

Seventy-Fourth Annual Meeting

National Conference of Jewish Communal Service

Montreal, Canada, May 28-31, 1972

President's Opening Comments, IRVING GREENBERG

Ladies and gentlemen, friends, members of the Conference. I assume that you all expect an inventory of what has happened this year from me. The inventory, I will have to leave to Matt Penn.

In leaving the office of President, I feel an obligation to let you know that there has been some improvement in the conditions of the Conference. I feel also obliged to tell you what I think still needs to be done and how in my opinion it should be done. First, let me say that the improvement this year over last was primarily due to the activity of our leadership on the executive committee and on the other committees most of whom were newly appointed this last year. The improvements in the conference were largely due to Matthew Penn's zeal, doggedness, great energy and conviction in the Conference. Of course, he was abetted by the office staff and especially Shirley Youngerman. As I listened to members, friends and associates of the Conference, I have had the feeling this year that there has been a greater excitement, a greater interest, and a greater commitment to the ideals of the Conference itself. I sense that most people are experiencing increased commitment to Jewish life and they in turn are more cognizant of the connection between the Conference and the universal Jewish community.

When I agreed to accept a second term of presidency, I was reminded of the story told about the prisoner who had just been convicted of two murders. In

sentencing him, the judge gave him a life time sentence for each murder to run consecutively. The judge asked the prisoner if he had anything to say, to which he replied, "Your honor can you tell me how I can serve two life sentences consecutively?" The judge looked at him carefully and said, "Try." All I can say is that I also have tried.

The great disappointment for me this year, as it was last year, was that we could not get any closer to the culmination of the Federation of Associated Groups. It was evident that there would be no success in pursuing the Federation idea. I realize the poignancy of my quest, but also realize that it was doomed to failure. Especially, when in all seriousness one day, a good friend of mine, trying to reassure me, said, "Irv, I think the solution will come when the Conference has faced its problem and solved it." I decided at that point that this was a lost cause. I felt that embarking instead on chapter development might produce the same result eventually, that of an organization of Jewish communal workers. Instead of starting from the top and working down, we would now work from the bottom up. Under the chairmanship of Matthew Elson, the chapter development committee has gotten under way and I am happy to report that while it is a slow process it appears to be the more correct direction and I am more sanguine about the possibility of a Jewish communal workers association coming to pass than ever before.

Our finances this year are not too good.

Next year we expect them to be in better shape. Partially because of the increase in dues, partially because of the increase in membership and partially because of our change in the fiscal bookkeeping system. In reading our fiscal report, this year, I am reminded of the piece in one of the newspapers in India, in which it was stated that the chairman of India's railway estimates, and I quote, "The government-run rail lines lose twelve million dollars in revenue annually, as a result of people sneaking aboard the trains and riding without tickets." Considering that there are people who come to this Conference and do not pay the registration fee, and considering how many people throughout the country are not members of the Conference itself, and should be, I am pleasantly surprised to see how well we are doing financially. Perhaps our eventual fiscal success will be based upon support by agencies such as the Federations, functional agencies and national organizations.

But in talking about a sense of improvement, I must bring to your attention something of which I am very proud. For quite a while I had been under the impression that the National Conference did not make any real contribution to Jewish life, that at best we were talking only to ourselves, that in contrast to the Council of Jewish Federations and the Jewish Welfare Board, to mention only two of the national organizations related to Jewish life, we were low man on the totem pole. Therefore, I am pleased to report to you that in the 75th anniversary issue of the *Forward*, which appeared last week, in the English section, there were feature articles contributed, I assume on the invitation of the *Forward*, by three of our former Presidents—Jacob Zukerman, Judah Shapiro and Judah Pilch. None of them was identified as ever having had anything to do with the National Conference of Jewish Commu-

nal Service, but at least I knew. This is not to say that I expect to be invited to write an article for the 100th anniversary of the *Forward*, but at least it gave me comfort to know that ex-Presidents of this Conference do find a niche for themselves in Jewish life—and a large number of them have done so. Another improvement. . . .

Those of you who have studied this annual meeting's program must admit that it offers much more in the way of the content and substance of that which is "Jewish" and "Communal" agencies—more than ever before. Carmi Schwartz must be given special recognition for the tremendous work and positive results of the program committee this year. It all hangs together and is related to the title of our opening general session, "The emerging agenda for Jewish Communal Life." It makes a great deal of sense to me and I am sure to the rest of you. It certainly is not like the announcement in one of our local papers describing the fair run by one of our Jewish agencies, which obviously was attempting to be ecumenical. The newspaper reported the following, "The fair presented demonstrations of Mexican and Indian dancing, a Japanese suicide ritual and a Passover Seder." I feel that with the excitement and interest that have been generated, with the increase in attendance of young people, with the increased willingness of Federation heads, our own peers and colleagues to increase their support of the Conference, with the reactivation of Jewish communal spirit for individuals, as well as within organizations, it is just possible that we have turned a corner and taken our rightful place in Jewish community life throughout the United States and Canada.

I believe, and would only want others to believe, that Jewish communal service as expressed by the daily tasks of Jewish communal workers is as important as the

Temple, the Synagogue, and the Jewish school.

As I leave the Presidency, I am confident that the Conference will continue

to grow and improve in the good hands of Charles Miller, our new President, the officers and the members of the executive committee.

Resolutions Adopted *

Resolution on Soviet Jewry

Increased emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union during the past year has been heartening. However, the basic situation of Soviet Jews has deteriorated:

Applications to emigrate to Israel from tens of thousands of Jews in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and Odessa, and in many other areas of the Soviet Union, are being denied.

Jews desiring to emigrate continue to be severely harassed. Soviet authorities are now using military conscription as a punitive measure for Jewish activists who seek to emigrate.

Jewish scientists, writers and academicians who apply for the right to emigrate are first discharged from their posts and then are charged as being "parasites." They are then assigned to menial and often excessively strenuous physical labor or are imprisoned.

Jews seeking to enter synagogues on holidays and Sabbaths in several cities during the last several months have been subjected increasingly to detentions, prevention of entry and beatings.

Jewish culture continues to be suppressed and forced assimilation continues to appear as official Soviet policy.

The National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, an association of more than 2,000 Jewish communal workers throughout the United States and

Canada, joins with millions of their fellow citizens in urging the Soviet Union to fulfill its moral commitment to abide by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations, to which all nations subscribe, a cardinal principle of which is the right of all people to live in the country of their choice.

We call upon the Soviet Union to:

1—Free all Jewish "Prisoners of Conscience" whose only "crime" is a desire to live as Jews or to emigrate to Israel where they can observe their Jewish traditions.

2—Grant to Jews the religious and cultural rights accorded to other groups in the Soviet Union.

3—Cease all restrictions and discriminatory practices directed at Jewish citizens.

Programs on behalf of Soviet Jewry are being co-ordinated nationally by the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and in communities by the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council. The National Conference of Jewish Communal Service urges its members and member organizations to co-operate with these co-ordinating agencies.

Resolution on Jews in Need

The Jewish community has had a history of seeking out the stranger within its midst, as well as the long time resident who is in need. This has been a traditional community responsibility founded on faith. Tzedakah and the self protec-

* The resolutions adopted at the 1971 Annual Meeting on Federal Support for Social Work Education; on the War in Indo-China; on the Vote for 18-year-olds; and on Dissent were reaffirmed at this 1972 Meeting.

tion of a minority group which has over the years accepted the role of helping its own.

Although the Jewish community is generally viewed as a full participant in the prosperity of the nation, the hard facts tell another story. We Jews have always had the poor among us, and while the percentages are small, the numbers are large, totaling well into the tens of thousands.

Throughout the decades the organized Jewish communal agencies have served the Jewish poor through their family agencies, vocational services, hospitals, homes for the aged, relocation agencies and Jewish community centers. In recent decades the voluntary sectarian agency entered into a partnership with the governmental institutions to provide increased aid and new services to all people in need.

To-day, in a rapidly and dynamically changing society, our urban problems and economic factors have brought to the surface the considerable needs of many Jews, who are essentially an urban people, in such areas as housing, employment, physical and mental health, as well as other basic human needs.

People in need require remedies for their concerns. As there are many Jewish poor who need assistance, it behooves us to give a high priority to meeting their needs and to support their equitable participation in government programs.

Be it, therefore, resolved that the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service continues:

1. To give a high priority to problems confronting Jews in need.
2. To encourage its constituent organizations and members to deal with the larger social and economic dislocations which create and perpetuate poverty within American society.
3. To use our energies and skills in

behalf of all Jews in need whether they be the impoverished aged, Hasidic Jews with unique problems, the drug addicted and drug prone, troubled youngsters from one-parent families, the emotionally or physically disabled, the unemployed or under-employed, or any Jew who fails to attain, or is denied, all the benefits and rights that American citizens should possess in order to live fully satisfying and dignified lives.

Resolution on Jews in Arab Lands

The National Conference of Jewish Communal Service expresses its deep concern over the continued persecution to which the Jewish community in Syria is being subjected.

The discriminatory policies of the Syrian authorities remain notoriously harsh even when compared to those of other states in the Arab world. Indeed, we note with satisfaction that Egypt and Iraq have in recent months eased the restrictions on their Jewish minorities, restoring some basic human rights and permitting emigration for Jews wishing to join relatives in other countries. In the countries of North Africa the Jews are generally free of harassment—although their future is precarious, while in Lebanon the Jewish community enjoys full freedom, including the right to travel freely.

The Syrian authorities have cruelly interrogated and imprisoned Jewish men and women for months and even years, usually on charges of attempting to leave the country. While the Syrian authorities released most prisoners in May, 1972, some others continue to be held. These include Mr. Albert Elia, the leader of the Lebanese Jewish community. Mr. Elia was kidnapped in September, 1971, while on his way to synagogue in Beirut. and

taken across the border to a Damascus prison by Syrian agents. The appeals for his release by his family—including a son and a daughter who are Canadian citizens—as well as diplomatic interventions have thus far proven unavailing. No formal charges have been brought against him and it is only conjectured that the Syrian Deuxieme Bureau (secret police) were after Mr. Elia because he was believed to have helped Syrian Jews who had managed to escape to Lebanon.

The efforts of young Jews to flee from Syria reflect the desperation resulting from the harassment and discriminatory measures to which the Syrian Jewish community has been subjected for years.

There is still a ban on Jewish emigration. Movement of Jews within the country has also been severely restricted. A special permit is still required if a Jew wishes to travel more than three miles from his home district, although the Syrian authorities have recently begun to issue such permits more readily.

Despite the pledges of the current regime to end the arbitrary arrests and other violations of human rights practiced by its predecessors, discriminatory restrictions, such as the following, continue to be imposed on the Jews:

In addition to a total ban on emigration, Jews are denied the right even to visit relatives abroad. In contrast, Moslem and Christian Syrians now are readily able to leave the country and can visit neighbouring Lebanon without even obtaining a passport.

Jews must carry distinctive identity cards marked prominently in red on both sides "musawi" (member of Mosaic faith).

A variety of economic restrictions including prohibition of employment as officials in government offices, public bodies or banks; dismissal without

compensation and revocation of licenses; orders to Army personnel and government employees not to buy in Jewish-owned stores; a ban on the sale by Jews of their houses or other real estate, and government seizure of the property of Jews who die and have relatives abroad.

A Higher Committee for Jewish Affairs (composed of representatives of the Interior Ministry and the security services) maintains a constant surveillance over the Jewish community and carries out arrests, interrogations, and sudden house searches.

The National Conference of Jewish Communal Services expresses its appreciation to the Governments of Canada and the United States for their diplomatic efforts on behalf of Jewish communities suffering oppression in various Arab lands and for their providing asylum to Jewish refugees from Egypt and Iraq.

We call upon the Governments of Canada and the United States to continue their efforts through the United Nations and other diplomatic channels to urge the Syrian authorities on humanitarian grounds to release all who are still imprisoned, to end the persecution of the 4,000 Jews in Syria, the remnant of an ancient and once flourishing Jewish community, and to permit the departure of those who wish to emigrate. These demands are in accordance with the fundamental human rights contained in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Syria has formally subscribed.

We call upon the members of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Services and its associate organizations to continue their activities to help arouse world public opinion and governmental action to restore to all Jews in Arab lands and particularly to the endangered

community in Syria their rights to live fully in freedom and dignity or to find asylum among their friends and relatives in free countries.

Resolution on Israel and the Middle East

Israel is now entering the sixth year since the Six-Day War, but the "seventh day" of peace is still far away. The past year has seen the increase of Soviet military aid to Egypt and other Arab countries and the efforts of the Soviet Union to expand its influence in the Middle East. The Arab countries continue their refusal of Israel's offer to negotiate a permanent peace agreement directly and without prior conditions. In the Middle East, as elsewhere, negotiations between the parties remain the only way in which international disputes can be settled and peace achieved.

In the face of Arab intransigence and Soviet belligerence, we welcome the President's policy—backed by a large bipartisan majority in Congress—to enable Israel to secure the military equipment needed to defend herself. We call upon our Government to maintain this policy and to show a concomitant understanding of the economic burdens that result from Israel's defense needs.

We note with gratification the steady progress in normalizing Arab civilian life in the territories Israel has administered since 1967. Just as the two peoples are showing that they can live together in peace on the local level, so we look forward to the day when the Arab governments will conclude a permanent peace agreement with Israel on the international level. With steadfast backing on the part of the United States and with the continued development of the Israeli society and economy, Israel's twenty-fifth year may see a significant advance toward peace in the Middle East.

In the area of action by our own members, we renew our proposals of last year:

1. To disseminate information and guidelines for action provided by responsible national and local agencies dealing with the Middle East situation.
2. To participate actively in the United Jewish Appeal, Israeli Bonds and other community campaigns to help meet Israel's economic and social needs, which are intensified by her defense burdens and the absorption of Jewish immigration from all over the world.

Resolution on Retirees and Retirement

Resolved that:

The Conference of Jewish Communal Service, as a professional organization representing the workers in the various functional fields of Jewish communal service, develop a greater concern and a more affirmative responsibility in addressing itself to the retirement needs of professionals.

This responsibility would be evidenced in concern for pension programs and portability, health benefits, pre-retirement programs, research and study in the field of aging and retirement, legislative action and by stimulating new and innovative approaches to retirement, opportunities for post-retirement employment.

This responsibility should be implemented in the following ways:

1. The Conference should support the principle of flexible retirement and should undertake a conscientious program to improve personnel practices in the various functional fields of Jewish communal service to provide for adequate pension programs and health benefits including provisions for building in responsiveness to increases in the cost of living

- and health care. Efforts should also be made to provide for portability of pensions.
2. In order to prepare workers for the sharp change in status and outlook that retirement often brings, the Conference should undertake a systematic pre-retirement program for professionals who are within five years or less from their anticipated retirement.
 3. The Conference should develop procedures for maintaining contact with retired members by communications and publications. Wherever possible, retirees should have an opportunity to participate actively in the affairs of the Conference.
 4. The Conference should conduct research and studies which would provide essential information about retirees and retirement programs in our fields of service.
 5. The Conference should actively support legislation and government programs which would enhance the condition of all retirees and older workers.
 6. The Conference should give public recognition at the annual meeting and through its publications to professional colleagues who have retired during each preceding year.