

North Africa

INTRODUCTION

THE JEWS OF NORTH AFRICA, who for centuries had lived in almost complete neglect, had, in the course of recent years, come to the foreground of Jewish life. This was due to a number of reasons, including, of course, the fact that these old traditional Mediterranean communities had come to represent some of the numerically more important Jewish settlements. As of July, 1950, some 510,000 Jews were living in the French possessions and in Libya. Although separated by political frontiers and, to a certain extent, by cultural heritage and environment, the Jews of this vast area shared in common the impact of the profound social changes in process in this part of the Moslem world.

FRENCH NORTH AFRICA

THE QUEST FOR social and political changes in full swing throughout the dependent territories undoubtedly had repercussions in the French-controlled North African countries. These repercussions were felt both in the French protectorates of Morocco and Tunisia and, to a lesser degree, in Algeria. (Since 1848 Algeria had been integrated into the French political structure and was organized as three overseas French districts [departments].) In a rather complex political climate, a number of native groups and organizations, varied in their approach and attitudes, were pressing political demands ranging from autonomy to the complete independence of their respective countries. Although differing in their demands, all these groups and organizations shared a common resentment of French intervention in the internal affairs of their countries. On the whole, the political struggles in French North Africa were directed by the Moroccan *Istiklal* (Independence) party, the Tunisian *Destour* (Constitution) and *neo-Destour* parties, and in Algeria by the Manifesto party and the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties. There were, however, other forces in the political arena, some working underground and to a certain extent in conjunction with the Pan-Arab League. Of these political groups, the North African Committee of Liberation, headed by Abd El-Krim, renowned Moroccan fighter in Cairo (Egypt) at the time of writing (July, 1950) was the most intransigent in its demands. This committee intended in its fight against France to appeal to the United Nations for immediate independence for the French-controlled countries.

The situation in North Africa was of serious concern to all political parties in France. Several parties, outstanding among which was that of the French socialists, Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière Socialiste (SFIO), suggested a number of far-reaching reforms in the direction of increasing local self-government, in addition to large-scale development projects in the countries concerned. As a matter of fact, during the years following World War II, the French had introduced considerable changes in the administrative and political organization of their North African countries. They had extended the electorate in Algeria and somewhat increased native participation in local consultative councils of both Tunisia and Morocco. The French had also enlarged the competence and jurisdiction of these limited assemblies.

There was much evidence that in the period under review serious moves were being made by both sides to arrange for some *modus vivendi*. At this writing (July, 1950) negotiations were under way between the French government and Tunisian leaders which might open to this French protectorate new opportunities for gradual development. There was apparently a growing awareness on the part of some moderate Moslem leaders that the presence of the French had contributed substantially to the material and social progress of the area and facilitated the gradual evolution of various ethnographical elements of the population. For several decades large numbers of the younger Moslem generations had taken advantage of the incomparable intellectual and technical training that France afforded them. Notwithstanding their ardent nationalism, they were greatly influenced by French culture, and it was extremely significant that after the defeat of France and during the German occupation the North African countries had not ranged themselves with the enemies of France.

MOROCCO

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY of Morocco was by far the largest of all the Jewish settlements in Moslem countries and, in fact, the seventh largest of all Jewish communities. It was estimated that in 1950 there were some 260,000 Jews in Morocco, about 225,000 in the French Protectorate, some 25,000 in the Spanish zone, and 10,000 in the international zone of Tangiers. Local estimates supplied the figures on the geographical distribution of the Jewish population in some selected cities, as shown in Table 1.

The latest estimate of the occupational distribution of Moroccan Jews indicated that 48 per cent were in business, peddling, and handicraft; 13 per cent were workers; 11 per cent were in white-collar occupations and professions; and 28 per cent were in various other occupations.¹

The social structure of the Jewish population was characteristic in that there was practically no middle-class group. Except for a small group of rich families, large numbers of Jews were living in the most degraded conditions of misery. Housing and sanitary conditions of the population living in the *mellahs* were, according to local observers, utterly distressing. Most of the families lived in one unventilated room possessing the most elementary sani-

¹ Based on reports in JDC files.