

## Eliezer Jaffe Speaks On The "Other Israel"



Dr. Eliezer D. Jaffe, renowned sociologist and architect of Project Renewal, spoke about "the empty half of the glass."

by Robert Markovich

On Thursday night, March 29, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Koffman hosted an informative lecture and slide-show briefing on Project Renewal, given by Dr. Eliezer D. Jaffe, renowned sociologist and important architect of Project Renewal.

"You've probably heard a thousand speakers telling about the success of Israel," said Dr. Jaffe, "but tonight you have one talking about the empty half of the glass." The lecture centered around what Dr. Jaffe called the "serious socio-economic gap that threatens to erode Israel's cohesiveness," referring to the crucial

inequities between Israel's European-based Ashkenazim and its Sephardim of North African-Asian ancestry who comprise most of the 200,000 Israelis living in conditions of distress in 160 communities throughout Israel.

Project Renewal is a joint campaign between Israel and the people of the United

States to wipe out hard-core pockets of poverty in Israel.

According to Dr. Jaffe, the Sephardim "were at a triple disadvantage from the beginning: they came from Moslem countries which did not prepare them adequately for the Ashkenazi way of life; they were settled in outlying areas, cut off from the mainstream; and they did not have the professional facilities that were available to people in urban centers." Indeed, according to Dr. Jaffe, doctors, teachers, and professionals rarely went to the development towns and outlying districts, like the Musrara Quarter of Jerusalem or the Hatikva neighborhood of Tel Aviv, where as many as 80 percent of the people are on welfare. Thus, the people inhabiting these districts are often referred to as "the Forgotten Israel."

Dr. Jaffe stressed that the social gap is "not a process of predetermined discrimination," but stems from the fact that the

Sephardim were often the first to emigrate back to Israel after the War of Independence in 1948, "and were settled in places that had to be occupied at that time—the development and border towns." In contrast, the later waves of Ashkenazim from western countries, and especially from the Soviet Union today, have more influence over where they are settled, which Dr. Jaffe calls a product of Israel's industrial growth and its economic development: the Jewish Agency's capacity to expand, and the growing level of UJA contributions.

Yet as the earlier-settled Sephardim watch later waves of immigrants move into increasingly better housing facilities, Israelis face "a backlash and a boiling over approximately every two years after each war," said Dr. Jaffe, observing that after each war, "human expectations increase and when they are unmet, there is social ten-

sion."

Two years after the Sinai Campaign in 1956, there was a riot in Wadi Saleb, "a slum-gully outside Haifa; where Sephardim rushed into Haifa smashing windows and looting stores," writes Dr. Jaffe in his Project Renewal Briefing Paper, Division and Unity. Then two years after the Six Day War, another riot occurred in Musrara, a Sephardi slum-quarter in Jerusalem. Yet, according to Dr. Jaffe, few Americans are even aware of it.

According to Sara Koffman, the Arab name Musrara was kept because the inhabitants were too ashamed of it to give it an Israeli name. The plight of these Musrara dwellers and those of comparable settlements, such as the Asbestos Valley, was clarified by slides showing large families cramped together in one room, living in disease and squalor.

In 1971, a group of

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## *Eliezer Jaffe . .*

Sephardi kids from Musrara and Katamon formed into what came to be called the Black Panthers, hoping to be spokesmen for other poor Sephardi kids and their families. But according to Dr. Jaffe, the idea of "blacks" and "whites" in Israel "was threatening to the whole purpose of Israel's being—the in-gathering of exiles and coming together of the two diasporas."

As a result, Prime Minister Golda Meir set up a commission on disadvantaged youth, with then-director of the National Insurance Institute Dr. Israel Katz as chairman. Dr. Jaffe was one of 139 experts from various fields who produced a three volume report on the "social state" of Israeli society, which was "the first of its kind," according to Dr. Jaffe, and presaged Project Renewal.

The Katz report found that, while older Sephardim had suffered the consequences of being early settlers, there are numerous poor young Sephardi couples who could not and cannot get housing because of a 40 percent rise in the average cost of public housing between 1967 and 1972, and an average wage increase during the same period of only 20 percent, according to Dr. Jaffe.

Dr. Jaffe later founded the Association For the Rights of Large Families, a citizens' lobby to improve services and help shape policy concerning Israel's 100,000 large families of mostly Sephardim and poor, living in vastly over-crowded housing conditions. The lobby is known in Hebrew as "Zahavi", or "Our Gold," according to Dr. Jaffe, "because of the belief that our children are Israel's gold." The large families average 6-7 children, though some Sephardi families have as many as 11. Under Zahavi and under Project Renewal, such families would receive special benefits and incentives.

During the course of his lecture, Dr. Jaffe stressed that social welfare must include both new buildings and social services—"hardware and software," as he expressed it—"and until now," he said, "most of the money has gone into hardware." Dr. Jaffe suggested that at least one-third of all Project Renewal funds should include the provision of day-care and pre-school programs, increased pre-university preparatory programs, mortgages on reasonable terms for young couples, outreach programs for

youth, integration of Sephardim into urban schools, social work, psychological counseling, and programs to help the elderly.

Perhaps Dr. Jaffe's most important point was the need he stressed for the cooperation and partnership of both Sephardim and

Ashkenazim, which is essential in bringing about a socially unified Israel. "If nothing else gets carried out except the involvement of (the Sephardim community) residents, that's a blessing," said Dr. Jaffe.

In a larger monetary sense, Project Renewal comprises a unified effort by Israelis and Americans, with each side "giving 50 percent," said Dr. Jaffe. Though Dr. Jaffe stated that he came "as a teacher and not a fund-raiser," many of those present saw the need to match their annual federation donation with one

toward Project Renewal, payable over five years, and some even doubled their previous donations. He ended on the note that Project Renewal was "a partnership, not charity—a twining, so that people might work together."

Dr. Jaffe is a graduate of Yeshiva University in NY, Ohio University, and Case-Western Reserve University, where he received a Doctorate in Social Work (D.S.W.) in 1960. He is presently a senior lecturer at the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.