

Disputes between Jewish Federations

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Community Organizations and Communal Affairs

The period after the war has been marked by the entrance into the country of representatives of a number of Jewish international organizations with whom contact previously had been haphazard or nonexistent. Among these organizations have been the Jewish Agency for Israel, the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), ORT, OSE, the World Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, and the newly created World Sephardic Organization.

One of the results of contact with the rest of world Jewry has been an increased activity among Jews in the fields of defense against anti-Semitism, the social services, and educational institutions. To meet the needs of the communities in the interior and to provide a single voice for the Jewish people *vis-a-vis* the government and elsewhere, a new Federation of Jewish Communities of Tunisia was formed in June 1952 under the presidency of Charles Saada, president of the Jewish community of Sfax, representing a collaboration between the older Federation of Jewish Communities in Tunisia established in July 1950 and the Jewish Community of Tunis. The Federation is still in the organizational stage and therefore it is too early to evaluate its influence. Nevertheless, various problems of a general nature have been referred to it for action, such as the economic needs of the Jewish populations of the communities of the interior, emigration, and educational and political questions. Its major problem is and for some time to come will continue to be the lack of funds to carry out the activities expected of it.

p380 As official representative of the communities, the Federation is financed by receiving 10 per cent of the income of the individual communities; the communities themselves are financed by tax money collected by the government on kosher meats and kosher wine. Other funds come from contributions made in the synagogues, payments for religious rites in connection with burials, etc. In virtually all communities a one-time appeal is made to the population at Passover for assistance to the indigents. The allocation of tax money is made by the government, based on population figures.

The social agencies and private schools are independent organizations and are financed by membership fees and occasional social affairs. All these organizations, including the local sections of ORT, OSE, and the Alliance, have been strengthened considerably during the last three years by the financial and technical assistance given by the JDC. This is particularly notable in the fields of child care and medical service for children, and in Jewish education.

Education

According to the governmental school figures for the school year 1951-52, 15,149 Jewish children or 87 per cent of the Jewish population of school age attend the French schools. Of this number, 3,300 attend the five schools of the Alliance Israelite Universelle. Among the 7,000 Jews in the villages in the extreme south virtually none attend French schools. Only the boys are sent to the traditional *cheder*; the girls and women in that area are illiterate.

Most notable this year has been the rapid advance in schooling for the Jewish boys and girls in the southern town of Gabes. The government appointed an enthusiastic Jewish director for the boys' school and has in general been careful to respect Jewish religious feelings, with the result that the number of children attending school has increased, and the quality of their school work much improved.

The Jewish community of Sfax has a project to construct a Jewish educational center for the coming school year (1952-53). This center will house the Alliance School, a modern Talmud Torah, and other adult educational classes and activities. The cost will be approximately twenty-

five million francs (\$71,400) and will be met by government payment of damages for destruction of community buildings during the late war.

Community Organization and Communal Affairs

Although a Federation of Jewish Communities of Tunisia had existed since 1948 under the presidency of Charles Saada, president of the community of Sfax, a second, rival federation was created in May 1953 under the sponsorship of Charles Haddad, president of the Tunis community. The country's Jewish communities were then split into two hostile camps: eighteen p315 communities remained with the federation headed by Saada, eight communities joined the newly formed federation, and the affiliation of four others was still in dispute.

The original federation had never been able to obtain legal recognition, because the largest community, Tunis, had refused to become a member. Confronted with two federations, the French took the position that they could not favor one as against the other, thereby retaining a neutral status *vis-A-vis* demands made upon them for financial aid. This division made it impossible for either federation to meet the needs of the communities of the interior and to provide a unified voice for the Jewish people of the country.

FUND RAISING

Neither federation had sufficient funds to carry on its activities, nor could they agree on a unified fund-raising campaign for the entire country. In November 1952, an accord was reached between the Community of Tunis, Nos Petits, and the local representatives of OSE Tunisia and ORT Tunisia, whereby the first six months of 1953 were given over to fund raising for Israel and the last half of the year to fund raising for the local organizations. Since a unified campaign for the country was blocked by the struggle between the two federations, OSE-Tunisia, ORT, and Nos Petits banded together and decided to run their own campaign during the second half of 1953.

The Jewish communities were financed by tax monies collected by the government from kosher meat and Jewish sacramental wine. The government allocated this money on the basis of population figures. The communities also received funds from contributions made in the synagogues, from religious rites at the cemeteries, and from special appeals made during Passover and the High Holy Days.

Independently of the organized communities, a multiplicity of small local organizations carried on specialized programs such as maintaining canteens, providing trousseaux, Bar Mitzvah clothing, blankets, etc. These organizations were financed by membership fees and periodic social affairs. Most of them received assistance from the JDC either in the form of supplies, technical assistance, or cash. Nos Petits, which had formerly served about 800 children with daily hot lunches in Tunis, was able to expand its facilities to accommodate about 2,000.

The Jewish communities of Tunisia had maintained active contact with many foreign and international Jewish organizations, notably the Jewish Agency, the JDC, the World Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, the World Sephardic Union, ORT, and OSE.

Community Organization and Communal Affairs

Two rival Federations of Jewish Communities of Tunisia carried on their internecine warfare, despite attempts made by the executive committee of the World Jewish Congress to reunite them. The first federation had been organized in 1948 under the presidency of Charles Saada, president of the community of Sfax. The second was organized in May 1953 under the sponsorship of Charles Haddad, president of the Tunis community. Legal recognition was refused to either federation, since the French refused to take a position favoring one against the other. This division made it impossible for either federation to meet the needs of the communities of the interior or to provide a unified voice for the Jewish people of the country.

Neither federation had sufficient funds to carry on its activities, nor could any agreement be reached for a unified fund-raising appeal for the entire country. Since a single unified campaign for the country was blocked by the struggle between the two federations, OSE-Tunisia, ORT-Tunisia, and Nos Petits conducted their own campaign. This raised only 3,000,000 francs (\$8,500) because the community of Tunis refused to give its support.

The Jewish communities were financed by tax monies collected by the government from kosher meat and Jewish sacramental wine. The government allocated this money on the basis of population figures. For the first time the French government agreed to the repeated requests of the Jewish communities for the inclusion of their welfare and religious needs in the annual budget along with those of the Moslems. The sum of 250,000,000 francs (\$71,400) was provided in the 1954-55 budget for Moslems and Jews. This represented an important departure from previous practice, since previously the Jewish minority was never assured of definite government aid. The communities also received funds from contributions made in the synagogues, from religious rites in the cemeteries, and from special appeals made during Passover and the High Holy Days. Independent of the organized communities, a multiplicity of small local

organizations carried on specialized programs, such as summer camps, kindergartens, and p441 canteens, and providing trousseaux, Bar Mitzvah clothing, and blankets. These organizations were financed by membership fees and periodic social affairs. Most of them received substantial assistance from the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), either in the form of supplies, technical assistance, or cash.

The Jewish communities of Tunisia had maintained active contact with many foreign and international Jewish organizations, notably the Jewish Agency, JDC, the World Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, the World Sephardi Union, the Organization for Rehabilitation Through Training (ORT) and OSE. Both federations of Jewish communities of Tunisia sent delegates to the congress of the World Sephardi Union held in Jerusalem on May 9, 1954.

Community Organizations and Communal Affairs

On April 24, 1955, elections for the governing council of forty were held by the Jewish community of Tunis. Two lists, one headed by the incumbent president, Charles Haddad, the other by Eli Nataf, honorary president of the community, were presented to the voters. The electoral campaign, because of the long and bitter personal struggle between the two contestants, called forth 6,609 registered voters, an increase of more than 2,500 over the 1951 elections. Haddad's list emerged victorious with thirty-seven candidates elected, as against three for the list of Nataf. Charges of fraud were immediately leveled by the Nataf group, who demanded a government investigation of the elections. The government conducted an investigation which upheld Haddad's list and validated the election. The election of the executive council of ten took place on June 13, 1955, and Haddad was reelected as president of the Tunis community for another four-year term.

The two rival Federations of Jewish Communities of Tunisia, immobilized by their protracted conflict, continued their separate unproductive existences. The first federation had been organized in 1948 under the presidency of Charles Saada, the president of the community of Sfax, and the second in May 1953 under the sponsorship of Charles Haddad, president of the community of Tunis. All attempts to unite the two federations had proved futile. Meanwhile, the pressing needs of the communities of the interior for financial assistance and guidance went unheeded. Neither federation could obtain recognition by the government, nor did either possess funds to carry on any activities. Nor could any agreement be reached for a unified fund raising appeal. The communities looked forward to the April 24, 1955, [] election of the Tunis community in the hope that the outcome of this election would somehow set the stage for the renewal of negotiations between the two federations for unity.

The Jewish communities were financed by taxes collected by the government on kosher meat and Jewish sacramental wine. The government allocated this money on the basis of population. For the tax year 1954-55 the community of Tunis received 35,000,000 francs (\$100,000) from the tax on kosher meat, and 15,000,000 francs (about \$43,000) from the tax on the wine. The communities also received funds from contributions made in the synagogues, from religious rites in the cemeteries, and from special appeals made during Passover and the High Holy Days.

p465 While the organized communities concerned themselves specifically with religious matters and with financial assistance to the poor, a multiplicity of small local organizations carried on other specialized programs, such as summer camps, kindergartens, canteens, and the provision of trousseaux, bar mitzvah clothing, and blankets. These organizations were financed by membership fees and periodic social affairs, as well as small subventions from the government. Almost all of them received substantial assistance from the JDC, either in the form of supplies, technical assistance, or cash.

The Jewish communities of Tunisia maintained active contact with many foreign and international Jewish organizations, notably the Jewish Agency, JDC, the World Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, the World Sephardi Union, the Organization for Rehabilitation Through Training (ORT), and Oeuvre pour Secour des Enfants Israelites (OSE). The international conference in London on June 14, 1955, sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the Alliance Israelite Universelle, and the Anglo-Jewish Association, was attended by two delegates from Tunisia, Charles Haddad, president of the community of Tunis, and Isaac Hayat, president of the community of Sousse.

p466 The community of Sfax completed the construction of a magnificent community center which comprised a synagogue, a ritual bath, six Alliance classes, a Garderie (nursery school), a canteen, showers, an OSE medical center, a large conference hall, and offices and apartments for the grand rabbi and the director of the Alliance school. The center cost about 40,000,000 francs

(\$111,111) to build. Of this sum, 28,000,000 (\$80,000) came from the government's war reparation funds, 7,000,000 (\$20,000) from local appeals, and 5,000,000 (\$14,286) from the JDC.

Community Organization and Communal Affairs

On August 4, 1955, after several years of conflict, the two rival federations of Jewish communities merged. Isaac Hayat, president of the community of Sousse, was chosen as first president to hold office until April 1956, to be followed successively by Charles Haddad, president of the Tunis community, and Charles Saada, president of the Sfax community. An executive bureau of ten members was elected, made up of representatives from different communities throughout the country. A varied program of activities was projected, and budgets of all the communities were drawn up for submission to the government.

At the first annual meeting held on April 22, 1956, Haddad succeeded Hayat as president. The chief topic of discussion was the difficult financial position of the communities, caused by the failure of the government to pay the annual subventions promised. Haddad pointed out that government subventions had decreased sharply over the past years, and cited the example of the Tunis community, which had received 21,000,000 francs (\$60,000) for 1952, but only 9,800,000 francs (\$28,000) for the year 1955-56. The executive committee was directed to pursue this matter with the government. At the end of June, despite numerous meetings with government officials, the subventions remained unpaid.

The Jewish communities' main income came from taxes collected by the government on kosher meat and Jewish sacramental wine. The government allocated this money on the basis of Jewish population. In order to make up for the decrease in the government's subvention, the Jewish community of Tunis requested an increase from 15 francs per kilo of meat to 20 francs per kilo and an increase in the wine tax. The government took this request under consideration, but by the end of June 1956 no reply had been received.

p349 The communities also received funds from contributions made in the synagogues, from religious rites and services at the cemeteries, and from special appeals made during Passover and the High Holy Days. While the communities concerned themselves specifically with religious matters and with financial assistance to the poor, a multiplicity of small local organizations carried on specialized programs, such as summer camps, kindergartens, canteens, and the provision of trousseaus, bar mitzvah clothing, and blankets. These organizations were financed by membership fees and periodic social affairs, as well as small grants from the government. All of them received substantial assistance from the JDC in the form of either supplies, technical assistance, or cash.

The Jewish communities of Tunisia maintained very active contact with many foreign and international Jewish organizations, notably the Jewish Agency, the JDC, the World Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, the World Sephardi Union, ORT, Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants Israelites (OSE), and the United HIAS Service. At various meetings called by some of the above-mentioned organizations, delegates from Tunisia attended.