

CHAPTER XIII

GROWTH OF THE JEWISH FEDERATION

The career of the Jewish Federation has been marked by an increasing extension of its scope of interests and activities. Organized principally as a more efficient instrument for the solicitation and disbursement of funds for philanthropic, cultural and other local organizations, the Federation early recognized that central fund raising and community planning go hand in hand. Because it represented every organization and institution in the community, the Federation was soon able to approach all community problems in a systematic manner.

The role assumed by the Federation in the integration of local social welfare agencies and the supervision of Jewish education will be discussed later. Here we will briefly review its course of development principally in the field of fund raising.

Following the successful campaign in 1943, the Jewish Federation exerted itself to achieve even more impressive results in its second drive. Joseph Wigon, long active in community work and in the Portland Zionist District, was chosen campaign chairman in 1944. The Jewish community, somewhat weakened in manpower through the impact of the war, rallied to meet the ever-increasing demands of its overseas and local agencies. Due to Mr. Wigon's dynamic leadership, the result was an impressive gain. More than \$78,000 was raised.

But the demands on Portland Jewry grew from year to year and the Portland community, like others throughout the land, raised its sights toward higher and higher goals.

In 1945 the Federation launched its third annual campaign, directed by George I. Lewis, aiming at a goal slightly over \$100,000. With the able assistance of his many co-workers, Mr. Lewis recorded a new high of \$120,000. It is interesting to note that when the Jewish Community Center set its fund raising goal at \$29,600 only seven years earlier, the amount was then regarded as astronomical. And even in 1943, during the first campaign of the Jewish Federation, it would have required unusual courage to predict that merely two years hence, this new organization could raise \$120,000.

At the end of the war in 1945, the American Jewish community girded its loins to face the almost insurmountable problems entailed in the relief and rehabilitation of the remnant of European Jewry. The struggle for Jewish survival in Palestine entered its decisive phase and almost limitless funds were required. The local needs of Jewish communities in America had to be temporarily by-passed; the all-consuming task was the deliverance of European Jewish survivors and support of Jews in Palestine.

The Federation geared itself to meet the overseas emergency. But before embarking on the 1946 drive, it undertook to set its house in order. The constitution and by-laws expressly provided that its member agencies agree "to solicit no funds for current expenses" and "to hold no special finance campaigns or affairs of whatever nature or by whatever name they may be called for capital or other purposes without the approval of the board of directors of this organization."¹ This provision was honored more in the breach than in the observance by some organizations.

Concern about the impact of resurgent multiple appeals on the central campaign led to a demand that Federation's by-laws be clarified and strengthened. In October 1945 Sidney W. Wernick was appointed chairman of a Policy Committee charged with responsibility for "establishing rules and regulations to govern the admission as a constituent agency into the Federation." In January 1946 the Policy Committee reported it had completed its task and submitted a set of rules governing fund raising. This statement underscored more strongly the sections of the original by-laws dealing with fund raising as follows:

Any attempt or undertaking whatsoever to obtain funds from the people of the city of Portland by any member agency of this Federation, beneficiary or non-beneficiary, by whatever method or for whatever purpose, is improper and is a violation of the principles of the Federation, unless said agency has first procured the permission of the Federation.

These regulations have remained in force. Their effect has been not only to protect the community from multiple appeals, but to encourage an orderly approach to fund raising. They have also established the primacy of the central campaign in the minds of the community.

Strengthened by this step in the direction of further unity, the Federation prepared to meet its increased obligations arising from the needs of the new displaced persons population in Europe.

Under the chairmanship of Louis Bernstein, the community responded magnificently and raised \$185,334 in 1946, a gain of fifty percent over the previous year.

Abraham S. Levey, who served as president of the Federation from the start, and concurrently as president of the Vaad Hoir, stepped down from his Federation office in 1946 to make way for an energetic successor, Saul G. Chason. On December 1 of that year a testimonial dinner was held in the Jewish Community Center to express the appreciation of Portland Jewry to Mr. Levey for his leadership and untiring efforts to unify the community. Since that year, Mr. Levey has been honorary president of the Federation.

Both the 1946 and 1947 campaigns were conducted without the services of the Federation's executive director, Norman E. Godfrey.² The lack of sustained direction and year-round programming had its effect on Federation's fifth annual drive. Despite the most prodigious effort under the leadership of William Goodman, the 1947 campaign declined to \$169,551. In October 1947 Joseph M. Papo assumed his duties as the Federation's first full-time executive director.³

The Federation opened its campaign in 1948 under the shadow of world-shaking events. On November 29, 1947 the General Assembly of the United Nations had ratified its plan for the partition of Palestine, allowing for creation of a Jewish commonwealth in the Holy Land. This decision was greeted with threats of doom by the neighboring Arab states. Some fighting already had broken out in Palestine between units of infiltrating Arab irregulars and the troops of the Haganah, the para-military Jewish defense organization.

Early in 1948 the Vaad Leumi, the representative congress of Palestinian Jewry, announced its decision to proclaim the existence of a Jewish state on May 14, 1948, when the British administration of Palestine would expire. War was imminent. Jews of Palestine required staggering sums of money to prepare for this eventuality and to finance the increasing Jewish immigration into the Holy Land.

On May 14, 1948, shortly before the Sabbath, David Ben-Gurion, as provisional premier, proclaimed the State of Israel. Hostilities began and the new state came to grips with the bitter facts of war. Actually, the Arab Legion of Jordan had already begun its invasion two weeks before the birth of the State of Israel, and was being contained before Jerusalem by the superhuman resistance of the Mizrahi settlements centering around Kfar Etzion.

During 1948 Israel Bernstein served as Federation president and once again George I. Lewis took the helm as general campaign chairman. The great need for funds was expressed nowhere more eloquently than in the headlines of the daily newspapers. The heroic resistance of David against Goliath, represented by tiny Israel ranged against seven invading enemy armies, thrilled free peoples of the world. Former skeptics, and even anti-Semites, could not refrain from expressing their admiration for the army and people of Israel. This was a do or die year and the Jews of Portland responded with their most successful effort to date, contributing \$292,000 to the Federation campaign.

The heartening result of the 1948 campaign, however, was only part of the struggle. The United Jewish Appeal called upon all Jewish communities for staggering sums of immediate cash. Portland was urged to turn over to the United Jewish Appeal \$194,000, without delay. With most of the contributions still in the form of pledges, the Jewish Federation appealed to the community to convert the pledges into cash at once. In a short time, \$119,000 was made available to the United Jewish Appeal. The Jewish Federation then negotiated a loan of \$75,000 with the Casco Bank and Trust Company.⁴ The bank advanced the money free of interest, as its contribution to the cause and in recognition of the Jewish community for making good on its pledges.

In October 1948, Joseph M. Papo resigned as executive director of the Federation to enter private business in California. The Federation engaged Jules Krems as executive director. Mr. Krems arrived in 1948. In addition he is directing, in his professional capacity, the social welfare, educational and historical functions of the Federation.⁵

A valuable technique in the fund raising campaigns of the Federation, first introduced by Mr. Krems in January 1949, was the "C Day Campaign." According to this plan, one day is set aside for the systematic conversion of pledges into cash. With the assistance of devoted workers, the entire community is alerted and mobilized. Each family is canvassed and exhorted to make its contribution in cash. The unusual success of the first "C-Day Campaign" led to its repetition in succeeding years.

In 1949 Sidney W. Wernick succeeded to the presidency of the Federation and Barnett I. Shur served as campaign chairman. A total of \$222,000 was contributed, the second greatest fund raising effort in the history of the Jewish Federation.

The 1950 drive, once again under the chairmanship of Barnett I. Shur, realized \$201,000.

In order to stem the tide of diminishing funds, the Jewish Federation intensified its efforts to achieve greater community understanding and support for its program. In December 1950 it published the first issue of *Federation Newsletter*, a weekly single page mimeographed digest of significant local, national and overseas developments. Publication continued through May 1952, when budgetary considerations forced suspension.

Federation Newsletter achieved national recognition for itself and the Federation at the 20th General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in December 1951. In competition with more elaborate publications of smaller communities throughout the United States and Canada, it received a certificate of award as the "Best 1951 Community Newspaper".

While campaign receipts in Portland and throughout the country were declining sharply,⁶ immigration to Israel was proceeding at an enormous pace. In three short years almost 500,000 newcomers were admitted to the country and additional hundreds of thousands were expected in the near future. Israel's policy of unlimited immigration, criticized severely in many quarters as economically unfeasible, was justified by Prime Minister Ben-Gurion on grounds that (1) Israel was morally obligated to accept every Jew who wanted to migrate to Israel, (2) economically, immigrants were necessary to build the country and (3) immigrants were needed for military security.

The task of resettling, housing, and absorbing the flood of newcomers taxed resources of the infant State to the breaking point.

All this took place at a time when American Jewry was raising less money each year and therefore reducing allocations to the United Jewish Appeal. Emergency action was called for and Prime Minister Ben-Gurion responded by convening in September 1950, the First Jerusalem Economic Conference of American and Israeli leaders. The Four Point Program which emerged from the conference called upon American Jewry to raise one billion dollars for Israel during the next three years. This was to be accomplished through (1) an expanded and strengthened United Jewish Appeal, (2) the launching of the Independence Bond Issue for the State of Israel, (3) intensification of American private investments in Israel and (4) intergovernmental aid.

Thus Portland Jewry, under the co-chairmanship of Abraham S. Levey, George I. Lewis, Harold P. Nelson and Harold J. Potter, undertook to sell Israel bonds in Portland during the years 1951-1954. In this period almost \$300,000 worth of bonds were sold,

representing one of the finest records of accomplishment among communities of comparable size. Benjamin Hagai and Lewis Michaelson provided professional direction as field representatives of the American Financial and Development Corporation for Israel.

Saul G. Chason returned to the Federation helm in 1951 and 1952, becoming the first president to serve three terms. Louis E. Weiner then led the 1951 campaign which netted \$167,000. In 1952, with Jacob Potter as campaign chairman, the most strenuous efforts yielded only \$147,416.

Arthur M. Waterman was elected Federation president in 1953. The downward trend of giving, paralleling national experience, was temporarily halted in that year. Under the leadership of Harold J. Potter, who succeeded his father as campaign chairman, the 1953 fund raising effort produced pledges totalling \$151,000. This marked the first time since 1948 that a campaign had raised more than its predecessor.

As a new and colorful feature of the 1953 campaign, the children of both the Portland Hebrew School and the Beth El Hebrew School made special contributions from their own pocket money. Under the leadership of student co-chairmen, Cedric Minkin of the Portland Hebrew School and Bette Krems of the Temple Beth El Hebrew School, the sum of \$135 was raised and turned over to the Federation.

The 1954 campaign, chaired by Sidney A. Davidson, continued the downward trend, raising only \$131,000. But by then, with the success of the Four Point Program conceived three years earlier in Jerusalem, Israel had made substantial strides toward economic recovery. Its policy of "unlimited immigration" had given way to a policy of "selective immigration." Productive enterprise blossomed, and the gap between imports and exports narrowed.

However, the burden of short-term indebtedness incurred in the process of absorbing 700,000 immigrants during its six years was pressing the State. As a result the United Jewish Appeal undertook in 1954 the sponsorship of a seventy-five million dollar five-year loan. It called upon Jewish communities to borrow seventy-five million dollars from banks to be liquidated over a five-year period. With this money, Israel could immediately repay its short term loans at a saving of seven million dollars annually in interest charges.

Once again the Jewish Federation rose to the occasion. In July 1954, under the leadership of George I. Lewis, a \$150,000 loan was negotiated with the Casco Bank and Trust Company and the pro-

ceeds forwarded to the United Jewish Appeal.

In the fall of 1954 the State of Israel also embarked upon a campaign to promote the sale of a second issue of Israel Development Bonds. This resulted from the success of the first effort which produced bond purchases throughout the country in the amount of one hundred and sixty million dollars. The campaign was launched in Portland with a testimonial dinner honoring George I. Lewis in recognition of his services to the previous bond drive. The dinner, held November 9, 1954, was attended by several hundred persons.

How did the Federation's fund-raising efforts compare with drives of Jewish communities of comparable size during the period of world Jewry's most serious crisis? Fortunately we have a basis for comparison in the figures made available to us by the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds.⁷ Using 1946, American Jewry's first big campaign year, as a base, the report indicates that communities with Jewish populations under five thousand raised forty eight per cent more in 1948 than in 1946 and thirty-nine per cent less in 1954 than in 1946. Portland Jewry's increase in 1948 over 1946 was fifty-seven percent. It raised twenty-nine percent less in 1954 than in 1946. The decline in fund raising since 1948 became a subject of national concern, and many theories were advanced to account for it. These included the declining impact of the overseas appeal, fear about the economic climate in this country, the resurgence of capital and maintenance drives to meet deferred local needs and the impact of multiple appeals.

Decreasing funds created serious budgeting problems. Pressures and dissatisfactions with allocations from local, national and overseas organizations began to mount, and the primacy of the central campaign was threatened. The fears concerning the impact of declining funds on the central campaign were given expression by Jules Krems in his annual report to the Jewish Federation, on December 9, 1954.

Should the downward trend persist, the results will, I believe, be disastrous for Portland Jewry. Our community must decide for itself whether it wishes to serve the needs of forty beneficiaries through one annual campaign or through forty independent campaigns. To use the vernacular, we can't have our cake and eat it too. If we believe in one campaign, then we must support it adequately.

However, while Portland was preoccupied during the years with

raising money to discharge its worldwide responsibilities, the Jewish Federation did not ignore its planning and coordinating functions. Thus, in November 1947, the Federation authorized a study of the community's Jewish education needs. In September 1948 it established a Social Service Coordinating Committee to analyze the Jewish community's welfare needs and services. And that same month it appointed a committee to study a request by the United Service for New Americans that the Federation assume responsibility for the resettlement of twelve displaced persons units in Portland.

The Federation was, indeed, on the threshold of important expansions in its program which will be discussed in a later chapter.

REFERENCES IN CHAPTER XIII

¹By-Laws of the Jewish Federation of Portland, Maine.

²Norman E. Godfrey became ill early in 1946 and died on January 24, 1947.

³Heretofore the Jewish Community Center's executive director had also administered the program of the Jewish Federation. Now each organization had its own full-time director.

⁴The loan was endorsed by the following: Israel Bernstein, Louis Bernstein, Lewis Bernstein, George I. Lewis, Benjamin Lewis, Leo Golodetz, James Stein, David Ebenstein and Joseph Wigon. This was the first of many similar advance loans through the years.

⁵Jules Krems received his B.A. degree from Penn State College in 1935 and pursued post-graduate studies for two years at the Graduate School of Jewish Social Work. In 1938 he received the degree of Master of Social Service from New York University.

⁶The Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds notes the decline in federation income throughout the country in millions of dollars as follows: 1948 - 130.0; 1949 - 102.6; 1950 - 88.6; **Analysis and Proposals for Strengthening Fundraising.**

⁷**Analysis and Proposals for Strengthening Fundraising.**