

PROJECT Renewal fails to take off and keep the promises made 40 years ago by Prime Minister Menachem Begin, the 300,000 Israelis whose slum neighbourhoods were to have been rehabilitated may never believe the government — any government — again.

Unwittingly, the premier was playing with fire when he grandly announced the \$1.2b. four-year project. One-tenth of the country's population, mired in the hopelessness of crowded and dilapidated housing, with crime and violence outside their doors, children in schools that don't teach, and old people who have been forgotten, are waiting for help. And the chances of all of them getting relief from Project Renewal are slim indeed.

Begin could have held off from making the project public until he had developed, with the help of experts, a detailed mechanism for making it work. Instead, two whole years were wasted on false starts and power struggles among local authorities, government ministries and the Jewish Agency. Meanwhile, the disadvantaged watched, angrily and discouraged, and contributors and fund-raisers were appalled by the delays.

One of the premier's first mistakes was to make Deputy Prime Minister Yigael Yadin the nominal head of Project Renewal. Begin did this for reasons of protocol and because Prof. Yadin is chairman of the

Ministerial Committee on Social Betterment. However, Yadin had neither the inclination nor the influence to put a stop to the wrangling over the project, and Begin was himself "too busy" to take personal charge of it.

CONTRIBUTORS abroad have been bombarded with publicity films, high-powered emissaries and invitations to visit the slum neighbourhoods. A donor may contribute to Project Renewal only after he has made his regular contribution to the United Jewish Appeal or Keren Hayesod. If Begin will someday soon have to abandon the project, explaining that it has to be undertaken at a later date, will the contributors ever be able to take special fund-raising campaigns seriously again?

The prime minister does not have to abandon the project completely. He can announce that it has finally

A promise that boomeranged

By JUDY
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found its sea-legs, that day care centres, clubs for the elderly, libraries and kindergartens are being approved by the dozens in the inter-ministerial professional committee.

But that would only hide the undeniable fact that construction of such facilities falls far short of the "rehabilitation of the lives of 45,000 families" that was originally envisioned.

Dr. Eliezer Jaffe, of the Hebrew University's School of Social Work, was prescient when he wrote in *The Jerusalem Post* on May 16, 1978:

"One of the most distressing features of government in Israel is the lack of coordination and the interdepartmental preoccupation with territorial sovereignty over ser-

vices. What mechanisms will guarantee that these features will be controlled?"

"To avoid a fiasco, perhaps it would be wise to promise less, to spend at least a year dealing with four or five neighbourhoods, developing models for comprehensive, integrated physical and social renewal and inter-agency cooperation. Even if the next parliamentary elections are three years away, the public will appreciate a good start on the housing issues. Grandiose promises will boomerang, no matter what the excuses or who gets the blame."

THE GOVERNMENT could try to save Project Renewal by tackling a smaller target. Instead of the 160 neighbourhoods that Begin first targeted for rehabilitation (after two years, local steering committees have been established in only five dozen neighbourhoods), efforts and

resources could be concentrated on only a dozen at first, and other rehabilitation projects shelved until the first round is completed or at least largely underway.

True, it sounds good when Eliezer Raphaeli, the Jewish Agency's coordinator for Project Renewal, rejects such a piecemeal approach because "there are young people in those neighbourhoods in trouble. They can't wait to be saved from drugs or poor education and put in a glass case until we're ready."

But the fact is that nothing will be completed in 160 or even 60 neighbourhoods in one go.

Many of the disadvantaged will have to wait — just as they have waited for the last 30 years. And it is much worse to raise their expectations only to have their hopes crash down on their heads.