

He's an Enlightener Of the Fiscal Scene

By LAWRENCE VAN GELDER

"THIS conference," Philip Finkelstein said, "represents to me the first time that I'm fitting my different worlds together."

The conference, set for this Friday, is titled "Getting and Spending." Co-sponsored by the Nassau Citizens' Budget Committee, headed by Phoebe Goodman of Roslyn, it is to be an all-day effort at fiscal enlightenment at the University Center of Adelphi University, where the 47-year-old Professor Finkelstein is a member of the faculty of the School of Social Work.

"The idea of this conference," he said, "is to educate, inform and train citizens and civic leaders in the problems and opportunities in local budgeting — to learn where it's coming from, where it's going and what they can do about it at the specific level at which they would operate." Representatives of Nassau County government will also attend.

It is debatable whether the conference will really bring together all of Professor Finkelstein's different worlds. There are so many of them.

Born in Brooklyn, he graduated in 1951 from Yeshiva University with a major in classical languages. A scholarship took him to the Hebrew

INTERVIEW

University in Israel, where devaluation of the Israeli pound eroded his scholarship to the point that he took up a career in journalism in Israel. This was followed by a stint in the United States Army. "I was the only guy in my entire outfit who was not asked to re-enlist," he said.

His Army career was followed by a re-entry into journalism, simultaneous education in the law (an LL.B. from New York University), a year's practice of law ("I didn't like it") and entry into politics as a public-relations man for the Liberal Party.

And what should the Liberal Party do but provide the springboard for John V. Lindsay's election as Mayor of New York City, whereupon Philip Finkelstein found himself a denizen of City Hall for the better part of eight years. "I was in charge of the management-analysis unit," said the former deputy city administrator, "and we did many studies of city operations."

But, he said, "the most important



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thing I did was something that I wasn't really asked to do. I did a study of the real-property tax in New York City. It was a very far-reaching study and it said the property tax is inequitable; it's terrible and the assessments are absolutely without any basis. And City Hall said I'd better not do anything about that study."

What he did was leave City Hall, produce his study in 1975 as a book, "Real Property Taxation in New York City"; found the nonprofit Center for Local Tax Research with the support of the Henry George School, and join the faculty of Brooklyn College. Professor Finkelstein, who is married, the father of three children and a resident of Valley Stream, joined Adelphi after leaving the Brooklyn faculty in 1975.

Discussing the forthcoming conference, he said failure to understand taxation and spending "makes for a lot — misunderstandings, bad politics, bad economics and frustrations.

"People who scream about budgets very often serve either a very narrow purpose or a very mistaken one. They're yelling: Protect my program. Or: Let's save money here so we don't have to raise money there. And they don't know that saving money in one place may not save that money for another purpose. In fact, with the incredible multiplicity of local governments, especially here on Long Island, a lot of people don't even know what level of government does what."

When the conference is over, Professor Finkelstein hopes there will be more people around who know how to make themselves heard — and heard forcefully — in budgetary matters. ■