## Leisure Time Problems of the Jewish Community

## Panel Discussion

By Philip Geliebter

Educational Director, The Workmen's Circle, New York City

similar to the education for children and adolescents. It either gives knowledge of certain facts and information or it prepares to meet the problems in life through a trade or profession. However, education for the sake of education is not sufficient for those adults who are workers or live by "gainful occupation." Besides information and knowledge they are interested or should be interested in such education which has for its purpose the bringing about of a change in the economic structure of society.

The change brought about by the "New Deal" has given shorter hours to many workers in many industries. The few shorter hours have created a little leisure time, but have not created a leisure mind. Despite the temporary gains through the NRA, despite the few leisure hours, the worker in the needle industries has not a leisure mind. His employment is still seasonal, and with all the codes his earnings are still as unstable as the weather. When one is under the stress of economic insecurity one's mind is restless. Our education should be more adapted to the restless mind of the average man and woman of our age than to the leisure time. The leisure time disappears practically when there is no "leisure mind."

In the Workmen's Circle we always followed this philosophy in the educational work for adults, as well as in the Tewish educational program of the Workmen's Circle schools for children. We were never contented with mere Iewish educational activities. We have always considered that Jewish education, as well as general education, must have a social background. In cultivating an interest in Jewish life and Jewish problems, in cultivating the knowledge of the Yiddish language and its literature, we have simultaneously cultivated the spirit of social-mindedness. While acquainting the children, as well as the adults, with important epochs of Jewish history, with contemporary Jewish writers and Jewish literature, we have not

HE education for adults is in many respects neglected to acquaint them with the economic, political and social problems of today, prompting them to think of a brighter future, a brighter morrow. Modern Jewish education should go hand-in-hand with economic and political education. The Jewish prophets were the fore-runners in this field of education.

In our Jewish educational work we never forget that the Jews as minority nationals are a bi-lingual people. Although there are no definite data, it is estimated that about two-thirds of the over four million Iews in the United States speak or understand Yiddish. The Yiddish language is an important medium which serves as a connecting cultural link between the Iews throughout the world. Jewish education should as far as possible be carried on in the spoken language of the mass of Jewish people-in Yiddish. The American-born Jew should have a knowledge of the Yiddish language which would not only bring him into closer contact with his fellow-Jews, but would also shorten the gap between him and his foreignborn relatives and friends. Someone said that American life and American civilization are about six centuries ahead of the life and civilization of the average Tewish immigrant. Our Tewish education must fill this gap from both ends: acquaint the immigrant Jewish population with the history, life and culture of America, and acquaint the American-born Jew with the history, life, culture and language of his people.

In order to unite all Jewish elements in educational activities we must omit religion from Jewish education for children and adults. In this respect we should follow the system of the American public school through which people of all nationalities, faiths and races become culturally united. Religious education should be severed from Jewish education. Religious education should be left to religious institutions.

The Workmen's Circle has long ago adopted a program of secular Jewish education. This labor organization, with its limited appropriations, has much nearer approached the spirit and tradition of American public education than many richer organizations. and institutions carrying on Jewish educational work.

A glance at the educational activities of the Workmen's Circle will illustrate the aim and spirit of our work:

- 1. At the 103 Jewish Workmen's Circle schools the children are taught the Yiddish language, Yiddish literature, Jewish history, history of the Jewish and general labor movement, biographies of great menchampions of human liberty. The pupils carry on debates among themselves on current events. By coming in contact with labor and labor organizations they begin to appreciate the importance of labor and its creative power.
- 2. Over 100 open forums are conducted by Workmen's Circle organizations throughout the United States and Canada. Although Jewish problems and Jewish literary questions are discussed the main object of these open forums is to broaden the aspect of the auditors on economic, political and social problems.
- 3. Writers' Evenings—These are literary evenings arranged for the purpose of acquainting the public with the life and works of great writers in Jewish and world literature. The program of these evenings consists of a lecture on the author's work; a one-act play by the author or a dramatization of his most characteristic literary creation; a reading or recitation of the writer's work given by a prominent Jewish artist; folk-songs, etc.
- 4. Concert and Little Theater tours—A small group of artists travel under the auspices of the Educational stance and spirit, and international in its scope and Department and give concerts in the remotest cities aim.

and towns, bringing to the audience literary Jewish entertainment, Jewish music, Jewish folk-lore, etc.

- 5. Lecture Tours—A few lecture tours are arranged every winter. The lecturers go as far as Pacific coast and the northern part of Canada.
- 6. Trips to Museums-Every winter a series of lectures is arranged in the New York Museums. These lectures are given by a prominent Tewish artist who takes the visitors to various departments explaining the work and characteristics of the respective department. These trips help to cultivate the love and appreciation of art.
- 7. The Workmen's Circle has seven camps in the United States and Canada where educational activities in Yiddish and English are carried on among children and adults.

If we ask ourselves: What should Jewish education be attempting to do?—the answer should be: Jewish adult education should prepare us for the future of Jewish life. History, especially modern history, demonstrates that the economic and political life of the Jews is more safe and more secure under a democracy, under a labor and socialist government, than under autocracy, under a fascist regime. Jewish education should therefore have for its goal to make the Jewish people realize the importance of identifying their economic and political security with the hopes and aspirations of the organized labor and socialist movement, of all progressive and democratic forces

Jewish education should be national in form, sub-

By Dr. Jacob S. Golub Bureau of Jewish Education, Cincinnati

E frequently hear it said that the NRA has offer so-called cultural programs. If the entire comcational and recreational agencies will be called upon to employ usefully. I fear that we have anticipated the NRA and have already programmed the extra free hours long in advance of their liberation. Our institutions are extremely alert. Especially in the field of adult education and more particularly in adult Jewish education our communities overflow with opportunity. The educational agencies, the centres, synagogues and even the membership organizations all

created a new vast leisure which the edu- munity does not avail itself of them; if, as is the case, our cultural programs attract the ladies mainly, we are at least communally absolved.

But while we are culturally strong on quantity, we are not as confident of our quality. With notable exceptions of schools conducted under communal or near communal auspices and of courses offered for recognized academic credit, our educational effort is too often distressingly elementary, oversimplified and not infrequently slightly vulgarized. We are too literally directing ourselves toward the running reader and the sampling student.

Why do our educational efforts strike such a hollow note and why are we, supposedly intelligent men and women, content with such superficiality? The reason is that we fail to apply the same educational criteria to the teaching of adults that we presumably employ in the teaching of children. We have long granted, at least theoretically, that the education of children must aim at molding conduct. Education must result in desirable types of behavior toward which the teacher as the maturer guide must direct his younger charges. Children have to learn so many simple everyday habits that we, as a rule, feel equal to the task, although it generally proves more formidable than we care to admit. To guide adults, however, and to assume to direct their conduct seems over-daring. Unfortunately, we are only partially correct. There are adults who have done their own thinking, who have found their direction. But these, too often keep aloof from our institutions. Because we do not represent a positive drive or tendency, we attract only the weak and the less venturesome.

Adult education is almost aboriginal with us Jews. We had a system of adult schools before we had schools for children, since every father was presumed to be teacher of his own children and the community provided training for the teachers. But this widespread system developed because our parents knew the ends that they sought and recognized the aid which knowledge could afford them. Practically every adult Iew, therefore, was a student, and the house of study was the central institution. Today we are at a loss for a point of view. We conduct educational department stores, as it were, with wide offerings, from which the customer may have his pick. Our sole concern is to make certain of enough activity to hide the underlying vacuity.

The Jew has been proverbially known for his earnestness in attempting to unite ideals and deed. There is sufficient idealism in Jewish life and sufficient problems toward which to direct this idealism. Our educational program might well be planned with these

Specifically, I shall mention only two aspects of this idealism. It is platitudinous to rehearse the fact that we are confronted by world economic prostration. Whatever our personal political views may be, there are at least certain facts which every mature adult should possess, even if he would draw his own conclusions. We need not determine what type of political action any one should pursue, but we should see to it that it be intelligent.

Even more urgently we are confronted with our age-old Iewish problem. Not merely must we relieve the Jewish mentality from its fear and persecution complex, but we must study the problem of the Jew intelligently in its long historic manifestations, in order to move toward some solution. Too largely the attempt at solving the Jewish problem has been left to specialized organizations and individuals. That must become the scope of our adult study.

If our adult education is to be vitalized, it cannot be left to the vagaries of every small institution, but it must be planned on a community scale. Our normal audience is too small to call forth spontaneous creativity and the lure of the American market is too great for the truly creative artists. The combined community resources will be required to secure the needed novel, drama, music and problem literature which will express our needs.

Above all we must create a serious student attitude, even if at the outset the group will be small. We must allow the true education to strike root; in time it will bear fruit.

## By Mary G. Schonberg

Executive Secretary, National Council of Jewish Women, New York City

ish community from the point of view of the Jewish woman, it seems obvious that my contribution to this subject should be a discussion of the leisure time needs of the Jewish woman as a member of the Jewish Community.

We are not here concerned with the Jewish woman of education and culture who participates in movements

N discussing the leisure time program of the Jew- of social and political reform, and in various forms of constructive social service; the woman who works on committees and enjoys them, reads current serious magazines and good books, subscribes to university courses and accepts as a citizen her social and civic responsibilities. I think we are concerned with the middle-class homemaker or housewife who is not engaged in any gainful occupation or who does not assist her husband in his business. We are certainly not concerned with the wives of small wage earners to whom the word "leisure" is almost unknown, nor are we concerned with the spare time of the single professional or business woman whose leisure hours of leisure time and her habits of thinking and acting are only too few for the things she would like to do.

The middle-class housewife or homemaker attends to the routine duties of her household, seeks to beautify her home and make it more comfortable, or instructs her servants to do so. The rest of the time this woman seeks "to kill" in pleasant diversion in order to escape boredom.

The average woman in this group has a choice as to how she shall pass her leisure time. What does she do with it? She plays bridge, goes to the movies, goes shopping and bargain-hunting, listens to the radio, visits and engages in a few other social amenities.

I don't mean to imply that the woman with leisure time must always spend it in serious pursuits, in organization work, and in study. There are countless opportunities for self-expression in the fields of social service, art, music, literature, development of skill in the building up of health, and for engaging in activities of definite spiritual value. These activities can bring much satisfaction to the individual and incidentally benefit mankind.

These middle-class women to whom I refer refuse to face the problems of a changing world. Even when this type of woman becomes interested in the world about her and some of its great needs, she spends her leisure time in giving charity. She has no idea of the larger concept of social justice. She cannot conceive of the importance of eliminating the need for charity, feeling only that she must relieve distress. She seeks frequently personal prestige and recognition for her philanthropic efforts.

There are no objections to the activities of the middle-class housewife and homemaker to beautify her home, but unfortunately the result of her efforts is frequently anything but satisfying. If we could teach the average middle-class woman the simple rudi-

tics and good taste, we might by the same token instill in her a desire to express herself in other constructive ways.

If the average adult woman has failed in her use cannot be changed, she at least owes her children the opportunities which she herself has passed up or neglected.

Education must be the guiding principle for the woman of the leisure class whether she is Iew or Gentile. Only by so doing can she make herself a worthy member of her family and community. The Iewish middle-class woman has a vital role to play. Among other things, she must learn the art of contemplation and the art of thinking as an individual, and not simply to repeat the thoughts of the other members of her household. She must develop hobbies that will bring her and her family pleasure and satisfaction. She must learn the importance of developing recreational and educational activities within family group in the home. She must seek to plan for activities that will keep the family group interested and happy and not continuously be finding ways of disposing of the members of her family group so as to give her more time for idle and listless pursuits. She must learn her responsibility in developing the mind and character of her children and not leave that responsibility to the schools, no matter how good to which she sends her children.

In the new housing developments planned for the moderate and low-income families, the leaders are pointing the way to the proper use of leisure time for all members of the family. Many of these projects might well be stimulated for the middle-class Jewish home.

Large National Jewish women's organizations. such as the one which I represent offer opportunities in adult education in a variety of fields, in self-expression and personal development, and in many spiritually enriching experiences.

There are, of course, other ways that the leisure time of thousands of Jewish women can be enlisted which will make them an asset to their families and to their ments of homemaking and give her a sense of aesthe- homes and which will be productive of much social good.

> By John Slawson Executive Director, Jewish Board of Guardians, New York City

HE National Recovery Administration program ty-six hours, although of course many violations of

has resulted in the reduction in hours of labor, codes have been noted. Nevertheless, the trend is in the average for the entire country being around thir- the direction of reduction of hours of employment.

In so far as youth is concerned, it is reported that the NRA program has reduced unemployment among youth to a much lesser extent than among the adult population, there being about four million unemployed under twenty-four years of age and one-half million under twenty. In certain regions, the ratio of unemployed among the youth has been reported as being twice as much as among the remainder of the population. The question of migratory youth is also a matter of serious concern. Demoralization due to inactivity is to be expected, of course.

The discrimination among the Jewish group is especially in evidence in those occupations in which the Jew expresses one of his strongest drives namely. those embracing intellectual activity. The field of academics and most of the professions are, or will soon be, practically closed to him,

In the evolving leisure time program of the Jew in America, the following important factors should lack of expression of some special pre-disposition for be taken into consideration:

Increased leisure time.

The curbing of self-expression, particularly in the realm of intellectual pursuits as a result of discrimination.

Increased mechanization resulting from the

NRA program with the consequent loss of joy of workmanship which needs to be replaced by satisfactions obtainable elsewhere than on the job itself.

The inclusion of content relating to Jewish leisure time program that will make possible intellectual and emotional orientation of oneself as a member of a minority group in the American scene, with the resultant inner security that comes from such orientation.

The leisure time program of the future should stress the creative activity type of program which would make available avenues for creative expression increasingly reduced in industry as the mechanization process is accelerated; to the lew this emphasis on creative pursuits will tend to offset the frustration that comes from the curbing of activity related to the intellectual drive of the Jewish people.

Personality disturbances are known to result from a specific functional interest. The leisure time program must therefore concern itself in a large measure with a varied and creative content that will offset the detrimental effects of mechanization, monotony, routinization, the general increased leisure, and vocational discrimination.

By MAURICE TAYLOR Jewish Family Welfare Association, Boston

HE problem of leisure time of the Jewish community is of material interest to the Jewish family welfare agency. This has been accentuated by the conditions arising out of the depression. Family relationships have been complicated due to the enforced leisure of wage-earners not only because of the absence of earnings which have supported the family's leisure but also because of the presence in the home of breadwinners when otherwise they would have been away working. This presence has made the housewives' problem more difficult by placing an added strain on family relationships. The care of the household and children and all the problems incident thereto have not been eased by the additional presence of idle grown-ups whose temper and helpfulness under such circumstances are generally not of the best.

Family welfare agencies in their budgeting of relief families have in a large measure failed to deal either at all or at best but inadequately with the recreational needs. Where provided for it has gen-

erally been done on the basis of a few cents per person in the family. This, of course, provides, if at all, only for the commercial recreation of the members. The big void which exists is in the development of a suitable non-commercial recreational program of sufficient quality and quantity to substitute for and compete with the commercial type. The problems of family agencies arising out of delinquency due to improper use of leisure time are well known and need no com-

The ability of the family agency to cope with the enforced leisure of its clients has been made difficult due to a general lack of provision on the part of the community of necessary funds due to failure to understand the value and need of additional recreational facilities during a period when people are without the normal opportunities for using the greater part of the day in work-time activities.

There has been too little getting together between family agencies and recreational agencies to meet

common problems, and that constitutes one of our prives them of an opportunity to work when they are greatest needs. It can be attempted even though no more money may become available for either type of service. Family agencies should give consideration to the use of enforced leisure through development or taking advantage of adult vocational and educational opportunities. This problem is not an easy one even where such opportunities exist because of the lack of zest on the part of unemployed persons, who are primarily beset with their economic problems, to participate in such program. People who are employed and a recreational program under its own auspices and who seek opportunity for advancement are more may yet find possibility of development in other places, willing to give the additional time in the evenings to self-development than those who are weighed down seeking new avenues of service due to the assumption with the degrading feelings of inability to support of a large share of their relief responsibilities by the themselves, bitterness against a system which de-

physically and mentally able to, and the drab outlook of an insecure future.

Where community facilities for recreation are lacking, it is the responsibility of the family welfare agency to attempt to stimulate the creation of such opportunities by other agencies, or failing that to conduct them as far as may be on their own account. The program of the Jewish Family Welfare Association of Boston over many years combining family case work particularly in these days when family agencies are government.