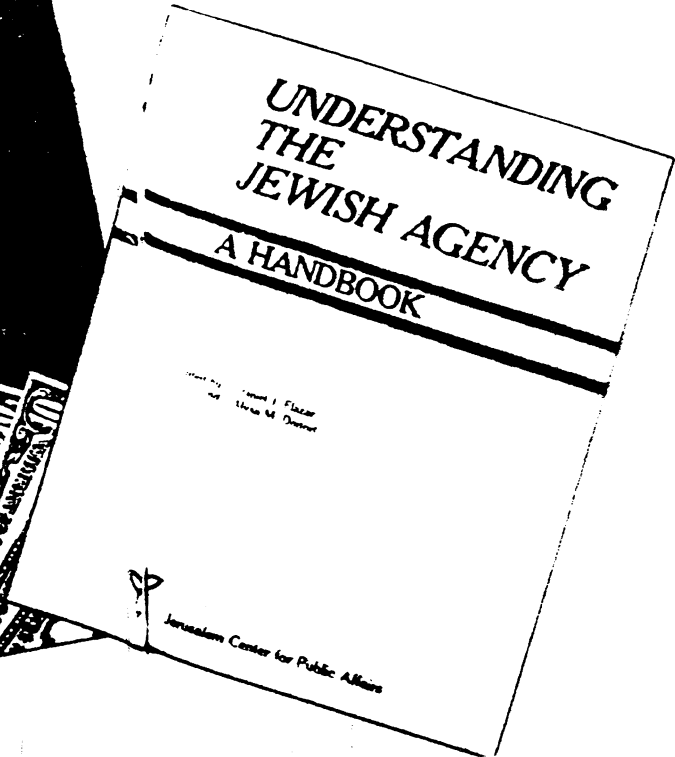
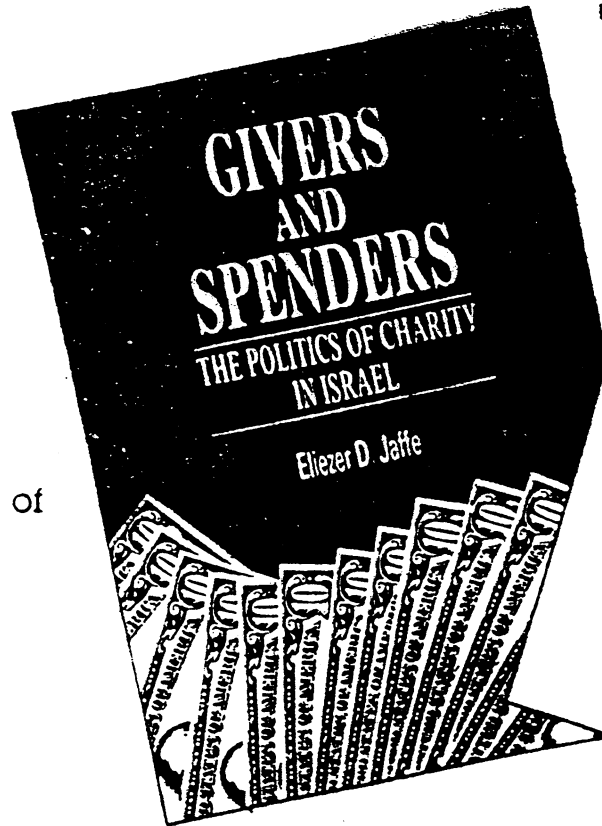


# Will The Real Jewish Agency Please Stand Up?

Two new books dealing with the workings of the all-powerful and equally mysterious Jewish Agency offer radically different perspectives.

BY CHARLES HOFFMAN  
Special To The BALTIMORE JEWISH TIMES



Eliezer Jaffe

**Professor Eliezer Jaffe:** Diaspora Jewry is letting itself be ripped-off by Israeli politicians who fund their political shenanigans with the hundreds of millions of dollars that are collected every year by the United Jewish Appeal, supposedly for educational and welfare work in Israel. Diaspora Jewry has a mission to abolish the institution that enables Israeli political parties to perpetuate this fraud — the Jewish Agency.

**Professor Daniel Elazar:** The establishment of the State of Israel marks a decisive turning point in the



Daniel Elazar

constitutional history of the Jewish people. The most important task facing the Jewish people today is to create a proper structure and process of governance for the emergent world Jewish polity. Diaspora Jewry has a mission to take a leading role in that effort, at the center of which stands — the Jewish Agency.

**I**t is a rare publishing event when two books appearing within a few months of each other, by men with similar backgrounds and living in the same city, and supposedly written about the same institution — are so radically different.

Both authors are professors, originally from America who made aliya to Israel in the 1960s. Both are middle-aged, traditional Jews who live in Jerusalem. But the similarities end there. One is anti-establishment and one works within the organized Jewish community, and their books reflect their views.

Prof. Eliezer Jaffe teaches social work at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and has been closely involved in several successful efforts to "change the system" in Israel through grass-roots organization and fighting the bureaucracy from within. He was head of the Jerusalem municipal welfare department in the early 1970s,

where he introduced several successful reforms. His dissatisfaction with the politicized channels of philanthropy in the Jewish Agency led him to help establish the New Israel Fund, which offers Diaspora Jews the opportunity to fund innovative social causes in Israel through an independent, non-political foundation.

Prof. Daniel Elazar teaches political science and divides his time between Bar-Ilan University near Tel Aviv and Temple University in Philadelphia. He is the founder and director of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, a think-tank dealing with a wide range of problems facing Israel and the Jewish world, which has offices in four countries. If he is not teaching at one of his campuses, Elazar is probably flying off to do consulting work on public policy problems somewhere around the globe. He is a prolific, not to say compulsive, writer, with 703

entries on his official bibliography.

Jaffe's and Elazar's books about the Jewish Agency reflect their divergent styles, interests and ideological perspectives.

Jaffe's book, *Givers and Spenders: The Politics of Charity in Israel*, reflects his moral passion, his outspokenness and his ability to lucidly expose the moral issues at the heart of public policy problems. Elazar's book, *Understanding the Jewish Agency: a Handbook*, reflects his sweeping vision of the political dimension in Jewish history and deftly combines an academic perspective with a practical analysis of current affairs.

Both books are collections of articles and other materials about the Jewish Agency. Curiously, although both authors are no doubt familiar with each other's work, neither includes material authored by the other, or even so much as a reference to what

the other has written. Now that gives us a pretty broad hint that we are dealing here with two opposing perspectives, and that the Jewish Agency is a subject that, in some circles at least, inspires more partisanship than objectivity.

Any reader tempted to drop out at this point in disgust with what may appear to be petty professional polemics should consider the following: since the establishment of Israel in 1948, Diaspora Jewry has poured over \$7 billion into Israel through the Jewish Agency, with the vast majority of those funds coming from American Jewry through the UJA. The Agency's main tasks over the years have been to bring new immigrants to Israel and to provide them with the settlements, schools, social and health services intended to insure their successful absorption.

Of the \$424 million collected in 1982/83 for the

Agency, some \$324 million came from the UJA, and \$97 million from the Keren Hayesod, the fund-raising arm of Jewish communities outside the United States.

American Jewry, whether it is aware of it or not, thus has a fairly large stake in what the Agency does, how well it does it, and who it does it with — which are precisely the matters that Jaffe and Elazar are so concerned with.

The major bone of contention between our professors, if we can imagine a dialogue between them, would be the significance of the Jewish Agency's "partner" in providing these needed services — the Zionist political parties represented in the World Zionist Organization (WZO).

The Agency and the WZO have had a many-sided and incestuous relationship over the years since 1929 when the Agency was created as the service arm of the WZO and as a forum for wealthy and influential "non-Zionists" to support the efforts to create a Jewish state. By the 1950s, the WZO had swallowed up the Agency, and part of the money pouring into it as charitable contributions from abroad was siphoned off to grease the wheels of the Israeli and Zionist political establishment. By 1971, the WZO and the Agency had cleaned up their act, formally separated their functions and channels of funding, and had begun a new chapter in their relationship that witnessed a greater voice for Diaspora Jewry in Agency affairs.

Today the WZO carries out Zionist educational and political work in Jewish communities around the world, while the Agency provides immigration, educational and welfare services for Israel. Nevertheless, the Zionist political parties and their Israeli counterparts have continued to control most of the funds and administrative apparatus of both bodies through a complicated "partnership" agreement.

And that's the rub, Jaffe would say:

... both the American and European fundraisers must insist on the real depoliticization of the Jewish Agency, and an end to the institutionalized overlapping directorates with the WZO, which is fundamentally a party-political organization feeding on Agency resources. UJA and Keren Hayesod donors, and the Israeli disadvantaged and immigrants, are the main partners in the Jewish Agency, not the WZO or the Israeli political parties. There is no reason why WZO representatives should sit on any of the Agency's governing bodies.

There most certainly is, Elazar would counter. The Agency can never attain the status of an authoritative and representative world Jewish forum if it is severed from a political context. Diaspora Jews must learn to see the Agency as more than just a philanthropic body, and the Zionist politicians must stop seeing it primarily as a vehicle for political patronage.

Both Jaffe and Elazar are seeking to shape and educate a constituency among Diaspora Jewry to work for change in the Agency and in its relationship with the WZO. Jaffe's prescription is simple and radical: abolish the Agency and channel philanthropic funds for Israel through non-partisan bodies. Elazar's is more subtle and convoluted, but it boils down to saying: work within the system to preserve and reform the Agency.

Jaffe began as a gadfly of the Establishment and has gradually achieved *persona non grata* status within Agency circles. Elazar began as an academic observer of Jewish political and communal organization, and has gradually become an adviser and consultant to the Agency and some of its leaders.

Is Jaffe taking an uncharitable view of the philanthropic work carried out by the Agency? Is Elazar a near-sighted visionary who fails to see the obstacles to reform down the road? That is for the reader to judge, but only after having read both books.

What can be said by this reviewer is that both of our professors have a curious blindspot; both are so engrossed in their respective political arguments that they have neglected to give the reader any systematic or critical account of the services provided by the Agency and WZO. Elazar's book includes some reprinted public relations material put out by the Agency about the

work of its departments, but that is no substitute for an objective analysis, especially from a think-tank with academic pretensions.

Most Jews who give to the UJA know only that the money "goes to Israel," although many might be surprised to find out that on the average, 40 per cent of each dollar contributed to local federation campaigns stays behind to fund welfare and educational needs in the local U.S. community. Some might be surprised too, at what some of the money is used for in Israel. For example, it might intrigue them to know that monies the Agency sets aside for Israel's universities actually ends up in the government's coffers through some complicated book-keeping maneuvers.

Until the concerned Jewish public gets a better idea of what the Agency does — and doesn't do — on the Israeli scene, it will probably be difficult to make informed judgments about how much and what kind of politics is a necessary accompaniment to its operations.

*Eliazer Jaffe (ed.), Givers and Spenders: the Politics of Charity in Israel (Jerusalem, Ariel Publishing House, 1985), 114 pp., no price listed.*

*Daniel Elazar and Alysa Dortort (eds.), Understanding the Jewish Agency: a Handbook (Jerusalem, Center for Public Affairs, 1984), 189 pp., no price listed.*

*The author is a staff writer for The Jerusalem Post, and has been on leave for the past year to serve as a WZO shaliach (emissary) in the United States.*