

A POVERTY OF PROSPECTS

A wild-eyed man who identified himself as Eliahu Jibli, threatened to refuse to do any more army reserve duty unless he was re-housed immediately. Jibli was speaking at a press conference called a few weeks ago by Jerusalem slum residents.

Did he know, Jibli was asked, that Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Israel Katz, and Housing Minister Gideon Patt, had come back from the U.S. with a promise of \$45m. for housing?

"That impresses me," retorted Jibli with infinite scorn, "like snow five years ago. I want a decent flat now."

Not so very long ago, the word "slums," like "organized crime," was taboo in Israel.

Policymakers in certain ministries were wont to explain that "We don't have slums here as they do in older industrialized countries, so we can't really use the term."

Similarly, the existence of poverty in Israel was not officially admitted until the Prime Minister's Commission on Youth did so in 1973. Today, most people equate poverty with slums, and according to the Ministry of Housing, there are a quarter of a million people living in them.

Nowadays, however, no self-respecting politician goes to the hustings without a declaration of intent to "abolish poverty."

It is, in fact, a major plank in the present government's platform, and particularly that of its coalition partner, the Democratic Movement for Change, on whose behalf Katz sits in the cabinet.

Susan Bellos writes that over-optimistic predictions about eradicating slums within five years may create a crisis of rising expectations.

Prime Minister Menahem Begin, when he is not preoccupied with foreign affairs, has shown an awareness of the expectations of his Herut grass-roots constituents, many of whom come from large, poor families in the slums. He has also taken an interest in getting the government's housing policy off the ground — or, rather, out of the air and onto the ground.

In fact, the present government started, at least, with all the signs of being more progressive in the social arena, free enterprise or no free enterprise, than its Labour predecessors.

The question in the eyes of some social observers is whether it has not promised the moon.

The person entrusted by Begin to lead the "war on poverty" generally, and specifically to "eradicate the slums in five years," is Deputy Prime Minister Yigael Yadin, who is chairman of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Social Policy.

Yadin has a clear idea what getting rid of the slums means — and that it entails very much more than just building more apartment blocks.

He knows that it means building new neighbourhoods, complete with services and proper amenities for a decent life. It is what planners call "infrastructure" and what Yadin has pledged as: "No more Neve Ya'acovs."

Neve Ya'Acov is a new neighborhood in north-eastern Jerusalem. While it looks pleasant enough and has some rather nice flats, it has, serious social problems.

Completed just after the Yom Kippur War, Neve Ya'acov had no amenities at all. People were shoved into new apartment blocks that had no play areas, no shops, no day-care centres and no preschool facilities.

The bus service to the centre of Jerusalem — where virtually all of the suburb's residents work — was totally inadequate. There were no cultural or recreational facilities.

At the beginning, there was no municipal or government office in Neve Ya'acov. There wasn't even a cafe or a kiosk.

Today, after a massive infusion of social workers and social work projects, the situation in Neve Ya'acov has improved.

But in the beginning, the inter-communal tensions there were fierce — and they were exacerbated by the fact that the "slum-clearance" families were segregated in highrise buildings.

Yadin has declared that there will be no more unplanned neighbourhoods. In keeping this pledge, he will find helpful the close relationship which has developed between Social Affairs and Labour Minister Katz and Housing Minister Patt, who seem

to genuinely appreciate the interdependence between their respective areas of responsibility.

In addition to building 30 new, planned neighbourhoods a

year, Yadin has pledged that 160 distressed areas will serve as models in a crash campaign to break down government bureaucracy.

A step has been taken in this direction, with the appointment of a resident co-ordinator for Yeroham, who is to see that what needs to be done in the Negev development town gets done, without tasks falling between different ministerial stools.

So far, so good. But Yadin complains of a lack of public understanding.

"Social policy," he remarks ruefully, "isn't news." He opens his mouth on Sadat or the settlements, and journalists jump; but who cares about his Inter-Ministerial Committee on Social Policy?

One reason for the rather mediocre press that Yadin's committee has been getting is that so few people even know of its existence. Its main aims are to formulate a set of national social priorities, and then co-ordinate the various ministries concerned.

Unfortunately for both Yadin and Katz, who is keenly interested in a national policy, the

JEWISH LEADER
ROCHESTER, N. Y.
W-4,000

APR-14-78

social ministries prefer to go on running their empires, unhindered, in their own sweet ways.

The committee received an unfortunate slap in the face when Finance Minister Simha Ehrlich did not even consult with Yadin before announcing his recent budget cuts, which primarily involved ministries concerned with social policy.

Furthermore, it is an open secret that two of the most vital ministries represented on the committee, Education and Labour and Social Affairs, do not get along at all.

This is most unfortunate, particularly since Yadin has said that the problem of Israel's marginal youth, whose numbers are anywhere between 14,000 and 25,000, depending on who gives the estimate, is as painful as housing.

Marginal youth are teenagers, usually between 14 and 18

but often younger, who have dropped out of school and do not work. They are the extreme, "failed," end of the 45% of the school population classified as "educationally disadvantaged."

Marginal youth and disadvantaged children are, in fact, the other side of the social equation which explains why Jerusalem's Shmuel Hanavi "new immigrant" neighbourhood is a slum,

and the overcrowded, ultra-Orthodox Mea Shearim, only 10 minutes away, isn't.

Both Education Minister Zevulun Hammer and Katz agree wholeheartedly about the urgency of the problem. As long as their two ministries run separate programmes involving pre-school education, extra-curricular activities, street-gang and youth work, vocational and special education, millions will continue to be spent without achieving the maximum effect.

Eliahu Jibli's real problems are these: his flat, his children's performance at school, the cost-of-living, and his need of help for both his ailing mother-in-law and a retarded relative who lives with the family.

He will judge the present government according to how it helps him cope with these problems.

They are what Dr. Eliezer Jaffe, a senior lecturer at the Hebrew University's Paul Baerward School of Social Work and a former head of the Jerusalem Municipality's Family and Community Services Department, calls "the nuts and bolts of social policy."

According to Jaffe, the social ministries are still preoccupied with "grand strategy" and not with the provision of services, which is what counts for ordinary people.

Israel Katz, a former social worker, was greeted in some quarters as a **near-Messiah** when he joined the government a few months ago.

Today, he still enjoys considerable support from liberal intellectuals, the social-work professionals, quite a few slum activists, and some of the solid middle-class voters who left Labour to vote for the DMC because they wanted social change.

However, although Katz is still regarded as a man who not only cares about changing things but also knows to some extent

how to do it, the honeymoon — at least in Jaffe's eyes — is over.

Not, Jaffe hastens to add, because of any bitter disillusionment, but rather because of a greater sense of reality among social workers and social planners, "a toning down of both enthusiasm and expectations."

Jaffe, and other social observers, would like to see fewer grandiose promises. Thirty new neighbourhoods a year is too much, he says.

If neighbourhoods are going to be properly planned there must be models, and there are today very few models of decent low-cost neighbourhoods.

If we really go on at this rate, Jaffe fears, there may be the same kind of frenetic building that took place in the 'fifties and produced today's slums.

Eliahu Jibli, and the pressure groups who speak for him, are not fools, and they sense that talk of eradicating the slums in five years is pie-in-the-sky, partly because they have heard it all before.

Jibli and the people he represents deserve more sober promises.

Reprinted with permission from The Jerusalem Post.