

2 Maverick Views of Philanthropy

By MORTON I. TEICHER
Givers and Spenders: The Politics of Charity in Israel.
By Eliezer D. Jaffe. Jerusalem: Ariel Publishers, 1985. 114 pp. \$7.00 (paper back).

Meditations of a Maverick Rabbi. By Albert S. Axelrad. Chappaqua, N.Y.: Rossel Books, 1985. 170 pp. \$8.95 (paper back).

The dictionary defines "maverick" as "an independent individual who refuses to conform with his group." It is a term which applies with equal validity to these two authors, Eliezer D. Jaffe and Albert S. Axelrad. Axelrad uses the term, "maverick," to describe himself. Jaffe can just as readily be characterized by the same name.

Jaffe is an American who immigrated to Israel 25 years ago. Except for two years as head of Jerusalem's public welfare department, he has been and continues to be a professor of social work at Hebrew University. He is an outspoken analyst of social problems in Israel and a strong advocate of involvement by American Jews in Israeli social affairs. He has persistently recommended abolition of the Jewish Agency and, in this book, he insists that it is an archaic relic which blocks real partnership between American Jews and Israel.

JAFFE BELIEVES deeply and fervently in the attitudes which he holds and which he puts forth with much emphasis in "Givers and Spenders." He describes how, in 1983, when the Jewish Agency Assembly met in Jerusalem and denied him a place on the official program, he rented a ballroom at his own expense.

Two hundred delegates attended his meeting for a frank discussion of the Jewish Agency's future. Another illustration of his readiness to spend his own money to fight the "establishment" is the fact that "Givers and Spenders" was prepared at his own expense without any grants or donations.

Jaffe argues that American Jews need to know more about what happens to the money they contribute to Israel and to exercise more control over use of these funds. He asserts that this outcome is difficult to achieve without changing the current cumbersome set-up. He points to Project Renewal as a good illustration of where American Jewish contributors follow their dollars into "twin" Israeli communities where they have a good deal to say about how the money is spent.

THESE EXPERIENCES open new possibilities for changing the present framework in which many

American Jews use their Federation contribution to buy a ticket to Jewish identification, to express support for Israel and to kiss off any further obligation. Jaffe's thesis is that more is required of American Jews in order to establish a true partnership with their Israeli brothers and sisters.

The implication of Jaffe's book is that we need to continue supporting Federation as generously and as solidly as we can. However, we should not stop by writing a check, important as that is. We need to become more deeply involved. The relationship of Miami through Project Renewal to Or Akiva exemplifies what Jaffe is getting at. In fact, it was he who suggested to the authorities the idea of twinning Diaspora communities with Israeli communities in Project Renewal.

Since 1981, annual visits have been made to Or Akiva by a Miami Federation delegation, headed by Stanley C. Myers, one of Miami's most distinguished leaders. These visits enable Miami to participate with the residents of Or Akiva in efforts to improve the quality of life in their community.

Other visitors to Israel from Miami include Or Akiva in their itineraries, thus establishing a people-to-people relationship.

"Givers and Spenders" is a thought-provoking book which is well worth reading. Copies may be ordered directly from Dr. Eliezer D. Jaffe, 37 Gaza Road, Jerusalem, Israel 92383.

OUR SECOND "maverick," Albert S. Axelrad, has been the Jewish chaplain and Hillel director at Brandeis University since 1965. He has collected in his book a series of his essays, articles and talks which clearly set out his views on a number of subjects. He would undoubtedly agree with Jaffe about the need to alter the philanthropic arrangements between American Jews and Israel.

Indeed, he makes a statement in one of his essays which might just as well have been written by Jaffe. "We must seek a new way of defining the relationship between American Jews and the State and Jewry of Israel . . . it should certainly be more than the contribution of funds."

Axelrad groups his work into four sections: The Chaplain as Critic; the Religious Imperative; Israel: Toward Peace and Pluralism; Spiritual Resistance. Each contains several essays which demonstrate why Axelrad is considered a controversial figure.

For example, he places "Jewish radicalism . . . a notch above

Jewish traditionalism." He advocates that college students develop alternatives to the adult Jewish community. He wants "to dispense with the halachic norm as a general governing principle in Hillel." He is prepared to officiate at mixed marriages.

AXELRAD THINKS that the age of Bar and Bat Mitzvah should be raised to 18. He criticizes Israel for its treatment of Arab citizens. He thinks that Israel should not "annex territory . . . (or) . . . establish urban settlements in conquered and occupied areas." He feels that "Israel has consistently failed to take creative political initiatives . . . toward the Palestinians and toward the Arab States." He calls for "Orthodoxy's stranglehold to be dismantled." He considers our American society to be "hypocritical," "idolatrous" and "paranoiac."

These excerpts have been wrenched from their context and perhaps Axelrad an injustice, but they suggest the flavor of his views. He is a self-styled "maverick," and reading his book suggests that he is quite accurate in his own characterization of himself.

Jaffe and Axelrad are non-conformist individuals who compel us to reconsider the conventional wisdom that ordinarily shapes our attitudes. They are "mavericks" whose books succeed in challenging us to exercise our minds.

Bookcase

THE JEWISH FLORIDIAN
MARCH 14, 1986