

Urban Problems and Jewish Problems

When are urban problems Jewish problems? There are two kinds of answers to that riddle. One: whenever they touch on social justice. Two: whenever they directly affect the welfare of the Jews.

There are a couple of situations developing in California and San Francisco which fit both definitions. One is a welfare situation. We now have a new State policy which calls for a "close-ended" welfare budget for the coming year: a specific amount which can't be exceeded no matter what. Alan Post, the state's legislative analyst, estimates that we will run out of welfare money in about 8 or 9 months. That means that for three or four months, a lot of dependent people - small children, disabled, ill, aged - will be out of luck.

It doesn't mean that the taxpayers will get relief. These dependent people will have to be put on County General Assistance to prevent starvation. That means hiking the taxes of local homeowners and renters. And the tax burden will not be distributed according to ability to pay. We will even lose the 75 cents that the federal government gives for every state welfare dollar. But, more important - even though it will cost local taxpayers more, the recipients will get less. County General Assistance is acknowledged to be well below minimal standards of decency.

Amongs those who will be cut off from minimal sustenance will be thousands of aged and otherwise dependent Jews. And the Jewish Welfare Federations will be affected, along with their ability to sustain the other needs of

the Jewish community, locally, nationally, for Israel or Soviet Jewry. And, as a recent survey showed, we grossly underestimate the number of needy Jews right here. San Francisco Jews are probably more badly informed about Mt. Zion Hospital than about any other Jewish institution - but the fact is that as much <sup>as</sup> ~~of~~ a quarter of those who come to the Mt. Zion out-patient clinic are Jewish -- and Mt. Zion does not get enough money from the Federation to cover the cost of those Jewish patients!

Anyway, we are told that some citizens are so exercised about this impending welfare crisis in California that they are asking the Governor to reconsider; they are asking their state legislators to help him reconsider, and certainly to prepare somehow to see that such a brutal welfare vacuum does not come to pass. Some of these citizens are indeed asking their national legislators to support the President's Family Assistance Plan, H.R. 1, which may be the only way to avert a welfare crisis year after year.

A little more complicated but no less impelling is the specific Jewish stake in Full Employment, and in federal public service employment programs - in health, education and recreation - which will take up the employment slack when necessary. In San Francisco we now see the squeeze on Jewish professionals - educators and others. New groups are emerging and properly demanding a place on those middle rungs of the economic ladder <sup>to</sup> which Jews emerged only a generation ago to occupy. Unless there is economic room, employment room, there is going to be growing unemployment and conflict affecting the Jews. Whichever way you want to answer the riddle, these urban problems are also Jewish problems.

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