What is chiefly inadequate in the Alliance schools in Iran—as well as in other Oriental states—is the teaching of Jewish history, religion, and Hebrew. So sketchy are the Jewish studies in these schools that the graduates’ knowledge in these subjects seldom rises above zero. Yet those whom circumstances allow to attend these schools are fortunate, especially those who can afford to graduate. The maximum proportion of these graduates, however, rarely exceeds 10–15 per cent of all Persian Jews.

Side by side with the dearth of religious education, the hold of religion on individual Jews is constantly slackening: The majority seldom know anything more than Shema Yisrael.

The Jews of Iran have neither clubs nor press. In their secluded ghetto, they are shut off from all contacts with their co-religionists throughout the world. Most of them speak Persian, though some speak Aramaic and others Arabic. A small minority, who were educated at the Alliance schools, understand French.

---

**22. THE FAR EAST**

By Ernest Strauss

When the Japanese “Segregation Order” came into effect on May 18, 1943, 15,225 Central European refugees had been crammed into what later came to be known as the Hongkew Ghetto. Their total number may have been slightly higher because of exemptions granted to a fortunate few.

At the time of the Japanese surrender, 14,874 were left. According to their countries of origin, 8,466 were Germans, 4,279 Austrians, 1,211 Poles and 918 other nationalities. 6,170 were male and 8,704 female. The age distribution showed 2 per cent up to 5 years, 7.5 per cent from 6–15 years, 44 per cent from 31–50 years, 24 per cent from 51–60 years, and 11.9 per cent above 60 years.
It was fortunate that the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee had a representative on the spot and so was in a position to take immediate charge of the assistance to the dangerously undernourished and inadequately housed DP’s. It has since become to them more than a mere relief agency. It has been called the refugees’ town hall, with social security services, health and real estate departments, public relations service and even, in the absence of a consular protection for most of them, their nearest approach to an outside representation.

The Economic Situation

All through its existence Shanghai, like the rest of China, had been a city of low prices. The equivalent of 50 American dollars a month was considered a fair pay for a foreign employee and the refugee, with his much lower standard, could amply manage on $15–20. Now, in a staggeringly short time, the city made the transition from a cheap place to a very expensive one. In the time from the reinstallation of the Chinese National Currency, October 1945, to March 1946, prices soared to 3–4 times their pre-war level in terms of American dollars.

It would have been hardly possible for the refugees to adjust themselves to these rapidly deteriorating conditions but for two factors working in their favor. The first was the advent of UNRRA which started operations in Shanghai in the beginning of 1946 and has since done a splendid job. The second was the appearance, beginning about September 1945, of the American Army and Navy as large-scale employers. Altogether around 1,500 refugees could secure jobs with them, working in every capacity from truck driver to legal adviser and giving evidence that the DP’s are willing and able to work hard and to give satisfaction, if only an opportunity presents itself.

Unfortunately it was no more than an interlude, for already in the spring of 1946 the American forces in Shanghai were greatly reduced. With them went the last chance of an economic recovery for the refugees. Increased cost of raw mate-
rials and labor, import and currency restrictions and general post-war conditions brought the commercial life of the city to a standstill and jobs for white people are simply not available.

This, combined with a devastating climate, low standard of sanitary and hygienic provisions, rampant epidemics and political insecurity, make the ardent desire of all but a very few Shanghai DP's to leave as soon as possible understandable and justifiable. A decree of the Chinese Government of November 1945, declaring all Jewish refugees as enemy aliens who had, pending their expected exodus, to furnish special guarantees for good behavior, required the combined efforts of Inter-governmental Committee, AJDC, UNRRA and CNRRA, UNRRA's Chinese affiliation, until finally the formal guarantee of the latter for all bona fide DP's was considered sufficient. But the general anti-foreign attitude of the population is unmistakable and has repeatedly led to minor outbreaks.

A Community in Liquidation

So far, however, only two countries have admitted Shanghai DP's in any number: 1,834 have up to this writing gone to the U. S., and Australia, which has been a haven to 813, made a particularly magnanimous gesture. In March 1947 a special delegate of the Australian Government, Mr. Alec Mazel, arrived in Shanghai in order to investigate the possibility of large-scale immigration and with authority to receive applications. 2,500 registered but under the principle of selective immigration only a portion may be eligible.

Repatriation, primarily an UNRRA responsibility, has lost much of its appeal through post-war developments in Europe. So far 960 Austrians have been repatriated and another batch of about 250 Austrians and 400 Germans is scheduled to sail in the second half of June. Only isolated stragglers are expected to go back at a later date.

All other countries together account only for about 550 Shanghai DP's. Palestine, where more than 2,000 earnestly desire to settle, has unfortunately remained closed, except in a very few cases.
At present the number of Central European refugees has dropped below the 11,000 mark, and in case the present rate of 400–500 sailings per month can be kept up or even increased, the refugee colony will in a few years be a thing of the past. But it will have left its mark on the economic, cultural and social picture of the city.

War-ravaged Hongkew, at its best no more than a low class workmen’s and wharf sector, has been rebuilt by the refugees into a residential area with teeming business life and excellent shops. They founded new industries, like knitting wear and leather goods and introduced into others a quality and a taste heretofore unknown in Shanghai. They set a new fashion in window dressing and interior decoration. In dressmaking and millinery they soon took a leading position. While handicraft used to be a purely Chinese province, the refugees were the first to prove that European workmanship and taste can hold their own even in the Far East. The Jewish Craftsmen’s Guild counts 540 members representing 44 different trades, and maintains a high standard of quality.

In all of the local universities and colleges, St. John’s, Aurore, University of Shanghai, Lester Institute etc., refugees are or have been active as professors or lecturers in such different subjects as sinology, economics, history, chemistry, physics, music and international law. Others work as editors or reporters with the English language newspapers and have done pioneer work in the field of economic journalism. The musical life of the city will lose some of its main pillars when the refugees depart, for they account for a prominent conductor and some excellent artists at violin, piano and cello. In the medical profession their achievements are generally recognized and some neurologists and surgeons already enjoy a more than local reputation.

Communal Life

Communal activities have shown a healthy growth since the liberation but are now somewhat handicapped by the past or impending departure of some of the most active members. Foremost in importance is the Communal Association of Cen-
central European Jews (Juedische Gemeinde) which includes 90 per cent of all DP’s. It operates one synagogue and four prayer places but on the High Holidays they are quite insufficient to accommodate the crowds of worshippers, and additional halls have to be rented. Besides ritual matters, the Association is in charge of the cemeteries, acts as a registry office and maintains an arbitration court which helps settle arguments among the refugees.

The Zionist idea has struck deep roots not only among the refugees but all Shanghai Jewry. Shekel payers have been around 6000 but only some 3000 are politically organized. The General Zionists work in 3 sections, AZO for the refugees, Kadimah for the Russians, and WIZO for women. Next in number come the UZO (United Zionists and Revisionists), the Poale Zion and the Mizrachi.

From these organizations, the Landsmannschaften and the Central Committee, an overall refugee representation, the Council of Refugee Organizations, has been formed. The cooperation of these elected bodies with the JDC staff has brought good results in every field.

The picture would be incomplete without mentioning the sporting activities, the only province where Jews from both sides of the Creek have really come into close contact. The Jewish Recreation Club, though mostly consisting of refugees, has a Russian Chairman and many followers among this colony. It has won a creditable position in the fields of soccer, ping-pong, chess and especially boxing where some of its members rank among the best amateurs in town.

Health and Housing Situation

The health situation in Shanghai requires constant vigilance, and twice serious epidemics have been averted only in the nick of time. AJDC’s Shanghai Refugee Hospital, around which all medical activities are centered, could be greatly enlarged and improved. Partly with the aid of some Quonset Huts provided by UNRRA, its capacity was brought up to 196 beds, plus 39 beds for the incurable. The hospital now features an up-to-date operating theatre, X-ray department,
medical laboratory, electro-therapeutical station, and ranks with the best medical institutions in town. The Out-patient Department caters to 150–200 patients daily and the Dental Out-patient Department has through recent improvements been brought up to a capacity of 50 dentures a month, a figure it is hoped will be doubled when a newly installed third chair comes into operation.

Far from showing any improvement owing to the departure of some 20 per cent of the refugees, the housing situation in the “District,” always desperate, is now more strained than ever. This is due to the fact that all 5 camps, housing still a considerable portion of the DP’s, are being claimed back by their Chinese owners or by governmental institutions. In 3 cases it has been impossible to avoid yielding to the pressure and others are expected to follow suit, thus placing the JDC before the necessity of having to acquire new lease-hold houses to accommodate the evacuees. On January 1, 1946, 2,547 DP’s lived in camps and 979 in JDC-operated tenement buildings and “Lane-Houses.” On May 1, 1947, the figures were 1,495 for the camps and 1,513 for the buildings and houses. Included in the latter figure are 120 old people housed and boarded in the new “Joint-House” in N. Szechuan Road, where they receive every care and attention.

Cultural and Educational Activities

The Jewish educational institutions, in the first place the S. J. Y. A. School, have been further improved. Vocational training is the special province of ORT which has been active in Shanghai since 1941 and has since trained 2,480 pupils in 36 different trades. The peak was reached in 1945 with 420 pupils. The present attendance is 240 in 14 classes. It speaks well for the serious turn of mind of the Shanghai Jewish juveniles that no less than 80 per cent have attended one or more classes, but perhaps still more significant is the fact that within the 18 months of the school term elapsing since the end of the war, already more pupils have attended than in the entire previous period. This shows clearly how anxious the
refugees are not to go unprepared to their countries of destination.

While professional theatrical performances seem to have come to an end with the departure of some of the prominent actors, lectures are frequent and draw large audiences. Prominent Americans and Australians speak regularly in the JDC-sponsored American Seminary on conditions in their homelands. The Shanghai branch of YIVO, the Zionist organizations and the Juedische Gemeinde arrange evenings on Jewish history, philosophy and folklore. The emigration boasts a daily paper, the *Shanghai Echo*.

A highlight in this field was the recent creation of a community center on the American model. It features lectures, social functions, sporting activities, handicraft classes, amateur theatricals, religious services and many other activities, and issues its own mimeographed magazine, *Future*, written, edited and typed by the youngsters themselves.

**RUSSIAN (ASHKENAZI) AND SEPHARDI COMMUNITIES**

The Russian Jewish colony, numbering about 3,500, is economically much sounder than the refugees and seems to have been less affected by the first post-war period. But now they also begin to feel the pinch of the trade recession and even here a marked tendency towards emigration is noticeable.

The Ashkenazi Communal Association owns and operates the Jewish Hospital with 80 beds, magnificently located on the premises of the former Polish Consulate in a fine garden, and a splendid new synagogue which could be perfected during the war. As to charitable institutions, there is a polyclinic, a loan-kassa and, one of the finest achievements, the Hebrew Relief Society running the Shelter-House which provides accommodations and low-priced or even free meals to the needy. This meritorious institution has been recently considerably enlarged and a new building has been added. Center of the social activities is the Jewish Club which repeatedly had to change its location during the war but has now found a new and satisfactory home on its own premises in the center of the former French Concession. Whereas before, the main emphasis
had been placed on indoor activities, the new location will provide also opportunity for outdoor sports, and a new swimming pool is already under construction. The Jewish school in Seymour Road, formerly financed by the Sephardim, is now a common responsibility of both colonies.

The old established Sephardi Community numbers now only around 500. The war years have left their mark even on this once fabulously rich colony. An entire section, the Syrians, who used to be engaged in the lace and embroidery business, have gone out of business and mostly left. Others who had their capital invested in landed property see their revenue greatly diminished. Of the two synagogues owned by this community only one, Olei Rachel, is now in operation.

The Russian Jewish colony in Tientsin seems unaffected. In this city as well as in Tsingtao live small batches of refugees. They are eligible for UNRRA assistance and their fate is more or less identical with that of their Shanghai brethren.

Little information could be gained about the once flourishing Jewish colony in Harbin. The city lies still within the communist sphere and communications are cut off. Some 4,000, mostly Russian Jews, are said to have remained there.