THE BRITISH RECEPTION OF THE MEMBERS OF THE POLISH RESETTLEMENT CORPS, 1946-1949

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Abstract

The Polish Resettlement Corps was created in September 1946 as a British solution for demobilizing the over 200,000 members of the Polish Armed Forces who found themselves to be an illegal army once the Second World War ended and the Polish government-in-exile was no longer internationally recognized as the legitimate leader of Poland. All this was taking place while Britain was suffering through a failing economy, a manpower shortage, and an immense loss of political and diplomatic prestige, among other troubles. In such a complex postwar environment, the Poles' futures were uncertain, many believing they would soon be able to return to an independent Poland, others wishing to re-emigrate to the USA or Australia. All these various factors, affecting both the host and immigrant populations, played a role in the success of the Poles' resettlement in Britain. While the government was forced to prioritize economic and diplomatic matters in addition to the reactions of its constituents, public opinion was formed on a more individualistic level, focusing on personal security, especially in terms of employment. This resulted in a very nuanced response by the British toward the Poles. The following thesis aims to assess the reception of the members of the Polish Resettlement Corps by their British hosts via public opinion and official reactions to their arrival. Such an analysis will mainly be accomplished through the examination of British government papers and major British periodicals, with secondary sources providing supplementary information.

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Introduction

Mass migration today is a normal part of our increasingly shrinking world. The process of globalization has resulted in a thorough mixing of cultures in many different countries, bringing with it many problems, but also many benefits that are born from intercultural exchange. At the end of WWII, however, when Europe was confronted with masses of displaced persons and refugees, the term "multiculturalism" had yet to be invented, let alone embraced.[1] On the island nation of Britain, a country whose culture has been described as insular[2], the impressive postwar wave of immigrants caused a great deal of consternation among citizens used to living in a thoroughly white and Christian British milieu. While Great Britain had seen several large groups of immigrants in the previous centuries, most notably the Irish and the Jews, nothing had yet approached the scale of immigration experienced after the Second World War.

As refugees and displaced persons struggled to start a new life among the ruins of war, many decided to migrate west. Accordingly, a number of immigrants chose to move to Great Britain. One such unique group of immigrants consisted of the members of the Polish Resettlement Corps (PRC), who numbered over 100,000 veterans. These men had fought alongside and under the command of their British allies throughout the war. Represented on a wide range of fronts from France to Algeria, and spoken for in each of the three main military branches (army, navy, and air force), they were often praised by

[1] Ephraim Nimni, "Nationalist Multiculturalism in Late Imperial Austria as a Critique of Contemporary Liberalism: The Case of Bauer and Renner", *Journal of Political Ideologies,* Vol. 4, No. 3 (1999): 291.

[2] James Hampshire, *Citizenship and Belonging: Immigration and the Politics of Demographic Governance in Postwar Britain* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 54. Hampshire describes the United Kingdom as having a "fully established society" that was closed to outsiders.

the British for their valor and dedication to the war effort.[3] When the war came to an end, though, the home for which they had been fighting had been conquered by the Soviet Union. Because there was no free Poland for them to return to, many opted to accept Britain's offer of resettlement on British soil.

What makes these immigrants different from all others who went to the United Kingdom in search of a new life is fourfold. Firstly, for a significant number of them, their access to British culture began well before they decided to settle there. Many Poles were stationed in England or Scotland before being deployed to the front, and so were able to interact with fellow British enlisted men and with the local population. This gave them an advantage when they later returned to Great Britain as civilians. [4] Secondly, the vast majority of Poles (approximately 95%[5]) entering Britain through the Polish Resettlement Corps were men.[6] While arrangements were made for reunification with their family members who had left Poland and become displaced persons, this did not completely remedy the male-skewed composition of the PRC. Such a factor had considerable impact on the type of labor in which they found jobs, as well as the rate of intermarriage between the Poles and the local population. Thirdly, their noteworthy involvement in the Allied victory afforded the Poles special consideration by the British government and populace, thereby distinguishing them from the rest of the European

[3] For a list of positive quotes from the British about the Polish Armed Forces, see Witold Leitgeber, *It Speaks for Itself: What British War Leaders Said About the Polish Armed Forces 1939-1946*. (Polish Armed Forces, 1946).
[4] According to Elizabeth Stadulis, 40% of PRC enlistees already knew some English, versus 10% of European Volunteer Workers. See Elizabeth Stadulis, "The Resettlement of Displaced Persons in the United Kingdom," *Population Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (March, 1952): 214.
[5] Keith Sword, Norman Davies and Jan Ciechanowski, *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain 1939-50* (Hove, Sussex: Caldra House Ltd., 1989), 449.
[6] "Women serving in the Polish Naval and Military Women's Services will not be enlisted into the Polish Resettlement Corps, but will be enrolled in the British [Auxiliary Territorial Service] (Polish Resettlement Section) and will normally work with the Polish Resettlement Corps." See Note from G.W. Lambert, July 18, 1946, WO 315/62. (1/0173/454 (SD 2))

immigrants flooding into Great Britain in the immediate postwar years.[7] Lastly, many Poles harbored hopes of being able to return to a free Poland. This attitude influenced their behavior in their new home, since their belief in the temporary nature of their stay made some PRC members less disposed to assimilate into British society.[8] All of these aspects of the Polish Resettlement Corps contributed to their unique reception in Great Britain.

Because of these distinctions, the members of the PRC merit separate attention. Unlike other immigrant groups who were recruited to fill labor shortages or who came from the newly liberated colonies, the PRC enlistees were accepted largely out of a sense of duty on behalf of the British government. For this reason, their reception in Great Britain varied from that of other immigrants. On the whole, they were better able to integrate and adjust to their new environs because of the special care taken to aid them in their transition from military to civilian life, and from Polish culture to British culture. Although faced with adversity as new arrivals to a foreign land, their experience was carefully guided by a number of institutions set up by the British government, and in the end, many former PRC members went on to lead successful lives in their adopted homeland. This is not to say that there were no instances of xenophobia directed against the Poles. A group so large could hardly have gone unnoticed by the British population. Cases of discrimination were recorded, as there were at times discrepancies between the attitudes of the Labour government and its constituents.

The following essay aims to flesh out the nuances in British attitudes toward the enlistees of the Polish Resettlement Corps. There was a noticeable difference between the

[7] Maud Bülbring notes that members of the PRC had greater freedom in choosing their employment, were given special training, and continued to be paid discharge gratuities like their British counterparts. See Maud Bülbring, "Post-War Refugees in Great Britain," *Population Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (November, 1954): 100.
[8] Keith Sword et. al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…360.

positions of the British government and the British public at large, and in this case, the government was rather more liberal than the average British citizen. I will argue that this discrepancy in opinion was due to the fact that the government, better informed about the dire economic situation of the United Kingdom, was more willing to compromise the relative societal peace that can come from ethnic homogeneity and to put aside any racist tendencies in order to restore economic order. However, the general public, after years of war, threats of foreign invasion and high unemployment, was much less willing to accept such a large influx of foreigners.

Accordingly, the following composition is divided into four chapters. First, I will provide a theoretical framework chapter in which a literature review will be given in addition to an explanation of the methods used in the research for this thesis. Little has previously been written about the Polish Resettlement Corps, but the literature surrounding postwar immigration to Britain is vast. I will attempt to place my research within the context of these previous works and to justify my methods of doing so. In addition, I will present my primary source materials, identifying their strengths and weaknesses as documents upon which to base my research.

In the second chapter, I will provide vital background information by analyzing different historical events that affected the acceptance of the Polish veterans into British society. The first of these is an account of prior Polish migration to Great Britain. In the nineteenth century, there were several waves of Polish emigration resulting from political turmoil and economic hardship in their homeland.[9] As a result, several groups of Polish émigrés established themselves in the United Kingdom well before the arrival of the large Polish influx after World War II. The preexistence of a small settled Polish community

[9] Polish immigrants arrived in waves according to political upheavals in nineteenth century Poland. See Jerzy Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants in Britain: A Study of Adjustment* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956), 5-7 and 37-38.

affected the success of assimilation of those who enlisted in the PRC. Following this subsection, I plan to discuss the state of Anglo-Polish relations during the war. From the onset of war with Germany, Britain and Poland became steadfast allies, but when the Soviet Union joined forces with the Allied powers, this dramatically shifted the position of the Poles in the esteem of the British, negatively affecting their relationship in spite of the Poles' continued military contributions.[10] Needless to say, this souring of diplomatic relations was filtered down to the civilian level. Lastly, I will touch on the domestic changes occurring in postwar Great Britain. During the war, British citizens of all classes were forced to join together in their suffering and in their efforts to win the war, leading to a widespread sense of civic responsibility.[11] After years of conservative political dominance, a Labour government was elected in 1945, and the creation of the welfare state ensued. This shift to the left profoundly affected the manner in which the PRC members were welcomed to Britain. Additionally, the economic devastation that plagued Britain after the war made clear the enormous need for foreign labor in order to return the country to a state of stability. I will elaborate on the labor schemes employed by the British government in the process of postwar reconstruction when displaced persons across Europe were recruited to enter the country as migrant workers. In addition, a discussion of British immigration policy during and after the Second World War will shed light on British attitudes toward outsiders.

The following chapter is dedicated to official British policy on the resettlement of Polish soldiers in postwar Great Britain. A description of the institutions that were integral to the process of relocating over 100,000 men will provide insight into the

[10] Britain's policy of appeasement toward the Soviets was made at the expense of their Polish allies. See Yohanan Cohen, *Small Nations in Times of Crisis and Confrontation* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 116.
[11] Francis Boyd, *British Politics in Transition 1945-63* (London: Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher, 1964), 29-30.

lengths to which the British government was willing to go in order to assist the Poles. It will therefore also identify the gaps in the systematic resettlement implemented by the British, and will highlight the areas in which the authorities experienced uncertainty or debate as to how to properly proceed to ensure the Poles' successful relocation. Furthermore, the reactions of individual members of government will be explored in order to appreciate the varying shades of acceptance among officials.

The fourth and final chapter will deal with the general British public's response to the arrival of the members of the Polish Resettlement Corps. Most of my attention will be directed toward the British representations of their own reactions, gathered mainly from periodicals and secondary sources. In this way, it will be possible to identify the unique aspects of the PRC in the eyes of the British public. Of course their reaction is quite nuanced and cannot be explained by any single cause. Many Poles experienced both negative and positive responses from their British neighbors. What is addressed in this chapter is why these mixed reactions occurred, in what proportion they were expressed and how this may have affected the success of the PRC members in their new environment.

Chapter I: Theoretical Framework

History of migration has become increasingly *en vogue* over the past years, with attention paid mostly to post-colonial migration and North American immigration. Consequently, other immigrant groups have slipped through the cracks, not receiving their deserved share of consideration from historians and social scientists alike. In the case of the members of the Polish Resettlement Corps, very little research has been undertaken since the 1950s. With the passing of time, though, more information has become available about the successes and failures of the Corps and about the major political and social changes taking place around them. It is therefore worthwhile to revisit its history, synthesizing old and new information to come to fresh conclusions about this sizeable immigrant group whose members are quickly disappearing.

1.1 Literature Review

During the late 1940s and the 1950s, several noteworthy publications were produced about postwar Polish immigrants to the United Kingdom. Most prominent among them is Jerzy Zubrzycki's *Polish Immigrants in Britain: A Study of Adjustment*. While not specifically about the Polish Resettlement Corps, Zubrzycki's main focus is on postwar Polish migration to Britain, concentrating on the Poles' adaptation to their new surroundings. His approach is a sociological one, working within a theoretical framework consisting of three different levels of potential adjustment by the immigrant community: conflict, accommodation, and assimilation.[12] One of Zubrzycki's main arguments is that the British policy makers were active in promoting the economic assimilation of the

[12] See Jerzy Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants in Britain*…153-188.

Poles, but remained indifferent to their success in social and cultural assimilation.[13] In turn, he argues, this led to an uneven assimilation of the Poles into British society. Zubrzycki paints an overall negative picture of the British, asserting that they were preoccupied with the economic benefits offered by the Poles in terms of a strong labor force, and gave little thought to the success and happiness of the new immigrants. He supports his argument by pointing to the Poles' segregated living arrangements and the existence of official government agencies created specifically to administer to the needs of the Poles as a separate group.[14] He asserts that by keeping the Poles separate from the general population, the British were actively inhibiting their ability to assimilate into British society. It must be noted that Zubrzycki also places blame on the Polish community for not being wholly amenable to the assimilation process, especially since they continued to hold on to the belief that they would soon be returning to their freed homeland.[15] However, an anti-British position is present as a subtle undercurrent throughout Zubrzycki's study, painting the Poles as victims of British xenophobia without giving consideration to other possible explanations for the separate treatment the Poles received from the British.

In fact, according to more recent research, assimilation was very much on the minds of British policy makers who wanted to prevent outbursts of xenophobia that would threaten postwar stability. In British immigration policy following World War II, attention was closely paid to the maximum number of immigrants that would be able to be assimilated into society.[16] Instead of trying to keep their population strictly British, legislators aimed to integrate newcomers as best as possible in order to appease their constituents. This is discussed in Robert Miles' article, "Nationality, Citizenship, and

[13] Jerzy Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants in Britain…*, 88-89.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid, 115.
[16] James Hampshire, *Citizenship and Belonging…*13.

Migration to Britain, 1945-1951". While Miles acknowledges that economic factors played one of the main motivating forces behind the admission of so many Poles to Great Britain, he also points to the consideration of the Poles as easily assimilable, as evidenced in past groups of Polish immigrants.[17] Policy makers were clearly concerned with more than simply economic assimilation when it came to Polish immigration. These more recent publications, such as Miles', shed new light on the political atmosphere of the time, and are rather helpful in revisiting the story of the Polish Resettlement Corps.

Several important articles were published in the 1950s about postwar refugees who settled in Great Britain. Among them are those by Maud Bülbring and Elizabeth Stadulis whose work can serve to complement Zubrzycki's by highlighting trends in the more general sphere of postwar refugee migration instead of focusing solely on the Polish community.[18] In Stadulis's article, emphasis is put on the conflict between government and labor, where she asserts that British politicians were more in favor of immigration than labor unions. Her observations are in tune with Miles', pointing out that the administration was more willing to accept foreigners into Britain than the general population. Bülbring's work is important for noting the huge variance in British responses to the refugees.[19] Taking a more sociological approach, she finds a correlation between the size of refugee populations and their acceptance by the host community. Both these articles and Zubrzycki's book have attacked the issue from the perspective of social scientists. Models have been applied to the refugee groups in order to better categorize them as assimilatory or rejectionist. Contrary to this system of classification, my aim is to approach the Polish Resettlement Corps on a more humanistic level. I plan to analyze

[17] Robert Miles, "Nationality, Citizenship, and Migration to Britain", *Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Winter, 1989): 432-433.
[18] See Elizabeth Stadulis, "The Resettlement of Displaced Persons in the United Kingdom"…207-237, and Maud Bülbring, "Post-War Refugees in Great Britain"…99-112.
[19] Maud Bülbring, "Post-War Refugees in Great Britain"…105.

their situation not through interviews and statistical information, but by looking closely at the documents generated by the British government and the British press about the PRC in the years immediately following World War II.

One notable exception to the general lack of contemporary literature on postwar Polish migration to the United Kingdom is *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain 1939-50,* published in 1989 by members of the M. B. Grabowski Polish Migration Project at University College London.[20] This singular publication, which is itself already more than twenty years old, presents a relatively thorough, if somewhat uneven, survey of the situation of postwar Polish migration to Great Britain. Details are provided about the political, military and social position of the new immigrants. However, even this book fails to focus on the Polish Resettlement Corps as a singular group of immigrants that merits particular attention. Instead, the story of the PRC is woven into the larger body of Polish postwar migrants, such as the members of the European Volunteer Worker schemes and other Polish displaced persons arriving from Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

The core chapter of the book, written by Keith Sword, is a comprehensive recounting of the systematic resettlement of Poles in Britain by the British government. He presents the process from both the Polish and the British perspectives, writing a fairly balanced account of the Polish immigrant community in Britain during the five years following World War II. His survey touches on employment, housing, education, and religion, among many other important topics. Most relevant, though, to my research is his short chapter on British attitudes toward the Poles. Here Sword does a fair job of tracing British public opinion throughout the war and into the postwar period, linking changes in

[20] Keith Sword et. al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*….

opinion to political events, such as the Katyn affair.[21] However, his chapter on British sentiment fails to extensively analyze internal parliamentary debate on the Polish issue. Much of Sword's research on British reactions to the PRC is based on periodicals and oral interviews, without touching on important decisions being made from above. This is where my research will fill in some gaps.

Overall, the selection of published material on the Polish Resettlement Corps is slim, especially contemporary work. It is therefore worthwhile and important to reanalyze the story of the PRC in terms of synthesizing newly available sources with now forgotten archival documents. Additionally, much of the previous scholarship has been carried out by social scientists (Keith Sword, too, was trained in social anthropology), so my contribution will provide a new historical voice in the area of postwar Polish migration to Great Britain.

1.2 Sources and Methodology

In order to gain a more balanced perspective of British attitudes, I have decided to base my research on two different types of primary sources: governmental records found in the British National Archives originating from a wide variety of governmental departments, and a selection of major mainstream British periodicals, namely *The London Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and *The Observer*. From the official records, I will be able to gain an understanding of internal debates within Parliament about policies regarding the Polish Armed Forces. A close study of these documents will provide insight to the considerations weighed by politicians in forming their responses to the problem of a large illegal army under their command, which in effect is what the Polish Armed Forces became after the withdrawal by the Allied Powers of recognition of the Polish

[21] Ibid, 344.

government-in-exile. By assessing which aspect of the Polish Armed Forces was most debated by Parliament, one can discern which issues most affected the official British reaction to the Poles.

However, it must be noted that archival documents cannot possibly illuminate the complete picture of official British reaction to the Polish immigrant group. While providing an accurate account of what was in fact decided by the government, evidence of some parts of the decision-making process are not included in such documents. For example, in the political realm, many deals are brokered, compromises are made, and disputes are settled outside of official governing bodies. Private conversations play almost as important a role as public debate in the formation of policies. Unfortunately, these private exchanges are rarely made public, and so cannot be accounted for in the analysis of official decisions. One way to attempt to compensate for this lack of documentation is to look to the memoirs and diaries of important politicians, who sometimes describe such momentous discussions years or decades after they were held. However, this too poses problems in terms of the infiltration of the author's own biases and the strength of his or her memory to be able to accurately recount the past exchange in an objective manner. Therefore, any analysis of governmental archival sources must be viewed as an incomplete story of the process of legislation. Attempts to compensate for this incompleteness via the use of political memoirs are useful, but must be undertaken with attention to the character of the author.

The second group of primary sources concerns journalistic British publications that were contemporary to the Polish Resettlement Corps. In order to provide a more general picture of British popular response to the PRC, I have decided to work only with mainstream periodicals with wide distribution. Less well-known newspapers tend to lean toward particular perspectives that account for only small percentages of the overall

British population. On the other hand, such popular publications as *The London Times* appealed to a much larger proportion of Britons, and can therefore be seen as more representative of their opinions. I plan to search these sources for articles about the PRC and to trace the arc of public opinion over the period of 1946, when the problem of dealing with Polish servicemen came to a critical point following the end of the war, to 1949, when the PRC was finally disbanded.

Still, one must acknowledge the danger in ascribing to the general population those views that are published in periodicals. Public opinion is nuanced, with many different shades of approval or disapproval. All of these subtleties are glossed over in newspaper articles, which are written to provide concise, easily digestible pieces of information for popular consumption. The press, too, has its own agenda that must be taken into consideration when analyzing such publications. Newspapers compose their reports to appeal to a certain type of clientele, and therefore may highlight or diminish certain aspects of any story. In addition, as Keith Sword rightly points out, public surveys were not commonplace then as they are now, and so researchers have very little statistical data with which to ascertain public sentiment.[22] The public opinion reported in periodicals cannot be checked against nationwide surveys and so must be understood within the context of the newspaper's and the journalist's political leanings.

1.3 Limitations

The limitations and obstacles of my study must here be noted in an effort to fully disclose and justify my research practices. First and foremost, a language barrier has prevented me from presenting the Polish perspective in the story of the Polish Resettlement Corps. My lack of proficiency in the Polish language precludes any analysis

[22] Ibid, 342.

of Polish sources, such as periodicals, personal memoirs, and general Polish secondary source materials. Consequently I have had to rely on English-language sources written both by native speakers and by Polish scholars. Because sources from Polish authors are available to me, I have been able to read a more balanced account of Polish postwar migration. However, much of the literature on this subject is unreadable to me. It is for this reason that I have chosen to focus on the British perspective in the story of the PRC. The sources pertaining to this standpoint are largely accessible to non-Polish speakers.

Secondly, time constrictions have forced me to narrowly focus my research. For this reason, the selection of periodicals from which I am basing my analysis of British public opinion is not as vast as it could have otherwise been. I have been forced to choose only a few newspapers from a wide selection, and so have decided to focus on the most popular ones in the conviction that they are most representative of the general British public opinion of the time. Similarly, other important sources have remained unexplored, such as documents from the Polish government-in-exile now housed at the Sikorski Institute in London. My choice to focus instead on the British official documents aligns with my aim in tracing British sentiment through this period. Although other related materials exist in diverse archives, time, unfortunately, does not permit me to review them.

Lastly, I have chosen to narrowly focus the time period dealt with in this analysis of the Polish Resettlement Corps. By choosing the years 1946-1949, I have consciously confined my thesis to a manageable time period whose endpoints are significant in several ways. I chose to begin in 1946 as the year in which the Polish Resettlement Corps was established. Additionally, this was a crucial year in which the administration was making important decisions regarding postwar life. Several key issues were raised that pertained to the Poles as future immigrants: the severe labor shortage, the failing

economy, the rise in power of the Soviet Union and the increasing tension between the two great allies, and the growing realization of the possibility of an influx of immigrants from the collapsing British Empire. All of these considerations affected how the Britons proceeded to deal with the Polish servicemen.

In 1949 the Polish Resettlement Corps was officially disbanded, symbolizing the end of a period of hope for the Polish exiles. For the first several years after the end of World War II, the Poles who had fought for the freedom of their homeland had believed that a third world war was imminent between the Soviet Union and western democracies. This belief kindled the hope of soon being able to once again fight for Polish freedom and to be able to return victorious to their homeland. Consequently, until 1949 the Polish immigrants to Britain thought their situation to be of a temporary nature and that they would soon be able to return home. Once this hope was crushed by the lack of open aggressions, the Poles changed their attitudes about their lives in the United Kingdom. Such a realization caused many Poles to re-emigrate at the turn of the decade to countries such as the USA, Canada or Australia, thereby changing the composition of the Polish community in Great Britain.[23] Additionally, up until this point, few Poles had become naturalized British citizens, but this too began to slowly change.[24] Therefore, my choice to confine the period of inquiry to 1946-1949 was consciously made to include the entire lifespan of the PRC and to address the phase in which Poles believed their situation to be temporary. In this way, I am dealing with a period in which attitudes remained fairly constant and can therefore be most effectively analyzed.

[23] Robert Miles, "Nationality, Citizenship, and Migration to Britain"…430.
[24] Even by 1964, approximately 95,000 out of 130,000 Polish immigrants in Britain had not yet naturalized. See Elspeth Huxley. *Back Street New Worlds: A Look at Immigrants in Britain*. (Toronto: Clark, Irwin & Co Ltd, 1964), 31.

Chapter II: Setting the Scene

2.1 Pre-WWII Polish Migration to Great Britain

Long before the arrival of Polish servicemen to Great Britain during and after the Second World War, Polish immigrants had already succeeded in establishing themselves on the island. Beginning in the nineteenth century, an era of unrest and revolt for the Poles, political and economic refugees sailed for England. The first batch of Polish émigrés arrived after the 1830 Insurrection against the Russians, and consisted of approximately two hundred[25] soldiers and political figures who chose exile over surrender.[26] These Poles were soon joined by more of their countrymen in the following decades. Some came to work in the coal, steel and iron industries, filling jobs created by Britain's early industrialization, and could therefore be classified as economic migrants.[27] Their population, though, was supplemented by a comparatively large influx of new arrivals after the uprisings of 1848 and 1863-64, and by 1870 there were approximately 1,500 Poles living in Britain.[28] Thus was established the political and economic nature of the Polish exile community in Britain, which was to continue to be the defining characteristics of the Polish émigrés through the postwar period to be discussed.

In tandem with the arrival of many Polish political exiles was the appearance of Jewish Poles who came mainly from the Russian Pale of Settlement. These newcomers came in abundance following the spread of pogroms and other acts of anti-Semitism in

[25] Others have quoted this figure as being six hundred. See John F. Kutolowski. *The West and Poland: Essays on Governmental and Public Responses to the Polish National Movement, 1861-1864*. (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2000), 57.
[26] Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain*…5-7.
[27] Heinz Fassman and Reiner Munz. "European East-West Migration, 1945-1992", *International Migration Review*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Autumn, 1994): 520.
[28] Józef Gula. *The Roman Catholic Church in the History of the Polish Exiled Community in Great Britain*. (Dorchester, UK: Henry Ling Limited, 1993), 10-11.

the Russian Empire.[29] By this time, the Anglo Jewish population had achieved emancipation and was well integrated into British society, an accomplishment that attracted many Jews from the East, where such tolerance was difficult or impossible to find.[30] However, this influx of Eastern Jews tended to cluster in the East End of London and gave worry to the preexisting Jewish community because of their tendency to remain outsiders. Instead of integrating quickly into British society, these newcomers often stuck together, recreating as best they could the atmosphere of their old homeland. In Britain, many held the view that such behavior was dangerous to the British way of life[31] and was thus liable to provoke xenophobic reactions from British society. Little evidence has been found to suggest that Christian and Jewish Poles intermingled. Rather they seem to have created separate exile communities despite their shared nationality and language. Polish culture, Gula argues, is deeply Christian, and therefore exclusive of other religious groups.[32] If Polish Jews, then, were not counted among the established Anglo-Polish community, the arrival of PRC enlistees after the war exponentially increased the size of the Polish community in Great Britain.[33]

Thus, the Anglo-Polish community had its roots in the nineteenth century, when "Britain was widely perceived as a centre of liberal refuge where the persecuted of other lands could take shelter."[34] Compared to other European countries, Britain had a reputation for tolerance and liberty, consequently attracting refugees from various backgrounds. It was such qualities that lured exiled Poles to Britain, thereby forming a

[29] Elspeth Huxley. *Back Street New Worlds*…17.
[30] Emancipation of British Jewry occurred in 1871. See Ibid.
[31] Colin Holmes and Kenneth Lunn. "Introduction" in *Hosts, Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Responses to Newcomers in British Society 1870-1914*, Kenneth Lunn ed. (Folkstone, England: Wm Dawson & Sons Ltd., 1980), 6.
[32] Józef Gula. *The Roman Catholic Church*…, 43.
[33] In the 1930s only a few thousand Christian Polish-born immigrants were living in Britain. See Sheila Patterson. "The Poles: An Exile Community in Britain", in *Between Two Cultures*, James Watson ed. (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1977), 214.
[34] Colin Holmes. *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971*. (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1988), 19.

nascent Polish community well before the mass influx of immigrants after World War II. These national characteristics were to remain associated with Britain through the twentieth century when more immigrants would flock to her shores to escape the hardships found in their respective homelands. Such a reputation, though, was not always supported by the actual experiences that immigrants found waiting for them on arrival, especially as their numbers grew.

However, British reception of these early Polish immigrants was generally positive. For example, one influential organization, the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland, a group sympathetic to the cause of Polish liberation, was formed soon after the 1830 Insurrection.[35] They served to inform the British public about the current situation of Poland and to aid the Polish exiles that had arrived in Britain. At this time, many Europeans sympathized with the romantic Poles who fought to free their homeland from the grip of foreign rule. In fact, the British government was generous in its support of the 1830 exiles, as reported in a post-WWII War Office memorandum:

> In order to give the Polish ex-soldiers accommodation, the British Government handed the Portsmouth barracks over to them and on 9th June, 1834 Parliament assigned £10,000 per annum for their support. This was the first Polish Resettlement Corps in England. Staff officers were paid £5 per month, Junior officers £2 and soldiers 28/-. Naturally a pound in those days had an incomparably higher purchasing power than the pound of today. The Polish Resettlement Corps of 115 years ago had no time limit. The British Parliament every year fixed a subsidy for the support of refugees. A subsidy was paid out for nearly 20 years but the amount became gradually smaller. In 1834 there was £10,000 for 488 people, in 1848 - £7,000 for 500 and in 1849 barely £3,800 was assigned to 800.[36]

Thus, the concept of the PRC was in fact conceived over a century before its postwar materialization, and the tradition of British humanitarianism toward the Poles was consequently established early on. In this sense, the long nineteenth century experience was like a rehearsal for the much larger Polish immigration of the following century. They used the same means of housing (military barracks) and gave the political exiles

[35] Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain…*, 31.
[36] "Polish Resettlement Corps of 1834", undated, WO 315/62.

stipends on which to maintain a basic level of necessities. However, in the future, the British learned from past mistakes, such as allowing the Poles to accept payment for an indefinite period of time, and created a more efficient system of resettlement that was geared more toward economic productivity rather than humanitarian goals. During the nineteenth century, when the number of Polish refugees remained marginal, the British government was rather hospitable and understanding of the Polish cause for freedom, and treated them in a humane and respectful manner.

However, the British reception of the Poles in the 1800s was not completely positive. The exiles were keen on continuing the fight for a free Poland by creating political associations and publishing radical texts in Britain.[37] Such actions could be viewed by the British authorities as potentially dangerous, especially in their demands for social reforms. In this way, the Poles were seen by the British authorities as a politically active group that could become a possible threat to the status quo, a theme that would reappear in the next century. It must be mentioned, though, that Britain's place among leading world powers was much more secure in the nineteenth than in the twentieth century, so she was less concerned with the diplomatic consequences of harboring such political émigrés.

In the coming decades, the government became more amenable to the politically active exiles. In 1867, the Committee of Polish Exiles obtained a headquarters in London, which included a library, a chapel and conference rooms.[38] More Polish associations began to emerge as the exile community grew in Britain. In 1886, the Polish Society was established, followed by the Roman Catholic Mission to the Poles in 1894.[39] It can be concluded, then, that the nineteenth century Polish community in Britain was quite well

[37] Józef Gula. *The Roman Catholic Church*…8.
[38] Ibid, 11.
[39] Colin Holmes. *John Bull's Island.*… 36.

tolerated by its host society, and some even embraced the newcomers as victims of unjust dominating powers who were fighting for a noble cause. Although the Polish population was quite small in comparison with other immigrant communities, such as the Irish, they had a cohesive and active character that was exemplified in the numerous associations they founded. The existence and success of these groups can serve as a testament to the amount of freedom and acceptance the Poles experienced in Britain.

During the next decades leading up to the Second World War, steady Polish migration to Great Britain persisted. Until the beginning of World War I, Poles continued to arrive in Britain with the hopes of finding work. Due to the emancipation of serfs in Russian Poland in 1865 and the existence of a high birthrate among Poles and Lithuanians under Russian rule, a large landless class was created in the last decades of the nineteenth century.[40] Because of this overpopulation and the lack of industry in the Polish territories, over one million people emigrated to the West over the course of 1870-1914 in search of better employment opportunities. This mass movement of migrant workers to industrialized countries mirrored similar trends in other underdeveloped countries, such as Ireland and Italy. Many of the Polish immigrants only stayed in Britain just long enough to finance the voyage to their final destination: America.[41] Nevertheless, some Poles settled permanently in Britain, the main Polish centers being in London, Manchester, and Lanarkshire, Scotland.[42] These economic migrants often worked in hard labor, such as the coal, steel and iron industries.[43] In 1912 they were used to break the strikes of Scottish miners, causing anti-Polish sentiment to blossom in that region.[44] The

[40] Kenneth Lunn. "Reactions to Lithuanian and Polish Immigrants in the Lanarkshire Coalfield, 1880-1914" in *Hosts, Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Responses to Newcomers in British Society 1870-1914*. Kenneth Lunn ed. (Folkestone, England: Wm Dawson and Sons Ltd., 1980), 310.
[41] Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain…*, 42.
[42] Ibid, 39.
[43] Heinz Fassman and Rainer Munz. "European East-West Migration, 1945-1992"…520.
[44] "Polish Resettlement Corps of 1834", undated, WO 315/62.

memory of this betrayal was still remembered decades later when the Polish Armed Forces were stationed in Scotland.[45] In this sense, there was continuity between the early Polish economic settlers and the major influx of Poles after WWII who were used to supplement the meager postwar British workforce. Distrust of the Poles by British union members continued well into the postwar period.

However, this source of antipathy did not stem the tide of Polish immigration in Britain. In fact, during the early twentieth century, the Poles seemed to solidify their presence. Many more Polish societies were established, including the Polish Benevolent Society (1914), the Polish Catholic White Eagle Society (1915), and the Association of Polish Organizations in Britain (1917).[46] The first Polish school was formed in October 1915.[47] Such continuation of activity among the immigrant community demonstrated its resilience and determination to preserve its cultural ties to Poland. Additionally, such an accomplishment by the Poles attested to Britain's comparatively liberal policies toward immigrant groups, and its overall acceptance of alien residents. This is not to say that the Poles faced no adversity, but compared to other countries during this period, Britain was relatively tolerant.

World War I drastically changed the situation of the Poles. At the outbreak of the war Poland was partitioned among the Germans, Russians and Austrians. Consequently young Polish men were drafted into various armies. Some of those who were forced to fight with the Axis powers were detained in England as prisoners of war, causing an increase in the number of Poles on British soil. Unfortunately, after mobilizing an impressive amount of resources to finance the war, there was little means left to the British for repatriating the approximately 2,000 Polish soldiers that had been imprisoned

[45] Ibid.
[46] Józef Gula. *The Roman Catholic Church*…, 26-27.
[47] Ibid, 26.

there.[48] A few years after the end of the war, when such means were again available, Poland was experiencing an economic crisis, and so many former POWs chose to remain in Britain.[49] Additionally, during the First World War, many of the Poles already living in Britain were able to take advantage of the boom in wartime jobs, which contributed to the rise in their standard of living[50] and also to their disinclination to return to Poland. In spite of these circumstances, though, many Polish émigrés ultimately decided to return to Poland, which had emerged from the war as a free and independent country, exactly what many of the exiles had been hoping and fighting for. As a result of this repatriation, though, several of the Polish organizations in Britain died out, and the community lost some of its vibrancy.[51] By the time the Second World War began, the Polish immigrant community in Britain was well established, but in no way comprised a significant part of the population.

2.2 Anglo-Polish Relations during World War II

On August 25, 1939, the signing of the Anglo-Polish Mutual Assistance Agreement signaled the beginning of an era of shifting relations between Poland and Great Britain. Clearly the two countries felt they could benefit from a treaty that bound one to the other against the threat of Nazism and Fascism then spreading throughout the continent. However, the mutual nature of this agreement did not assure that they would be on equal footing throughout the war. When Germany invaded Poland six days later, Britain was nowhere to be seen on the battlefield, already violating Article I of the treaty:

> Should one of the Contracting Parties become engaged in hostilities with a European Power in consequence of aggression by the latter against that Contracting Party, the other

[48] Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain…*, 42-43.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Józef Gula. *The Roman Catholic Church…*, 27-28.
[51] Ibid, 28.

> Contracting Party will at once give the Contracting Party engaged in hostilities all the support and assistance in its power.[52]

Britain and France both knew that if Poland was attacked, she would not be able to resist the Nazis alone, and the Poles were accordingly counting on French and British assistance in the case of such an event.[53] However, Poland, too, knew that Britain could offer her little assistance, and looked on the treaty as a means of assuring eventual victory resulting in a liberated and independent Poland.[54] This attitude colored Anglo-Polish relations throughout the rest of the war. The Poles were convinced that the British would honor the mutual assistance treaty by ultimately returning Poland to its prewar state.

Many Polish soldiers, however, were less understanding than their diplomatic counterparts, and "blamed the Allies, particularly Great Britain, for failing to respond to the German aggression with concrete military aid."[55] All they could see was the oppression of their country, which had only recently regained its independence. In spite of this negative attitude, the Poles continued to fight heroically alongside the other Allies in an effort to regain their country from its oppressors. This passion, or even obsession, for liberating Poland from Russian and German domination gave the exiled Poles a distinctly political character and consequently affected how they were regarded by the British government during and after the war. On the one hand, Polish determination to liberate their homeland translated into valor and heroism on the battlefield, which was heavily appreciated, especially by members of the Royal Armed Forces.[56] On the other hand, the Poles were often seen as obstinate and unreasonable in their demands, since

[52] "Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Polish Government Regarding Mutual Assistance (With Protocol)", London, August 25, 1939 in George V. Kacewicz, *Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the Polish Government in Exile (1939-1945).* (London and The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 226.
[53] Anita J. Prazmowska. *Britain and Poland, 1939-1943: The Betrayed Ally*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1.
[54] George V. Kacewicz, *Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the Polish Government in Exile*…27.
[55] Józef Gula. *The Roman Catholic Church*…49.
[56] For quotes of praise by British military men, see Witold Leitgeber. *It Speaks for Itself*….

they refused to compromise in the slightest with respect to the liberation of Poland and the return to its pre-1939 boundaries.[57] This view tended to dominate British thought toward the end of the war, when she was trying especially hard to maintain good relations with the Soviet Union.

The governments of Britain and Poland were destined to form a close relationship after the fall of France. When the Nazis and Soviets invaded Poland in September 1939, a Polish government-in-exile was formed in Paris, which became the center of all Polish exile activity. It was to France, then, that approximately 80,000 displaced Polish troops were reunified under central command by May 1940.[58] However, once France surrendered to the Nazis that very same spring, the Poles relocated their headquarters to London, which was where it would stay for the remainder of the war. This shift from Paris to London greatly affected the future of Anglo-Polish relations by pushing the two governments closer together and encouraging further cooperation. Especially after the collapse of France, the Poles and British needed each other more than ever, as opposition to the Nazi threat diminished with each German victory.[59] The British, who had previously preferred to regard the continental war as a primarily French concern, could no longer afford to do so.[60] Additionally, the withdrawal of France from the alliance pushed Poland into a much stronger position vis-à-vis England. And so for the year between the fall of France and Operation Barbarossa, in which the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union, Poland filled the role of being Britain's major mobilized ally.

[57] When discussing the stubbornness of some Polish soldiers in refusing to demobilize after the war, Attlee wrote, "I think the Poles ought to be brought quickly to a more reasonable attitude." See Letter from Prime Minister C.R. Attlee to the Foreign Secretary, Secretary of State for War, August 7, 1946, PREM 8/832. (M 256/46)
[58] Thomas Lane and Marian Wolanski. *Poland and European Integration: The Ideas and Movements of Polish Exiles in the West, 1939-91*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 19.
[59] Scandinavia, Belgium and Holland all fell to Nazi control during the same period as France.
[60] Anita J. Prazmowska. *Britain and Poland*…28.

During this year, which included the epic Battle of Britain, relations between the two countries were as solid as they would ever be. Polish military units were continuously evacuated from France to the United Kingdom, where they were needed and welcomed by British nationals. On August 5, 1940, the Anglo-Polish military agreement was finalized, stating that the Polish Armed Forces would be employed under British command and that the two forces were allied.[61] Thus began an era of extremely close military cooperation that was to continue throughout the war and eventually form the basis of the future Polish Resettlement Corps.

Throughout the Second World War, though, Anglo-Polish relations were dominated by negotiations with the Soviet Union over postwar Polish territorial boundaries. This issue was a renewal of the same debate following World War I, in which Lord Curzon drew an ethnically determined eastern Polish border that excluded such major cities as Lwow and Wilno.[62] As early as 1939, at the very start of the war, the British were "reluctant to antagonise the Soviet Union" because of the Poles and their desire to restore an independent state with the same pre-1939 borders that included territory then occupied by the Soviets.[63] This set the precedent for Anglo-Polish relations throughout the war. Soviet influence was very strong, and compared to Poland, the Soviets had much more political and economic heft in the international arena. Consequently, no matter how close the Poles were to Great Britain, they were never strong enough to counter Soviet authority. In then end, this fact was to result in a Soviet-controlled postwar Poland, which in turn caused the majority of Polish troops to choose to settle in Britain rather than return to their homeland.

[61] Keith Sword et. al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…93.
[62] Peter D. Stachura. *Poland, 1918-1945*. (London: Routledge, 2004), 169.
[63] Keith Sword et. al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…91.

However influential Anglo-Soviet relations were on Anglo-Polish relations, it is also important to note the role that the Polish government-in-exile played in the postwar fate of Poland and of the Polish people. Composed of members from across the Polish political spectrum, the only real unifying force in the administration was the desire to liberate Poland from Nazi and Soviet grips. Ideas about what postwar Poland should look like were constantly contested, and opinions about how to react to the Soviets varied immensely. For instance Wladislaw Sikorski, Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish government-in-exile until his sudden death in 1943, tried to convince fellow politicians to cooperate with the Soviets as the only tangible means of obtaining a free Polish state after the war. From this desire materialized the Polish-Soviet Pact of July 30, 1941, which failed to secure eastern Polish territories for a postwar Poland.[64] Others, particularly the National Democrats, members of the Polish Armed Forces and most Socialists were unwilling to compromise with the Soviets on the matter of postwar boundaries[65] and were even outraged by the terms of the treaty. The persistence of prewar frictions and personal conflicts among various members of the government-in-exile negatively affected their ability to reach a consensus on such important issues as postwar borders.[66] In the end, this rendered the Polish administration quite impotent and unable to effectively respond to Soviet political maneuvering. This in turn destabilized Poland's position in relation to the British.

Consequently, once the Soviets joined the Allied forces in 1941, Anglo-Polish relations began to weaken. Poland was no longer Britain's most powerful mobilized ally, so her goals and desires were subjugated to those of the Soviets, whose favor the British

[64] Jan Ciechanowski. "Sikorski's Role as a Statesman and Commander-in-Chief during World War 2" in *Sikorski: Soldier and Statesman.* Keith Sword ed. (London: Orbis Books Ltd, 1990), 106.
[65] George V. Kacewicz, *Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the Polish Government in Exile*…183.
[66] Peter D. Stachura. *Poland, 1918-1945*…163.

wished to obtain. All through the war, the Polish Armed Forces had fought alongside the British with the goal of eventually liberating Poland from foreign control. However, once the Soviets entered the alliance, Poland's objectives were pushed to the side in an effort by the British to appease the Soviets. This soured relations between the two countries, and by the end of the war, many Polish soldiers felt that they had been betrayed by their allies.[67] During the Tehran conference of November 1943, the Big Three (Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt) privately decided on the future borders of postwar Poland without consulting the Poles themselves. It was during this meeting that Eastern Poland, including the contested cities of Lwow and Wilno, was informally given over to the Soviets.[68] This decision sealed the fate of postwar Poland, and accordingly affected that of the Polish Armed Forces, many of who were suddenly stripped of their homeland. Furthermore, such an agreement between Britain and the Soviet Union violated the Anglo-Polish Mutual Assistance Treaty of 1939. Throughout these negotiations, the Polish diplomats were seen as a disruptive nuisance to the persistence of a smooth Anglo-Soviet partnership.

Therefore, relations between the Poles and British during World War II became increasingly complex as the war progressed. Because of the shifting alliances that occurred in the middle of the war, namely the switch of the Soviets to the Allied side and the mobilization of the Americans after two years of detachment, Poland's place among Britain's priorities vacillated. This was to result in a mixed reception of the Poles by the British after the war. Since the Poles had played an important role in preventing Nazi victory in Great Britain, the British in some way felt indebted to them. The Polish troops

[67] There was a "strong feeling of the average Polish soldier that…he and his country had been wronged, and that conditions did not permit of his return to the free and independent Poland for which he had so steadfastly fought." See Lt.-General Wladislaw Anders. *An Army in Exile*. (London:Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1949), 284.
[68] George V. Kacewicz, *Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the Polish Government in Exile*…167-169.

had sacrificed their lives to save those of the British, and therefore merited the assistance of the British in settling in the United Kingdom.[69] At the same time, the Poles had stood obstinately in the way of British efforts to work with the Soviet Union and refused to cooperate or make any concessions to the Soviets, which would have diplomatically helped the British. This attitude did not make the Poles any friends in Parliament, but instead gave them a reputation of having a quality of unrelenting nationalism, which gave some British cause to worry about the idea of allowing such people to settle on British soil.

2.3 Postwar Britain – The New Labour Government and Migration Policy

British citizens of all social classes experienced the hardships and horrors of World War II together, which had the effect of fortifying their national bond and creating amongst them an awareness of the need for social reform.[70] This collective experience led to the election of a Labour government in 1945, and the consequent replacement of Winston Churchill as Prime Minister with Clement Attlee. Such a sudden change at the very end of the war greatly affected how the Polish servicemen were dealt with. Churchill, a longtime supporter of the Poles, was forced to give way to Attlee and his Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, neither of whom were especially partial to the Poles, perhaps because they had not worked as closely with them during the previous administration.[71] The ultimate blow was dealt to the Poles by the new Labour government

[69] In a March, 1946 House of Commons debate about the Polish Armed Forces, Bevin stated, "His Majesty's Government and, I am sure, the whole House, are conscious of their debt to these men." See Witold Leitgeber. *It Speaks for Itself*…154.
[70] James Hampshire. *Citizenship and Belonging*…82.
[71] After the end of the war, many Poles wanted to remain mobilized to continue the fight for a liberated Poland. While Churchill argued for the use of Polish troops in Germany to keep the Poles in uniform, Bevin was vehemently opposed to this, instead urging for immediate Polish demobilization and encouraging Polish repatriation. See Lt.-General Wladislaw Anders. *An Army in Exile*…290-295.

when, in the summer of 1945, it withdrew official recognition of the London-based Polish government-in-exile, instead choosing to work with the Polish Provisional Government in Warsaw. This diplomatic shift signaled the end of an independent official Polish voice in London. Negotiations would thenceforth be made with the Soviet-controlled Warsaw Government, a body that was not representative of the majority of Polish troops then under British command. Because of this change in policy, many Poles refused to return to Poland, thus complicating Britain's role in their futures.

In the postwar period, Britain was in a poor state. She had entered World War II as a major power, but left the conflict extremely weak and fatigued, her vast resources depleted.[72] Economically, Great Britain was ruined, especially once the Americans abruptly withdrew the Lend-Lease agreements in August 1945.[73] This retraction of aid came at a crucial moment when the British were trying to engineer a smooth transition from a wartime economy to a peacetime economy. Over the course of the war, Britain had lost approximately one-fourth of its national wealth,[74] and with the loss of US aid she was in a very precarious situation. Furthermore, the Labour administration had come to power with the promise of creating a Welfare State in which public benefits would be extended to all social strata. This scheme would require the spending of funds that were not immediately available. Consequently when the Americans offered a $3.75 billion loan in December 1945, the British government was willing to accept it on less than preferable terms.[75] To finance the war, Britain had taken out sizeable loans and was forced to

[72] Francis Boyd. *British Politics in Transition*…15.
[73] Tony Judt. *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945.* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), 90.
[74] Kenneth O. Morgan. *Labour in Power 1945-1951*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 144.
[75] The British accepted the loan under the condition that "sterling would become freely convertible into dollars after only a year." See Kevin Jefferys. *The Attlee Governments 1945-1951*. (London and New York: Longman Group UK Limited, 1992), 16.

borrow more money in the postwar period. The end result was that Britain was strapped with huge debts to the Americans that it would struggle to repay for many years to come.

In order to be able to pay off such debts, Britain's exports needed to be greatly increased.[76] However, production and population growth had both been in a decline for years, and it became clear to the British authorities that it would be necessary to import a workforce in order to increase production and turn the economy around.[77] Due to the Labour party's close relationship with the trade unions, though, the matter was made all the more complicated. Already during the Churchill administration, British labor gained ground in legislation, owing especially to the appointment of former labor activist Ernest Bevin to the position of Minister of Labour and National Service in 1940.[78] Once the Labour party took power in 1945, its victory due in part to the support of the unions, Attlee gave six out of twenty of the Cabinet posts to union-sponsored MPs.[79] This meant that the unions, who were largely against the use of imported immigrant labor because of their desire for full British employment, wielded tremendous power in the new government. Great compromise was therefore needed in convincing them to allow the much-needed immigrants, such as the PRC enlistees, to enter employment in essential industries.

The Poles had several qualities to recommend themselves to the British as a source of manpower. Because they were an almost exclusively male group, they were capable of engaging in the hard physical labor that was required in critical industries. Additionally, since they were of European descent, there would be less controversy about

[76] Norman Luxenburg. *Europe Since World War II: The Big Change*. (London and Amsterdam: Feffer & Sons, Inc., 1973), 132.
[77] Elizabeth Stadulis. "The Resettlement of Displaced Persons in the United Kingdom"…209.
[78] W. Hamish Fraser. *A History of British Trade Unionism 1700-1998*. (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1999), 185-186.
[79] Henry Pelling. *A History of British Trade Unionism*. (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books Ltd, 1963), 222.

their admittance to Britain as laborers.[80] Some members of Parliament and of the British population in general found Europeans to be more "biologically acceptable" and better able to assimilate than non-Europeans.[81] This factor was a serious consideration for the government, who feared upsetting its constituents, especially at a time so fragile as the immediate postwar years. Consequently, once the government accepted the fact that an overwhelming number of Polish military men would enlist in the Resettlement Corps, they reconciled themselves to the idea that they were making a necessary, but controversial decision, and were doing so in a way that would cause minimal disturbance to the status quo.

Previous to World War II, immigration to Great Britain had been somewhat limited. Before the Aliens Act of 1905, there were no real restrictions of migration flows into the country, but with the influx of Russian and Polish Jews at the turn of the century, legislation on matters of immigration began to take shape.[82] The 1905 Act was followed by the more prohibitive 1914 Aliens Act, which forced immigrants to register with the police and allowed officials to deport them without the possibility of appeal.[83] Such restrictive policies were continued throughout the period of World War I, and included allowances for the internment of enemy aliens.[84] In spite of Britain's reputation as a place of refuge, she was not without xenophobic tendencies.

[80] According to Hampshire, the "immigration debate in post-war Britain was thoroughly racialized and … immigration controls had a racial demographic purpose: they were intended to prevent, or at least limit, Britain developing into a multiracial society. See James Hampshire. *Citizenship and Belonging*…11.
[81] Robert Miles. "Nationality, Citizenship, and Migration to Britain"…437.
[82] The 1905 Aliens Act limited the number of Jews coming from Eastern Europe by enforcing a so-called poverty test, in which potential immigrants had to prove they were not "undesirable". However, the officials were allowed to give a "limited concession for asylum seekers" to preserve the British tradition of giving refuge. See Louise London. *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 16.
[83] Daniel Snowman. *The Hitler Émigrés: The Cultural Impact on Britain of Refugees from Nazism*. (London: Chatto & Windus, 2002), 86.
[84] Louise London. *Whitehall and the Jews*…17.

The British seemed to be preoccupied with the economic responsibility that came with admitting foreigners to live within their borders. As previously discussed, the very first piece of legislation regarding immigrants focused on their ability to support themselves. Those who were deemed too poor were classified as undesirable and were not allowed to settle in Britain. During the interwar period, a similar mentality continued to influence immigration policy. For example, as the threat of Nazism grew in the 1930s, an increasing number of German Jews sought to emigrate, many to England. Unfortunately, this occurred during a time of economic hardship, and many British people were hesitant to allow Jews to immigrate because they feared that even more serious unemployment would result.[85] In the end, the Jewish refuges were admitted only because the established Anglo-Jewish community took complete financial responsibility for them.[86] When British Jewry exhausted its funds and could no longer support the growing number of Jewish immigrants, the British authorities agreed to allow only the skilled refuges to enter.[87] This preoccupation with the effect of immigration on the national economy was carried into the next decade. When the Labour administration had to address postwar immigration, it weighed the costs of maintaining a large group of immigrants against its need for imported labor. However, an arguably equally important consideration for the government was the ability of an immigrant group to quickly assimilate.

When the Second World War came to a close, the Poles were not the only group trying to migrate to Britain. In fact, there were many other ethnic and national groups who thought they would find a better future in the United Kingdom. Many of these were inhabitants of the British dominions and colonies. After its loss of economic and diplomatic power at the end of the war, the British knew that they could no longer keep a

[85] Daniel Snowman. *The Hitler Émigrés*…86-87.
[86] Colin Holmes. *John Bull's Island.*.. 142.
[87] Daniel Snowman. *The Hitler Émigrés*…89-90.

firm grasp on their protectorates across the world. As a concession to the colonies, the government passed the 1948 British Nationality Act, which provided for the equal citizenship of all British subjects regardless of birthplace.[88] Once this right was extended to the inhabitants of the British colonies, immigration from the Caribbean, Indian sub-continent, West Africa and the Far East increased drastically. However, until 1948, the import of these British subjects was not seriously considered as a means of ameliorating the labor shortage.[89] Rather, the government feared the racism of the British people and was unwilling to challenge this bigotry by bringing in large groups of non-white laborers.[90] Consequently, the composition of the immigrant population in Great Britain immediately after the Second World War was mainly European. Such a preference for white immigrants favored the Poles.

An additional consideration for deciding who was a preferable source of foreign labor was the legal conditions under which the immigrants were admitted into the country. The fact that Europeans could be regulated as aliens, while colonial immigrants could not, played a role in the decision to import labor from the Continent.[91] In this sense, the British were better able to control the Europeans. It was much more difficult for the Europeans to become permanent citizens, so they could be regarded as temporary inhabitants rather than as permanent settlers. Indeed, many of the Poles thought of themselves in this manner.[92] An alien status also meant that the government could decide into which industries and professions the newcomers would be admitted. This power was especially wielded over the European Volunteer Workers (EVWs)[93] who were subject to

[88] James Hampshire. *Citizenship and Belonging*…13.
[89] Ibid, 59.
[90] Robert Miles. "Nationality, Citizenship, and Migration to Britain"…437.
[91] James Hampshire. *Citizenship and Belonging*…61.
[92] Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain.*..98.
[93] EVWs were displaced persons who were recruited by the British government on a temporary basis in order to fill labor shortages in specific industries. See Elizabeth Stadulis. "The Resettlement of Displaced Persons in the United Kingdom"….

employment restrictions for three years and needed permission from the Ministry of Labour in order to change jobs.[94] The employment opportunities of PRC enlistees were less regulated than those of the EVWs, however both were only allowed to take work in industries that could not find any suitable British labor. Consequently, these European migrants were put at a disadvantage to British nationals in terms of employment.

Housing was another area in which the alien immigrants could be better controlled than colonial migrants. Postwar Britain was caught in an acute housing shortage as a result of the destruction that had occurred during the war. In 1945 there were 700,000 fewer houses than there had been in 1939, and due to increased marriage and birth rates, there was a very high demand for separate housing.[95] This was rather problematic for the newcomers who had come from army camps and displaced persons camps without proper provisions. Many did not even have winter coats, let alone the capital to afford their own housing.[96] However, because they were aliens, and not subjects of the British crown, the newly arrived immigrants could be lodged in old military barracks and hostels until more adequate housing was made available. A significant number of PRC members and EVWs remained in these second-rate accommodations for several years before being able to afford their own private housing.[97] Additionally, these hostels and camps were widely dispersed throughout the country, which helped to achieve the Foreign Office's wish to avoid forming large concentrations of any single foreign ethnic group.[98] Such restriction

[94] Maud Bülbring. "Post-War Refugees in Great Britain"…100.
[95] Alan Sked and Chris Cook. *Post-War Britain: A Political History*. (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 46.
[96] When describing the condition of the newly arrived Poles from India, Major Sparkes wrote, "A great many had no greatcoats, that appeared to be the biggest necessity next to that of the young males who all appeared to be dressed in Indian Drill and had no warm clothing." See "Welfare Report by Major P.J. Sparkes", September 25, 1947, AST 18/92.
[97] Most Poles were not able to afford their own housing until the1950s. See Keith Sword et. al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…378.
[98] Ibid, 270.

of movement would not have been possible for immigrants from the British colonies and dominions.

This sudden influx of immigrants, while advantageous in terms of developing a labor force robust and controllable enough to rebuild the British economy, nevertheless put a major strain on Britain's already sparse resources. The housing shortage was so severe partially due the lack of building supplies available.[99] Additionally, the war effort had seriously depleted Britain's food supply. Rationing of foodstuffs persisted into the 1950s,[100] and national agriculture was seriously shorthanded. Consequently, the new government faced criticism for allowing foreigners to settle in Britain while there were already too few resources for the native population. Such an environment at times made it very unpleasant to be an immigrant in Britain.

Thus, the postwar situation in Britain greatly influenced the reception of the Poles in that country. A grave lack of manpower and a sense of duty toward such men who had helped defend Britain from the Nazis compelled the government to accept the PRC enlistees. However Anglo-Polish relations in the immediate postwar years prevented their welcome from being completely sincere. The British desire to appease the Soviets via the Warsaw Government came at the expense of the members of the Polish Armed Forces. Furthermore, British public sentiment, due to the extreme economic hardships in the postwar period, was not always encouraging of Polish immigration, especially with regards to their employment. True to their record, though, the government weighed economic factors over all others, and the Poles, along with over 80,000 EVWs[101], were admitted en masse.

[99] At the suggestion of building new accommodation for the PRC, the Minister of Works argued, "It would be a considerable drain on building materials, and particularly equipment, in short supply." See Extract F.L.C. (46) 6th Meeting, November 7, 1946, PREM 8/832.
[100] Tony Judt. *Postwar*…235.
[101] Maud Bülbring. "Post-War Refugees in Great Britain"…99.

Chapter III: Settlement of Polish Soldiers in Postwar Great Britain – Official Reaction

Throughout the war, the Polish Armed Forces received praise for their valor and courage from British military officials and politicians alike. Winston Churchill was especially outspoken in his appreciation of the Polish contribution to the Allied war effort, and he became one of their most important advocates in Parliament when a new Labour government took over in 1945. Clement Attlee, Churchill's successor as Prime Minister, working with Ernest Bevin, the new Foreign Minister, appeared to be less admiring than Churchill of the Poles. Instead they were focused on creating a positive working relationship with the Soviets at the Poles' expense.[102] However, as antagonism grew between the Soviets and the West in the aftermath of the war, the Labour government warmed up to the Polish Armed Forces, as it became apparent that neither the Soviet-guided Polish Provisional Government nor the Polish military would be cooperative in wholesale repatriation. In addition, the British government began to open its doors to Poles out of a necessity of supplementing its meager national workforce, and as a result of the embarrassment caused by maintaining an illegal army across Europe and the Near East long after the war had ended.[103] The Labour government was finally forced into dealing with the problem of such a politically charged group of men[104], and accordingly created the Polish Resettlement Corps. The PRC, as an institution designed to help demobilize the soldiers and subsequently transition them into civilian life on a

[102] Adam Zamoyski. *The Forgotten Few: The Polish Air Force in the Second World War*. (London: John Murray Ltd., 1995), 203.
[103] Robert Miles. "Nationality, Citizenship, and Migration to Britain"…430.
[104] There were approximately 5,500 women who enlisted in a separate resettlement scheme administered by the British Auxiliary Territorial Service. Consequently, the members of the PRC will be referred to as an all-male group. For the male to female ratio in both the PAF and the PRC see Keith Sword et. al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…449.

voluntary basis, was engineered in a way so as to maintain the option of repatriation, which the British continued to encourage throughout the postwar period.

3.1 The Polish Resettlement Corps – Origins

In a speech in the House of Commons on February 27, 1945, Prime Minister Churchill declared,

> His Majesty's Government will never forget the debt they owe to the Polish troops who have served them so valiantly, and for all those who have fought under our command I earnestly hope it may be possible to offer the citizenship and freedom of the British Empire, if they so desire. I am not able to make a declaration on that respect to-day because all matters affecting citizenship require to be discussed between this country and the Dominions, and that takes time. But so far as we are concerned we should think it an honour to have such faithful and valiant warriors dwelling among us as if they were men of our own blood.[105]

Thus, hope was given to the approximately 250,000 members of the Polish Armed Forces that, after the war ended, they would be welcomed to Great Britain from where the battle for a democratic and sovereign Poland could continue. Here Churchill was expressing recognition of the Poles' many wartime contributions to the Allied cause, but he was also articulating a position of gratitude and respect that would not be continuously held by the following administration. Nor was Churchill's generous attitude mirrored by many British citizens who were quick to forget the important role the Poles had played in the salvation of their own country from the Nazis. It seemed that once the danger of a Nazi victory receded, appreciation of the Poles' assistance diminished, too. This trend was to continue through the postwar period, as approximately114,000 Poles arrived in the United Kingdom as members of the PRC.[106]

[105] Witold Leitgeber. *It Speaks for Itself…*149.

[106] 114,000 members is the figure quoted by Keith Sword (Keith Sword, et al. *The Formation of the Polish Community…*449), Andrew Nocon (Andrew Nocon."A Reluctant Welcome? Poles in Britain in the 1940s", *Oral History*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Political Lives (Spring 1996): 79.) and Jerzy Zubrzycki (Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain.…*90.). However, Józef Gula (Józef Gula. *The Roman Catholic Church…* 151.) gives a slightly larger figure of 137,000.

As previously mentioned, such a correlation between general British attitudes toward the Poles and the British need for Polish assistance in preventing a Nazi victory can be traced throughout the years of the Second World War. For example, at the very beginning of the war, in 1939 and 1940, Poland and Great Britain were the main resisting forces to the German aggressions. As such, there was a great deal of mutual respect between the two countries.[107] France fell early to Nazi occupation, and American involvement did not commence until more than two years after the war began, so the Poles and British relied heavily on each other to prevent a Nazi victory. During this period, prominent figures such as Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, Minister of Labour Ernest Bevin, and King George VI publicly commended the Polish forces and the Polish government-in-exile. For instance, in a message to President Raczkiewicz on September 4, 1940, King George VI wrote, "I and my peoples in this country and overseas are filled with admiration for the courage and tenacity of the Polish people. We are proud to have at our side…the heroic Polish Army, Air Force and Navy which have covered themselves with glory."[108] This comment, made at the close of the epic Battle of Britain (which took place during the summer and fall of 1940), marked the peak of British appreciation for the courage and skill of the Polish Forces. From this point on, though, especially after the Soviets and Americans joined the Allied cause, recognition of Polish war contributions and Polish interests on the part of the British declined.[109] This waning of respect for the Poles and the Polish cause greatly affected their treatment after the war was finally won.

As the Second World War came to an end, debate about how to deal with the Polish troops under British command became a pressing matter, and suggestions for

[107] Keith Sword, et al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…32.
[108] Witold Leitgeber. *It Speaks for Itself*…7.
[109] Keith Sword, et al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…32.

resolving the issue were rarely as accepting and generous as Churchill's contingent offer of citizenship. Rather, the Cabinet worked to reinterpret Churchill's statement as signaling a willingness of the government to assist the Poles, but as assuring no right to settlement in Great Britain. On January 14, 1946, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs made the following recommendation to the Cabinet:

> The statement made by Mr. Winston Churchill…should be interpreted as implying no guarantee of settlement in British territory or of British naturalisation for all members of the Polish Armed Forces under British command but as meaning that His Majesty's Government will be ready in collaboration with other Governments to give what assistance they can when the time comes to enable those who have fought with us throughout the war and have finally decided not to return to Poland to begin with their dependents a new life outside their own country.[110]

It is clear after reading this statement that the Cabinet wished to remove as much responsibility as possible from itself and instead distribute it across the governments of other Allied powers. Indeed a meeting was convened on May 1, 1946 to discuss "the problem of the disposal of the Polish Armed Forces", and a proposition was made to send as many as possible to other Western European countries, to the USA, and even to Latin America.[111] It is clear from the government documents that the British government was afraid of the burden such a large number of aliens would have on their national resources.[112]

Consequently, by refraining from giving the Poles any reassurance about their ability to settle in Britain after the war, the government was indirectly encouraging their return to Poland. Because there were approximately 250,000 troops enlisted in the Polish Armed Forces, the costs of accepting all those who potentially wished to live in Great

[110] Memorandum by Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, January 14, 1946. CAB 129/6. (C.P. (46) 13)
[111] Meeting of Prime Ministers, May 1, 1946, WO 315/50. (P.M.M. (46) 14)
[112] Ibid.

Britain would be vast.[113] The government also had to consider the reaction of its constituents, who were not likely to favor an influx of foreigners who could be seen as a threat to their employment opportunities and to their idea of Britishness in all its various forms.[114] For these reasons, the British administration tried to distance itself from the Polish Armed Forces while simultaneously promoting their repatriation.

This must be understood, however, within the context of postwar Britain. As previously mentioned, the country was in financial straits. Its economy was ruined, huge loans were to somehow be repaid, and a lack of manpower greatly contributed to its woes. Additionally, Britain's role as a dominating world power was quickly coming to an end, so she was more inclined to work together with other great powers, such as the Soviet Union.[115] In fact, Zamoyski asserts that Britain even "craved harmonious relations with the Soviet Union."[116] Although his phrasing might somewhat hyperbolize the extent of Britain's wish to collaborate with the Soviets, the fact remained that Great Britain was losing its diplomatic heft, and was becoming quite conscious of it.

This desire to please other powerful countries is evident in the way in which the British government informed the Polish troops about the resettlement scheme. In a brief from the War Office to its senior officers concerning the distribution of statements by the British and Polish governments concerning the PRC, Major General Reeve wrote, "no propaganda calculated to influence members of the Polish Forces not to return to POLAND [sic] is [to be] included in any newspaper or broadcast under your control."[117] A desire to appease Warsaw is evident in this message. While seemingly presenting an impartial face, the British government was actually stressing control of propaganda

[113] Notes on a Meeting. June 1, 1946. CAB 195/4. (C.M. 54(46)) Ernest Bevin is quoted as saying, "We owe 1/6 of the world [and] can't absorb 200.000!" He was clearly overwhelmed by the prospect of such an influx.
[114] Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain.*..81-82.
[115] Keith Sword, et al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…213.
[116] Adam Zamoyski. *The Forgotten Few.*.., 203.
[117] Note from Major General Reeve, March 13, 1946. WO 315/50.

against repatriation, but did not concern itself with propaganda in favor of such a decision. Consequently, the government became a sort of accomplice of the Warsaw government, who at that point in time, was trying to demobilize and repatriate as many Polish troops as possible.[118] The British authorities wanted to cooperate with the Polish government, and by doing so, remain in the good favor of the Soviets. At the same time, His Majesty's Government (HMG) appears to have been worried about the possibility of many Poles refusing to return to Poland and instead choosing to emigrate to the United Kingdom. Thus, it was also in the interest of the British for as many Poles as possible to repatriate so that they would not have to bear the economic burden of supporting them all. Under the false façade of humanitarianism, Britain was in no way eagerly anticipating the arrival of the PRC enlistees. Rather, the government was concerned with how to diplomatically deal with a large body of politically charged armed men who could at any point turn hostile. Instead of acting in the interest of its former allies, the free Poles, Britain did its best to keep them satisfied just enough to prevent any damaging of Anglo-Soviet relations.

Another motivating factor in the British desire for the repatriation of Polish troops was the promised upcoming free elections to be held in Poland. Ernest Bevin stressed the importance of the troops returning home to take part in the elections in order to ensure the success of democracy in that newly reformed country.[119] He is quoted as having said, "We wanted the General [Anders] and the other Polish Commanders to help us to get as many [Polish troops] as possible to go back. The more returned the greater was the

[118] Keith Sword, et al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…201. Ciechanowski explains that in the year or two immediately following the war, the position of the Warsaw Government "wavered uneasily between demanding the return of Polish Army units, which it regarded as its own, and fearing the arrival in Poland of thousands of patriotic veterans, who might well be used to challenge the communists' grip on the country."
[119] Lt.-General W. Anders. *An Army in Exile*.…289.

guarantee of Polish independence."[120] At this time, the British still believed that the Soviets would allow free elections to take place in Poland. This did not, however, reflect the attitude of the Polish Armed Forces, many of whom were very skeptical of Soviet intentions. Not only was this doubt a product of a long history of tension between the Poles and Russians, but it was also due to the fact that many Poles who had escaped Soviet-occupied Poland had joined up with the Polish Forces, bringing with them stories of the bleak conditions to be found back home.[121] It must be understood that the men who composed the Polish Armed Forces were fiercely patriotic and did not wish to return to a subjugated country, especially when they had been fighting for its liberation for approximately six long years.[122] The British government, however, was more inclined to curry the favor of the Soviets at the expense of the weak and powerless Poles.[123] At the same time, though, the British still believed in their ability as a world power to greatly influence political events across the globe.[124] Consequently, they pushed for the Polish troops' return to Poland.

When it became clear that the majority of Polish servicemen would not go back to their homeland[125], the British were forced to quickly come up with a plan for dealing with the tens of thousands of Polish people under their command. It was quickly becoming a palpable embarrassment to the British government that the Polish troops were still active while the rest of the European armies were well into the process of demobilization.[126] In

[120] Notes on a Meeting at 10 Downing Street, March 15, 1946, WO 315/50.
[121] Lt.-General W. Anders. *An Army in Exile*…287.
[122] Ibid, 283.
[123] Yohanan Cohen. *Small Nations in Times of Crisis and Confrontation*…116.
[124]Ernest Bevin displayed his confidence in influencing the outcome of the Polish elections when he "pointed out the different view points of Politicians [sic] and soldiers, and said that while General Anders won wars, he (Mr. Bevin) won elections!" See Notes on a Meeting at 10 Downing Street, March 15, 1946, WO 315/50.
[125] In the winter of 1945-1946, approximately 35,000 of the 250,000-strong Polish Armed Forces chose to repatriate. See Keith Sword. "Their Prospects Will Not Be Bright", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (July 1986): 370.
[126] Józef Gula. *The Roman Catholic Church*…146.

order to solve this matter, Bevin created the Polish Resettlement Corps as a means of transitioning servicemen from military to civilian life.[127] It was also a tactic that allowed the British to accept a large number of Poles without granting them the rights attached to full citizenship. Thus, the PRC was born as an instrument allowing the British to disband the Polish Armed Forces while at the same time importing a virile workforce that would have fewer rights and privileges than the average British worker. This solution, then, helped the British economically and diplomatically by taking the Poles out of a military context and using them as a resource to help rebuild their shattered country.

3.2 The Polish Resettlement Corps – Structure and Institutions

The Polish Resettlement Corps was thought out as an intermediary between military and civilian life. Its main function was to place Polish ex-combatants into employment in industries that were in dire need of extra manpower.[128] However, the facilitators of the PRC were also involved in reuniting the former troops with family members and dependants who were spread across the globe, from places as near as Germany and Italy to faraway lands such as India and East Africa. Additionally, accommodation needed to be found for the tens of thousands of newcomers who were arriving in the midst of an acute housing shortage. Vital to the economic assimilation of the Poles was English language instruction and job skill training, so courses and apprenticeships had to be organized. Finally, negotiations with the powerful trade unions were crucial to placing the newly arrived Poles in critical industries in order to rejuvenate Britain's faltering

[127] Keith Sword. "Their Prospects Will Not Be Bright"…371.
[128] Memorandum by the Minister of Labour and National Service, January 30, 1948, PREM 8/832. (L.C. (48) 4). Here it is recorded that the British government would only give the Poles employment where no adequate British labor was available. In addition, it is noted that Poles were generally only offered jobs in heavy industry or in agriculture. Light work was not made available to them for the most part.

economy. As such, the resettlement process involved a wide range of government organizations, including the War Office, the Home Office, the Ministry of Labour, the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and the National Assistance Board.[129] Such a concerted effort required a great deal of organization and coordination, which the British were fairly successful in accomplishing. After all, it was in their own best interest to integrate the Poles as quickly and seamlessly as possible into the struggling British economy.[130] Consequently, emphasis was placed on improving English and technical skills that would enable the newcomers to be inserted as employees in vital industries. Less emphasis, however, was placed on social integration or on the repayment of any debt the British may have accrued during the war, which were deemed secondary goals, since they would not directly improve the British market.[131] For the most part, as long as the British were able to use the Poles in the improvement of their national economy, regardless of the Poles' personal happiness and success, the PRC was counted as a success.

Here it may be useful to give a brief demographic sketch of the PRC, so as to better understand the population with which the British government was dealing. The vast majority of PRC enlistees were between the ages of 20 and 54, and approximately 95% of them were male.[132] Of the 114,000 PRC members, approximately 14% were officers in the Polish Armed Forces.[133] Needless to say, the age range of the officers skewed higher than that of the other ranks. As for language skills, approximately 40% of the men knew

[129] Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain*…88.
[130] According to Hampshire, the PRC was seen as an obvious source of recruitment to fill the postwar labor shortage, especially with regards to the possibility of recruitment from the colonies. The British were clearly concerned with the racial makeup of such a large new immigrant group and its ability to assimilate. See James Hampshire. *Citizenship and Belonging.*…59.
[131] Robert Miles. "Nationality, Citizenship, and Migration to Britain"…426.
[132] Keith Sword, et al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…449 and 452.
[133] This figure is based on Zubrzycki's figures of 17,000 officers enrolled in the PRC out 114,000 enrolled between September 1946 and September 1949. See Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain*…90.

at least some English[134], however General Anders, commander of the II Polish Corps reckoned that less than 1% of his troops spoke English.[135] Such a discrepancy can be explained on several grounds. Firstly, the II Polish Corps was composed mainly of men who had been released or had escaped from the USSR, so they never had the opportunity to live in Britain as the men of the I Polish Corps had. Secondly, these figures do not specify any levels of proficiency. While the 40% can refer to a very basic knowledge of the English language, Anders' 1%, which is after all a rough guess, might refer to a high level of fluency. With regards family life, I have not been able to find any concrete statistics. Still, it is important to note that many spouses and children of PRC men were trapped within the sealed borders of Soviet-dominated Poland, and it was difficult for many of the men to ascertain whether their families were alive. Consequently, any statistics about the PRC members' marital status would be extremely difficult to corroborate. Thus, the generalizations that can be made about the PRC are that it was composed of relatively young men, a sizeable group of whom had already been exposed to British culture during the war. Furthermore, because of the large number of young men in the PRC, many of whom had been fighting in the war for the past two to six years, it can be assumed that many were unmarried. The British government, then, was dealing with a relatively homogenous immigrant population, which made it easier for the government to attend to them as a group.

Arguably, the most heavily involved government agency in the administration of the PRC was the War Office. Because the Polish Armed Forces had been under British military command during the war, the War Office was already equipped with a built-in infrastructure for dealing with the Poles, and so it was logical that they would continue to

[134] Elizabeth Stadulis. "The Resettlement of Displaced Persons in the United Kingdom"…214.
[135] Keith Sword, et al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…390.

be one of the primary ministries involved in their resettlement.[136] The troops were, after all, being paid as servicemen until they were able to find an approved and sustainable civilian occupation, and so continued to be under the auspices of military organization.[137] Furthermore, the British government was very much in favor of the continued responsibility of the War Office because of the disciplinarian structure it provided for the demobilized troops. In a *Times* article of August 31, 1946 informing its readers of the conditions of the PRC, it is written that "the Poles will be under military law and under control of the War Office. No alternative method of ensuring discipline and administrative order could be found."[138] The prospect of admitting over 100,000 ex-combatants, who had seen battle, many of who were politically active, posed a possible threat to the postwar peace that the government wished to instate. By keeping the Poles under military authority, the British were better able to control them as a group. They were segregated from the native population by being housed together in former military camps that were often located in rural areas.[139] Zubrzycki wrote about the retardation of "the cultural amalgamation of the Polish community" due to British policies that enforced the segregation of Poles in special camps and hostels and the "setting up of special departments to deal with the Poles as a group".[140] In such a way, the Poles were kept separate from the British population so as to be more easily manipulated for economic purposes.

[136] "As the Battle of Britain was being fought, the Poles and British negotiated a comprehensive military agreement (5 August 1940), which specified: 'The Polish Armed Forces (comprising Land, Sea and Air Forces) shall be organized and employed under British Command, in its character as the Allied High Command, as the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland allied with the United Kingdom.'" See Michael Alfred Peszke. "An Introduction to English-Language Literature on the Polish Armed Forces in World War II", *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (October 2006): 1042.

[137] The rate of pay for PRC members was 2/3 that of pay for British forces of the same rank. See Keith Sword, et al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…247.

[138] "Resettlement of Poles", *The London Times*. August 31, 1946, 3.

[139] By October 1946 120,000 Polish troops were housed in 265 of these camps spread across the country. See Keith Sword, et al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…271.

[140] Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain*…88-89.

Additionally, the drop in morale that could possibly materialize when the men were demobilized, but were not yet integrated into civilian life, could prove difficult to manage, especially outside of a military setting.[141] For these reasons, it was important to provide the Poles with a structure of boundaries and limitations that would also serve to maintain a sense of pride in them. The British believed that a military structure, with which the Poles were already very familiar, would make the transition easier, since its system of rankings and earned rewards and punishments would command respect and discipline from the troops and would give them a sense of purpose until employment could be found. Expressed by such measures was an unambiguous fear on the part of the British of the potential volatility of the Polish veterans.

In fact, to ensure such a sense of purpose, the British government devised a scheme that would permit members of the PRC to "be allocated to an employer 'on loan' in a group, to carry out work of national importance such as harvesting or clearing bomb-sites."[142] This would allow for temporary employment while the Poles were in the process of finding a permanent position, thus minimizing idleness, which could lead to demoralization. On the other hand, this kind of plan risked making the PRC members feel like they were being exploited, since they were used to do some of the most unpleasant work available.[143] In economic terms, though, this was a logical step for the British government, who needed as much help as possible in reconstructing its devastated country. The main point of this policy, then, was that the demobilized troops were kept occupied in such a way that they were less likely to become involved in asocial behavior, and that they were being used to the advantage of the British economy.

[141] Adam Zamoyski. *The Forgotten Few…*, 207. According to Zamoyski, demoralization became a visible phenomenon among the Polish airmen who turned to crime, alcohol consumption, and even suicide after the end of the war.
[142] Keith Sword, et al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…247.
[143] Sword notes that British troops were involved in similar work, and that the Poles were not singled out for such jobs. See ibid.

Another primary player in the resettlement of members of the Polish Armed Forces was the Ministry of Labour and National Service. The main purpose of the PRC for the British was to place as many Poles as possible in essential industries in order to reinvigorate the sagging economy, so the Ministry of Labour (MoL) was integral in facilitating such a plan. Most challenging for the Ministry was its negotiations with the trade unions, who at this point in British history wielded tremendous power. The steelworkers, coalminers, and agricultural workers were all initially strongly opposed to the inclusion of Polish laborers among their numbers.[144] It was understood by the MoL that "each industry feared that if it agreed [to accept Poles] it might receive more than its fair share."[145] In this situation, then, it was necessary for all of the various trade unions to accept some Poles in order for any Poles to be taken at all.[146] The unions were clearly afraid of being overrun by an alien population that they believed would undercut them and threaten the rights they had won.[147] Consequently, the mission of the MoL was to make a compromise with the unions in a way that would allow them to feel in control of their industries without conceding too much. It was essential that the Poles, a sizeable proportion of whom were already skilled in industrial vocations[148], be placed as quickly as possible in critical industries, and the MoL was willing to engage with the unions in order to make this possible.[149]

[144] Hall writes of the "negative attitude exhibited by certain factions of British labor toward acceptance of foreign workers." See Harold E. Hall. "Production and Manpower in Great Britain", *Economic Geography*,Vol. 24, No. 2 (April, 1948): 123.
[145] Extract from C.M. (46) 99th Conclusions, November 21, 1946, PREM 8/832.
[146] Officials seemed to feel it was an "all or nothing" situation with the unions. If a few of them decided not to accept the Poles, the negotiations would fail with the rest as well. See Note to Mr. Graham Harrison, November 14, 1946, PREM 8/832.
[147] Elizabeth Stadulis. "The Resettlement of Displaced Persons in the United Kingdom"…225.
[148] Approximately 25% of PRC members who volunteered for mining jobs already had experience. See Ibid, 216.
[149] The MoL was willing to put up a fight in order to get unions to agree to accept Poles. In a MoL note it is written, "the Governement should be really tough and fight the A.E.U. Executives to the last ditch." See Ministry of Labour and National Service, Midlands Regional Office note to C.W.K. MacMullan, January 17, 1948, LAB 8/1490.

In order for the trade unions to consent to hire Poles, the government agreed to delineate a number of conditions under which the Poles could be employed. While these conditions varied slightly according to the specific union, they generally included the following four points:[150]

1. Poles could only be hired if no suitable British labor were available.
2. Polish workers must become union members.
3. Polish workers would be the first to be fired in the case of redundancies.
4. Polish workers would only be placed where local union branches agreed to accept them.

Such a compromise allowed the unions to feel more comfortable in hiring Poles because it gave them leeway in the hiring and firing processes. It also insured that the Poles would be union members, thereby stemming fears of being undercut by cheaper alien labor. Until such a compromise had been reached, though, it was very difficult to place PRC enlistees in critical industries, so negotiations with the trades unions were of the utmost importance. It became clear that the goals of the government and the unions did not easily converge.

In addition to working with the Trades Union Congress (TUC), the MoL was responsible for registering and conducting interviews with PRC members in order to place them in the most fitting employment.[151] During the interviews questions were asked about general previous work experience and level of English proficiency in addition to other standard inquiries. In this way, the British government tried to use the newcomers as effectively and efficiently as possible. This was not necessarily the case for skilled professionals, though. The men and women of the PRC were unusual as an immigrant group in that a large proportion of them had formerly been working as professionals

[150] "Coal Mining Training – Poles", January 23, 1947, LAB 18/432.
[151] Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain*…90.

(approximately 10%)[152], and many were university educated (10%)[153].[154] However, because of the British government's concern about the public perceiving the Poles as receiving preferential treatment, members of government were hesitant to place Poles in professional fields such as law or finance. Although Józef Gula argues that the PRC offered no real options for Polish professionals to reenter their previous professions, this was not altogether true.[155] Polish medical practitioners and pharmacists were employed by the PRC in the service of its members.[156] Later, three Polish hospitals were accordingly set up around the country.[157] In any case, it was the priority of the British to place the Poles in the industries most in need of labor, and in those that were most central to the recovery of the economy. Consequently, many Poles were forced to forfeit their old professions and acquire new skills to "bear their share in the Economic Crisis."[158] This was a logical policy in the eyes of the British, whose main concern during this period was economic restoration. Unfortunately, though, the Poles were left in the unenviable position of having to learn new trades that were less appealing to them. Once again, the economic concerns of the British were put ahead of the personal happiness of the Poles. In such a period of instability, though, this type of policy was rational, and was especially

[152] Ibid, 67. However, Sword writes that as many as 11,000 officers and 9,000 other ranks in the PRC had been professionals in Poland. This would mean that the percentage of professionally qualified PRC enlistees would have been closer to 17.5%. See Keith Sword, et al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…265.
[153] Elspeth Huxley. *Back Street New Worlds.*..31-32.
[154] It must be noted, however, that there were great differences between the men of the I Polish Corps who had been stationed in Britain since 1940 and the II Polish Corps under the direction of General Anders. The majority of troops in the II Polish Corps were from eastern Poland, an area that was much less developed than western Poland, where many of the I Polish Corps originated. Anders is quoted as saying that 80% of his troops had been peasants or smallholders in Poland. Conversely, the Polish units in Britain and Germany had better qualifications. About 65,000 had been skilled or semi-skilled workers, and approximately 18,600 had completed secondary education. Only 25,500 of them had no skills or qualifications whatsoever. See Keith Sword, et al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…455.
[155] Józef Gula. *The Roman Catholic Church*…147.
[156] Polish Resettlement Act, 1947, WO 315/62.
[157] Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain*…91.
[158] Memorandum from the War Office. "Appeal to Members of the Polish Resettlement Corps", April 20, 1948, WO 315/62.

justifiable in regards to a foreign population.

Britain was, however, able to show its humanitarian side when it promised PRC enlistees to reunite them with their family members and dependants. This responsibility was mainly assigned to the National Assistance Board (NAB). With the addition over the course of several years of over 30,000 of PRC family members and dependants who had been displaced across Europe, the Near East, India and Africa, the NAB, in cooperation with the War Office, was charged with finding them reasonable lodging without upsetting the British public at large, who were liable to be furious when immigrants were provided with housing before they themselves were.[159] This challenge was for the most part handled in a professional and sensitive manner.

Once the PRC arrived in Britain, they were housed in empty military barracks provided by the War Office. Later, when members had been discharged after finding suitable employment, the NAB took control of these camps.[160] This rudimentary type of accommodation was eventually replaced by hostels where civilian, rather than military rules applied.[161] The NAB took the initiative to prepare for the arrival of family members and dependants, as well. They requested statistical information about the age and sex of these newcomers in order to provide them with proper clothing and supplies on their arrival.[162] The Board also monitored the welfare of camp residents, checking on their health, provisions, housing conditions and English language education.[163] Concern for the wellbeing of the Polish dependants was clearly demonstrated by members of the NAB. They were attentive to the needs of the former displaced persons and saw to their basic

[159] According to Zubrzycki's statistics, there were 31,800 dependants of Polish ex-servicemen brought to the U.K. by the War Office by December 1949. See Table 13 in Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain*…62.
[160] Ibid, 95.
[161] There were over 400 of such Polish hostels in Britain in the 1940s. See Józef Gula. *The Roman Catholic Church*…159.
[162] Letter from C.J.R. Whetmath to Major-General M.W.M. MacLeod, June 27, 1947, AST 18/92.
[163] Welfare Report by Major P.J. Sparkes, September 25, 1947, AST 18/92.

living conditions. In this sense, the British were far from being a cold-hearted administration concerned only with the economic productivity of these new immigrants, but were more like a benefactor who was very attentive to the basic needs and comforts of these former displaced persons.

Much debate was given to the way in which ex-military members could be accommodated with their civilian families or dependants. Different options were put forth: to house the whole family together with the ex-combatant, to unite the wives and children together with the ex-combatant while keeping other dependants separate, and to keep the ex-combatant separate from the entire family.[164] Complications arose when civilians and non-civilians, such as PRC enlistees, were housed in one unit because different sets of rules applied to each. A debate was also raised about distinguishing between dependants and families, the War Office asserting that the dependants (defined as related civilians who were neither spouses nor children of the PRC members) should solely be under the responsibility of the NAB.[165] This made it necessary to separate the dependants from the nuclear families, so that administration of the camps would fall either under the military rules of the War Office or under the civilian structure of the NAB. It is evident from this note that efforts were made to keep families together, but when it came to more distantly related relatives or other types of dependants, there was less concern over complete reunification. It seems that the War Office was eager to disengage itself from the administration of the PRC as soon as possible, and began to do so by denying any responsibility for the dependants. This is where the NAB became an integral organization in Polish resettlement. It was involved in the transition from military to civilian life, first by taking care of the civilian dependants, and second by taking over

[164] Board Memorandum No. 473, "Polish Resettlement", July 11, 1947, AST 18/92.
[165] War Office Note, "Polish Families, Welfare Personnel and Dependants", April 25, 1947, AST 18/92.

authority from the War Office when ex-soldiers left the PRC. In the end, as men were placed in various industries and became full-fledged civilians, it was the NAB to whom they turned for assistance. Therefore, the Poles were not left without support once they left the PRC (and eventually once the PRC was formally dissolved in 1949). In terms of the role of the NAB, the British tried to ease the shift from military to civilian life as much as possible, and could in this respect be thought of as a compassionate force, rather than one purely motivated by economic factors.

3.3 Support and Anxiety among Officials

During the formation process of the PRC, the British government had several concerns about such a large alien population coming to settle on its territory. Although the Poles had been steadfast allies of the British, they still were regarded with suspicion, and were consequently dealt with cautiously. In a meeting about "Poles and Security", Mr. Hill, a security official, intimated that "all that had been said about the security risks arising from aliens during the war applied with redoubled force to a solid block of aliens of this kind."[166] With the term "this kind" he was referring to the strong national sentiments carried by many of the Poles, which to him implied an unwillingness to assimilate and a potential for espionage.[167] Mr. Hill was expressing a common fear of both the British government and the British public of living among a large population of culturally alien people. The idea of flooding the country with potential spies and Fascists was heavily considered by many officials when deciding how best to screen the new immigrants.

A fear of Polish nationalism was tangible among many politicians, both because of

[166] Extract from SSS (LOC)(46) 37th Meeting, October 29, 1946, "Poles and Security", KV 4/286.s
[167] Ibid.

the threat it could pose to British internal affairs and because it could seriously damage Anglo-Polish and Anglo-Soviet relations. In the same meeting about "Poles and Security", the committee (composed of Home Office and Security Service representatives) endorsed the following statement:

> The Conference [agreed that from the general security standpoint it was] undesirable to encourage the formation or continuance of large Polish colonies, or of large Polish organizations or institutions in the United Kingdom such as might cause embarrassment to the British Government by means of open or clandestine opposition to the Warsaw Government on a large scale.[168]

More than a year after the recognition of the Polish government-in-exile was withdrawn and reassigned to the provisional government set up by the Soviets in Poland, the British still did not fathom the true character of the Warsaw government and continued to tiptoe around issues that might provoke any amount of conflict between the two governments. Furthermore, fear was expressed of far right Polish nationalists joining forces with British fascists.[169] Because the Poles were seen as a political community, they were viewed with apprehension.

The British authorities recognized the strong anti-Soviet sentiment that pervaded the Polish ranks, especially in the II Polish Corps, many of whose members had formerly been prisoners of war in Soviet camps. The Warsaw Government was well aware of these antipathetic sentiments among the Polish Armed Forces, too, and was therefore very irresolute in its policy toward the ex-combatants. Keeping in mind this distrust by Warsaw of the troops, the Polish Resettlement Corps was created as an "official solution" to the problem of dealing with the Poles as a group in a way that would cause as little damage as possible to Anglo-Polish relations. It was considered to be

> a compromise between the Home Office disinclination, on the one hand, to absorb, as civilians, 250,000 individual Poles who are likely to grow roots and will prove difficult to eventually dislodge, and on the other hand the Foreign Office reluctance at having to account to the interested Governments for the continuance of a homogenous and self-

[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid.

governing Polish community under military control.[170]

By making those who chose to enlist with the PRC subject to British military discipline, it prevented a deluge of Polish civilians from descending on the territory at once. At the same time, in an effort to maintain positive diplomatic relations, it took away any trace of Polish military authority over the demobilized forces, which could have been perceived as a threat to the power of Warsaw. The continued existence of an armed organization of Poles who were clearly opposed to the Polish provisional government and were under British command would have greatly threatened any chance for cooperation between the officially recognized Polish government and the British.

The government especially considered the need for assimilation as essential to maintaining a harmonious society.[171] Consequently, a solution for these fears of a large, separate, politically charged immigrant population was soon proposed. To spread the Poles as thinly as possible across the territory was deemed "obviously necessary" and the need to "avoid aggregations of Poles which would prove difficult to assimilate" was a top priority.[172] By not allowing Poles to form their own communities, the British hoped to prevent any insularity that would inhibit their assimilation into British culture, regardless of whether this was in the Poles' best interest as newcomers to a foreign land. However, in spite of such plans, the housing shortage made them unachievable. Because of such circumstances, the Poles were accommodated in unused army barracks and worker's hostels, and so were kept together in large communities despite the fears of policy-

[170] "Polish Question", KV 4/286. However, in the end, only about 114,000 men joined the PRC, less than half the amount they so feared.

[171] A memorandum from the Ministry of Labour asserts that in London "there would be all sorts of opportunities for [the Poles] finding…employment in ones and twos in small undertakings willing to employ aliens." The phrase "in ones and twos" implies that the British wanted to see the Poles widely distributed across the country so that their presence in British society would be as unobtrusive as possible. See Cabinet Foreign Labour Committee, "Polish Resettlement Corps: Accomodation Problems: Erection of New Accomodation, November 2, 1946, PREM 8/832. (F.L.C. (46) 15.

[172] Extract from SSS (LOC)(46), KV 4/286.

makers.

However, in spite of the suspicion held by many politicians against the Poles, there were some who voiced contrary opinions. These officials tended to be members of the military, such as Colonel Jago of the RAF, who "consider[ed] the majority of the Poles to be a very good lot who have much the same outlook on life as [the British] have."[173] Because members of the Royal Armed Forces had been in a position to work alongside the Polish troops for the span of the war, they were more likely to approve of the Poles. After such an experience, it is understandable that the RAF members would be able to see beyond the Polish stereotypes, and would thus be less inhibited in forming more meaningful relationships with the Poles. However, goodwill toward the ex-servicemen could be found in other, unlikely places. For instance, when the government requested cooperation from various British Isles in accepting PRC members, it received mixed responses. Even though the island of Jersey refused to accept any Poles whatsoever, Mr. Corbet of the States Office of Guernsey responded to such a request with a measure of sympathy and respect for what the Polish troops had been through during the war. He was quoted by the *Guernsey Star* as saying, "We feel it is right to give [a greater measure of] freedom to men who fought for us, and for reasons which we all know well, cannot go back to their own country."[174] Unlike other officials, he was not suspicious of the Poles' motives, but even went so far as to argue for giving them increased freedoms in order to prevent their return to England.[175] Clearly, Mr. Corbet valued the contribution the Poles made to the wellbeing of the Guernsey economy, but also respected them as honorable people.

The British authorities were also known to be very honest with the Poles and to

[173] Memorandum from Major S. Alley, May 28, 1946, KV 4/286.
[174] "Freedom for the Poles", *Guernsey Star*, October 21, 1948, in HO 45/22426.
[175] Ibid.

protect them from exploitation. For example, in a program established to connect local businesses with Polish officers to learn different trades, a MoL official expressed concern that "the employers…not use the officers as a form of cheap labour."[176] They worried that local businessmen might seize such apprenticeships as an opportunity to exploit the Polish officers for their labor without compensating them adequately for it. On another occasion, the MoL published a pamphlet containing general advice and warnings about starting a privately run business in the United Kingdom. The enclosed information, published in both English and Polish, was sincere and helpful, giving such practical suggestions as "you would be wise to consider taking employment in your chosen trade for a time before starting a business of your own", and "you should bear in mind that there is a serious shortage of most materials, and in many districts, of labour."[177] The MoL painted a realistic picture for the Poles of the hardships of starting a private business, but did so without being too discouraging. They seemed to genuinely want to make sure the Poles were well informed and able to make the best possible decisions when considering starting their own enterprises.

Overall, the reaction of the government toward the PRC was geared toward the economic benefits such a strong and skilled new labor force could provide to the United Kingdom. Humanitarian values, too, played a role in their interactions with the Poles, however the economic incentives were clearly the dominating force. While xenophobia and racial stereotypes were able to infiltrate official debate over the handling of the PRC, they did not make a significant impact on the resulting policies. The majority of governmental representatives was practical in its acceptance of the inclusion of such an influx of Polish immigrants, and was able to acknowledge the contributions such a

[176] Letter from N. Parker to J. Graywood, November 18, 1948, LAB 18/515.
[177] "Leaflet for the guidance of Members of the Polish Resettlement Corps wishing to set up Business or Professional Practice on their own account in the United Kingdom", published by the Ministry of Labour and National Service, WO 315/67.

community could make in Britain, while simultaneously recognizing the desirability of adequately accommodating them. At the same time, though, there was always the consideration that the Poles should not be perceived as being treated in a superior manner to the native population. This factor weighed heavily on all the decisions that were made about the PRC. Additionally, the benefits of Polish re-emigration were constantly kept in mind, and HMG was always willing to aid in any such arrangements for the Poles. Consequently, rather than welcoming the Polish troops with open arms, the British government did its best to accommodate them without going so far as to make serious efforts to facilitate their social assimilation.

Chapter IV: British Public Reaction to the Polish Resettlement Corps

While the reception of the Poles by the British government can generally be perceived as a rational and practical reaction to the sudden responsibility, in a time of great economic hardship, of accommodating over 100,000 members of a relatively homogenous immigrant group[178], the response by the British public at large was much more varied and reactionary. Without the need for diplomatic and political considerations, the British population saw the admittance of such a large group of foreigners on a more personal level. Unlike those of the government, their reflections tended toward their own wellbeing, weighing the potential economic and social effects of the new Polish immigrant community on their individual lives.[179] Many, especially trade union members, were concerned about the prospect of increased unemployment due to the introduction of a new labor force that would possibly be willing to work for lower wages.[180] However, on the opposite side of the spectrum could be found Anglo-Polish voluntary societies that benevolently worked to aid the newly arrived Poles settle into life in Britain. Additionally, the Poles found vocal advocates in the shape of former RAF members who wrote editorials about the honorable behavior the Poles exhibited during the war in order that their service to Great Britain would not be forgotten. Still, stereotypes about the Poles persisted, and even though many Britons were welcoming and hospitable, there was still a significant amount of adversity that prevented the PRC men from experiencing a

[178] According to Sword, 86% of PRC members were Roman Catholic. Greek Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant faiths were represented by approximately 4% each. Finally Jews made up about 2% of the PRC. See Keith Sword et. al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…453.
[179] Maynard Keynes had predicted "a post-war 'craving for social and personal *security*'" due to the destabilizing effects of six years of war. See Tony Judt. *Postwar*…73.
[180] Many Brits assumed that foreign workers were accustomed to lower standards and so expected less in terms of remuneration and working conditions, which would in turn be bad for British laborers. See Elizabeth Stadulis. "The Resettlement of Displaced Persons in the United Kingdom"…225.

completely smooth transition into civilian life in the United Kingdom. Public opinion, like that of the government, was a nuanced phenomenon.

4.1 The Negative Reaction: Trade Unions and Stereotypes

During the 1930s and 1940s British trade union membership had grown steadily, reaching 9.4 million members by 1948.[181] This meant that by the time the Polish Resettlement Corps was formalized in September 1946, the unions already had established enormous influence in labor relations. The fact that a Labour government that was quite supportive of the unions was brought to power in 1945 also contributed to the unions' political heft.[182] Additionally, the British public had come out of the Second World War a changed nation, leaning much more heavily toward drastic social reforms, especially ones that would curb unemployment.[183] As a result of all these factors, the Poles were considered by many members of the British working class as a potential threat to their standard of living. One clear example of such sentiments is evident in the journal of the National Union of Agricultural Workers (NUAW), *The Land Worker*, in which the following words were published in July 1946:

> There is now a suggestion that a large number of Polish workers may be permanently employed in British agriculture. The employers would gain from such employment, which would have a depressing effect on wages. The workers are alive to the dangers of this development, which might have serious consequences, and stand firmly opposed to the continued employment of P.O.W.'s and to the settlement on the land of foreign workers who are badly needed in their own country.[184]

Several reactions to foreign labor are conveyed in this extract, which can give insight to the overall reaction of the trade unions to the PRC.

[181] W. Hamish Fraser. *A History of British Trade Unionism*…177.
[182] Approximately one-third of the Cabinet posts were filled by union-backed MPs. See Henry Pelling. *A History of British Trade Unionism*…222.
[183] Boyd writes that "there was a positive horror of a return to the conditions of mass unemployment." See Francis Boyd. *British Politics in*…28.
[184] Elizabeth Stadulis. "The Resettlement of Displaced Persons in the United Kingdom"…222.

First, and probably foremost in the minds of the agricultural laborers, and in those of other working class members, was the notion that the admittance of Poles would cause wages to decline. With the British economy in a shambles and the rationing system still firmly in place, many people were concerned about their personal finances and about the already thin distribution of foodstuffs, not to mention the scarce availability of housing. While there was plenty of work available in the country, funding for such positions was limited by the failing economy. Consequently, the unions felt that an addition to the existing British labor force, especially one consisting of poor foreigners, would only bring increased economic hardship upon its members and would be an impediment to the future acquisition of workers' rights. The NUAW believed that "to catch up the labour shortage [through the use of Polish labor] would slow down modernization of the industry. The whole life of the farm ought to be revolutionized and the agricultural labourer given hours and wages comparable to those enjoyed by the workers in towns."[185] They viewed the Poles as having lower standards that would allow them to accept less remuneration for the same work as British employees. This would in turn weaken the bargaining power of the trade unions vis-à-vis management or the government, especially after many industries were nationalized between 1946 and 1948.[186] Zubrzycki sums this up well when he writes that the British workers feared that the Poles would "jeopardize the maintenance of full employment, bring down British workers' living standards or wages, destroy the hard earned liberties of trade unionists, accentuate the housing shortage and eat food that the British could hardly spare."[187] To the average British blue-collar laborer, the PRC men posed a viable threat to their standard of living. The idea that any continuation of the

[185] "Union Reject Polish Labour for Farms", *The Observer*. September 29, 1946.
[186] "The Bank of England and civil aviation were nationalized in 1946; coal, rail, road haulage and cable and wireless in 1947; and electricity and gas in 1948." See Andrew Thorpe. *A History of the British Labour Party*. (Houndmills, UK and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 124-125.
[187] Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain…*81-82.

manpower shortage in Britain would only serve to further cripple the national economy and worsen the living conditions of the majority of British citizens was not at the forefront of union members' thoughts. Their frame of mind was limited to a narrower picture.

Another concern can be detected in the same excerpt from *The Land Worker*: the fear of the permanence of such foreigners. As previously mentioned, the number of PRC members was approximately 114,000, while the EVW schemes brought in over 80,000 displaced persons.[188] These were certainly no small quantities, and it was through government initiatives that they were admitted to the country. This implied that they were legally entitled to live and work in the United Kingdom. Although the admission came with certain restrictions, especially for the EVWs,[189] there was a very real possibility of the postwar European immigrants being allowed to continue their lives in Britain after their work contracts had expired. The PRC members were particularly likely to stay, since they had been learning English, had been reunited with their displaced family members on British soil, and refused to return until Poland was a free and independent nation. In fact, 91,400[190] out of 114,000 PRC enlistees remained in Britain,[191] proving that such a fear of permanence was not irrational. Thus the unions feared an eventual dominance of Polish influence in their matters leading inevitably to the sharing of power. At a meeting of coalminers' union officials, one critic of the National Union of Mineworker's (NUM) position against the Poles, Midlands official George Jones, asked, "Are we so weak that

[188] Colin Holmes. *John Bull's Island*…213.
[189] EVWs came to Britain on two-year contracts. See ibid.
[190] A slightly larger figure of 95,000 men was given by the British Joint Committee for Polish Affairs in 1949. See "Do the Poles Here Really Work? Some Facts", compiled by the British Joint Committee for Polish Affairs, 1949, WO 315/62.
[191] Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain*…62. Sword corroborates the figure of 91,400 PRC members left in Britain in October 1949. See Keith Sword et. al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…447.

we cannot protect ourselves from the inrush of 1,000 Poles?"[192] Clearly the majority of union leaders perceived the Poles as a menace to their power.

Along the same lines as a fear of Polish permanence was the common claim that these immigrants were needed in their respective homelands, an argument that echoed the desire of the Labour government for the repatriation of as many Poles as possible. The government clung to such a position for its economic and political functions,[193] and the unions propagated this sentiment for economic reasons as well, but for them, there was also an underlying current of xenophobia. Harkening back to the nationalistic argument of "Britain for the British",[194] labor leaders strongly held to the position that Britain was in no situation to be able to support immigrant groups, especially when it was having trouble supporting its own citizens. The possibility of thousands, if not tens of thousands, of Polish workers settling in Britain brought out several displays of bigotry among union leaders. Mr. L. McGree of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers spoke of the Poles in a most derogatory manner at the General Council of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in 1946:

> The overwhelming majority of the so-called refugees have never fired a bullet or handles a rifle in the battle against Hitler's Fascism. I have sympathetically investigated applications to our union, and I want to say that the Fascist officers have done their job thoroughly! The first qualification of the applicant is to be a hundred per cent Jew-baiter. Their second qualification for hospitality here is a hatred of the present Polish Government. The third excuse is that they do not think they will be here long, as they will be mobilized for war against the Bolsheviks. I want to say that frankly there is no room in this country for these people. Their employment would be a great obstacle to production. To have this well-disciplined organized military force in this country is going to be a constant cause of international friction. For these reasons we ask the General Council to reconsider its decision and bring pressure on the Government to reverse its policy and send these people to their own country.[195]

[192] "Miners Decide against Poles Working in Pits", *The Daily Telegraph*, June 26, 1946.
[193] As previously mentioned, the government was concerned both by the cost of maintaining such a large immigrant population and by the effect it would have on its diplomatic relations.
[194] Colin Holmes. *John Bull's Island*…250-251.
[195] "Hostility Over Polish Workers in Britain", *The Daily Telegraph*, October 24, 1946.

It was not only the woodworkers who proposed forced repatriation. Rather this idea was popular among many of the various trade union leaderships.[196]

Strong communist influence in the labor sector[197] also contributed to the desire to send Poles back to Poland. Because the Poles refused to return to a country in which socialist ideals were supposedly being implemented, the British Communists held the Poles to be enemies to their cause and were suspicious of them.[198] The two Communist members of Parliament, Phil Piratin and Willie Gallacher, were against the whole scheme of the PRC because they saw it as an insult to the Polish Government.[199] Communist propaganda in British society had also been particularly strong during the war when the British government was trying to promote support of the alliance with the Soviets. The antipathies created during the war against fierce anti-communist nationalists carried on into the postwar period.[200] In short, support for the repatriation of Polish ex-combatants came from a multitude of sources.

In the above-quoted excerpt, McGree touched on one of the main stereotypes held by the British about the Poles, namely that the PRC men were Fascists and Nazi sympathizers. Stereotypes about the Poles were numerous, and played the role of dissuading many British citizens of the morality and merit of the Polish servicemen. The Pole as a Fascist enemy was arguably the most frequent generalization used to give substance to the claim against the rationality of allowing Poles to settle in Britain. It played on the fears the British public had recently experienced during the war,

[196] "The Amalgamated Engineering Union [AEU] issued a statement saying that strong exception was taken to the retention of large numbers of Poles, who, it felt, ought to go back to their own country." See "Unused Polish Labour: Lack of Agreement in Engineering", *The London Times*, September 20, 1947.
[197] Some unions were completely in the control of communist leadership: the Electrical Trades Unions, the Foundry Workers, and the Fire Brigades Union. Others held significant communist membership: the NUM, the AEU, and the Transport and General Workers Union. See Henry Pelling. *A History of British Trade Unionism*…227.
[198] Andrew Nocon. "A Reluctant Welcome?"…82.
[199] Keith Sword et. al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…327.
[200] Józef Gula. *The Roman Catholic Church.*..146.

specifically that Europe was in danger of being dominated by authoritarian powers. In this way, the stereotype capitalized on identifying the Poles with the former enemy, the Nazis. Such fears did not die so quickly, and in the immediate postwar years, calling someone a Fascist was a serious accusation that had dangerous connotations in the minds of the public.

While many other union leaders used this line of reasoning, such as Mr. W. J. Ellerby of the Civil Service Clerical Association who "urged [the Trades Union] Congress to give a direction that the General Council would not countenance the employment of any known Fascist,"[201] other sectors of society also portrayed the Polish ex-combatants as Fascists. *The Observer*, reporting on the decision to use Polish labor in the mines, expressed the following concern: "It is difficult to see how some recruits from General Anders's[202] Army…could fit into a society which militantly detests everything in which they believe."[203] Here, the newspaper was asserting that because of the Poles' supposed pro-Fascist sympathies, they would never be able to assimilate into British society; these Poles were so completely different and alien to the British mindset, that they would eternally remain outsiders. As previously discussed, the ability of immigrants to integrate into the British social order was one of the important considerations for their admittance into the country. The idea of recruiting from a worthy group of immigrants was very much on the minds of the British.[204] However, by asserting that the Poles were heavily Fascist, it implied that they would ultimately fail to integrate or would outright

[201] "Hostility Over Polish Workers in Britain." *The Daily Telegraph*. October 24, 1946.
[202] General Anders was well known for his strong views against both the Soviets and the postwar Polish government.
[203] "Pit Plan to Use Germans is Abandoned", *The Observer*, February 24, 1946.
[204] In a May 1946 *Daily Telegraph* article about Polish child dependants, this value was clearly expressed: "No country could wish for better immigrant stock than those well set up, Christian educated, disciplined children." See "Gallant Poles in Exile: Our Undischarged Debt of Honour", *The Daily Telegraph*, May 21, 1946.

oppose such assimilation in democratic Britain. Consequently, the PRC men were painted as troublemakers who would cause more social grief than their labor was worth.

Other British stereotypes about the Poles included that they were Papist spies[205], immoral Casanovas, and idle parasites that were undeservedly taking advantage of the humanitarian values of the British people. All of these served to promote anxiety and unease among the general British public about the settlement of over 100,000 Polish ex-military personnel in their country. The Papist spy assertion served to emphasize the Poles' otherness in the United Kingdom, a predominately Anglican country, and also created suspicion among the British of such a large group of Polish immigrants. Indeed, 86% of PRC enlistees were Roman Catholic and only 4% were Protestant.[206] In a non-Catholic country, such statistics fostered a feeling among some that the Poles were not to be depended upon. Mr. Drew from the Home Office warned that "the Pole with his known tendency to collect information of all kinds would be ready to sell it to the highest bidder."[207] They were represented as a conniving and opportunistic population that was not to be trusted.

Furthermore, the Poles were considered to be immoral in their conduct with women.[208] Polish servicemen as seducers of British women dated back to the Second World War when they were stationed in Britain. This sort of generalization about the Poles portrayed them as a moral threat, in which British women were the victims.[209] However, such a sweeping statement was not altogether unfounded; there was a grain of truth in it. By 1947, there were approximately 5,000 recorded instances of Polish-British

[205] This stereotype was most widespread in Scotland. See Colin Holmes. *John Bull's Island*…250.
[206] Keith Sword et. al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…453.
[207] Extract from SSS (LOC)(46) 37th Meeting", October 26, 1946, KV 4/286.
[208] The Poles were accused of stealing British jobs and women and were considered to have low moral standards. See Michelle Winslow. "Polish Migration to Britain: War, Exile and Mental Health", *Oral History*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Spring, 1999): 61.
[209] Viscount Simon was quoted as saying, "If they don't speak English, it is remarkable the Poles get on with English and Scottish girls." See "Service Open to Poles", *The London Times*, March 12, 1947.

intermarriage, and this number was to increase over the next few years.[210] Many Poles were stationed in Britain, the majority in Scotland, during the war and had been able to form relationships with the native population while many of the young local men had been shipped abroad for military duty. Consequently, such intimate relationships were bound to form between British women and the Polish soldiers. Moreover, the "overwhelming majority [of PRC members] were young and fit males under 40 years of age,"[211] many of whom were unmarried. So, after the war, when the Poles returned to settle in the UK as PRC enlistees, they were keen to find wives and start families. Because of the unbalanced ratio of Polish men to Polish women in Britain (approximately 3:1)[212], the ex-servicemen had to look outside the Polish community for prospective partners. By some Britons this was seen as a terrible threat, since with the possibility of the loss of British women to foreign men, came the prospect of the dilution of British culture. This was a very serious concern for some Britons, especially with regard to the general influx of immigrants in the past decade and the major decline in Britain's diplomatic power after the war. The idea of depravity among Poles manifested itself in other types of stereotypes as well. Some officials worried that the PRC men would engage in illicit activities, such as racketeering.[213] The moral character of the British public, then, was thought to be in danger of being infiltrated by the wickedness of the Polish soldiers.

Idleness as a Polish trait was another popular generalization among British people from all strata of society. One MoL official, Ann Patterson, asserted that the men in the PRC who had not yet found employment were living in "luxurious idleness".[214] Such a

[210] Keith Sword et. al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…401.
[211] Ibid, 451.
[212] In December 1951, 25.6% of the Polish immigrant community in Britain was female, while 77.4% were male. See Ibid, 449.
[213] Note to Mr. White, June 18, 1946, KV 4/286.
[214] Letter to Mr. Rouse from Ann Patterson, October 4, 1947, LAB 8/1491. (E.M. 100/2216/1947)

statement disregarded the poor living conditions found in PRC camps and hostels[215] and failed to take into account the frustration resulting from joblessness, lack of personal space and poverty that was keenly felt by many members of the PRC.[216] In a *London Times* article about Poles refusing either to join the PRC or to repatriate, a clear message was transmitted that leeches on British generosity would not be tolerated. While clarifying that no Pole should be sent back to Poland against his will, the author asserted that "the prospect of a large number of [Poles] remaining as a permanent and useless charge on British economy [was] unacceptable."[217] In fact, so many people thought the PRC enlistees were living off the British public without doing anything to earn such generosity, that the British Joint Committee for Polish Affairs published a pamphlet titled "Do the Poles Here Really Work? Some Facts".[218] The mere publication of such a booklet in 1949 signals that even by the end of the life of the PRC, there existed widespread ignorance on the part of British citizens about the Polish contribution to their economy. By the time the pamphlet was distributed, approximately 79,000 out of 95,000[219] Polish ex-servicemen had already been placed in employment, and the majority of those that were not yet placed were old and/or disabled veterans who would have found trouble finding work in any situation. Whether the British were simply unaware of the conditions under which the people of the PRC were living, or they just turned a blind eye to them is

[215] Bülbring notes that the longer one lived in such worker hostels, the increased chances there was of neuroses, suicide, demotivation and evasion of responsibility. See Maud Bülbring. "Post-War Refugees in Great Britain"…110.
[216] Demoralization among former members of the Polish Air Force was made evident through the increase in crime, alcohol consumption, suicide and even repatriation. See Adam Zamoyski. *The Forgotten Few*…207.
[217] "Poles Sent to British Zone: 200 for Demobilization", *The London Times*, March, 13, 1947.
[218] "Do the Poles Here Really Work? Some Facts", compiled by the British Joint Committee for Polish Affairs, 1949, WO 315/62.
[219] Even though approximately 114,000 troops enlisted in the PRC, many eventually emigrated elsewhere. The figure of 95,000 refers to the number of enlistees who remained in Britain by 1949. See ibid.

hard to say. Nevertheless, the fact remains that a significant percentage of the national population resented the Poles without completely understanding their situation in Britain.

The stereotype of Polish idleness ties in closely with the outrage many British citizens felt at the "unjust and impossible burden on the British taxpayer" that resulted from the support given to the PRC and other displaced persons resettled in Britain.[220] In turn, the concept of a Polish debt to the British was formed, urging that eligible Poles "be permitted to contribute to the wealth of the country which [was] supporting them."[221] Several articles were written about the amount of money it cost to support the Poles, but after reading them, it becomes obvious that the majority of incensed Britons held misconceptions about the system through which the Poles were paid. In fact, the PRC men were paid "between two-thirds and three-fourths of those for the equivalent British rank."[222] Furthermore, no attention was given to the heavy obstacles posed by trade unions to Polish employment during the first years of the PRC. The sooner the Poles found jobs, the sooner they would be taken off the government payroll, so any delay in their employment increased the burden to the taxpaying citizen. In this sense, the failure of unions to accept Poles into critical industries from the start only served to add to the cost of maintaining the PRC men, and thereby caused greater animosity toward the Poles than was necessary.

However, it must be noted that the negative attitude toward the PRC members gradually softened, especially once the unions realized the futility of prohibiting Polish employment when the government was so strongly in favor of it. Instead, the unions began to use the Poles as a sort of bargaining chip with which to gain concessions from the government. One major campaign of the unions was to have a law passed limiting the

[220] "£129M. Burden on Taxpayer: Cost of Displaced Persons", *The London Times*, February 21, 1948.
[221] "An Essential Import", *The London Times*, February 10, 1947.
[222] "£110 Million Polish Corps", *The Daily Telegraph*, March 8, 1949.

legal workweek to five days. In a *Daily Telegraph* article from May 1946 it is written, "Miners' leaders…will strongly object to the employment of Poles in British coal mines until their demands for a five-day week and 14-day holiday with pay are conceded."[223] In this way, the unions began to use the Poles to their advantage, turning the potential threat they posed to blue-collar workers into a means of achieving more rights for their members. They were savvy enough to realize that the Labour government would not want to engage in a messy dispute over the Poles, but would also insist rather strongly on their acceptance in critical industries. So because the government was under so much pressure to find employment for the Poles, the union leaders were able to maneuver the situation to their own benefit. Later, when asked why the miners had changed their minds with regard to the Poles, "Mr. Lawther, [the leader of the NUM], stated that they had previously deferred a decision. Their changed attitude now had been brought about by the realization that British labour fought shy of the pits."[224] In fact, the coalmining industry had known they were short-handed since the end of the war; there were serious shortages of coal in postwar Britain due to the lack of miners. However, instead of recognizing this, the National Union of Mineworkers, who had at first outright refused to admit Polish workers, wanted to change their policy to one of acceptance as gracefully as possible, most likely to save face.[225] Notwithstanding the decision at the national level of the NUM, 300 local branches continued to refuse admittance to the Poles well into 1948.[226] Additionally, even once the five-day workweek had been granted to the NUM, several of the union's leaders still felt strongly that no Polish immigrants should be admitted to

[223] "Miners Object to Poles for Pits Plan", *The Daily Telegraph*, May 25, 1946.
[224] "Poles in Pits: Miners Agree", *The Daily Telegraph*, January 17, 1947.
[225] In the end, 66,000 PRC men out of 84,000 who were placed in employment by 1950 took work in manual labor. See Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain*…66.
[226] Harold E. Hall. "Production and Manpower in Great Britain"…123.

work in the mines.[227] Consequently, the change in attitude of many labor leaders over the course of the postwar years did not always reflect a similar change in their membership.

4.2 The Positive Reaction: Anglo-Polish Cooperation and Vocal RAF Veterans

Kathy Burrell argues that "the Poles were welcomed relatively warmly" by the British after World War II.[228] While this might be an oversimplification of the public's reception of the PRC, it is true that the majority of Britons were at least accommodating, and sometimes even welcoming, of the members of the Polish Armed Forces. As a result of Britain's social structure, foreigners somewhat had an advantage in acceptance by the national population when compared to aliens in other countries. This was because "the social bonding of the various segments of the capitalist class [in Britain] is dependant upon traditional class-cultural bonds, rather than on ethnicity."[229] Consequently, entrance into different social strata was determined more upon class than it was on race or ethnicity. In this way, there was some opportunity to penetrate into society while still having roots in a different culture, and this eventually happened with the Poles. As the contact between Poles and Britons increased, the members of the PRC were gradually admitted into British society and were able to make their way in their adopted homeland. Moreover, the humanitarian tradition found in Great Britain also made any such transition easier for the Poles. As previously mentioned, the government was supportive of Polish economic assimilation through the provision of English classes, skills training and placement services. This assistance was supplemented by the work of several Anglo-

[227] "Polish Labour: Miners Decide Next Month", *The Observer*, December 22, 1946.
[228] Kathy Burrell, "Time Matters: Temporal Contexts of Polish Transnationalism" in *Transnational Ties: Cities, Migrations, and Identities*, Michael Peter Smith and John Eade eds. (London: Transaction Publishers, 2008), 18.
[229] John Rex. "Immigrants and British Labour: The Sociological Context" in *Hosts, Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Responses to Newcomers in British Society 1870-1914*, Keneth Lunn ed. (Folkestone, England: Wm Dawson & Sons Ltd., 1980), 25.

Polish societies. Furthermore, RAF men who had fought alongside the Poles and had not yet forgotten the PAF's important wartime contributions continued to speak out in favor of the PRC enlistees, acting as their advocates in both the administration and in the public forum.

Anglo-Polish societies had their roots in the 19th century when in 1832 the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland began giving assistance to Polish political exiles and spreading information throughout Britain about the political situation in Poland.[230] Thus was established a tradition of British aid to Polish émigrés on a charitable level, rather than a diplomatic one. Several British voluntary groups, including the Women's Voluntary Service and the Women's Institutes, were active in PRC camp and hostel life, especially in terms of aid to women and children through the organization of field trips, daycare, and English classes.[231] Advertisements were put in major British newspapers in order to recruit donations for the needy arrivals who came without many basic possessions. One appeal for children's supplies read as following: "Toys, drawing-books, pencils, crayons, &c., are wanted for the children of the members of the Polish Resettlement Corps already, or now arriving, in this country. There is almost a complete lack of the many things which help keep children amused and happy."[232] Many members of the British public were clearly concerned for the wellbeing of the newcomers and desired to assist them in the arduous transition that lay ahead. Instead of resenting the influx of Poles in a time of economic crisis, these Britons were able to show compassion and sympathy for the hardships facing such displaced persons.

In fact there were so many Anglo-Polish societies emerging in the postwar period (over 50 of them) that the Central Council of Anglo-Polish Societies was created to

[230] Keith Sword et. al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…349.
[231] Ibid.
[232] "Polish Child Welfare", *The Daily Telegraph*, September 25, 1946.

coordinate all the various groups.[233] The existence of such a large number of these societies testified to the positive attitude of many Britons toward the Poles. The main focus of these associations was to "provide a social forum and meeting ground for members of the majority and minority communities, with a prime object to educate British opinion about Polish culture, history and the contemporary situation in Poland through lectures and debates."[234] Initiatives to socially integrate the two communities appeared in several communities, most notably in that of Bradford. In that city, a hospitality scheme was established to promote ties of friendship to form between the two groups. Locals invited hundreds of Polish soldiers into their homes to help welcome the newcomers and make them feel more comfortable in their new environment.[235] While this example illustrates one of the more extreme cases of positive reception[236], it is still important to note its existence. The negative reaction of the trade unions has the effect of overshadowing many of the encouraging responses the Poles met with upon arrival.

Another mark of British acceptance was the recognition of the Polish role in the victory of the Allied powers by a significant part of the population. As noted earlier in Chapter II, the British tended to devalue the Poles' involvement in the war as the Anglo-Soviet alliance strengthened. Consequently, by the time hostilities ended, Polish contributions to the war effort had overwhelmingly gone unappreciated by the British public. In the Victory Parade in London on June 8, 1946 the Polish Armed Forces were excluded from the procession.[237] Even Winston Churchill, who was previously such a staunch supporter of the Poles, wrote an article in *The Daily Telegraph* describing the

[233] Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain*…96.
[234] Keith Sword et. al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…350.
[235] Maud Bülbring. "Post-War Refugees in Great Britain"…105.
[236] Another example includes eleven Poles playing on the Dorchester-on-Thames football team. See Ibid, 106.
[237] The Polish Air Force was the only Polish military branch that was invited, but they refused to participate because no invitation was extended to the rest of the Polish Armed Forces. See Lt.-General Wladislaw Anders. *An Army in Exile*…299.

Battle of Britain without so much as mentioning the Poles.[238] Some Britons even went so far as to completely deny the importance of Polish participation in the Allied effort. Recalling McGree's comments recorded in the previous subsection, one has a clear example of the denial of Polish valor in warfare. Speaking of the PRC enlistees, he said, "The overwhelming majority of the so-called refugees have never fired a bullet or handled a rifle in the battle against Hitler's Fascism."[239] Aside from this being untrue, it exhibited a certain British attitude that would find any excuse to deny the Poles any amount of support. Luckily for the PRC men, there were many other Britons who were willing to stand up for them and keep the memory of Polish war contributions alive in the public memory.

Generally it was the members of the British Armed Forces who spoke out about the Poles' significant involvement in World War II. When a proposal was made for the erection of a memorial for Polish Airmen, Viscount Trenchard, a Marshal of the RAF, supported the plan, arguing, "Nothing should be allowed in any way to interfere with our honouring to the best of our means those Polish members of the Royal Air Force who…laid down their lives both for their own country and for ours."[240] This quote succinctly reflects the sentiments of many British veterans who had experienced combat at the side of the Poles. These Britons had had much more of an opportunity to become acquainted with the Poles and to understand their cause, unlike the majority of the British public. In this sense, their more intimate relationship with the PAF members allowed

[238] The Right Honorable Winston Churchill, "The Battle of Britain: Mastery in the Air", *The Daily Telegraph*, March 17, 1948.
[239] "Hostility Over Polish Workers in Britain." *The Daily Telegraph*. October 24, 1946.
[240] Marshal of the R.A.F. Viscount Trenchard, "Heroic Polish Airmen: 'They Fought and Died with Us'", *The Daily Telegraph*, July 2, 1946.

them to see past the stereotypes propagated by Britons who were in actuality quite ignorant of the Poles and their culture.[241]

For many of these war veterans, the idea of honor and the repayment of a debt was a major motivation for their fervent Polish advocacy. After all, the significant role played by the Polish Air Force in the Battle of Britain had greatly contributed to the salvation of their country from the grip of the Nazis. Other factors, too, contributed to such a feeling of duty and responsibility toward the PRC members. The close interaction between the two armies during the war produced a high sense of mutual respect. To many British soldiers, the Poles became "a race renowned for valour in battle, and burning with fierce hatred of the invaders of their native soil [who] supported with unsurpassed *élan* the operations of the R.A.F. on every European front."[242] Many of the RAF members admired the strongly held values of the Polish combatants who continued to fight even after their country had fallen. While the general British public was informed of British valor through the popular media, their lack of personal connection to the Poles had perhaps prevented the majority of them from feeling such a strong sense of obligation as that felt by the RAF veterans.

However, war veterans were not the only ones publicly praising the character of the PRC enlistees. Mr. Isaacs, the Minister of Labour, was quoted as saying, "I am sure that anyone with any human feelings who saw [the Poles] would realize the fine type of men they are. When that is realized and the unsatisfactory conditions under which they are living I feel all opposition will fall away."[243] His motives were most likely less selfless than those of the British military men, especially since he was under pressure to place as many Poles as possible in employment. In any case, the voice of an important

[241] The cultural ignorance, however, was a mutual phenomenon. See Elizabeth Stadulis. "The Resettlement of Displaced Persons in the United Kingdom"…237.
[242] "Memorial to Polish Airmen: Lord Portal's Tribute", *The London Times*, November 3, 1948.
[243] "Industries to Employ Poles", *The Daily Telegraph*, January 29, 1947.

member of government can have a significant effect on public opinion. The effort to integrate Poles into the workforce, though, was also given a boost by some British officers. Lt.-General H. G. Martin argued, "The Poles are a prolific race who are prepared to win coal and to work on the land; in all these respects they would strengthen our social structure. Need we be deterred by possible reactions elsewhere from discharging this debt of honour?"[244] In this way a combination of public displays of support from the administration and the military aimed at promoting an accepting position toward the Poles among the British populace, and this attitude eventually prevailed.

Over time, as the majority and minority populations began to interact on a more frequent and intimate basis, public opinion about the Poles tended to become increasingly positive.[245] This was especially evident in the labor sector, where several managers and labor leaders began to praise the industriousness of the Poles. For instance, *The London Times* reported that "local authorities speak highly of [the Poles'] work; it has even been said that 'there is a certain nervousness because the Pole is apt to work too hard and in all conditions of weather.'"[246] Such a description exemplifies a clear appreciation for Polish laborers who were considered to be diligent and dedicated to their work. Some employers were so impressed by the Poles that they tried to "secure great numbers" of them.[247] However, racist undertones persisted in such praise, as evidenced by Sam Evans, chairman of the Production Committee of the National Coal Board, when he "agreed that these fellows [were] a fine example of the Slavonian race."[248] Even though the Poles had begun to be accepted into British society, they were far from being truly assimilated. A

[244] Lt.-General H. G. Martin, "Gallant Poles in Exile: Our Undischarged Debt of Honour", *The Daily Telegraph*, May 21, 1946.
[245] Andrew Nocon. "A Reluctant Welcome?"…84.
[246] "The Poles in Britain: Changing Attitude Towards Repatriation", *The London Times*, May 17, 1947.
[247] National Coal Board: "Polish Survey", LAB 18/432.
[248] Ibid.

racial barrier, which had been crossed economically with the inclusion of the Poles in industry had yet to be broken down in the social sphere.

Thus by 1949 the Poles had come a long way in gaining acceptance into British society. The success of the PRC in economically integrating the Polish ex-combatants allowed the Poles to prove their worth to the British public. Through their industriousness and dedication in employment, the Poles were able to win the respect of many Britons. However, the support of the British public was not enough to ensure the Poles' success in other areas of society, and many of them relied heavily on their own community organizations to survive in the United Kingdom.[249] The proliferation and popularity of Polish societies[250] in the postwar period is a testament to the fact that members of the PRC still faced much adversity in their new homeland and, in spite of a significant amount of support from British citizens, still needed to depend on each other for assistance.[251] This reliance only served to maintain a strong Polish identity among the émigrés, spurred by the establishment of Polish schools, libraries, theaters and churches.[252] In this sense, the British contributed to the retardation of the assimilation process by not providing the Poles with enough means to socially integrate with the local population, signaling an overall shortcoming in the amount of public support for the PRC enlistees and their families.

[249] Burrell argues that the establishment of a Polish community was crucial in getting through the first years in Britain. See Kathy Burrell. "Migrant Memories, Migrant Lives: Polish National Identity in Leicestershire since 1945", *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. 76 (2002): 72.
[250] There were over 40 Polish-run organizations in Britain of various kinds. See Jerzy Zubrzycki. *Polish Immigrants in Britain*…109.
[251] The Polish Ex-Combatants Association, the most popular of Polish societies with over 45,000 members in 1947, provided many services for the Polish community, such as running a press bureau, raising money for families in need, and providing employment placement services. See Keith Sword et. al. *The Formation of the Polish Community*…441-442.
[252] Józef Gula. *The Roman Catholic Church.*…148.

Conclusion

The members of the Polish Resettlement Corps arrived in Great Britain at one of its weakest moments and as a result were welcomed with quite mixed reactions. Economically and diplomatically, the country had been severely damaged by years of active warfare. Its endangered position as a dominant world power left the British ego deeply wounded, and its uncertain future caused great unease among the populace. Consequently, the government, cognizant of the need for external assistance, reluctantly came to terms with the idea of an imported labor force. The Polish Armed Forces provided an ideal source for such labor, being composed mainly of young men of European descent with no home to return to. The British public, however, being less informed of the dire domestic and international situation and being more reactionary in nature, was less consistent in its recognition of the value of such aid. The Poles were alternately seen as an honorable group of veterans and refugees who were deserving of British gratitude and assistance in starting a new life on British soil or as a threat to full British unemployment and a drain on limited national resources. These conflicting reactions resulted in an uncertain situation for the PRC enlistees, since they were being actively integrated into some parts of British society while simultaneously being refused admittance to other parts.

This push and pull effect made the Poles rather dependent on their own ethnic community, something that is evidenced by the growth in Polish organizations during the postwar years. However, in spite of this reliance, much was done on behalf of the PRC men by both the British government and laypersons alike. Without the carefully considered structural elements of the PRC, success in transitioning from military to civilian life in a foreign country, especially in terms of finding employment, would have

been far less feasible. The impressive amount of organization and planning that went into the execution of the Corps testifies to the earnestness with which the government desired to smoothly settle the Poles into British life. Of course this dedication on their part was not completely altruistic, since it was greatly motivated by economic and diplomatic considerations. The administration was first and foremost aiming to improve the domestic economy and secondly to rid themselves of the embarrassment of maintaining an illegal army. However, such goals are entirely understandable with respect to Britain's rather bleak postwar situation.

There was also, naturally, the idea of a British debt to the Poles for their tremendous efforts during the war. Although this played a part in accepting so many former Polish servicemen, the role of the Polish Armed Forces in the Allied victory had mostly been forgotten by many members of Parliament and by the general public as well. In my estimation, British official acceptance of the PRC occurred more out of economic necessity than out of any humanitarian feelings. This is not to say that the Poles were treated unfairly in this scenario. The British did pay a great deal of attention to their wellbeing, and provided them with more than just the bare minimum for survival. The conditions to be found at the PRC camps were better than those at most DP camps across Europe at the time. Nevertheless, Britain's focus on economic assimilation took precedence over social integration, and this attitude affected how the British public reacted to the PRC.

For its part, the government did not do enough to educate the British public about the situation of Poles in their country and about Britain's postwar condition. Many Britons justifiably saw the immense Polish immigrant community as a competitive threat for scarce resources, such as food and housing. They could not see the larger picture: that of the grave need to import sources of labor in order to recover the economy and improve

the standard of living nationwide. Rather than seeing the acceptance of the PRC as a step in the process of renewal, much of the public saw the ex-combatants' arrival as a setback in any such procedure. Had the government been more explicit in its motives for creating the PRC, such widespread disapproval could have been prevented, at least to some extent.

Thus one of the main shortcomings of the government's plans for the PRC was the lack of accurate, widely broadcast information, which allowed for antipathies to proliferate among many moderate, uninformed Britons. However, other significant factors arguably included the change in Britain's international status and her transition from a country of emigration to one of immigration. The noticeable increase in foreign residents in the United Kingdom, combined with a decrease in British worldwide dominance, created an underlying fear of the dilution of British culture and identity. Especially with the collapse of the British Empire, immigrants from the former colonies and dominions threatened to overwhelm the native population, and the addition of over 100,000 Polish ex-servicemen only added to these anxieties, particularly when the unstable postwar environment was taken into consideration.

Therefore an examination of the British response to the members of the PRC, such as this one, contributes to the much larger picture of migration to Britain in the postwar period. It highlights the successes and failures of the government's management of a specific case of immigration in terms of how the public reacted to the newcomers. Furthermore, such a study illuminates the general atmosphere of postwar Britain in a unique way, through the case of alien veterans who were suddenly confronted with the realities of living in a foreign country recently shattered by war. However, there is still much room for exploration on the topic of the Polish Resettlement Corps. Thorough research has yet to be done on the aftereffects of the Corps on its members, including those who later re-emigrated to a third country. Similarly, a comparison of the fate of

Polish officers with that of other ranks could shed light on the effects of the distinctions the British authorities made between the two in the administration of the PRC. There are plenty of other ambiguities surrounding the Corps that are in need of illumination. Clearly, much more work needs to be completed in order to fully understand the story of the Polish Resettlement Corps.

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