

CHAPTER VII

PRE-WAR REFUGEES

A. CATEGORIES AND IDENTIFICATION OF PRE-WAR REFUGEES

1. NANSEN REFUGEES.

(a) Russian Refugees—"Any person of Russian origin who does not enjoy, or who no longer enjoys the protection of the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and has not acquired another nationality" (Arrangement of May 12, 1926).

(i) Nansen refugees from the USSR were formerly known as "Russian Refugees" and were scattered in various countries. It was estimated in 1938 that they totalled about 6-700,000 persons. They constitute the largest group of pre-war refugees in Germany, Austria and Italy where their identification has been a serious problem since the end of the war. Therefore, special practical hints will be given below to help in the solution of this problem. The group includes persons of varied ethnic origins which form the population of USSR, *i.e.* Russians, Armenians, Georgians, Kalmucks, etc. The Nansen refugee from USSR will be identified in the following manner: A Nansen passport should not be considered as the sole criterion of Nansen status. Many persons who are entitled to Nansen passports have been unable to obtain one. Any documentary proof of a Russian national's residence outside of USSR before 1 September 1939 will be considered as sufficient indication of his Nansen status. This will include:—

(a) Birth or Marriage Certificates, School or University Certificates or Diplomas; certificates of employment or domicile, identity documents etc., issued by competent authorities before 1 September 1939, outside of USSR. Competent authorities are—Police, Government agencies, Nansen Office, Church authorities, etc. In Germany a check should always be made with the Polizei-Amt or the Einwohnermelde-Amt.

(b) "Fremdenpass" designating nationality as "staatenlos" issued before or during the war, with the exception of certain cases, mostly in the post-war period, when it was possible to acquire these documents illegally (See Section 1 of Chapter XIV on Identity Documents).

(c) Certificates issued by the High Commission for Refugees of the League of Nations, later by Intergovernmental Committee, and by IRO.

(ii) Failing the documentary evidence mentioned above, additional information will need to be obtained either from the person himself or from members of his group. Nansen refugees usually maintain close ties among themselves, and know each other's background. As a rule, an oral testimonial is not sufficient, and it will be necessary to require a sworn statement of at least three genuine Nansen refugees.

(b) Armenian Refugees—“Any person of Armenian origin, formerly a subject of the Ottoman Empire, who does not enjoy or who no longer enjoys the protection of the Government of the Turkish Republic, and who has not acquired another nationality” (Arrangement of May 12, 1926).

(i) Armenian refugees include two categories, those from USSR and those from Turkey. They enjoy Nansen status if they had left Russia or Turkey before 1 September 1939. The Armenians occupied a district of north eastern Asia Minor with very uncertain boundaries. They were the subject of perennial persecution by the Turks who sought to eliminate them because of their non-Moslem religion. By the fall of 1921 when Russia had become master of the Caucasus, the boundaries of Armenia were redefined; part of the territory becoming a Soviet republic while another part remained with Turkey. However because of persecution on the part of the Turks and because of political objections to Russia, a great number of Armenians fled. These Armenian refugees may be found in the following places :—

- (a) United States : These may be regarded as completely absorbed and therefore not the concern of IRO.
- (b) Turkey : There is a minority of 75,000 Armenians most of them in Istanbul. The majority are Turkish citizens.
- (c) Greece : Received about 50,000 Armenian refugees from Smyrna when it was seized by Turkey. Some have been absorbed economically but Greek legislation as to their nationalisation is ambiguous. A small number were deported to Italy by the Germans. They have been refused repatriation to Greece. The majority of these persons remain the concern of the Organisation.
- (d) France : A great number have been absorbed into the economy of the country; although it is estimated that about 65,000 may not be so absorbed.
- (e) Bulgaria : Although of the 15,000 there only a small number have acquired Bulgarian citizenship, most of them are considered to be fairly well established.
- (f) Rumania : Of the 6,000 refugees in Rumania only a few are naturalised; however the presence of a resident community of Armenians has made it easy for them to become absorbed.
- (g) Great Britain : The majority of Armenians there have become absorbed and are not in need of aid.
- (h) Other European countries have a small number although their position is not known.

(c) Assyrian Refugees—“Any person of Assyrian or Assyro-Chaldean origin, and also by assimilation any person of Syrian or Kurdish origin, who does not enjoy or who no longer enjoys the protection of the state to which he previously belonged, and who has not acquired or does not possess another nationality” (Arrangement of June 30, 1928).

(d) Turkish Refugees—“Any person of Turkish origin, previously a subject of the Ottoman Empire, who under the term of the protocol of Lausanne of July 24, 1923, does not enjoy or no longer enjoys the protection of the Turkish Republic, and who has not acquired another nationality” (the same arrangement).

(e) Saar Refugees—“Persons who, having been domiciled in the Saar have left the territory on the occasion of the 1935 Plebiscite and are not in possession of national passports” (Arrangement of June 30, 1935).

Saar refugees have been issued with Nansen Certificates after the Plebiscite of 13 January 1935. They were required to show that they were domiciled in the Saar on 3 October 1934. The greatest majority of these refugees have settled in France (about

3,500 persons) while others emigrated to other countries. Since the change of regime (the Saar is now autonomous territory) the refugees will have to produce valid objections against returning to the Saar in order to remain under IRO mandate.

2. OTHER PRE-WAR REFUGEES.

(a) Refugees from Germany—“(i) Persons possessing or having possessed German nationality and not possessing any other nationality who are proved not to enjoy, in law or in fact, the protection of the German Government; (ii) Stateless persons not covered by previous Definitions or Arrangements who have left German Territory after being established therein and who are proved not to enjoy, in law or in fact, the protection of the German Government” (Convention 10 February 1938). (Persons who left Germany for reasons of purely personal convenience are not included in this definition.)

(b) Refugees from Austria—“The Definition of Refugees from Germany is extended to ‘persons having possessed Austrian nationality and not possessing any nationality other than German nationality who are proved not to enjoy in law or in fact, the protection of the German Government’, and ‘stateless persons’, not covered by any previous Convention or Arrangement, and having left the Territory which formerly constituted Austria, after being established therein, who are proved not to enjoy in law or in fact, the protection of the German Government”. (Additional Protocol of 14 September 1939.)

(c) Sudetenland Refugees—“(i) Who, having possessed Czechoslovak nationality and not now possessing any nationality other than German, have been obliged to leave the territory which was formerly part of the Czechoslovak State, that is, the territory known as the Sudetenland, where they were settled and which is now incorporated in Germany. They consist of persons who do not enjoy the protection of the German or the Czechoslovak Governments” (League of Nations, 104th Session of the Council 19 January 1939).

Refugees from Germany, Austria and Sudetenland—“(ii) (who were considered as German nationals until 25 November 1941) were carefully screened as enemy nationals in England and France at the beginning of the war. Those who came to Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, and other countries were registered by local authorities so that it can be assumed that they are in possession of documents to show their refugee status. About four-fifths of these refugees are of Jewish faith, and most of the rest are non-Aryan Christians, political and confessional persecutees.

(d) Spanish Refugees—in Metropolitan France are currently identified as to their refugee status by the Central Spanish Refugee Office in Paris in close touch with IRO Mission. The Government extended the application of Nansen Convention of 1933 to the Spanish Refugees on 15 March 1945, and the Intergovernmental Committee assumed their protection on 14 June 1945. A few Spanish Republicans who are in Germany may be recognised by their Spanish origin, and case histories.

(e) Stateless Refugees (other than Nansen)—who lost their nationalities etc., can be found in Central Europe but are not very numerous. Most of them became stateless before the war and refugees after the war, (World War II). Their identification is rather complicated and requires the knowledge of various causes of their statelessness. Consultation of National Committees may be helpful in this problem.

(f) Any Other Refugees—whether *de jure* or *de facto* stateless who were refugees before the war although they did not belong to a recognised category of refugees, and who have continued to be refugees in spite of the changed circumstances. (See (e) above.)