span have had their quantitative impact on attendance and membership lists. The philanthropic impulse of the Jewish community is as strong as ever. The "gross national product" of Jewish communal service is at an all-time high of more than \$625 million.²

^{*} Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Washington, D.C., May 14, 1966. The paper is based on the Symposium of twenty-two statements submitted in advance of the Annual Meeting by professional leaders in the various fields of Jewish communal service. The author wishes to express his debt to the Symposium participants (listed below), but takes full responsibility for the views expressed and especially for the conclusions reached. The Symposium, The Jewish Community Faces the Great Society; Implications for Jewish Communal Service, is available at the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service. New York. (References in this paper to the Symposium or quotations from it are indicated in the footnotes as Symposium etc.) Symposium participants included: Irving Brodsky, Jules Cohen, Oscar Cohen, Samuel Dinin, William Gellman, Milton Goldman, Irving Greenberg, Rabbi Oscar Groner, Rabbi Richard Hirsch, Sylvia Krakow, Herbert Millman, Edward Newman, Max S. Perlman, Louis L. Ruffman, Saul Schwarz, Robert E. Segal, Doris Siegel, Florence Stein, Bernard Stern, Emanuel Tropp, Sidney Z. Vincent, Ann G. Wolfe, David Zeff, Charles Zibbell.

¹ Avram Kampf, Contemporary Synagogue Art, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1966.

² Cf. S. P. Goldberg, "Jewish Communal Services, Program and Financing," Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, New York, 1965, p. 3. "The gross national product of Jewish communal services is the estimated total of major sources of income; annual

There is a swirl of activity—but some are concerned. What does it add up to? Is it the storm before the lull? What concerns us—as it has for the past several years, is purpose and substance, direction, continuity and the availability of manpower, voluntary and professional, to do the job that cries out to be done. And the Great Society, as an idea even more than its current reality and program, has brought these concerns into sharp focus.

The Great Society—Idea and Direction

What is the Great Society? The answer is not simple. With all the present vagueness as to its shape and substance, it all depends on which part of it you see and touch. One of the major news-weeklies some months ago referred to HEW, the operational center for building the Great Society, as "Big Daddy, all money and muscle and determined compassion."3 The Great Society is a seven league stride in a gigantic effort to overcome the lag between the rapid rate of technological change and the vast problems created by these changes in economic and social displacement. The Great Society is a series of unprecedented legislative triumphs in the fields of welfare, health, education, civil rights. But above all, the Great Society is an idea and a direction. the words of John W. Gardener, "If the Great Society is to mean anything, it must mean something for the quality of our lives—a society of opportunity, a compassionate society designed to serve the individual and preserve his dignity." 4

But on the other side of the ledger, there is the feeling that the Great Society is a hastily put together program with all the flaws of inadequate and insufficient time for sound planning and community or citizen involvement. And in spite of the apparently astronomical figures of its budgets, the funds available are miniscule in the face of needs and projected programs. The Great Society furthermore can become a veritable Pandora's box of regional, state and municipal irritations and conflicts, with roadblocks at every turn. But above all is the pervasive concern of the impact of the Great Society on the quality of our services as well as on our projected programs. Despite the declarations of our governments' officials and spokesmen, the questions intrude themselves: "Will the government be willing to put forth what may appear to some to be 'radical' new proposals and to put flesh on the bones by expanding the vast amount of funds necessary to implement the new programs?"5

These concerns reflect realistic appraisals of a present condition, but what prevails nevertheless is the Great Society as an idea and a beginning in its implementation. The Great Society "as is" may fall short of fulfillment, but what must be recognized is that it has set our society in a direction, and having started in motion, we have reached the point of no return.

The thrust is clearly toward more governmental involvement in a variety of areas—health, welfare, education, the arts, civil rights—areas which are very much the concern of the sector of private, voluntary support. Unless there is a clear definition of relationship and respective roles, it may very well be that the Great Society programs will be on a collision course with those of the private sector in several areas of concern and service.

Major Issues Which Face Us

In addressing ourselves to the impact of

campaigns for contributions, service payments and public tax funds.''

⁸ Newsweek, Feb. 28, 1966, p. 22.

⁴ As quoted by Newsweek, ibid., p. 23.

⁵ Richard Hirsch, Symposium, p. 43.

this thrust on our sectarian programs and objectives, we can factor out a series of issues which are of concern to the broad range of our communal services and indeed, the Jewish community.

1. The first issue is that of the "bandwagon." The challenge of the large scale war on poverty is exciting and the lure of federal funding can be irresistible. The new governmental programs offer opportunities for pioneering, and the leadership in the field of social welfare seems to be passing from the private to the public sector. And thus there is a great deal of concern about individuals and agencies rushing to "get on the bandwagon" to "go where the money is" to find a "niche for themselves in the 'Great Society'.'' Are our agencies getting caught up in an "Operation Headlong?"

2. This relates to the second issue, the role our agencies can and do play in planning in the face of increasing government support in several key areas of service. How will the flow of federal funds affect our programs, our purposes, our sense of priorities? Will the main thrust of community planning come from the government or from our central planning agencies, our federations?

We see what is happening in the health field, especially with respect to our hospitals. The hospital depends on several sources for major financing. And this has an impact on the way hospitals do their planning. To the hospitals, federation may be an important financing and planning resource, but only one of several, and often not the most important. In addition to federation, the reference points for hospitals include the granting agencies, the public welfare bodies, Blue Cross, and especially the medical schools where such affiliations exist. While federations are becoming more involved in

health planning, with the hospital inevitably as the central element, the hospital is subjected to pulls and major policy decisions from sources that are completely outside the orbit of Jewish communal services.

The situation in the hospital field may be a model for the structures and relationship in the other fields in which federal and state financing will become the dominant factors.

3. The third issue is that of manpower. It is a special irony of fate that at a time when high premium must be placed on quality of professional personnel there is an increasingly critical personnel shortage. Shortage of personnel is a problem of our society in general, and we are up against some stiff competition. The professional field of Jewish communal services is not keeping pace with either the population explosion or the "explosion" in higher education. While this has been a chronic condition for some time, the malady has reached the critical stage. The current problem is not only that of lack of recruits, but increasingly also that of the exodus of trained personnel in many of our Jewish agencies toward more exciting and challenging vistas. With federal support of salary structures in some areas of health and welfare, the condition in the sectarian field will be further aggravated.

It is actually no longer just a question of salaries and fringe benefits. Even a lure of larger paychecks can no longer compete with the exciting opportunities offered in the "Great Society." The reference groups for professional practitioners are to be found in government, in the universities, in the public arena. And as we stress sectarian commitments and intensive sectarian training as prerequisites for responsible positions in Jewish communal services, we limit further the available pool of manpower.

4. The fourth issue deals with the

⁶ Sylvia Krakow, Symposium, p. 47, and Emanuel Tropp, Symposium, p. 101.

meaning of the acts of the "Great Society" to a middle-class structure and middle-class values.

Jewish communal services are serving essentially a middle class population. The concerns that we have for the future of our services, for the needs in our community, the apathy, the alienation, the relevance of our practices and values to the oncoming generation are in the context of an overwhelmingly suburban, college bred, professional and proprietary class group. But the focus of the Great Society, the programs of income maintenance, education, housing and rehabilitation, is on the poverty groups, and poverty as defined by the Great Society is minimal among Jews.

Largely, the Jewish "poor" are the aged. They are living on Old Age Assistance grants or on inadequate OASI payments. Their age, their tenuous relationships with others in the community, their general disengagement from communal life make them all but invisible. They are government charges. Governmental programs provide either "adequate" or "token" income maintenance, basic medical care and decent housing; and in that sense, they have been taken under the wing of the Great Society.

Still another aspect of this issue is the attraction which the Great Society programs have for intellectuals of the middle-class as against the role the recipients of the programs are playing in the planning and direction of these programs.

Nathan Glazer poses this dilemma succinctly:

"... we find that on the one hand, many of the militants who are now organizing or attempting to organize the poor, who are demanding greater representation for the poor in war against poverty, are Jews; but on the other hand, the organized Jewish community,

the Jewish social work agencies are not militant. They all find attractive the program emphasizing education rather than the programs emphasizing organization and conflict."⁸

5. The fifth issue is the impact of the "Great Society" on our concepts of Church and State relationships.

The numerous government programs in operation are riddled with potential church-state infractions. On the one hand, the "Great Society" concept holds the promise of greatly improved inter-group relations in the U. S. But on the other hand, there are threats to religious liberty implicit in the programs to achieve the "Great Society"; the benefits under the federal aid to education and anti-poverty programs which are available to religious communities, institutions and sectarian school systems.

We see the emergence of different points of view as to the payments from tax funds to which practices and services in sectarian schools constitute violations of constitutional safeguards for religious freedom.⁹

The various rationales being developed to make possible the acceptance of federal funds for religious programs and purposes, may be but stop-gap. perhaps our concepts of what constitute infringements of the principle of separation of church and state may be in need of searching re-examination and re-evaluation in the light of current historic developments. The re-assessment of our traditional position against inclusion of questions on religion in the decennial census is just one example of the awareness that some of us have, that maybe things are a bit different from what they were a generation ago.

6. This leads us to the sixth issue, the problem of consensus among profes-

⁷ Max S. Perlman, Symposium, p. 66, and Milton Goldman, Symposium, p. 25 ff.

⁸ Jews and Poverty, Midstream, Vol. XII, No. 1, p. 35.

⁹ Cf. Ann G. Wolfe, Symposium, pp. 113 ff.

sional and lay leadership. There is a feeling that as the professional field becomes involved in the new service areas and challenges of the Great Society, the gap will widen between the field and the policy-making sector of the Jewish community.

All of our major federations, service agencies and civil rights agencies have issued declarations of support for the war on poverty, but have found themselves troubled as to how to find a niche in this endeavor. Lav members in community relations agencies are reluctant to take positions on economic matters that are at the heart of the war on poverty. The necessity for massive public works, increased social security, guaranteed minimum wage, increased AFDC are becoming part of public discussion and consciousness. Community relations agencies have remained silent on these questions and have preferred to support the less controversial measures: support of job training, school improvement, etc.

We still have too many pockets of resistance to the principle of fair housing practices, too many adults who, in their voting in school board elections, reflect prejudices. We still encounter numerous Jews who continue to discriminate in hiring policies and some who oversimplify their judgments against Negroes.¹⁰

As Robert Segal so well puts it:

"For Jews whose liberalism is not for all seasons, the demands of Negroes in the time of the Great Society will comprise a sharp test. Militancy among Negroes is certain to breed more militancy; there will be riots and rumors of riots. Some Jewish parents in suburbia will find their love for mankind in the round wilting under the pressure of a campaign to bus Negro children out of the ghettos to lily-white territory. Our

prophetic zeal for righteousness will be on trial." 11

No Ready Answers or Simple Solutions

These then are some of the issues that trouble us as we face the "Great Society". What is the role of our communal agencies and our profession in the face of these developments? (I am tempted to paraphrase that pungent line of Tevyah in Fiddler on the Roof. "Should I tell you what our role is? I'll tell you. I don't know.")

Actually, there are no ready answers and no simple solutions. The changes and developments in public policy and programs will profoundly affect the structure and the direction of voluntary services, sectarian or non-sectarian. This is almost axiomatic, even if there may be confusion and difference of opinion with respect to directions. The very issues which confront us call for a continuing and realistic probing and reexamination of the nature of our community and its needs, of the way in which our communal services can most effectively accommodate themselves to the changing conditions and meet their respective responsibilities within the framework of the total Jewish communitv.

These issues have also acted almost as a centripetal force in creating a greater sense of community in our field and a sharpened awareness of the interrelationship of agencies, services and interests. It is this renewed sense of community which is expressed at our conferences and that emerges as a significant reaction to the various historic developments in our society.

Interestingly enough, this community approach has also become a major aspect of the programs of the "Great Society" and indeed can become the common ground on which services of the sectar-

¹⁰ Wolfe, ibid.

¹¹ Robert E. Segal, Symposium, p. 82.

ian and general communities can find their point of constructive interrelationships.

A characteristic objective of the major health and welfare acts of the "Great Society" is the establishment of comprehensive networks of services in the communities where people live, rather than in specific institutions. To attain this objective, the focus is on the community as the nexus for planning, for coordination and for delivery of services. comprehensive community approach is characteristic of the imaginative new programs envisaged under the Community Mental Health Centers Act, the proposed community service centers, as well as of the various plans for the delivery of comprehensive health care services. It is also basic to the various community action programs and to the renewed emphasis on involvement of the people to be served in planning and policy-making processes.

Communal Services and the Jewish Community

This community concept is, of course, no stranger to us. Jewish communal services have long recognized the interrelationship of services and their roles as instruments of the total Jewish community. This recognition has been often, to be sure, observed more in principle than in practice. The implementation of this community concept has also been limited essentially to the family of communal services under the aegis of a federation, rather than in relationship to the other major communal institutions and forces.

It seems to me that a prime objective of Jewish communal service in the years ahead will be to find more ways in which to put into practice this concept of comprehensive services with a community, rather than agency, orientation.

Thus, in health care we have seen some of the most imaginative advances toward interrelationship of resources and services for more effective and continuing delivery of services on various levels of need. The medical center as a concept and as a reality in some of our major communities is a tangible response to this interrelationship. With the increasing emphasis on preventive services, on health education, rehabilitation and extended care facilities, the hospitals will reach out more to other related services in the community.¹²

In community relations, there is a history of a community approach to problems and services through the local community relations councils and nationally through the agencies of the National Community Relations Advisory Council. But here, too, there is further recognition of new forces calling for more intensive and comprehensive community approach to our problems. Vast new fields and new opportunities are opening up in this field for working with student groups who are giving massive support to the militant forces in civil rights, with synagogue social action groups, with organizations and agencies whose physical location and programs place them into the storm's eye of civil rights struggle.

Jewish community centers are envisaged as developing into "integrated multidisciplinary community institutions, including Jewish education particularly for adolescents and adults, mental health education, and medical screening services, career guidance, evaluative social research, and a variety of other programs related to the needs of individuals and families." ¹⁸

The Center is seen as a community instrument working and planning with other instruments of the community toward enhancement of the quality of living of individuals as Jews and as members of society, and thus enhancing the

¹² Doris Siegel and Florence Stein, "Symposium," p. 87 ff.

¹³ Cf. Irving Brodsky, "Symposium," p. 3.

quality of the community of which the individual is a part.

But in no field are the imperatives for a comprehensive, community-wide approach more evident than in Jewish education. Here we see the most widespread fragmentation, along ideological as well as bureaucratic lines. Here the crisis of increasing quantity versus inadequate quality or relevance runs most deeply. This is recognized and given clear expression by our leading educators. But here also we see an increasing recognition of the need for a comprehensive, community approach toward strengthening the network of services. Such an approach would recognize and include all denominations, all levels of educational experience, and have the communal strength and competence to work effectively with the various institutions toward improvement of quality and relevance.

This involves the recognition of community responsibility for encouraging a variety of educational efforts, and for entering into constructive relationships with all sources of financing and planning in this field. At the same time, it calls for community responsibility to bring higher standards of excellence and relevance to this field.

Are Priorities Possible?

This brings us inevitably to the perennial question of priorities. What kind of priorities can we establish? Assuming that there was a central authority which could develop sharply defined priorities which revolved around "Jewish values", could we apply a measuring stick of "Jewish content" or "Jewish purpose" and transfer funds from low indexed to high indexed services. This approach does not face up to the realities of Jewish community organization.

For even if we should accept the yard-

stick of Jewish purpose, or Jewish content, or Jewish values, who will constitute himself as the "bureau of Jewish standards and measurements." What is Yidishkeit to one is narishkeit "apikorsus" to another.

Furthermore, it would be an impoverished Jewish community indeed which would carve out and discard services, no matter how deeply rooted in tradition, no matter how much they contributed to the community's welfare, no matter how strongly they were objects of identification by significant segments of the community, as long as they did not pass muster with a "bureau of Jewish standards and measurements."

But this need not be belabored. I believe that we are done with notions of simple solutions to our problems. They still make good material for Jewish lecture circuits, but do not stand up against the realities of Jewish communal existence.

Well then, are there to be no priorities? The answer is yes. We have a history of evolving priorities—field by field -not field against field. History has also demonstrated the ability of the organized community to respond to the call for special priority in times of crisis and great need. Witness the outpouring of funds for the rescue of the survivors of the holocaust, the ingathering of exiles, the rebuilding of Israel. I do not agree with some of the views that priorities in each of the fields be related to Jewish content. Only too often this represents an artificial formulation and seeks a rationalization which is quite removed from the basic rationale of the service.

It seems to me rather, and I do find concurrence in the *Symposium*, that the yardstick for priority is relatedness to the network of community services, excellence, and leadership in each of the fields.

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Quality and Continuity as Objectives of Communal Services

The objectives of our Jewish communal services can be and, I believe, will be in increasing measure the quality and continuity of service through inter-agency and inter-disciplinary approach to the needs to be filled and the problems to be resolved; the stressing of opportunities for intensive services; and the provision of leadership groups for the continuity of the service, essentially in the Jewish community, but also to the enrichment of the general community.

Much of this is already in process. Much of it is still a direction awaiting the test of actual experience. We can point to a number of examples to underscore this—

- 1. The direction of our health services toward integrated medical centers.
- 2. The emphasis on research and demonstration projects.
- The recognition of the need for more intensive efforts in Jewish education and teacher training.
- The increasing efforts for establishment of departments of Jewish scholarship in universities.
- The leadership training programs of federations.
- The concern of Hillel Foundation and other agencies for reaching out to the intellectual sectors of the academic community.
- 7. The integration of mental health and the "traditional" social work services.

This stress on quality of service and leadership within the framework of and related to the organized Jewish community will be increasingly the hallmark of our services. This concept of communal services gives full recognition to the many organized expressions of the community (the ideological and fraternal groups, the social associations as well as the social aspects of synagogual organizations) in their performance of essential group maintenance functions whatever their depth of intellectual or cultural identification. But it places a specific responsibility on Jewish communal services for giving leadership in the areas of inter-organizational planning towards intensive and top quality service.

Thus, as we are committing ourselves in many ways to responsible participation as citizens and as social workers in the Great Society, we cannot bypass our commitment to the Great Jewish Society. We in Jewish communal services have brought a significant measure of experience, of skills and insights, of leadership toward the quality of living and the quality of continuity as a Jewish community. How to enlarge and enrich this contribution has to be our continuing task—a task which will be, as it surely should be, the never finished agenda of our Jewish communal services.