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Refugees in the Far East

EXTENSION OF REMARKS
OF

HON. ARTHUR G. KLEIN

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Mr. KLEIN. Mr. Speaker, under leave to extend my remarks, I include in the RECORD a report by Miss Laura L. Margolies on refugees in the Far East. Miss Margolies was a representative of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Shanghai, directing assistance to men and women who had fled to that city from Nazi Germany. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Miss Margolies, as an American citizen, was interned by the Japanese. She was recently repatriated.

Our country has every reason to be proud of the fact that its citizens of Jewish faith have been able to develop an organization such as the Joint Distribution Committee. The committee was organized during the last war and for a generation has been the chief American agency giving aid to Jews overseas. Its leadership and personnel have shown not only a sense of personal sacrifice, but a vision and an ability to plan, which will yet save the remnants of the Jewish communities from the holocaust of the present war, and stand out in the annals of great human services.

It is interesting to note that while this committee was established and is supported by men and women of Jewish faith, it has not limited its benefactions exclusively to Jewish victims of war and persecution overseas. It has cooperated closely with such organizations as the

American Friends Service Committee (Quakers), the Unitarians, and with Catholic and Protestant organizations everywhere. Frequently Christian as well as Jewish refugees have received the help of this committee.

In Shanghai, a substantial number of the refugees to whom Miss Margolies refers are persons of Catholic and Protestant faith. They are still being assisted by a local committee which represents the Joint Distribution Committee. In the actual rendering of human service, distinctions of creed and nationality have disappeared and men and women of many backgrounds and faiths have served in the common cause of humanity.

REFUGEES IN THE FAR EAST—EVEN AFTER PEARL HARBOR THOUSANDS OF EUROPEAN JEWS IN SHANGHAI CONTINUE TO BE KEPT ALIVE THROUGH MACHINERY SET UP BEFORE THE WAR BY THE JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE

(By Laura L. Margolis)

I don't have to tell you how glad I am to be home. I'm still a bit confused, rushing around to say hello to my family and my friends at the Joint Distribution Committee, trying to sort my thoughts and impressions of my two and a half years in Shanghai into some sort of order and particularly trying to get some clothes to round out the wardrobe of a single dress and one pair of worn-out shoes that I came home with. I left America to help refugees and now I return a refugee myself.

I went to Shanghai for the Joint Distribution Committee in May 1941. Manuel Siegel, who remains in internment there, joined me just 12 days before Pearl Harbor. Before he could unpack his bags Japanese warships were firing on American and British gunboats under our windows and we realized that our country was at war.

It's only when people begin asking you questions about how you lived, what you did in an enemy-occupied city, how you were able to help the refugees—and we were able to—that your whole experience shapes itself into some meaningful pattern.

THOUSANDS KEPT ALIVE

I want to make one point very clear: The Joint Distribution Committee and the organization it set up in Shanghai under wartime conditions in enemy-occupied territory has meant the difference between life and death to thousands of refugees there. Our kitchen, now feeding 5,000 persons 1 meal a day, our 5 camps that are housing them in crude but protective barracks, spell hope and life for these people. Our work has never stopped for a single day. That work is still going on.

Our difficulties were so numerous and serious that more than once I felt sure that our whole structure would collapse. Money was always a problem; getting adequate equipment was a major headache for us. Unraveling the red tape, overcoming the apathy of the Japanese occupation authorities was a long-term undertaking in itself.

Just before Pearl Harbor we were feeding 8,000 a day in the Joint Distribution Committee kitchen, giving them a noon meal and an evening meal. But our funds were running low and the expected Joint Distribution Committee allotment for December had not arrived. In fact, it never arrived, because Pearl Harbor intervened.

The declaration of war automatically put the Joint Distribution Committee's arrangement for occupied countries into effect. Here I must explain that before Pearl Harbor the Joint Distribution Committee in New York, foreseeing the possibility of war, had informed all its overseas committees, including ours, that local borrowings should be made against the Joint Distribution Committee's post-war credit if war should come and communications be severed. This credit

was for a period of 6 months, at the monthly rate of expenditure then current.

On the basis of this guaranty we called a meeting of a group of prominent Shanghai Jews, explained the plan to them, and appealed for their support.

At first, the large sums we needed were slow in coming. In the meantime we took stock of our funds and decided that, by cutting out one meal a day, we could continue for some time. Cutting out one meal a day was a difficult decision to make, because it meant putting already undernourished men, women, and children on still shorter rations. But it was either that or close down entirely and turn the refugees over to the Japanese.

More meetings followed, this time with individuals. Again we explained the Joint Distribution Committee's arrangement; again we asked for funds, explaining how increasingly desperate the refugee situation was becoming.

The loans grew—not only in number, but also in amount. As a matter of fact, we exhausted the Joint Distribution Committee's credit limit. But we went ahead with our borrowings, feeling sure that, although we had no authorization to do so, the Joint Distribution Committee wanted to help, but because of wartime conditions couldn't communicate its wishes to us. All in all, we were able to accumulate \$500,000, and up to the day of my internment I was able to contract a loan. This made my internment easier to bear.

FIVE THOUSAND MEALS A DAY

The Japanese allowed us to borrow from neutrals only. At first the loans permitted us to give one meal a day. When I say one meal a day, you must understand that I mean a meal of one course—a heavy soup that we made as nourishing as we could, or a stew of some sort. Later we were able to add 3 ounces of bread a day. Later, too, we bought a large amount of soya beans, and, with a press that we acquired, turned out enough of the highly nutritive soya milk to supplement the children's diet. At first they refused to drink it, but after a while they got used to it.

When we first began working in Shanghai we found that we were burning money. Our kitchen was an antiquated Chinese affair which was terribly inefficient. Meals cost us

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60 cents each in Chinese money—3 cents in American currency. Of this, 10 cents went for food and 50 cents for fuel. Obviously, this extravagance had to be eliminated. This was easier said than done. You just couldn't go out and buy new equipment in a city where every piece of metal was a Japanese prize. But we did manage to locate four steam boilers that belonged to a commercial firm. By much persuasion and wire pulling, we got possession of the boilers and installed them. This gave us a kitchen with a capacity of 10,000 meals a day at a cost of only 10 cents a meal, in Chinese money, of which only 2 cents went for fuel.

Unfortunately our resources forced us to limit ourselves to 5,000 meals a day. We chose only the most needy—the children, the aged, the ill—and fed them. This is a tragic situation. Unless funds can be sent through to the committee that is now operating the kitchen, it means that they will have to maintain this level of inadequate relief; it means giving people neither enough to let them live, nor enough to let them die. In order to keep feeding the people we had to close our two hospitals in June 1942.

I want to tell you proudly that the refugees themselves worked with us, shouldering their responsibilities, rather than sitting idly by and passively accepting our aid.

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

In January 1942 we called a meeting of the 500 paid refugee workers in our kitchen, two hospitals, and barracks, and explained our precarious financial situation to them. We told them that there would be no money for salaries, that every cent we were raising from day to day had to go into the kitchen. We asked them to please find other jobs. The next day every one of them reported for work. We held meetings with all the other refugees because we felt that they had a right to know the situation. We told them that to work together most efficiently they would have to organize themselves democratically, to elect representatives who would consult with us. Only then would we pull through this crisis together.

We organized ourselves along these lines. We met regularly with these delegates, heard their special problems, and, consequently, found things working out much better. It was as if we were shipwrecked on an island

and had organized ourselves into a community government so that we could more efficiently stave off disaster until we were rescued.

THE POOR HELP THE POORER

A great change came over these people as a result of this application of simple democracy. Poor as they were, they recognized degrees of poverty among themselves. I remember that one day a representative came to see me with an idea. He was gaunt, pale from insufficient food, and wearing threadbare clothing. He told me that some of the refugees had thought of giving a party to raise funds for their fellow refugees. That first party led to others. The poor were helping the poorer.

In February 1943 I was interned in the Chapei camp in Shanghai. People want to know why the Japanese waited so long before interning us. The answer is very simple: until then they needed us to help run the varied and complicated affairs of a city as large as Shanghai—under their supervision, of course. By February they had no further need for us, so they interned us. I can't tell you too much about the camp for obvious reasons.

I was given 1 week's notice to get ready and pack. The camp to which I was sent was for women and families. Mr. Siegel was interned in Footing camp, which was for unattached and single men.

The food was very simple and quite inadequate. We had three monotonous meals each day. If I never taste fish, rice, and cabbage fried in oil again, it won't be too soon. According to Oriental standards, we were well treated.

We had to do all of our own work. The buildings and stoves were furnished to us and we were just dumped in to shift for ourselves. We did our own laundry. We did our own cooking and preparing of food. As for accommodations, I had a cot which was just enough to turn over in, and the space between beds was just enough to get in sideways. The only thing that kept us going was the hope of repatriation.

I feel that I have come out of darkness into the light, that I have come as a messenger from a far world, to tell you that back in distant Shanghai, in the hands of your enemy, there are brave men and women of your blood and kin, who in danger and in difficulty have never lost faith, have never lost hope.