

PARTLY. JEWISH ISSUES

Economists are like Jews: whenever three of them get together, there are four opinions.

There is even some disagreement among economists as to how disastrous inflation really is. For consumers, however, inflation ranks with scarlet fever. And there is a general belief that high government expenditures are a major cause of inflation. Or, at the very least, there is the feeling that while consumers are straining to pay the grocery bill, they should not be strained by higher taxes. In either case, there has been an evident impetus for mandatory controls on government spending.

Is that a "Jewish issue?" Some Jewish agencies think so. The American Jewish Congress has just taken a public stand, nationally, against proposed Constitutional amendments which would limit government spending.

Let us define "Jewish issues" as those which directly affect the self-interest and survival of Jews as Jews. There is *still* controversy as to whether some issues fit that definition.

Inflation affects every American, Jew or otherwise. However, there may be some reason for Jews to have a *special* sensitivity to the problems of inflation control. For one thing, Jews remember the runaway inflation in pre-Nazi Germany. They have reason to believe that, with the exception of a Jewish State, such a runaway economy is a risk-factor for the kind of political extremism which directly threatens Jewish security. And they believe mandatory controls are necessary, because nothing else has worked.

On the other hand, Jews have a special concern with Israel. Many Jews believe that the fate of Israel depends finally on America's military capacity. And many of those Jews are opposed to mandatory controls on government spending because they believe that our

defense capacity would be affected. About three quarters of the federal budget is classified as "uncontrollable," such as debt payments and other hard commitments. The defense budget makes up over half of the "controllable" budget. That would be a likely target under mandatory-cut conditions.

Others believe that there is a special Jewish self-interest in government's flexible ability to deal with social problems which could tear the democratic society apart. Freezing too much into Constitutions, Federal or State, instead of concentrating on the legislative process, could result in less flexibility. As Justice Holmes once commented: "The Constitution is not intended to embody a particular economic theory, whether of paternalism or of laissez-faire."

In other words, there are some special Jewish considerations in the matter of mandatory limits on government expenditures. But there is some disagreement about those Jewish considerations, even among Jews. Indeed, the recent survey of attitudes among Jews in San Francisco, Marin and the Peninsula shows a major split on the question of mandatory limits on government spending. About 57 per cent of the Jews indicate that they are in favor of such limitations.

So, what does the Jewish community do with an issue which seems to have special Jewish self-interest dimensions -- but on which there is not the kind of consensus which allows for a "community position"? Energy may be another issue of this kind.

There should be some special educational ferment in the Jewish community, so that the various positions of *individual* Jews on such issues will be informed by the Jewish considerations that do apply. We don't need -- and probably can't get -- a "Jewish position" on such issues; but to ignore their Jewish dimensions would be suicidal.