

Between You and Me..... By Boris Smolar

THE FEDERATIONS AND ISRAEL: Something new and important in the relations between the American Jewish community and the community in Israel was initiated recently by the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF). This central organ of the Jewish Federations in the United States and Canada -- serving about 800 organized Jewish communities representing 95 percent of all the Jews in the two countries--has opened an office in Israel to strengthen relations between the Federations in North America and Israel. The office was opened on September 1 in Jerusalem.

It is no secret that there is a growing gap between Israel and the Federations in the United States and Canada in understanding each other. The Federations prefer not to come out into the open with their grievances, but grumbling by their leaders is heard at closed local and regional meetings and at their national board meetings. The CJF has been under growing pressure to indicate to Israeli leaders and influentials the necessity to close--or at least narrow--the gap which worries many American Jews interested in helping Israel.

The Federations are the financial backbone of Jewish communal activities. They raise in contributions about \$600 million a year to help meet local, national and overseas needs. Half of this sum goes to Israel through the United Jewish Appeal to meet communal needs there. But the Federation leadership has come to realize that the people in Israel -- even members of the Knesset -- have no understanding of the pulsating Jewish community life in the United States and Canada.

The information given by Israelis to people in Israel is considered by Federation leaders as often distorted. American Jews are viewed in Israel primarily as a fund-raising source and a factor active in Washington on problems concerning relations between the American and Israeli governments. Israelis know practically nothing of how the Federations work, their scope of activities, their influence, their philosophy,

their services, community organization and problem-solving approaches, as well as their achievements in stimulating Jewish life in the community. This is true even with regard to influential government officials. They are indifferent to what is going on in American Jewish life, except to matters concerning Israel, despite the fact that the Jews in the United States are the largest Jewish community in the world. This, according to Martin Citrin, CJF president, has impaired the effectiveness of dialogue and cooperation between the two communities.

As an example of this indifference to understanding Jewish life in America, the leaders of the Federation cite the fact that there is no curriculum provision in Israeli elementary and secondary school systems for the teaching about the Jewish communities in the U.S. and Canada, while there is extensive curricula and materials there related to Jewish life in other countries of the diaspora.

ISSUES AND PROBLEMS: During the past years, the issues and problems around understanding between the organized Jewish communities in the U.S. and Canada and the Jewish community in Israel have become exacerbated. These developments have given a sense of urgency to the need for the CJF to build stronger relations with Israel. As the growing list of concerns of Federation leaders and members has increased, it became essential for the CJF to think of opening an office in Israel to build bridges of understanding.

The CJF leaders came to the conclusion that only a CJF presence representing the organized Jewish communities in the U.S. and Canada--and speaking when necessary on their behalf -- can aid in accomplishing the distinctive goals that Federations require in their Israel relationships. Presently, there are a number of American Jewish organizations which have offices in Israel -- the United Jewish Appeal, American Joint Distribution Committee, American Jewish Committee, and others -- but no one among them can

speak for the Federations. Prior to deciding to establish an office in Israel, the CJF consulted these organizations. They all agreed that representation of the Federations is needed in Israel; it will be helpful to them in their own work, they said.

Some Federation leaders who strongly advocated the opening of a CJF office in Israel have advanced the argument that the basic trusteeship responsibility of Federations for their allocated funds which is applied to domestic uses should also be applied in Israel -- that the contributed dollars be spent for the most important needs, be used most productively, with the soundest policies and programs. They pointed out that the CJF has been established and maintained by the Federations to act as their instrument to assure this by making independent and objective analyses.

CJF FUNCTIONS IN ISRAEL: The functions of the CJF office in Israel will be in general to expand the agenda of the relations between the North American Jewish communities and Israel. This will include extension significantly beyond the purely philanthropic area.

The Federations place great emphasis on the need to build constructive relationships between the people of this country and the people of Israel in all their variety. The functions will include:

1. Interpreting Federations in an ongoing manner to influential sectors of Israeli leadership and society.
2. Monitoring, collecting and providing on-site information, analyses and intelligence to Federations in the U.S. and Canada regarding developments in Israel that could impact directly and indirectly on the Federation agenda.
3. Affirmation by the Jewish Agency of non-discrimination on a religious denominational basis relating to services funded by Federation campaigns.
4. Issues of religious pluralism in Israel.
5. The issue of proposed amendments to the Law of Return.
6. Immigration and absorption developments that impact

on Federation policies.

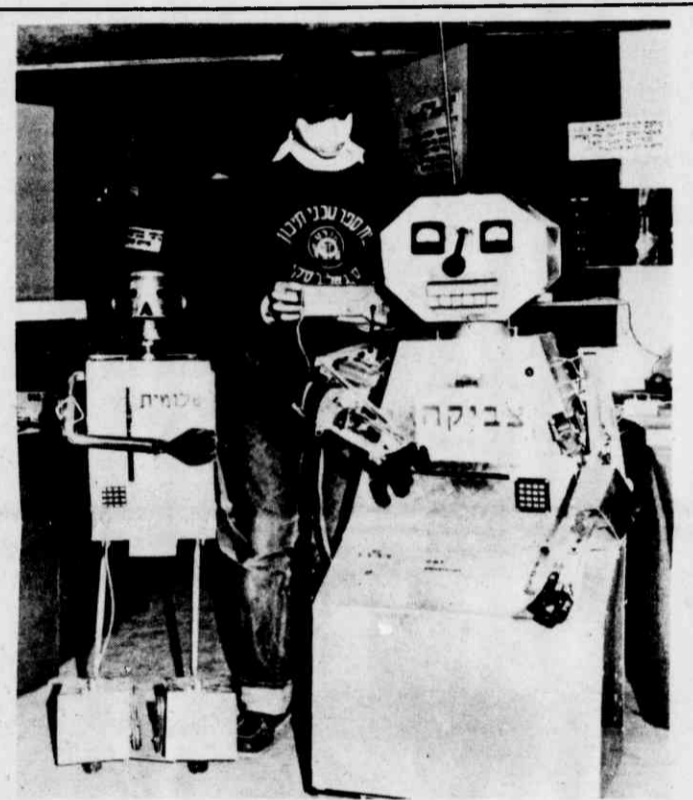
7. Public information relating to serving immigrants from the Soviet Union, Ethiopia and to Jews coming from the United States and Canada to settle in Israel.

8. Counseling with many entities in Israel that are developing and publishing Jewish educational material for use by Jewish communities in the U.S. and Canada, and advising on their distribution.

9. Helping to develop appropriate in-depth contacts between Federation leaders and leaders in Israel in areas outside of fund-raising and philanthropy -- commerce and industry, arts and letters, academia and leaders in culture -- and planning educational seminars for leaders of Federations and Federation agencies, lay and professional, utilizing Israeli sources.

10. Helping those responsible in Israel to select, provide and train appropriate community Shelichim and to work effectively with Federations around their goals and programs; also assist in the education and orientation of Shelichim in understanding the Jewish communities in the United States and Canada.

A pilot program will be conducted under the guidance of a special CJF committee over a three-year period to test out the goals, functions and programs of the Federations in Israel. The committee will launch an evaluation process in time to emerge with recommendations by the termination of the pilot. Martin Kraar, executive vice president of the Jewish Federation of St. Louis, has been appointed Director General of the CJF office in Israel.



To meet the technological challenges of the 21st century, ORT-operated schools in Israel, France, Latin America and the U.S. have added a fourth "R"--robotics. Here, a student at the ORT Syngalowski Technical High School in Tel Aviv works with Shlomit (at left) and Tzvika, two robots built by students in the school's computer and robotics program. ORT is a beneficiary, through the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, of funds raised by UJA.

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