

## WHAT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE?

*(A Plea for Closer Relations Between Rabbis and Social Workers)*

BY EDWARD L. ISRAEL

FOR many years rabbis and social workers have shared a more or less mutual lack of enthusiasm for the respective offices of each other. This statement is one of those heresies which bring forth vehement condemnation from our polite society as embodied in the respectable leadership of our Jewish communities. It is just one of those situations like the widespread practical polygamy. We know it exists but we do not talk about it.

This lack of complete understanding between rabbi and social worker *ought* to be talked about, because there are not two groups in American Jewish life that should be more closely allied. The reasons for misunderstanding have been numerous. Many social workers have looked upon old-fashioned rabbis as unscientific dolts and upon modern social pulpитеers as publicity seeking charlatans. On the other hand, many old-fashioned rabbis regard social workers as mercenary and irreligious inhumanitarians, while many a modern socially minded rabbi looks upon most social workers as an over-professionalized lot who apply patch work plasters to a festering social organism because they have not the courage to court the disfavor of rich contributors to charities by getting down to the bottom

of the reasons for our social evils.

Some of these accusations and counter accusations may have in them a vestige of at least an appearance of truth. It is true that too often the rabbinate has failed to appreciate the value or spirit of modern case work methods and has imagined the solution of social ills to rest somewhat magically in the sanctimonious mouthing of Biblical texts. It is also true that many social workers are far from being socially minded, and fail miserably in giving support to those great social movements which strike more fundamentally at the roots of social ills than all the apparatus of case work philanthropy. The enlightened leadership of the rabbinate is recognizing the tragedy of the former fact. The enlightened leadership in social service is recognizing the latter. The point of view of these two progressive groups is strongly similar. There is an excellent opportunity for concerted effort among them if only some of these ancient prejudices can be obliterated by better understanding.

The state of mind and activity of the rabbinical group which demonstrates the modern socialized conscience is chiefly exemplified in the work of the Commission on Social Justice of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. The Commis-

sion is entering more and more deeply into the fundamental problems that are agitating our industrial and social life; and more and more, the modern liberal rabbi is finding the solution to the demands of a socialized religious conscience in the same great reform movements which engross so many of our Jewish social workers. Side by side, yet with uncorrelated effort, they are striving toward the same end.

THE beginnings of this zeal for social justice in the liberal American rabbinate go back unofficially to the very beginnings of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. There, the social messages of the prophets of Israel are emphasized again and again, due largely to the tendency of Reform Judaism to place greater stress on the Biblical writings rather than upon the formalistic aspects of our faith. The first concrete evidence of support of social legislation by the Conference came in 1908, when the adoption of the national Child Labor amendment was advocated. Activity along this line had already taken on fair proportions in Protestant and Catholic groups. Amid this general interest, a Committee on Synagog and Labor was appointed.

The difficulty with much of this early activity as represented by this committee and those who supported it was that the main zeal was to bring the working man back to the synagogue, if ever he had been there in modern times. The interest in social justice was, we may say, mercenary—not so much an expression of indignation at industrial social wrong as an effort to win the

support and the interest of the working man in the synagogue by showing an interest in his problems. This utilitarian attitude failed of its purpose as it always fails. The sympathy of the workers toward the Orthodox synagogue today is not increased by the Orthodox advocacy of a five-day week, because the workers look upon that advocacy as purely a selfish desire to have an opportunity to force the laborer to attend *shul* and not a desire to grant him adequate leisure. It must be stated in passing that the philosophy of the present Commission on Social Justice of the Central Conference of American Rabbis is entirely different. It is interested in social justice regardless of saving the worker's soul for synagogue membership. It will defend the civil, industrial, and social rights of the avowed atheist with as much zeal as those of the most devout Temple member.

After several years of dilatory tactics and wordy reports which seemed never to get down to the very roots of the problem, the Central Conference of American Rabbis adopted in Chicago in 1918 its first declaration of principles of social justice. Significantly identified with this first concrete act was the late Horace J. Wolf, of Rochester, New York. The struggle which he led was not an easy one. The reactionary members of the Conference fought every move bitterly. The almost unanimous attitude on social problems which now prevails among the members of the Rabbinical Conference by no means characterized the membership in the days when Rabbi Wolf led his fight. The last ten years have been marked by a profound increase in

social consciousness in our liberal American rabbinate.

The present program of social justice was adopted in Chicago in 1928. It has been declared by many leaders in the field, both religious and secular, to be one of the finest and most advanced expressions of its kind. It has been distributed among Reform Jewry and many rabbis preach on some aspect of it at every Holy Day season. In fact, a special Holy Day Social Justice Message has become part of the regular program of the Commission. The message of this year emphasized the rights of collective bargaining, the moral responsibility of the public in general and investors in particular to concern themselves with the ethics of economic life, a plea for justice in the Mooney-Billings case, and the appeal for a complete investigation and revision of the textile industry. This Chicago program of 1928, upon which all the activity is based, cannot be quoted in full within the confines of a brief article. A greatly abbreviated form of it is as follows:

Deriving our inspiration for social justice from the teachings of the prophets of Israel and the great traditions of our faith, and applying these teachings concretely to the economic and social problems of today, we, the Central Conference of American Rabbis make this declaration of social principles:

*I. The Duty of Social Mindedness.* Every worthy member of society must have an intelligent attitude towards social and industrial problems. Investors, in particular, must concern themselves regarding the ethical administration of the industries from which they derive dividends.

*II. The Distribution and Responsibilities of Wealth.* Unbridled monopoly and unrestricted material exploitation must be prevented. Inequalities of wealth are

morally unjustifiable in the midst of poverty and want due to exploitation.

*III. Industrial Democracy.* Dictatorship of any class in industry is autocracy. Worker, employer and investor must share their inalienable rights in a finer industrial democracy.

*IV. The Sacredness of the Individual Personality.* Our machine age must not lose sight of the paramount spiritual dignity of the individual. Machinery and industry exist for man and not man for them.

*V. The Rights of Organization.* Employees as well as employers have the same rights of organization. Workers must be allowed to bargain collectively through such honorable means as they may choose.

*VI. The Fundamental Rights of Society.* Contribution to the common good and not the selfish service of a class must be recognized by all industrial groups as paramount.

*VII. Arbitration of Industrial Disputes.* Arbitration and not conflict is the ethical method of settling industrial disputes. Moral responsibility for evils of industrial conflict rests with the group failing to observe this principle.

*VIII. The Rights to a Living Wage.* A living wage, protective of old age, illness or disability, as well as livable, is the first charge on industry. No business can attempt to maintain or further itself by beating down standards of living.

*IX. Unemployment.* Present day economic ills make the unemployment problem exceedingly vital. We endorse plans for national interlocking employment agencies, unemployment reserve funds, stabilization of employment in periods of depression by part time work, and unemployment insurance, as essential steps in alleviating the physical and moral distress of this evil.

*X. Social Insurance.* We urge adoption and expansion of old age pensions, mothers' pensions, workers' health and accident insurance, and state-directed rehabilitation of industrial cripples.

*XI. Hours of Labor and Days of Rest.* We support the reduction of hours of labor to the lowest possible point consistent with physical, mental, and moral good, with an unqualified maximum of eight hours per

day, and with a five-day week wherever possible.

*XII. Women in Industry.* We advocate special regard for the health and safety of women in industry and for their equal pay with men for equal work.

*XIII. Child Labor.* We oppose child labor in any and all forms and ask for proper and immediate state or federal legislation.

*XIV. Prisons and Penal Laws.* Society's right to self-protection implies moral obligation to remove, wherever possible, causes of crime and to make punishment corrective in its spirit rather than retributive.

*XV. Lynching.* We decry lynching both as to the deed itself and the moral attitude which actuates or condones it.

*XVI. Civil Liberties.* We urge unqualified adherence to the constitutional rights of freedom of speech, press, and peaceable assemblage. We maintain the right and duty of a free pulpit. We condemn suppression of constitutional freedom by misuses of the federal injunction.

*XVII. Social Justice in International Relations.* We believe that nations ought to outlaw war. We oppose economic imperialism, especially interference by force of arms with the autonomy of other nations to further claims of foreign investors in those lands. We condemn foreign investors who refuse to abide by the laws of the land in which the investment is made. We believe a popular referendum with absolutely free speech and press ought precede any declaration of war. We advocate an international conference to prevent private manufacture of arms. We oppose compulsory military training in schools and colleges. We advocate for our educational system the extolling of the virtues of peace rather than of those of war.

ON THE basis of this development culminating in the above program, and at times, in co-operation with national Protestant and Catholic groups interested in social problems, the Social Justice Commission of the Central Conference of American Rabbis has entered into many investiga-

tions of an economic and social nature. Chief among these of recent date was the Western Maryland Railroad situation, on which a rather voluminous report was published. This report has been proclaimed by many leaders in the social and economic fields as a significant contribution to the literature of industrial relations. Together with the Protestant group, there was made in 1928 an investigation of the full-fashioned hosiery industry. There has not been a significant industrial struggle in the past few years in which the Social Justice Commission of the Central Conference of American Rabbis has not played some part, endeavoring to bring peace into a discordant situation, or at least to help toward that end by making clear the fundamental issues. The efforts of Pullman porters to organize into a union, the textile difficulties both in New England and the South, and the struggle in the coal fields of Pennsylvania, have all come within the purview of the Commission. In the battles against oppression in the courts, the Commission has declared itself officially with regard to the case of Mooney and Billings, and is at the present time actively engaged in an investigation of the Armistice Day outbreak of several years ago in Centralia, Washington, through which investigation it is hoped to bring belated justice into an atrocious situation.

Returning to the strain in which we began this article, we recount an action of the most recent convention of the Conference, which surely must convince every enlightened socially minded person of the courage with which the modern liberal rabbis are willing to face

social problems. At the meeting held in Detroit last summer, the following action was unanimously taken on the subject of birth control:

"Recognizing the need of exercising great caution in dealing with the delicate and complicated problem of birth regulation in view of the widespread dissolution of the old sanctions affecting the institution of marriage and the ties of family life; earnestly desiring to guard against playing into the hands of those who would undermine the dignity and sanctity of these precious bonds through reckless notions and practices having to do with sex relations; especially mindful of the noble tradition obtaining among the Jewish people with respect to the holiness and the crucial importance of domestic relations; but realizing at the same time the many serious evils caused by uncontrolled parenthood among those who lack the prerequisites of health and a reasonable measure of economic resources and intelligence to give to their children the heritage to which they are entitled;

"We, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, urge the recognition of the importance of the control of parenthood as one of the methods of coping with social problems;

"We furthermore recommend to the executive board of the C. C. A. R. that a portion of next year's program be devoted to one or more papers on this subject."

As far as we know, this is the first time in the history of organized religion, that a group of religious leaders has been willing to face, unafraid, this fundamental problem of our social life. It surely must dispel much of the skepticism with which many social workers have

been accustomed to regard the social co-operation of the pulpit.

Social workers cannot be construed to be inherently socially minded any more than can rabbis. There is a sort of plus quality which marks the true adherent of social justice in each of these groups. The great contribution of the Jew to the social idealism of his own group as well as to the community at large is going to be made through the ability of the truly socially minded rabbi and social worker to attain a closer bond of understanding and co-operation and to labor together for social reform and a keener community social conscience. That this social idealism of the rabbis is being widely recognized by secular and religious groups of all kinds is attested to by the numerous lines of communication established by the Commission during the past few years and by the widespread publicity which this work has received in social and labor journals. There are so many problems that Jewish life in America must solve for itself that it is rather sad that a closer official contact has not yet been reached between the most enlightened rabbinical and lay social service forces. The way is open intellectually and spiritually. It will come through contacts that will dispel ignorance and misunderstanding. Its coming will mean a new era in American Jewish life, a new opportunity for the Jew to make additional ethical contributions to the world.

## THE JEWISH AGENCY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR AMERICAN JEWISH LIFE\*

BY DR. MAURICE B. HEXTER

IN THE invitation to present this paper, the chairman of the Program Committee indicated that it was the intention of the Conference this year to emphasize more than has been the case in the past the general implications for Jewish social work of the various national and world wide movements. That is a more difficult task than would have been a mere description of the work of experts and of the discussions of the Commission about the problems in Palestine and the structure of the Jewish Agency. It is not a misplaced gesture that this presentation of the implications of the Jewish Agency occurs at our opening session, for no one single force has been in recent years projected which is more pregnant with possibilities for, and which will have as important repercussions upon, American Jewish social work as the Jewish Agency which is practically *fait accompli*. For Palestine, whatever one may say of it, occupies the center of the Jewish stage. It is naturally a great pleasure to be able to approach the threshold of knowledge amongst largely professional colleagues. There, one need not—indeed one may not—indulge in vague generalities, or in empty platitudes. There one must hew to the line of fact and reality. I shall avoid any discussion of the merits of the controversy concerning the desirability of the Jewish Agency from the standpoint of Zionist ideology. I omit, too, any allusion to the question whether

Great Britain did or did not suggest this extension. I shall also pass over any possible effects which the Jewish Agency may in the future have for both the World Zionist Organization and the Zionist Organization of America. I shall assume these controversial though very interesting problems to be beyond the ambit of my assignment.

Now prophecy is alluring. Comparatively, it is not even a hazardous occupation if the denouement is sufficiently postponed. It is not, however, with dim distant eras with which we are asked to deal. While long time trends are statistically attractive, as social engineers we need a view of shorter ranges. It is with the decade or two just ahead with which we shall concern ourselves. Predictions, of course, notoriously reflect one's personal beliefs: they are, in other words, highly subjective. In addition to this subjective element, they are usually based upon a number of axioms or unstated assumptions. Neither of these two troublesome dilemmas may be entirely escaped. Their dangers may however be substantially minimized through their portrayal. Before discussing the subjective element in this, my personal, prediction I present my assumptions and axioms which are mainly these:

1. That both partners to the agreement are in earnest. My work with the Commission, the contacts therein engendered and the character of the men involved easily demonstrate the fact that this is not so much an assumption

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