

Israel's Urban Renewal Scheme Gets Underway

By Nahum Bedein

Perhaps one of the most ambitious operations ever taken on by the Israeli Government and the Jewish Agency is now underway. "Project Renewal," as it is appropriately termed, is an immense campaign to face-lift over 160 neglected and disadvantaged neighborhoods throughout Israel.

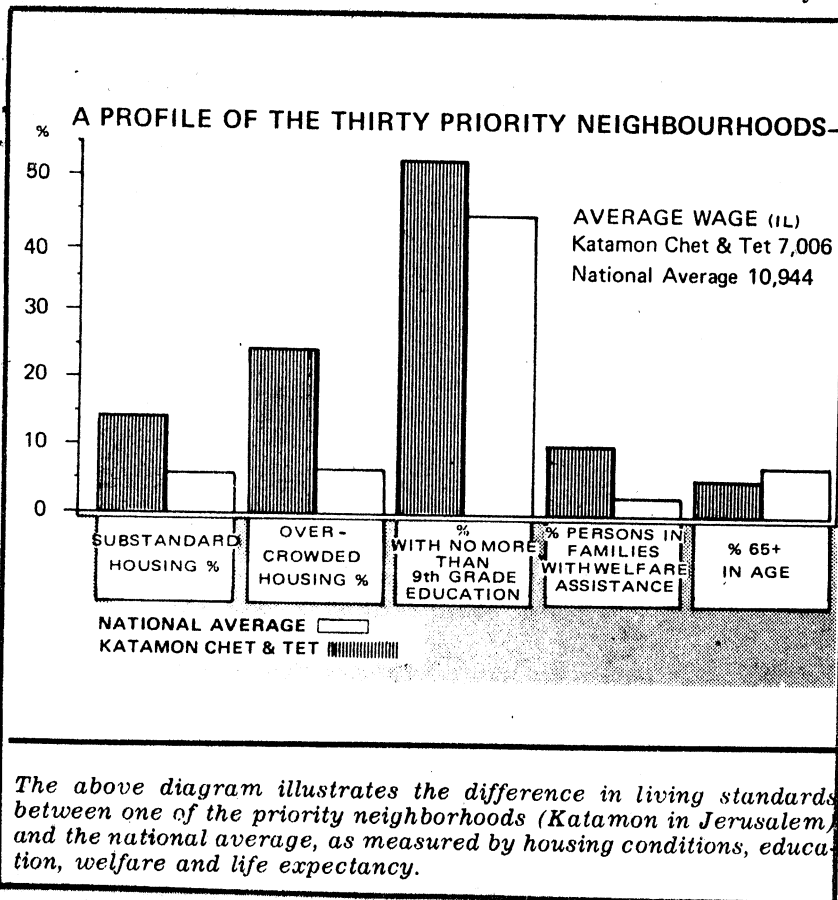
The initiator of the program was Prime Minister Menahem Begin who last June ('77) stated that "the poorer Jewish neighborhoods are a blight on Jewish consciences." More than 45,000 families dwell in these areas with two-thirds of the families consisting of four or more children. Mr. Begin called for the combining of all possible forces to eliminate this problem.

The approximate cost of the project will be 1.2 billion dollars which is to be raised within five to nine years. Half of the money will be funded by the

United Jewish Appeal (U.J.A.) and Keren Hayesod. The remainder will be provided by the Israeli Government by means of Israel Bonds and money previously allocated to different ministries.

Accordingly, "Project Renewal" is an extremely complex operation involving two of the biggest Government agencies (the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs), a number of Jewish Agency departments, municipal planners, and, of course, the leg-men who will actually be doing the rehabilitation.

Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Yadin has been appointed the coordinator of the "Inter-Ministerial Committee" which has been set up to oversee all aspects of the project. His main assistant is Dr. Daniel Shimshoni, professor of urban planning at Tel Aviv University. The ultimate goal of the committee is to achieve both the physical and social integration of the people who live in these neighborhoods. Until now, the ministries have worked only in-



frequently together. However, with the establishment of this campaign, an initial step has been taken in bringing about cooperation, instead of competition, between the different ministries. The committee will, of course, also be requesting the involvement of the residents of each area. This will undoubtedly lead to a new dimension of improved relations between the Government and citizens of Israel.

Adoption scheme

Initially, the U.J.A. and Keren Hayesod are raising 180 million dollars — 120 by the U.J.A. and 60 million by the Keren Hayesod — to begin the rehabilitation of the 30 slum neighborhoods. The money is being raised by means of an "adoption" system, whereby communities abroad will choose a neighborhood that will receive all of their funding. In this manner, each contributing community abroad will be able to focus its attention on that particular neighborhood and survey the improvements as they are put into effect.

Already, 13 neighborhoods have been "adopted" by communities abroad. Seven of these areas are in Jerusalem; for example, Los Angeles has adopted Musrara, Baltimore has adopted Ir Ganim. In Jerusalem, there has been an overall upswing of new housing developments since the Six-Day War, however, renewal of the deprived areas has not really occurred on a large scale until this time.

Speaking last month at a plenary session of the Jewish Agency Assembly, Labor and Social Affairs Minister Israel Katz stated that 250,000 Israelis tread on the border line of the disadvantaged. "We need comfortable flats to expand the human mind," Katz asserted.

A major aspect of the project will be allocated to these neighborhoods. Substantial amounts of money need to be provided for social services, according to Dr. Eliezer D. Jaffe, Senior Lecturer of Social Work at Hebrew University, and previous director of the Jerusalem municipality's bureau of social welfare. Jaffe has proposed that one division of the fundraisers (e.g., U.J.A. Women) will take upon themselves the raising of money for social services that are required in these neighborhoods.

There are a number of dangers inherent in "Project Renewal," Jaffe admitted. There could be internal splits in neighborhoods or major schisms breaking out between two or three different areas because of jealousy. "Neighborhoods, like people, have souls," Jaffe commented. The changes in each area must be very well thought out. Jaffe hopes that



Top, apartment block in the Musrara district of Jerusalem. Below, sketch by architect David Kroyancker showing additional rooms added on to front of building.

one neighborhood will view another areas' improvements as a positive model of urban renewal. The present problem though, Jaffe noted, is that there are no actual models of urban renewal in the country for these areas to look at.

Closer cooperation

The idea of neighborhood representation to the "Inter-ministerial Committee," Jaffe contended, is a "good catalyst for bringing neighborhoods together to be well organized and, in

As Jaffe and many others admit, the U.J.A. and Keren Hayesod do have a very tough road ahead to raise such huge sums of money. But, the concept of "adoption" of neighborhoods by the fundraising committees abroad will surely give a personal touch to the project and will hopefully bring about much closer relations and better understanding between Diaspora Jewry and Israel.

Overall, this will pressure Israelis into something which they have never done before on such a large scale — that is, work together.