

10/10  
em  
Appendix No. 13  
REPORT ON MINSK

May 31, 1920.

General Resume:

The situation in Minsk, as far as the factional grouping is concerned, is very complicated. There exist three factions, which may be designated as follows: 1st, the Kehillah faction, 2nd, the workingmen, third, the Central Organizations. The Kehilla is an elected body of men in which the workingmen do not participate. This was elected at the time of, or soon after, the entrance of the Polish Government into Minsk. Less than 7000 people participated in the election, out of a total of 25,000 eligible voters. The workingmen claim the number at least one-third of the population, and this they did not participate in the election at all. The central organizations consist of the following three branches, the Ort, the Ekopo and the Oze. Each one of these organizations has local committees consisting of prominent people of the community. They are supposed to be branches of central bodies with headquarters in Petrograd and Moscow, and in Minsk there are the authorized agents from the headquarters, as for instance, Mr. Feinleb and Miss Logunowa from the Ekopo; Dr. Levin from the Oze and Mr. Alexandroff for the Ort.

63  
Attempts to organize a general committee comprising all these elements has repeatedly failed. The Kehillah on the one hand claims that they represent the entire population, and that they constitute the final authority with reference to all social and economic work to be done in the city. The laboring element of course claim that since they haven't participated in the Kehillah they are not represented there, and they cannot allow the Kehillah to act for them. The Central Organizations, on the other hand, claim that they are specialists in the type of work which they are doing, such as work among the refugees as represented by the Ekopo, medical aid, as represented by the Oze, and agricultural work as represented by the Ort, and that the Kehillah is in no position to conduct such functions in the manner in which they can conduct them.

X  
It should be emphasized that the relief work which in America has done so much to unify and stimulate action among the various factions, has had the opposite effect here. Realizing that by obtaining for itself a separate share of the American relief money, it can strengthen its own political position, each faction is fighting to this particular end. It must be stated at the outset that as far as the quality of the work is concerned the Central Organizations are far ahead of the other, inasmuch as the workers at the head of these organizations are trained and experienced workers who have been in this work since the beginning of the war and who have stuck to their jobs during all the changes of Government, beginning with the old Czar regime, going through the German, Kerensky, Petlura and Bolshevik periods. Their institutions are always conducted in the best order and with the best equipment, and in spite of the fact they cannot be considered as democratically elected bodies, and in spite

of the fact that at present they are practically disconnected from their central bureaus in Moscow and Petrograd, still their work is of the best type and should be encouraged. There are, of course, insinuations on the part of the Kheillah, that the people at the head of the central organizations are irresponsible but these insinuations are unfounded and upon careful investigation and close personal contact with the work of these organizations and with the workers, I am convinced that the work is carried on honestly and that the workers possess that degree of responsibility which should satisfy anybody.

The workmen find it very difficult to participate in the Kheillah because of the bitter feeling that exists between the proletariat and the so-called "bourgeoisie". The nine months of Soviet rule have intensified this feeling to such an extent and so widened the breach between these two classes that it is almost impossible to bring them together, and, although among the workmen there are many individuals who would be willing to participate in the Kheillah (I must mention the name of Dr. Herzog, one of the most prominent representatives of the workingpeople, who has always been for participating in the work of the Kheillah, and who because of this great breach between the two classes, has been forced to work independently of the Kheillah). From all this it should be quite evident that it is out of the question to turn over all the money to any of the above mentioned factions, and if we cannot succeed in organizing a general committee consisting of all these elements, the only obvious thing to do is to allow the separate elements to act independently, although this would of course result in a great deal of duplication, lack of coordination and possibly even friction in the work, and naturally, the giving up of the idea of forming a general committee.

#### Polish authorities:

In addition to the difficulties that we have in carrying through our work on the part of internal strife among our Jews, a great deal of difficulty is encountered with the Polish authorities, and in spite of the fact that I have succeeded in establishing very pleasant personal relations with the Governor of the district and with the other officials it has been very difficult for me to secure permission for our men to travel, to secure locations for institutions, and in general the very knowledge of the fact that the authorities look with suspicion upon our work makes the work of course very difficult. In the smaller cities and towns our committees are hampered a great deal by the fact that the authorities continuously requisition their institutions and place various obstacles in the way of the committees in carrying through their work. The fact, of course, that the Minsk district is so close to the front aggravates the situation still more, and in many instances the Polish civil authorities are entirely helpless even though they be ~~thoroughly~~ willing to assist us in the work, inasmuch as they themselves are under the absolute control of the military authorities. Of course, the military authorities claim that everything they do is for military reasons,

against which no complaint can be lodged. The recent event on the Minsk front have entirely interrupted the progress of our work in the district and partially stopped our work in the city. The sudden advance of the Russian army upon Minsk at one time created such panic in the city that for two days it was impossible to carry on any work at all except to get ready for eventualities. As it happened, it was the two days of the Jewish holidays, Shevnoth, and the institutions were closed. The depression in the city was terrible. The entire city was wrapped in an atmosphere of despair. The fear of course was not only the actual fear of the bolsheviks and the hunger that they know is bound to come with the entrance of the Bolsheviki, but it was also a tremendous fear ~~that~~ for the transition period, for the period of the retreat of the Polish army, for the massacre and pogrom which were spoken of openly and freely in the streets. Prices of food immediately rose 50 and 100%. Such things as white flour, sugar and salt immediately disappeared, and could not be obtained for love or money. For once it was made clear to me what terrible psychological strain it must mean to our people who have already lived through several changes of government and now found themselves again face to face with another change, which they could hardly escape. Is it to be wondered that the people cannot think in a rational straightforward way, as we think? Often I was on the verge of losing my patience with our own people for the reason that I could not make them see things in a way which appeared to us so plain. But when I had lived through those few days of alarm, the few days of the evacuation of Minsk, I realized that the terrible strain that it exerted on me as an on-looker must have been multiplied tenfold and a hundredfold upon the people who could not view these happenings as onlookers, but who had to submit to fate and live through them. For the past few weeks it has been impossible to reach any of the surrounding cities and villages. The military authorities have absolutely refused to grant us any permission to travel anywhere. Communication has been discontinued, and such cities as Ihumen, Berezin, Borissov, have been captured by the Bolsheviki and recaptured by the Poles twice during this period. Many of the smaller towns have been visited by detachments of the Polish soldiers and have been threatened with pogroms unless they pay certain contributions in money, cigarettes and sugar. In one case a committee from the village of Uzlani came to me all in despair with the story that a division of Polish gendarmerie rode in to the town and demanded a contribution of 150,000 Russian rubles. I was told that this same division had visited a few weeks earlier the neighboring town of Dukora where, under the threat of making a pogrom they exacted 50,000 rubles. This committee presented an appeal to me that I should intervene for them with the authorities. I realized, of course, that officially I could not take any steps in this matter, but having established personal relations with Mr. Zahorski of Minsk, who is the man in charge of political matters, in that district, I paid him a visit and told him that I came to him neither as a representative of the J.D.C. nor as even an American citizen, because as I told him I realized that in neither of the above capacities did I have the right to interfere in matters concerning the local citizens' relations with the Polish Government. I told him that I simply came to him as an individual to whom certain people who found themselves in despair appealed for help, and my humanitarian

instincts compelled me to come to him and tell him about it, -- that outside of that I was not interested in the matter and after having spoken to him about it I was ready to dismiss it forever. Mr. Zahorsky requested that I should send the committee to him, that he wanted to hear the whole story from them, which I did. I also gave the committee 30,000 marks for which they asked in order to help them pay the contribution which was demanded from them. Eight days later the committee came to me, returned the money and told me that when they appeared before the officers who had demanded the contribution, he asked them what they wanted and when they told him that they had brought the money he chased them out and said that nobody was asking them for any money. Apparently Mr. Zahorsky had intervened in the matter. It is interesting to know that while the committee came to me and wanted me to intervene for them yet they were all in fear that intervention might mean death to them. They were ready to submit and pay the contribution without making any complaint. Such was the case of course in Dukora, where it might be that the Dukora people complained to the higher authorities, the contribution there too might have been removed.

In spite of these tremendous difficulties, however, the work is going on. Our help is reaching everywhere. Institutions are functioning. Kitchens are opening, orphanages are being improved, summer colonies have been opened, loan banks, although not yet legalized by the government, are already in operation. Consum-cooperatives are being improved and enlarged. Cooperative workshops are being enlarged and new ones opened and everywhere, after all criticism and after all fault-finding, the people raise their hands to God with a blessing and exclaim, "What would we have done without American aid!?"

X  
Work done in the district: X

In the district of Minsk, we have taken care of altogether 86 villages and towns. The social help in these various villages and towns is carried on through local Kehillahs, principally, which are reached through the Nationalrat, where representatives from the various Kehillahs are supposed to come together periodically. The medical work in the towns, however, is principally carried on by the Oze, which has ambulatories, day nurseries, child welfare stations, in a great many cities of the district, such as Minsk, Bobruisk, Borissov, Novo Borissov, Sluck, Ihumen, Niesuwisz, Kleck, Swisloecz, Beresina and Baranovicz. Besides, there are small ambulatories in Glusk, Lagojsk, Zembin, Smiloviczi and Smoloviczi, Shack, Kojdinov, Sztoipc, Kadaszkevici, Rakow, Stary Dorogi, Uzda and Dukar. Children's colonies have already been opened in Minsk and Borissov, and in Bobruisk, Sluck and Baranovicz they are in the process of being opened. Altogether it is planned to take care of 1000 children. In addition to that plans are being made to open up a sanitorium for consumptive children in Minsk. As mentioned above, this work is done by the Oze, and in a very satisfactory manner. Besides that there is some medical work being done by the Linas Hazedek in Minsk and a smaller organization in Bobruisk and Sluck. The Kehillahs in the other places are also trying to carry through medical aid but in a very unsatisfactory manner, and I have been trying to discourage such efforts on the part of the Kehillahs.



### Productive Aid:

The money for productive aid was distributed as follows: About 25% to the Workingmen's Committee and the rest to the Kehillahs. The Nationalrat elected a special committee for that purpose. A loan bank in Minsk is already functioning and the loan banks in Sluck, Bobruisk and Berissov are prosperous organizations.

### Reconstruction:

The question of the rebuilding of Smargon is as yet not definitely decided. About 10 families who own land there have already returned and are living in neighboring village and tilling their ground. They received the seed and a little help from the Ort. Now the Ekopo is planning to organize the work of building houses for these families and some additional houses for the few families who have already come there for the purpose of trading, and their families, who are anxious to go back to Smargon. Concrete plans are in process of being worked out and the work is soon to be definitely started.

It is very difficult for one to visualize and actually realize the tremendous difficulties under which our work is carried on in such districts that lie near the front and where the fortunes of war swing back and forth continuously. In this situation, unless one actually lives in that area for a certain period. One realizing the conditions must come to the conclusion that at the very best we can do but a small fraction of what we would like to do, but that very small fraction is very important indeed. It is difficult to imagine what would really be the results in this district if not for the presence of an American citizen representing the JDC. The very presence of such a person lends strength, hope and reliance to our people and helps them bear the strain under which they have to live, outside of the actual material aid that we bring to them.