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RUMANIAN JEWRY AND ISRAEL 1959

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100,000 More

At first notice, it hardly seems like an oppressive burden. Early last September, the Rumanian Government after an interval of six years suddenly re-opened the gates to permit Jewish emigration. Some 10,000 Jews left Rumania before the year was out. Close to ten times that number -- out of a total Jewish population of 240,000, the second largest behind the Iron Curtain -- have registered with the Rumanian authorities to emigrate to Israel. Thus the contemplated influx, about 100,000 during 1959, would amount to a 5% increase in Israel's present population of nearly two million. This does not compare with the massive immigration of the first years, when more than 200,000 were received annually (and the percentile increase was close to 20), and at a time when the new state was recuperating from the Arab-Israel war. It is also reported that the Rumanian Jewish community contains within its ranks many trained persons -- technicians, engineers, doctors, etc. -- who would soon constitute a plus factor in the economy. (Interestingly, Jewish refugees from Rumanian pogroms in the 1880's were among the first to colonize Palestine.)

But the fact remains that Israel, although its welcome signs are out, is deeply worried over the practical consequences. The strain on housing and social welfare services is acute, and the already heavily taxed Israeli population is in no position to ease this load unaided. The Rumanian immigration will come on top of ten years of unremitting labor and sacrifices to absorb previous waves. Neither does the security situation permit cutting down on defense expenditures. But another reason, too, is that the Israelis -- and world Jewry -- are determined that this time newcomers will not languish for months in the maabarot (transit camps) before being integrated. Some twenty thousand families from previous immigrations are still living in the tin and wooden huts of the maabarot.

That is why this year the United Jewish Appeal is launching a drive to collect an additional \$100 million. With this aid it is hoped that the "ship-to-settlement" policy of the last several years, when immigrants went directly into permanent housing and jobs, will be continued for the Rumanians. Reports from Israel indicate that most will be settled in northern Galilee and the area around Beersheba (Negev).

What are the alternatives? No responsible voice has suggested that the Jews stay in Rumania. Leaving out for the moment Arab propagandists, some critics of Zionism argue that it may be "Communist strategy," as The Christian