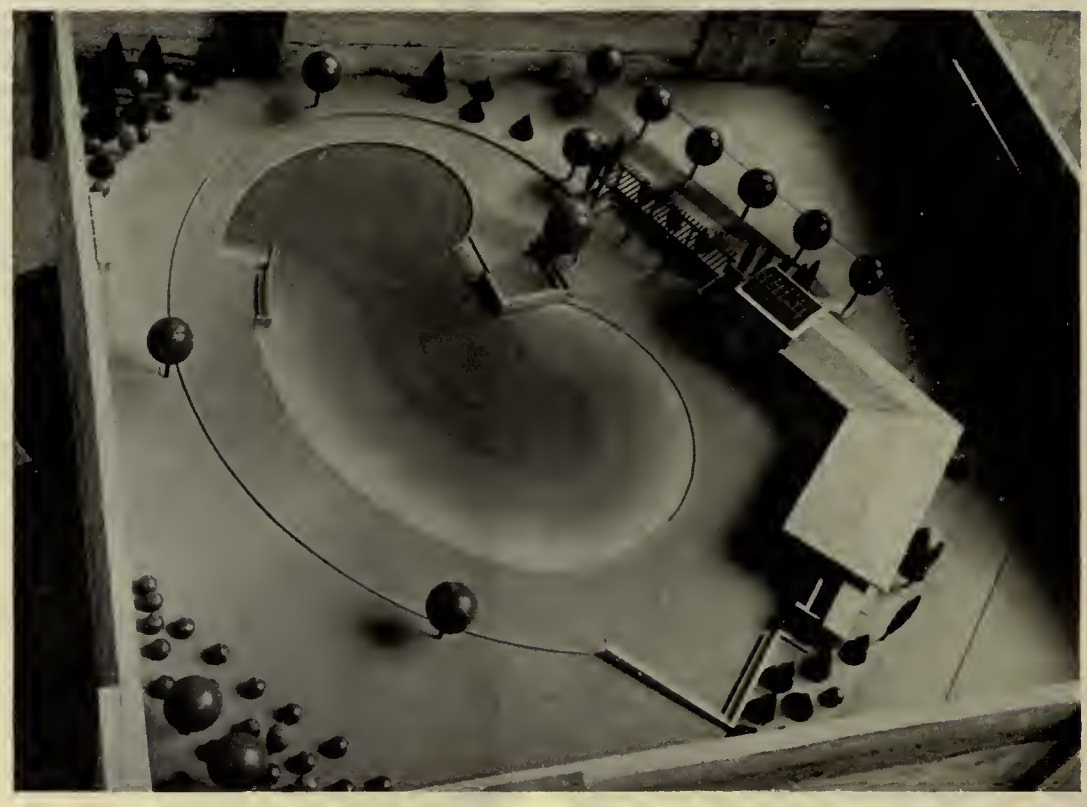


A stylized relief model in painted metal of a children's swimming pool in a public park

MUSEUMS OF THE FUTURE

BY OTTO NEURATH

SUPPOSING somebody came to me and said, "Build the museum of the future just as you want it." How would I answer him? "Agreed," I would say, "but that is not the way to put it. There is no such thing as *the* museum of the future. I can only talk about the museums of the future." And I would go on: "Museums of the future, anyhow, ought not to be as I should like to have them, but as the visitors and users would want them if they knew what makes a museum."

To speak of the museum of the future is like speaking of the automobile of the future. Automobiles are manufactured in series and not produced one by one in a smithy. The idea that every museum ought to contain unique exhibits has come to us from the past. Famous individual objects are collected—a Madonna by Raphael, a calf with four heads, the armor of Charles the Bold, a stranded whale, the first locomotive, and other curiosities—especially those of which only a single specimen is to be had. And for many people the enjoyment of a museum visit consists in seeing something, no matter what, that they can see only once.

It was the same at one time with books: some famous manuscript entered into a collection, a unique treasure; but today, there are ten thousand reproductions of the same manuscript. In the future, museums will be manufactured, exactly as books are today. This basic proposal to produce copies of museums in standard series has often been expounded, particularly by Paul Otlet of the Palais Mondial in Brussels. But the realization of that idea implies international agreement on a specific method of presentation. And thus we arrive at the second point, namely, the museums of the future will have to be organized by agents of the museum users and not by specialists who want to exhibit what *they* consider important. Is not that just the sad part of most exhibitions, that every exhibitor has his own special purpose? This does not mean necessarily that he wants to do business. He may, for example, only want to show how marvelous is the institution of which he is the administrator. So it may happen that in a public-health exposition six different clinics demonstrate six times what a good sick-bed ought to look like. One of these beds may, of course, be better than another, but those who visit this exposition can hardly be expected to distinguish more than

The social museum, says Dr. Neurath, is the museum for our time. In the Social and Economic Museum of Vienna he has developed ways of making social facts stand out through striking charts, models and films. Branches of his research workshop have been established in Berlin, Prague, Amsterdam and Moscow; and a committee has recently been organized in New York to promote the use of the Vienna method in this country and establish a workshop where clients can order anything from a chart to an entire exhibit and the data for it

two beds from each other and, as a rule, will be fully satisfied if they thoroughly understand how one of them works. Would it not be a better plan if the clinics concerned were together to appoint someone to think out a way in which visitors to expositions could best be shown the principal innovations? Incidentally, perhaps, each of the six clinics might show in one common exhibit exactly what major novelty it has introduced—but six sick-beds, that is too much!

And why must the poor visitor to a museum of natural history look at hundreds of birds, even though he can perhaps hardly distinguish the difference, just because some particular ornithologist considers it necessary? As a matter of fact, some of the museum experts have already noticed that something does not quite click, and that, for example, it might be preferable not to introduce birds in companies and battalions; and so, at huge expense and with the aid of photographs, they have produced wonderful panoramas that are to show us how the birds live in nature, master works of men who specialize in creating these illusions.

Now suppose the visitors had appointed an expert of their own to represent them, what would he say about it? Everything that is shown in a museum, he would say, ought to serve a comprehensive pedagogical purpose. Is it really so important to show in dozens of colorful panoramas how all sorts of rare animals live among the weeds and under water? What significant questions are answered by such exhibits? Would it not be far more important to tell the people whether there are many or few animals of this or that kind, which of them are edible, what the skin of this or the bones of that beast might be used for? Isn't it curious: We are constantly told that we are living in the age of technique, and yet when we enter a modern museum of natural history, there is no sign of it. Some of the minerals are shown, perhaps, in relation to their decorative uses; but we do not see the diamond as part of a glass-cutting instrument, or dust of rubies as a substance used for edge-tools, or agate used as neutral surface in a machine, or anything like this. A huge whale hangs in the middle of the hall; but we do not learn how the "beard" is transformed into old-fashioned corsets, how the skin is transformed into shoes, or the fat into soap that finds its way to the dressing room of a beautiful woman. Nor do we learn how many whales are caught per annum, or how much whale-bone, fat and leather are procured by this means. And yet many people surely would be interested to know what countries more particularly are engaged in whaling. And some may want to know what this means for the balance of trade, how it relates to the economic crisis, and so on. Human fortunes are connected with this exhibit—starving seamen, hungry families of fishermen in the north of Norway. And so, everything leads to man and society.



A cave drawing, an ancestor of the Vienna pictographs of today

How to organize human life socially—that is the great question which people are asking today with ever greater insistence. Just as, in their time, museums of technique and museums of hygiene arose to answer a recognized need, so the social museum is the museum for our time. And this is its twofold task: to show social processes, and to bring all the facts of life into some recognizable relation with social processes. Take paintings, for example: they are parts of a social pattern and as such belong with homes and buildings, cities, costumes, and other works of human hands. Therefore, in the museums of the future, the marvelous



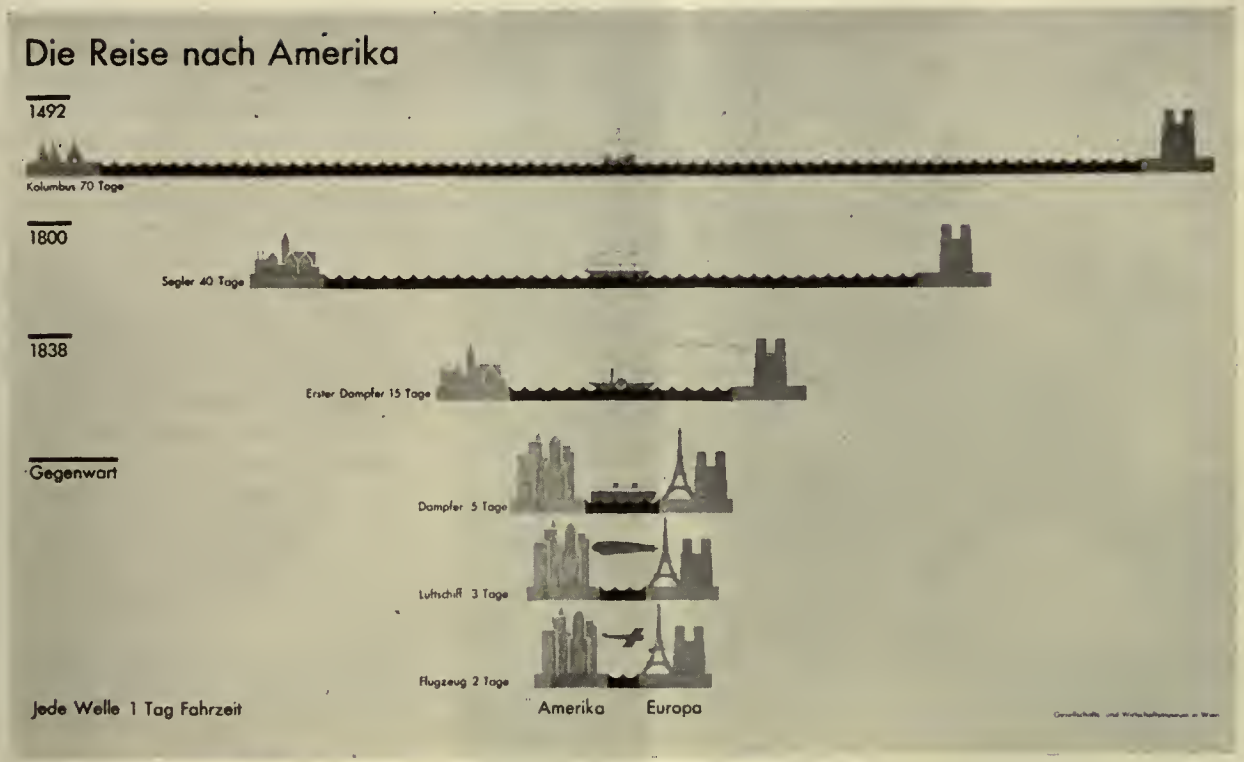
A selection from the growing dictionary of standard graphic symbols developed the Mundaneum



What happened when Austrian coal mining was rationalized. In contrasting men and output in 1923 and 1928, each car represents fifty thousand tons of coal mined, each figure two hundred miners at this production



A pictorial municipal budget. Each disc represents 100 million schillings spent in Vienna on housing, schools, welfare, administration, technical and other services



The distance between the continents has shrunk. Each wave represents a day in the journey to America—it took Columbus seventy days to do what is now done in five by boat, in three by airship, in two by airplane



It takes a map of the world to show where the food comes from that appears on the breakfast table. Consequently breakfast is not a bad occasion to consider not only geography but the interdependence of the nations of the whole world



A map that lies on a table and shows three dimensions makes it easy to compare the relative height of the tariff walls before the war

works of the great masters will be shown within the frame of the social life of their time. Every event, every creative act, both influences the fortunes of humanity and is influenced by them.

But how is humanity to be represented in a museum? That was the question which the Social and Economic Museum of Vienna set itself to answer a decade ago. Since then, a group of collaborating scholars and artists have worked out a method that will be the foundation for the museums of the future. The Vienna method of visual education, designed to include the representation of all sorts of things, has gone far to solve the problem of representing social data. That method is today known all over the world and is being applied on a large scale. The way from Moscow to New York is long—even longer sociologically than geographically speaking; and yet the same picture tables can be used and understood in both places. How is that possible?

By what means can social relationships be made visible? A machine or an animal might be photographed when we are in need of a picture but do not know how to simplify it for educational purposes. But a photograph is not a conceptual analysis, and it is just that which the simple-minded need. We have, in this pedagogical effort, to get rid, on the one hand, of pure abstraction and, on the other, of crude facts. The well-known story of the camel may help to illustrate my meaning. A Frenchman is asked, what is a camel? He goes to the Paris zoo and asks someone to show him a camel. There is none. So he travels to Marseilles, then to Bordeaux—nowhere can he find one. And the malicious rumor has it that on his return he reports: there is no such thing as a camel. The German, confronted with the same problem, follows a very different procedure; he sits down and thinks, and thinks, and thinks—and the camel is there. The American, as an empiricist, again follows a wholly different method; he buys himself a lasso, leases a yacht, and travels to Africa where he catches a camel which he brings back to New York and exhibits, saying: here is an idea of the camel! (There is a sequel to this story: each of the three writes a book. The Frenchman's bears the title: Sonnets to the Unknown Camel. The German names his: The Absolute Camel and the Metaphysical Principle of Its Antithetical Being. And the American proclaims: Two Records.—The Largest Camel, and the One That Can Live Longest Without Food, Is to Be Seen in New York.) To come to the point, an abstract formula is educationally as useless as is a naturalistic reproduction. What we need is a schematic representation that can be immediately understood. We could not photograph social objects even if we tried. They can be demonstrated only through symbols. It is because this is not an easy task that it has so long remained unfulfilled.

With the growth of popular educational activities, and especially of workers' education, the necessity arose to transmit to the students in brief evening classes comprehensive information about social and other facts. The traditional methods of adult education are no more than popular applications of the usual highschool teaching methods. They give the learner the feeling of uncertainty and of incompleteness. But how different is the response when pictures are introduced! A picture is seen as a whole; and it is possible, without looking at it again, later on to understand it more fully; while a book when it is but half comprehended has to be read again and again if one wants to be sure to get all its meaning.

Of course, as in everything educational, success in this field is secured by giving up something else; in order to create pictures that can easily be remembered one has to omit many details. But that only proves the maxim that he who knows best what to omit is the best teacher, and one who can omit nothing from his demonstrations should not be a teacher at all.

As might be imagined, the statisticians do not like to hear that. Since it is part of their job to count and measure everything as accurately as possible, they demand that everybody appreciate the trouble they have taken and remember the exact figures they provide. The Vienna school, on the other hand, postulates: to remember simplified pictures is better than to forget accurate figures.

So, out of the actual needs of the learners arose the Vienna method of graphic statistical presentation and the Vienna method of visual education. The city of Vienna has a progressive municipal government. Representative in the main of labor and of the white-collar class, it endeavors to build, insofar as this is practicable, within the existing social system—or, if you like, social chaos—an urban environment adapted to the needs of the masses. So, for example, the city has built some sixty thousand tenements (constructed, by the way, to rent at two dollars a month for three rooms), hundreds of kindergartens, dozens of bathhouses, both for

children and adults, playgrounds, health centers, and many other things. But how, it may be asked, is it possible in any city with a democratic government to achieve so much of benefit to the masses unless the people understand what it is all about, at least in its larger outlines, and unless these enormous expenditures out of tax revenues are approved on the basis of a constant accounting to the people? Only those who have graduated from a course of social studies, it would seem, can pass with real understanding on the desirability of all the social measures proposed or the way in which they are carried out. Hence, general social education became a necessity for this city.

It is out of this need that the Social and Economic Museum of Vienna was born. When a Viennese citizen enters this museum, he is impressed from the first moment with the fact that the institution is intended for him. In it, he finds reflected his problems, his past, his future—himself. This does not mean that the museum limits itself to local interests; on the contrary, it provides the setting of world-historical relationships within which the individual discovers the decisive influences on his own fortunes. Take this matter of housing, for example: the aim is not to show what a particular building project looks like, but to help the citizen see the different types of homes that are included in the plan for the city's development, realize for what groups of the population these different types are intended, how they are going to modify the lives of people, to what extent they are going to help in improving health, reducing mortality—especially that of infants—and so on.

Only quantitative facts are socially significant; but most people are frightened by rows of figures, and diagrams they regard as an imposition. That sort of thing, they will tell you, is all right for specialists. But social quantities need not parade as rows of figures. The pictorial statistics of the Vienna school represent larger and smaller quantities of objects by larger and smaller numbers of symbols. So we see men and women, wage-earners and employers, automobiles and railroads, sheep and cattle, marching over the pages in simple, clear, colored, contrasted symbols. One symbol means a given number. If, for example, one figure means a hundred million people, then a row of seven white figures means seven hundred million of the white race, and a row of six yellow figures six hundred million of the yellow race.

The important point is that there must be a system of rules that can be applied without exceptions, a sort of grammar of picture language; that, and a dictionary of symbols. The problem is not how to invent ever new symbols but how to get accepted the best that can be found anywhere. With this aim the Social and Economic Museum of Vienna is engaged in creating standard symbols and standard rules. But in order to introduce a single system of signs and rules throughout the world, an international organization is needed. A special institution, the Mundaneum, has therefore been established in Vienna, in close connection with the Museum, to work for general acceptance of the Vienna rules and dictionary of visualization. Because of the inescapable need to have all educational materials uniform, it was found necessary to centralize the creation of exhibits, illustrations, and so forth. Experience has shown that few artists have the ability so to submerge their personality and pleasure in creation as to serve solely in the capacity of objective informant for the learner.

We have in Vienna a research bureau, a statistical department, and an archive for visual (*Continued on page* 479)



A large wall model in three dimensions shows the number of houses built by the city of Vienna up to the end of 1930; each small white cube represents 100 new tenements, each black cube 100 new dwellings in garden suburbs

maxim of statesmanship is not merely to watch trends but to shape and guide them. Though concentrating on wages, hours and trade practices, NIRA can and should take the first steps toward breaking down the old capital-labor dilemmas. The establishment of Adjustment Boards under the cotton-textile code is a first step in the right direction. But with the aid of the Department of Labor, and perhaps by establishing a National Industrial Relations Board under NIRA, a more concerted attack might be made along the lines suggested here before we are involved in bitter conflicts over terms of power, which would imperil the success of the great experiment upon which we have embarked.

MUSEUMS OF THE FUTURE

(*Continued from page* 463)

education which assembles all historically significant experiments —primitive cave drawings which are extraordinarily clear and intelligible, well-worked-out hieroglyphics, attempts at pictorial statistics in illustrations of military campaigns, and other precursors of modern attempts at graphic presentation of statistics that are more than an attempt to reproduce numbers. But the principle of symbolical representation of number or quantity is only one part of the Vienna method. Another problem is how to bring into a revealing relationship to each other the totality of the individual graphs. Each new pictorial table, each new model, is in a sense only a chapter of a single large book in process of being written about the world in which we live.

The technical department is a large one; for here artists of reputation as draftsmen collaborate with others in working out sketches which then are cut in linoleum or wood, or engraved on zinc. Signs and lettering are printed, pasted on the original drawings, and then the whole is glazed and framed. A carpentry shop builds house models, illuminated wall-boards, and constructs the skeletons for magnetic iron plates on which metal signs and letters can experimentally be placed in any position with the aid of a magnet.

A photographic studio is engaged mainly in producing factual photographs—not intended to evoke esthetic sensations, but to emphasize the more significant aspects of the object, in preparation for drawings that will further simplify the outlines for graphic presentation.

Perhaps the most original section of the Vienna central institution is the department of transformation. On it the educational purpose of the whole enterprise is concentrated. While in other museums it is customary to have each department administered by a specialist who in turn must direct as best he can the painters, modellers, and other assistants placed at his disposal, in Vienna every one of the scientific specialists must deal with the department of transformation which acts as a liaison between him and the technical departments. This has the great advantage that there is one special department which knows exactly what potential visual resources there are to solve any given problem of presentation. A scientific specialist may be ever so eminent in his own field—indeed, he may even have high qualifications as an educator—but that is no reason for supposing that he necessarily knows what is the best way of translating his intentions into visual reality. Besides, it is a decided disadvantage to have the separate departments of a museum deal with their materials in different ways. Intentionally to aim at variety in this matter is wholly superfluous. The objects to be represented offer chances enough for variety even within a completely unified method of representation.

Just as in Vienna the department of transformation has succeeded in securing complete uniformity of method, so our effort should be to create a similarly uniform method for all the museums of a country—yes, of the whole world. A museum of natural history, a technical museum, a museum of hygiene, and a social museum will then represent, so to speak, four volumes of a single work. If, for example, the museum of natural history were to intimate that animal fats enter into soap manufacture, the technical museum, starting at the point only lightly touched on by the natural history museum, would show more in detail the (*Continued on page* 484)

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(*Continued from page* 479) processes of that manufacture. And similarly, if the technical museum were to indicate in a few pictorial graphs the quantities in which different articles are produced in various countries and in the world as a whole, the social museum would show the part played by this particular industry in relation to the whole demand and supply.

In other words, only through a unified, planned, central control of all museums and educational institutions is it possible to lead the public with the greatest benefit to its education from one museum to another, and thus to make the individual more and more familiar with the world in which he lives. Museums, exhibitions and periodicals might be regarded as three different means of education with the identical purpose of making him less afraid of the world. If previously he felt depressed by the complexity of facts, the visitor to the museum should leave it with the feeling that, after all, "one can find one's way through." We have here, then, a colossal international task in keeping with an age that more and more brings the eye into the learning process, and in keeping with the special social problems of our day. So the Mundaneum has opened branches in Berlin, Prague, and Amsterdam, where offices and facilities for exhibition have been placed at our disposal by public authorities. From these centers radiates a planned effort to influence the whole methodology of exhibitions and of education.

In the Soviet Union, the Council of People's Commissars has issued a special decree to the effect that "Dr. Neurath's method of graphic representation of statistics is to be applied in all schools, trade unions, public and cooperative organizations." For this purpose, a central institute for pictorial statistics, called Isostat, has been established in Moscow, where whole staffs are being trained for local bureaus, the first of which has just been opened in Kharkov. At present, five staff members of the Vienna Mundaneum serve as instructors and consultants in Moscow where, as specialists in pictorial statistics, they will also have the opportunity of introducing this new method into a social museum which is to be created.

At present, movements are on foot to establish similar regional offices for counsel on pictorial presentation of statistics in London and New York. While in the Soviet Union this work is necessarily centralized in one institution, and while in Central Europe municipalities and other public authorities with here and there a private organization are in the main the promoters of the Vienna method, in New York and London private initiative will, in the first instance, have to be relied upon. Here, foundations, societies, individual schools, and other institutions might cooperate to create effective central bureaus for promoting the work of the Mundaneum. Such a central office can render distinguished service in what we might call scientific management for visual methods. In this way one might hope that gradually a uniform method would spread to periodicals and books, expositions and museums, lantern slides and educational moving pictures, and that through a uniform direction of these efforts, these various tools of education would more and more complement one another.

The northern part of the world seems already won for the principle of pictorial presentation of statistics. Now the movement will have to be extended also to the southern half, especially to those vast areas where illiteracy still prevails. If I may compare a relatively unimportant influence with one of the greatest influences on human civilization, I should like to cite the diffusion of pictorial statistics as a general method side by side with the diffusion of the art of printing. From Commenius' *orbis pictus* an uninterrupted movement leads to modern visual education. A picture made according to the Vienna method shows at the first glance the most important aspect of the subject; obvious differences must be at once distinguishable. At the second glance, it should be possible to see the more important details; and at the third glance, whatever other details there may be. A picture that has still further information to give at the fourth and fifth glance is, from the point of view of the Vienna school, to be rejected as pedagogically unsuitable.

Thus there is developing a new clarity (*Continued on page* 486)

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(*Continued from page* 484) and purposefulness in communication that may be regarded as preparation for more incisive social planning. Teachers and other groups of people concerned in social education, directors of museums, and editors of periodicals are confronted with the responsibility of placing their energies at the service of this common international task.

BELOW THE SURFACE

(*Continued from page 454*)

crowding of these places, they are not as competent in them as were the Jews, who had never had a chance in the army or the government and had naturally turned to business, commerce, finance and the learned professions and journalism. Under the new regime Jews came into great prominence, they were leading men in the Socialist party and in the Democratic and even the Communist,—indeed, the fact that the most famous Communist leaders were Jews—Kurt Eisner, Liebknecht, Rosa Luxumberg, Haaze and Thaelmann, for instance—is always brought forward in any denunciation of the Jews. The Jewish professors, artists, journalists and leading physicians and lawyers certainly won their places fairly, in competition with Gentiles. But there is a quite understandable clannishness among Jews which brought it about that large and important services came almost entirely into Jewish hands because the chiefs chose all their assistants from among young Jews. Thus in the public hospitals of more than one city and in the *Krankenkasse* it was almost impossible for a Gentile physician to get a place. This was true in most of the Berlin hospitals while in Neukoelln, an industrial suburb of Berlin, the two-hundred city physicians there were all Jews. There were estimated to be more than seven times as many Jews in professional positions as their proportion in the population and this was not due entirely to superior capabilities, but in part to the fact that the Jew had at last a chance to favor his own people and used it imprudently. In this he was doing, of course, just what the others, Protestants and Catholics, have always done."

THE day when the Jew could do that is certainly over. As the Hitler government puts increasing pressure to find work for the unemployed, to better the lot of the small shopkeeper and to provide for the army of young professional men in a land that has already far too many, the persecution of the Jews increases, for here is an easy way of satisfying some at least of the hordes of claimants. We were told that when we read of work being found for six thousand more people we might be sure that at least four thousand of them were taking the places of Jews. The laws ruling Jews out of economic life are added to daily until one wonders if anything can possibly be left. Just as we sailed came the official announcement that the government of Hessen-Massen would provide 100,000 to 200,000 good Nazis with jobs during the next four weeks. Social workers assured us that they could see no prospect of a real increase of employment but Frankfurt-am-Main is in Hesse and there are still some Jews working there.

The passion for unification for "one aim, one faith, one discipline, one leader" seems also to increase and this too renders the Jew more suspect, more distrusted, for the Jew has a critical, sceptical strain and he is not carried away by the mob *Schwaermerei* which now possesses Germany. After the Leaders' Conference in Berlin in the second week in June the stiffening of program and intensification of methods was clearly to be seen. During the last ten days of our stay in Germany, we watched the clouds thicken, the suspense increase and finally we saw the dreaded blow fall on friend after friend, that which had only been threatened in May became a reality in June, those who escaped the first flood and hoped they were safe were caught by the rising waters and those waters are still rising. If anyone hopes that there will be a change for the better let him read Hitler's book, Mein Kampf, and he will be convinced that so long as Hitler rules Germany there can be no hope for the German Jew.