

LIBYA

THE year 1951 was a decisive one for Libya. Under the superintendence of the United Nations, represented by High Commissioner Adrien Pelt, Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, and Fezzan were to become a federal state on January 1, 1952, with Emir Sayia Mohammed Idran el Senoussi, religious and political head of Cyrenaica, becoming King of Libya.

A parliament of sixty members (twenty for each of the three states making up the prospective federation) met regularly to prepare for the establishment of the new Libyan state. Among these sixty members there was not a single representative of the non-Moslem minorities. On March 8, 1951, the first national government of Tripolitania was formed, which constituted one more step along the road to Libyan independence.

The minorities were apprehensive about the arrival of January 1, 1952. After consultations with such Jewish organizations as the American Jewish Committee and the Alliance Israélite Universelle, both of which sent experts to Libya in February, 1951, the Jewish community of Tripoli placed an important memorandum in the hands of High Commissioner Pelt and G. Marchine, representative of minorities on the Commission of the United Nations for Libya. This memorandum, in the form of an outline of projected legislation, demanded that the rights of minorities be fully guaranteed in the future constitution of the country (although Libya, to be admitted into the United Nations, would in any case have to promise to respect the principles set forth in the International Declaration of the Rights of Man). The memorandum also demanded a statutory guarantee of the Jewish community's right to organize a council of its own; official recognition of the rabbinical court; recognition of Jewish educational and cultural institutions; safeguarding of the right of emigration; and freedom of transfer for the property of emigrants until 1965. It requested complete equality of treatment with Libyans in all matters of public welfare. Finally, it requested recognition of the Jewish population's right to observe its religious holidays and days of rest as prescribed by the Jewish religion.

This memorandum was sympathetically received by the United Nations authorities, who were endeavoring to make its principles an essential part of the new state—which, because of its economic dependence, must in any case remain under international tutelage for a lengthy period of time.

Jewish Population

The pogroms of 1945 and 1948, which no one had forgotten, together with the prospect of Libyan independence, stimulated a powerful movement of emigration to Israel. In 1945 there were around 30,000 Jews in Libya, living in 15 centers in Tripolitania and 7 centers in Cyrenaica. The exodus began in 1949. In one year the 6,000 Jews living in Cyrenaica were evacuated to Israel. In 1951 there was as large a movement of emigration from Tripolitania.

Since February, 1951, Jews were still to be found in only one place in all Libya—Tripoli. However, most of the 6,000 Jews of Tripoli were awaiting the hour of their departure. Everywhere synagogues were closed and houses stood empty.

This exodus constituted an incalculable loss to the economy of Libya; by the departure of its Jews Cyrenaica courted the danger of falling back into a state of nomadism. The same fate would menace Tripolitania if its Italian settlers, who were also concerned about their future in the country, should decide to emigrate.

Community Life

For those who remained, life went on, but at a considerably slower pace. Tripoli's *Hara*, once so lively a place, was now a half-empty quarter, unrecognizable to those who had known it in its heyday. There used to be thirty synagogues; only seven were still open.

Six schools continued to function, thanks to the support of the British military administration, the Jewish Community Council, the JDC, and the Alliance. There were 1,375 children attending the two Italian schools, and 601 the kindergarten and school maintained by the Alliance. The latter gave instruction in French and Hebrew. Four hundred children were studying in the Talmud Torah.

The social distress attendant on the abnormal situation of Tripolitanian Jewry necessitated large assistance from the JDC. The OSE maintained a free dispensary and the schools gave meals and clothing to their children.

There was little religious and cultural activity. The only remaining organization so engaged was a Maccabi circle. A small magazine, *Hayyenu*, appeared in three languages; its principal item of interest for the Jewish population was the schedule of departure of ships for Israel.

ANDRÉ CHOURAQUI