REPORT ON MINSK.

Before the war the city of Minsk had a population of approximately 100,000 inhabitants. During the wartime when Minsk became an important strategic centre and due to the fact that large refugee masses were concentrated there, the population reached 140,000. At the present time, according to the census of 1922, the population is 102,975, of which 48,979 are Jews and the rest divided among other nationalities. The 1922 figures of the population in Minsk are as follows: total of population 102,975, including 50,070 males and 52,864 females, the number of families is 22,936, of which 49% are Jews. The total number of children of both sexes under 17 are 39,846.

Former and Present Economic Situation: Before the war Minsk was an important commercial centre with a considerable number of factories and plants; there were a few match factories and a few yeast factories. Leather industry occupied an important place, the traces of which are noticeable even now. Kantoriviche’s wall paper factory, saw-mills, carpentry, occupied not a small place in the local industry. There were also brick factories, mills and a small metallurgical plant.

Most of these enterprises rapidly developed during the war time, when the two-year requirements of the western front, where Minsk proved to be the chief centre, absorbed not only the local production, regardless of its quality, but also stimulated further extension of large industries. The commercial world filled its pockets, and bank deposits were so many that depositors had to stay in line for 2-3 hours in order to deposit their savings. The end of 1917 made a yawning gap in the local life, and afterwards the rapid change of governments completed the thing. And only at the beginning of 1922, Minsk, as a ransacked city, began to show signs of animation under the new economic conditions (NEP). It is true that contraband, foreign exchange brought to life the most unhealthy elements of the commercial world, while production slackened to a turtle’s step and slowly began to come into its own. The most striking example of the latter’s backwardness is shown by the 10,000 unemployed registered at the Exchange of Labor. Besides, the 10-15% of the re-established industry is wholly in the hands of the Government. In 1922, an opportunity was presented for opening some private stores, but more than half of them have been closed down already because of the taxes, while the rest, impelled by inertia, still move on but are not far from being shut down.

Small artisan production and handicraft work have been on the decrease, since they are being concentrated in state economic organs. Production there is very far from being perfect; purchasable ability is very limited, which is proved by the impossibility of providing and absorbing the unemployed masses. There are very few skilled workers, and this also contributed not in a small degree to the swelling of the unemployed ranks.
Children's Institutions, Schools and Homes for Bringing Up Children.

Gorono (City Educational Department) Children's Homes: There are 13 children's homes sheltering up to 1586 children and 246 of the personnel, of whom 6 are Jews and attend to 542 children, and 18 are Russian, Ruthenians and Polish who care for 994 children. There are also 6 children's homes for 300 children from the famine districts, and refugees of various nationalities who are being supported by the POMGL (Pomstka Riesle) and various boards and combinations of workers of various State organs. The average age in all these children's homes is from 4 to 12 years.

Kindergartens: Of these there are 16 for 357 children, of which 7 are Jewish for 391 children.

Comparing these figures with what I pointed out regarding the size of Minsk's population and its economic position, the insufficiency of Jewish children's homes at once arrests one's attention. And in reality the children's homes shelter orphans exclusively, leaving in the streets children who are absolutely in need of care. There are now in Minsk about 300 homeless children. Therefore, it is necessary to establish at least one more children's home for 75 Jewish children and 50 non-Jews.

The general condition of these kindergartens and homes is not bad. However, they are in need of repairs. Part of the Jewish homes have been repaired through JDC means, but a considerable part is extremely in need of repairs. Most children lack clothes, underwear, bed linen. Heretofore, the question of feeding has been satisfactorily met, but with the ARA's departure and cessation of the ARA and JDC ration distribution, the feeding question will become very acute.

Schools: There are 86 schools of the general type, of which 36 are for 7 years old children, a few between the ages of 5-6 and the rest for 4 years old children. These schools are attended mostly by Jewish children. About March 1st, 1923 these schools had 9849 children attended by 467 teachers. Among these schools there are some national where instruction is given in the mother-tongue, and there are mixed schools where instruction is given in Russian. Heretofore these children received neither feeding nor any other aid, though there are a large number of poor, ragged and semi-starved children.

Professional technical education: There are 8 schools of this type altogether, which include 974 youngsters from 14 to 18 years and over. As regards national composition, 90% are Jews. The conditions in these schools have been improving more and more since the JDC has begun to support them in some way. Further extensive help is necessary.

There are 3 pedagogic technological schools, of which 1 is Jewish for 176 people of both sexes. The latter has been almost wholly kept up by the JDC, since they receive food products, shoes and clothing. The question of further feeding will become acute should this be discontinued.
Ruthenian State University: The University is divided into the following faculties: 1. Workers, 2. Medical, 3. Social Science, 4. Pedagogia. During the academic year there were the following number of students (1922-1923) - 2240 students, divided among the courses as follows:

- Workers Faculty - 264
- Social Science - 793
- Medical - 567
- of this number 398 were Ruthenians, 926 Jews, Great Russian 43, Poles and others - 23. This year's composition is practically the same.

Most of the students have to combine their studies with some sort of employment which scarcely covers their needs. There is a shortage of everything. JDC and ARA have participated greatly in the establishment of this young university, but the latter's needs are far from being covered and there is a wide field for useful application of activities by any Public organization. JDC has opened for the students a dining room which distributes 600 dinners a day.

The Agricultural Institute has two departments: 1) Agronomical, and 2) Forestry. In all, there are 360 students, of whom 25% are Jews, 20% of which are at the Agronomical Department. JDC assists them with food.

Medical Aid: Minsk has 10 hospitals with 900 beds, for all medical branches, 4 ambulatories of 500 visiting capacity daily and 2 ambulatories of the dispensary type for tubercular and venereal diseases.

There are the following children's institutions: 1) Nursery of 80 beds, 2) Home for Babes 1-3 years old with 120 beds. 2) Consultation with milk kitchens with visiting capacity of 1000; a third consultation home is now being built; 2 sanatoriums for tuberculosis and lung diseases of 60 beds and 1 children's ambulatory with a dietetic dining room and reception for special cases.

All these institutions are fairly well equipped and thanks to the ARA supplies with medicaments and food in sufficient quantity. At present, owing to recent new rulings the large groups of the poor population find access to them very difficult as they render free service only to Union members and those receiving aid from the Social Welfare Department. The rest have to pay rather high fees. When the ARA ceases its activities the question of feeding and medicaments will enter upon an acute stage. The question of accessibility and free of charge help is very important too. In time, when certain allocations are made to the State it may be possible either to obtain a revocation of these rulings or to come to an agreement on certain conditions to make these institutions more accessible to the poorest population.

Home for Aged: Minsk has two homes for Aged at present a third home is being organized, especially for Jews. JDC has given to the latter a considerable subsidy for repair. In general, these Homes are in good condition.
Individual Aid: The flow of refugees, starvation wages and unemployment has increased considerably and spread widely the want among various groups of the population. Particularly bad have been the conditions of the intelligentsia and kindred groups. Poverty among them has reached extreme limits. We have been frequently besieged by all sorts of requests for aid which we have had much difficulty to meet because of lack of definite funds. At the present moment with the discontinuance of individual food and articles, parcels distribution the situation has become worse still. Special attention in this field is absolutely necessary.

CONCLUSION.

Summarising the aforesaid it is necessary to point out the following:

The Economic situation of the Jewish as well as of the entire population is far from being bright, which fact gives rise to a number of pressing and vital relief problems.

1. It is necessary to extend the net of children's educational institutions, and to give aid to those already functioning.

2. It is necessary to raise to a required standard the professional technical and special education, and with this in view to give aid and support to all such existing institutions and to subsidise all the new undertakings in this field.

3. An extensive credit system would best meet the needs of the artisan, kustar workers, as well as small tradesman. Such bank will undoubtedly take the above-mentioned elements out of the clutches of poverty in which they now are.

4. Medical help is a very pressing problem of the moment because of the peculiar position of the poor who are not Union members or recipients of aid from the Social Welfare Department.

5. Individual help, insofar as it is not covered wholly by State organs, should be extended as far as possible.

June 15, 1923
Minsk.