

## Book Review

Eliezer Jaffe's

# *Givers and Spenders: The Politics of Charity in Israel*

Reviewed by David Bedein

*Givers and Spenders: The Politics of Charity In Israel* by Dr. Eliezer Jaffe. Ariel publishers Jerusalem and Cleveland, available in North America, 3535 Bendemeer Rd. Cleveland Hts., Ohio 44118, 1985. (\$7.00).

*Givers and Spenders: The Politics of Charity in Israel* represents a welcome collection of essays, articles, and graphs which give evidence to the deteriorating state of relations between Diaspora Jewish communities and Israeli political organizations. The increasing rancor and controversy concerning the Jewish Agency allocation policies and Diaspora-raised funds is the major subject of this timely and important primer.

One of the items on the agenda of the Jewish Agency Assembly which convened in Jerusalem recently was the Ethiopian aliyah and what has come to be called "Operation Moses." Invited were representatives of almost all ethnic groups in Israel to discuss aliyah and the rescue and relief operation that the Jewish Agency had engaged in during the past several years on behalf of Ethiopia Jewry. "Almost everyone" was there. But not one black face was in sight. No one in the Jewish Agency had thought to invite at least a representative of one of the Ethiopian immigrant organizations.

A mistake? Or a traditional way of handling situations in a paternalistic manner, on behalf of an immigrant group, without always bothering to ask them what they were feeling...?

Professor Eliezer Jaffe, Social Work Professor at the Baerwald School of Social Work at the Hebrew University, thinks that the Jewish Agency and donors from abroad have forgotten basic lessons learned from Project Renewal where principles of client involvement with Diaspora Jews could have been equally applied to work with and fundraising for Ethiopian Jews in Israel. Jaffe believes that the Jewish Agency is in need of basic reform and depolitization. In past decades it has gotten out of hand for lack of checks and balances, with the "funders" in the dark as to the political trade-offs and interests to which their funds are beholden. This is the subject matter of Jaffe's short reader. It is a subject that is so sensitive that no one else dares to write about it. There are some who fear that the tax-exempt status afforded to American givers will be

placed in jeopardy. There are others who fear a drop in support and funding for Israel. Still others in the professional world of Jewish community service and Zionist organizations fear that their generation-long effort to systematize fundraising through one efficient and well-known channel will be in danger of change and challenge.

None of these fears bother Jaffe. He sees his role as educator and warner, whose task it is to not only administer, but to also ask questions about policy—essentially, about how the funds are used and as to whether this cynical dichotomy of "Givers and Spenders" should continue to exist.

Jaffe reflects a deeper frustration of many Israeli citizens interested in social change when they confront the enormity of the Jewish Agency. Each week Israeli Haaretz investigative journalist, Gideon Alon, publishes well-researched columns on the waste and, at times, corrupt use of funds in the Jewish Agency. Judy Siegel of the Jerusalem Post is, at times, equally caustic, but she must be careful—the Jewish Agency owns 10% of the Post, according to authors Salpeter and Elitzur in *Who Rules Israel* (1974). After all, the Jerusalem Post cartoonist, Yaakov Kirshen, was reprimanded and permanently lost his "Weekend Dry Bohes" in the magazine section of the Post following a cartoon in which he showed the officials of the Aliyah office in Jerusalem sleeping and tossing paper airplanes, while reading an investigative report concerning their department's failings.

The frustration of an irate Israeli citizen is clear. To whom do you turn when you are outraged at Jewish Agency policy? When you are upset with the Executive branch of government, you turn to the legislative or the judicial, in addition to the government itself. You can also choose to call on the State Comptroller's office which monitors government functions, or even to the police, which in Israel is a separate government ministry.

However, the Jewish Agency remains outside of the reach of Israeli citizenry. It is also bound up with the World Zionist Organization, whose members are selected on the basis of political party.

Jaffe therefore contends that the avenue for change at the Agency must lead to the donors and funders of the

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service, who plays the role, in a sense, that the taxpayer plays towards the Israeli government.

Jaffe does not see everything that the Jewish Agency does as wrong. It was the state-in-waiting before 1948. It mobilized the resources of the Jewish world to receive and absorb aliyah that was three times the size of Israel at its inception.

Moreover, the Jewish Agency has not been lacking in its responsiveness to recent grass-roots initiatives in partnership and growth. Witness the case of Project Renewal, initiated in the late '70's with an idea of twinning Israeli neighborhoods with Diaspora communities. The Jewish Agency would act as a catalyst for the stimulation of the connection, designed to invigor a given sagging community with the spirit of partnership that a Diaspora community might be able to provide. Agency personnel and donors realized that the mistakes of the '50's might have led to dependency without allowing responsible constituencies to develop self-help frameworks of their own and responsibility for their neighborhoods themselves.

The tragic thing that Jaffe emphasizes in *Givers and Spenders* is that the progressive "Renewal Model" seems to have been a flash in the pan rather than a precedent for Agency policy.

The most blatant example is Operation Moses. According to Jaffe, a separate channel, with a separate budget, was not created. And, moreover, the highly sophisticated Ethiopian community was not involved with the allocation process, except on the receiving end. Meanwhile, the springing up of numerous indigenous Ethiopian immigrant groups lent the Jewish Agency and the thousands of Operation Moses donors the opportunity for direct contact and cooperation in community planning.

All this is a call for a reconceptualization of the Jewish Agency framework so universally recognized and accepted in the organized Jewish world. Why should the World Zionist Organization's political purposes be joined with the Jewish Agency's philanthropic service goals? This problem and ways of solving it are clearly presented in *Givers and Spenders*. Have the various departments of the

Jewish Agency ever discussed overlapping, or at times, competitive goals of their *raison d'être*? For example, the Youth Aliyah Division absorbs children from the same families that the Project Renewal division is trying to strengthen within the neighborhood. Should the givers to projects such as Operation Moses establish their own representatives in Israel to monitor use of funding on the model of the Los Angeles and San Francisco Federations? These Federations have hired their own people to monitor how money is spent while developing programs of creative cooperation between their home-town communities and their Project Renewal neighborhoods.

*Givers and Spenders* is a call to the international and especially the American Jewish Community to: introduce a concept of diversified funding as policy, to see the Jewish Agency/UJA-Keren Hayesod as *one* source for their support, and to convert the Jewish Agency into a foundation-like avenue for Israel's development, devoid of direct manipulation by Israeli politics.

Jaffe essentially warns his readers that if the organized Jewish world does not give official sanction to diversified funding, the trend of more Jewish communities giving outside of the established framework will occur anyway. More hospitals, social welfare institutions and other areas of service are worthy of public aid, and the Jewish Agency and private donors must take up the slack.

*Givers and Spenders* should be especial interest to non-USA readers. Americans give exclusively to the Jewish Agency through the conduit of the UJA for reasons of gaining a tax write-off to a charitable organization. However, the non-American funder gives his checks to Keren Hayesod and much of it goes directly to the WZO. As one Canadian contributor recently said, following a talk by Jaffe at the International Jewish Communal Service Conference in Jerusalem this summer: "It is nice to know what pork barrel our funds are going to. It is high time to carefully monitor the Israeli system for what it is — a normal political animal." ■

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