

**Allies or Antagonists?  
British and International Relief Agencies and the Post-War  
Displaced**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the administration of Displaced Persons (DPs) in the British Zone of occupied Germany, between 1945 and 1951. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and its successor, the International Refugee Organization (IRO), identified the care and maintenance of Allied displaced populations as one of the foremost international humanitarian obligations in the post-war period. However, their methods were often contested by British military and occupation authorities. This thesis explores both points of cooperation and confrontation through the lens of the British DP administration, with a focus on Polish and Jewish DP communities. This combined approach will help to capture the *diversity*, as well as any unity, among administrative attitudes on the one hand, and within the “DP experience” on the other. These groups received markedly different treatment and highlight different aspects of the politics of relief as it developed and affected different DP groups over time. More broadly, this thesis hopes to highlight the role that the nation-state played in evolving visions of the DP future. It will be argued that while international relief agencies might proclaimed a new era of *internationalism*, the British solution to the DP problem was restoration into a *national* collective.

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## INTRODUCTION

[D]isplaced, uprooted, migratory people seem to have dwelled in the penumbra of European history, people living in the shadows of places where they do not belong.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis deals with the administration of Displaced Persons (DPs) in the British Zone of occupied Germany, from 1945-1951. It focuses on the administration of Polish and Jewish DP communities, two groups receiving markedly different treatment, in order to explore the relationships between British occupying authorities and the international relief agencies charged with their care, as they developed over time. More broadly, it hopes to highlight the role that the nation-state played in evolving visions of the DP future, in spite of the dominant rhetoric of international cooperation in the field of relief work. It will be shown that although the problem of displaced persons gave birth to international humanitarian organizations, these reflected the policies of the governments that controlled them. A comprehensive approach to British refugee policy highlights the limits of nation-states' preparedness to act on the basis of humanitarian concern. In the British Zone, the 'DP Problem' was assessed primarily in terms of self-interest, expressed differently across DP groups and time.

What follows will offer a brief historical introduction to the displaced communities in occupied Germany at war's end and a review of the dominant trends in "DP history" to date. This thesis will be presented as an important and fruitful addition to that literature; asking new questions of available primary source materials as well as adopting a comparative approach to offer fresh consideration of the administration of Displaced Persons after the Second World War and what it can reveal about the post-war period more generally.

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<sup>1</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Guests and Aliens* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1999) p.6.

## Introducing the Displaced

The traditional historiography on post-war liberation has focused predominantly on D-Day, the Allied advance westward into enemy Germany and the horrors of the discovery of Nazi concentration, POW and extermination camps throughout Europe. Liberation, in this tradition, appears almost as a single, simplified moment in time; the Allies get the job done, with the result that the world is a better place. The narrative is a triumphant and uncomplicated one, complete with images of flag-waving civilians greeting conquering Allied troops. The idea of the 'liberation', however, has long been problematized by a growing body of literature concerned with the continuous presence of economic hardships and national antagonisms, as well as the emergence of a new Cold War confrontation; all of this inflecting upon the fates of the post-war Displaced and in particular, the limitations and challenges of Allied relief missions operating in Allied-occupied areas.

Established in anticipation of the problem of homeless victims of war in Germany, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) identified 8 million civilians as Displaced Persons (DPs) in occupied Allied territory.<sup>2</sup> By the end of March 1946, Allied military authorities, with the help of UNRRA, had successfully repatriated 7 million of these to their countries of origin.<sup>3</sup> After this initial period of mass-movement, just over a million remained without homes. The majority of the “last million” homeless in DP camps across Germany were nationals from Eastern Europe. Deemed ‘unrepatriable’ because they did not want to return to their country of origin, this ‘hard-core’ group of DPs have been described as the “most visible and enduring legacy of the conflict”.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> William I. Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom: The Human Cost of Allied Victory in World War II Europe* (New York: Free Press, 2009) pp.215-217.

<sup>3</sup> George S. Marshall, 'Concern Expressed on Resettlement of DPs; Statement by Secretary of State', *Department of State Bulletin*, July 27, 1947, pp.194–95.

<sup>4</sup> Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) p.4.

These uprooted DPs presented a dual problem; where could they permanently settle and how could they be supported in the meantime. In only two years, the number of camps being run by UNRRA increased by 500, to 762 in 1947; of which around a third were inside the British Zone.<sup>5</sup> DPs were not an amorphous mass but comprised of distinct national and ethnic groups. *Exact* numbers of DPs are difficult to determine, even more so by nationality. However, the majority of these DPs (over 150,000 of approximately 280,000 DPs in camps in the British Zone of occupation at the end of 1945) were Polish. This figure also included Jews, who for a variety of reasons were recorded as Polish. Whilst the Allies had liberated around 20,000 Jews from German concentration camps, the arrival of new Jewish migrants in Occupied Germany (a steady influx of Jewish “infiltrates”, predominantly from Poland and Russia, in the wake of post-war anti-Semitism at home<sup>6</sup>) made the Jewish population much larger. In January 1946, Jewish “infiltrates” already entered occupied Germany “at the rate of several thousand a day”.<sup>7</sup> Two years after liberation, the numbers of Polish and Jewish DPs in all of occupied Germany had virtually equaled at about 200,000 respectively. As British authorities opposed 'infiltration' into their zone, the camps in the American Zone sheltered nine tenths of the Jews, but only half of the Poles.<sup>8</sup>

At the heart of this thesis is the question of how the administration of Displaced Persons was worked out in the aftermath of the Second World War by the political and military authorities in the British Zone of occupied Germany. Not only was this region home to hundreds of thousands of DPs, it also produced some of the most vibrant and controversial DP politics. The principles and preoccupations guiding a British administration passed

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<sup>5</sup> Tannahill, J.A., *European Volunteer Workers in Britain* (Manchester University Press, 1958), p.26

<sup>6</sup> Koppel S. Pinson, 'Jewish Life in Liberated Germany: A Study of the Jewish DP's', *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol.9, No.2, April 1947, pp.103-4.

<sup>7</sup> Hitchcock, pp.14-15.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Brenner, *After the Holocaust: Rebuilding Jewish Life in Postwar Germany* (Princeton University Press, 1997) pp. 15-18.



through a number of phases and yet remained strikingly constant. The British government continuously balanced perceptions of national interests against humanitarian considerations.

This study will explore how its changing policies affected both its relationship with international organizations as well as different DP communities on the ground. To what extent was the mass displacement of thousands of people anticipated and prepared for? How did military and relief workers thrown together in occupied Germany work together to administer and run DP camps? What points of co-operation or antagonisms were there, and why? What does considering the administration of Polish and Jewish DP communities in particular, highlight about DP administration in the British Zone? Most importantly, how were administrative relationships affected over time; as camps were handed over and administrative, economic and especially political contexts changed?

This thesis, then, is an investigation into the roles that the major administrative bodies played in relationship to each other and to different DP communities over time. More broadly, it is an exploration of how post-war DP relief figured in the process of post-war reconstruction. In particular, it hopes to examine and highlight the central role that the nation-state played both in the organisation of DP communities into national camps and in official, evolving visions of the DP future, in spite of the highly publicized frameworks and rhetoric of international cooperation.

## **Different Displaced Histories**

Even a cursory analysis of the context and disorder of the post-war period highlights a number of important themes that warrant consideration in a more specialized study. Unfortunately, the explanatory power of this broader context has often been divorced from the more precise historical accounts. In many studies of displacement, topics such as

nationalism and racism, human rights and challenges to state sovereignty, “development” discourse and humanitarian intervention, as well as travel and citizenship, have been considered the kinds of background causes and information beyond the scope of study. Thus, the existing historiography tends either to study singular (most commonly national) groups or analyse wider global trends that neglect the DP voice and national particularities.

Well-known works belonging to the former of these two categories, including Mark Wyman’s *DP: Europe’s Displaced Persons* and Malcolm Proudfoot’s *European Refugees*, offer panoramic studies of life in DP camps. Where Wyman’s work concentrates on the practicalities and daily concerns of everyday life in both Jewish and non-Jewish DP camps in occupied Germany, Proudfoot focuses on refugee movements and especially the influx of Eastern European Jews into British and American Zones. Proudfoot’s work belongs to an especially rich body of scholarship that has focussed its efforts on the history of Jewish DP communities. Early studies from Koppel Pinson, and later scholarship from historians Atina Grossman, Yehuda Bauer, Zeev Mankowitz, and Avinoam J. Patt, to name a few, have attempted to establish the contours of Jewish DP history from a number of different perspectives that highlight the unique particularities and challenges faced by displaced Jews in the post-war context. By contrast, scholarship on Polish and other DP communities has received significantly less treatment; although a growing number of specialized studies are narrowing their lens on specific DP groups in similar ways, including Anna Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann’s work on Polish DPs with attention to the politics of immigration and its impact on Polish American communities.<sup>9</sup>

An emphasis on nationality has thus permeated DP literature; with historians tending to examine DPs and their experiences in isolated national groups. Though this suggests an opportunity for fruitful comparisons, little has been done in the way of systematic

<sup>9</sup> Anna Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann, *The Exile Mission: The Polish Political Diaspora and Polish Americans, 1939-1956* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004); Rainer Ohliger *et al.*, *European Encounters: Migrants, Migration, and European Societies since 1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

group comparison in DP scholarship. Rather, the particularities of the experiences of certain DP communities are emphasized; especially those of the displaced Jewish populations, who have been very much at the centre of DP scholarship.

As to the studies of the second category, the mechanics of expulsion, population exchanges and subsequent DP immigration, including its longer-term impact, has been well treated; recently by historians Jessica Reinisch and Elizabeth White. Reinisch and White's work joins others in offering broader discussions considering the particular visions about ideological purity - combined with national purity and security - that led to massive displacement beyond the natural chaos of war and invasion. At the end of the war, only categories changed; as different views of ideological and national purity became prevalent.<sup>10</sup> A number of general works, notably Kulischer's *Europe on the Move* and Jacques Vernant's *The Refugee in the Post-War World*, situate DPs in context of migration problems and population movements on the Continent since the First World War. Displaced Persons in this tradition are often explored as "problematic stateless outsiders", who confirmed the belief that viable and stable nation-states had to be ethnically homogeneous – a conviction that, though ironically reminiscent of certain tenets of Nazism was pursued as the best prevention against a revival of German militarism and expansionism.<sup>11</sup> Where the DPs were, and who they were, remained incompatible with dominant views of nation state security and broader social/cultural/political cohesion.

There have been comparatively few studies of divergent *administrative* attitudes/provision towards different nationalities and why this occurred; with emphasis

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Gatrell, 'Trajectories of Population Displacement in the Aftermaths of the Two World Wars', in Jessica Reinisch & Elizabeth White, *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-War Europe, 1944-49* (England, Palgrave MacMillan, 2011) p.3; Matthew Frank, 'Reconstructing the Nation State: Population Transfer in Central and Eastern Europe, 1944-8', in Jessica Reinisch & Elizabeth White, *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-War Europe, 1944-49* (England, Palgrave MacMillan, 2011) p.27.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Frank, 'Reconstructing the Nation State: Population Transfer in Central and Eastern Europe, 1944-8', in Jessica Reinisch & Elizabeth White, *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-War Europe, 1944-49* (England, Palgrave MacMillan, 2011) p.34.

typically placed either on Allied policy or the work of international and/or independent relief operations. Kathleen Paul contrasts the active recruitment of DPs from DP camps on the continent for reconstruction projects in Britain to the absence of recruitment schemes from the colonies and Commonwealth, as exemplary of post-war Britain's 'racialized' understanding of populations.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, historians like Linda McDowell have attempted to break down the category of 'DP' by considering more comprehensively divergences, prejudices and even biases in attitudes towards the migration and resettlement of particular DP nationalities.<sup>13</sup>

Reinisch in particular, has extended her research to consider in-depth the history of UNRRA's work in post-war Europe. She joins a smaller community of historians interested in the motives and practices of organizations and individual agencies interacting with DP communities. This scholarship in particular draws heavily on the social histories and descriptive documents written almost immediately after the War. In particular, the work of the official historians of the two major intergovernmental agencies operating in post-war Europe, UNRRA and its successor, the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) have attempted to document the birth, and life of the agencies in which they themselves were working. Recent work by Rystad, Salomon and Loescher, to name a few, have stressed that it is worth considering the histories of the different officials and volunteer experts who spent months in unfamiliar and challenging circumstances exercising administrative power of DPs.

By utilizing existing work on DPs, and coordinating disparate sources in a single study, the aim of this thesis is to apprehend the often contradictory images of the British government and relief agencies dealing with DPs in the British Zone, to arrive at a more nuanced interpretation of the complexities of relief in the post-war context; a subject which

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<sup>12</sup> Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (USA: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> Linda McDowell, *Hard Labour: The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers* (London: UCL Press, 2005).

continues to resonate today. Adopting a comparative approach, as I propose, between both British and international DP policy as well as between Polish and Jewish DP communities, can bring clarity to these existing issues.

### ***Emplacing a Methodology***

There were millions of DPs in camps across Europe after WWII, they were supported by dozens of military and civilian agencies and their fate was subject to numerous debates among Allied powers. Those that remained in DP camps encountered an array of individual and organisational actors, and the experiences they had with relief workers differed according to official policy, perception and prejudice. Ultimately, their experience was interrelated with - and representative of - a wider international post-war disorder.

As we have seen, the existing historiography tends either to study singular (most commonly national) groups or analyse wider global trends that neglect the DP voice and group particularities. For this reason, critical thinking about the framing of a study on displacement - and disciplinary self-reflection on the scope and theoretical framing of research questions - is of special importance. Prematurely claiming a coherently narrow field, or sub-field of study (where one does not, or should not exist) would risk shoehorning new research into this rich subject along existing, exhausted trajectories.

Previous works have evidenced some of the risks of studying this topic. Cohen attempts to provide an overarching narrative, situating the history of the IRO as “a seminal case in the study of post-1945 international history”.<sup>14</sup> He argues that the particular example of the “battle of refugees” – international political negotiations over the fate of DPs – was the first direct confrontation over political dissidents between the two emerging superpowers:

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<sup>14</sup> Frank, p.8.

"Human rights politics did not only hasten the end of the Cold War, as commonly assumed, but also led to its outbreak".<sup>15</sup> However, whilst this broader narrative of international politics makes an important contribution to our understanding of the period, the perspective of DPs is markedly absent. Too broad a focus risks presenting a unified DP experience – a perennial problem of balancing structure and agency.

In order to do justice to the research question in this thesis, it is important to find a balance. The focus on the British Zone in this study does not limit analysis of the broader international context - it just makes it manageable and selects the context in which traditions of nation-state reasoning were most actively at work. Moreover, where historians have focused their energies on DP administration in occupied Germany, efforts have concentrated overwhelmingly on the American Zone of occupation. However, both Britain and international relief agencies were key actors in debates about the post-war order in general, and the fate of the displaced in particular. Naturally, the histories of non-governmental and international institutions that provided refugee relief in Europe both during and after the war extended far beyond occupied Germany. But a specific focus makes inter-connections easier to discern, and contradictions more obvious through the smaller comparison. Broader studies often claim that DPs symbolise general post-war disorder, but only a case study can provide proof of the extent to which this was manifested. Considering evolving administrative relationship and policy towards DPs should reveal much about British policies concerning ethnicity more generally. The fact that other focused case studies have failed to foreground these themes in their work will add strength to my own.

The double focus on *both* Polish and Jewish DPs sustained throughout the thesis avoids treating DPs as just passive agents, swept up in global trends. They also were particular peoples, with particular experiences, backgrounds and identifications that varied

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.59.

across spaces. Considering the particularities of the interactions that different DP groups had with relief organisations will help to highlight this. Polish and Jewish DP communities were the largest sub-groups of DPs in the British Zone and had highly developed group identities; they also received markedly different treatment. This combined approach will help to capture the *diversity*, as well as any unity, among administrative attitudes on the one hand, and within the “DP experience” on the other.

At the same time, the historian should be attuned to any pitfalls risked in the adoption of a comparative framework. Where studies have focused on the ethnic identity of DPs, research questions have been predicated on the assumption that the groups being treated – Polish and Jewish – are somehow entirely self-contained. While a comparative analysis along the lines proposed does indeed run the risk of concretizing the categories of “Polish” and “Jewish”, efforts will be made to reveal the processes of group formation in DP camps. In the case of the DPs, spatial proximity, shared histories and an awareness of each other subvert clear-cut group boundaries. Thus, despite the fact that these categorizations come with risks inherent in any comparative, emphasis is placed on the administrative aims and visions that came together and pulled apart in the management of DPs.

Focusing on the evolving relationships between refugee relief bodies draws attention to competition over the boundaries of group solidarity in DP camps and to the constructions of the identifications that different commentators reacted to in different ways.

With both an awareness of the dangers of adopting any seemingly ready-made methodological toolkits, my research will attempt to broadly introduce the problems that DPs, both as a whole and as members of different groups, presented on an *international* level; as reflected in the more focused case of the administrative policies and attitudes of the British Zone. In doing so, this study will hopefully problematize some of the convenient narratives about an undifferentiated mass of DPs and crudely characterised national positions of those

states and relief agencies that negotiated their fate. The diversity of groups working in a relatively chaotic post-war environment, with their competing methods and motivations, must have had a substantial impact on the experience of the DPs that they worked with but this has never been systematically considered. There was no single 'administrative approach'. This study seeks to determine if there was a common 'administrative attitude'.

## Theory and Concepts

This thesis touches upon questions of national sovereignty, identification and international legitimacy that were of fundamental importance in the post-war period. Certainly, the experiences of unrepatriable displaced persons in occupied Germany demonstrate some compelling aspects of theories of nationalism developed in the past three decades.<sup>16</sup> Now one of the standard texts on the subject of nation and nationalism, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* sees nations as being self-generated, redefined and reconstructed on an ongoing, continual basis. A nation, Anderson argues, "is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members [...] yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."<sup>17</sup> On this model, a nation is *limited* by boundaries - which can have varying degrees of elasticity -, is *sovereign* in the sense that no dynastic monarchy claims over-arching authority, and is *community focused* with its stress on "deep, horizontal comradeship."<sup>18</sup>

Other theories of nationalism, including Geoffrey Cubitt's *Imagining Nations*, similarly stress the especial importance that members of nation-states place on emphasizing

<sup>16</sup> Laura Hilton makes this point also, in her article 'Cultural Nationalism in Exile: The Case of Polish and Latvian Displaced Persons', *The Historian*, vol. 71, Issue 2, pp.280-317.

<sup>17</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991) p.13.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.16.



ethnic ties and, relatedly, on separation from other ethnic groups.<sup>19</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein's *Race, Class and Nation* posits positive identification with a nation state as part of a broader attempt within communities to subsume differences by attaining (and retaining) cohesion across populations.<sup>20</sup> Certainly, DPs themselves aggressively - and even in opposition, particularly in the Jewish case - defined themselves and their DP community along national lines that helped them to preserve a sense of belonging in exile and present a positive, separate identity within the category of 'Displaced Person'.

However, as historian Philip Ther has recently argued, as much as members of nation states themselves identify with a state, the plans and actions of respective nation states themselves are often secondary to the centrality of an international system. In the post war period, Ther argues, "the victorious powers of the Second World War wanted to establish at any price homogenous nation states" and sought to regularize this process.<sup>21</sup> The evolution of the European state system itself plays a crucial role in setting the norms institutionalizing both the removal of populations from their home territories, shifting borders and the elimination of minorities. Individual states and crucially, the international system in which they operate, worked together to create homogenous populations, or what Ther calls "population technical utopias."<sup>22</sup>

From this perspective, the concept of "Displaced Person" was defined as an anomaly. The term, coined by Eugene M. Kulischer (*The Displacement of Population in Europe*, 1943) and adopted in international parlance during the war, was an umbrella term for persons who found themselves in an irregular and exceptional state *outside of their country of origin*. Only ethnic Germans outside the German border were excluded from the official definition of the

<sup>19</sup> Geoffrey Cubitt, 'Introduction', in *Imagining Nations*, ed. G. Cubitt (Manchester: 1998) pp.1-21.

<sup>20</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, 'The Construction of Peoplehood: Racism, Nationalism, Ethnicity', in Immanuel Wallerstein & Etienne Balibar (eds) *Race, Class and Nation* (London: Versom, 1991) pp.67-85.

<sup>21</sup> Philipp Ther, *The Dark Side of Nation States: Ethnic Cleansing in Modern Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014) p.264.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.79.

DP category. The very definition of a displaced person then, was an individual outside of his/her national border; a citizen in need of return.

Allied governments saw DPs as Poles or Jews, united in a national community with other DP Poles or Jews, yet they were deprived of citizenship. Unrepatriable Poles refused, for the most part to identify with a communist East, recreating instead what Laura Hilton calls a "cultural nationalism." In DP camps, displaced Poles presented themselves as the Polish anti-communist (democratic and Roman Catholic) counterparts to the new (and in their eyes illegitimate) Polish political establishment. The state of statelessness in which Jewish DPs found themselves, fostered a growing Zionism in the DP camps and identification with a Jewish state that was not (yet) in existence.

Thus while DPs forged strong national identifications in the space DP camps offered, they were repugnant to the principle that every individual should belong, as a *citizen*, to a member of the "family of nations" at war's end and submit to its incumbent state authorities.

Although DPs may have been able to distinguish between citizenship and national identity (as ethnic identification), the international community charged with their care was confronted with a challenge to the ever-important security of the theoretical underpinnings, based on citizenship, of the modern nation states they hoped to make strong once more. This research hopes to highlight the urgency in seeking and developing solutions to what presented a monumental human, material but also *political* problem. Ultimately, what this tension reflects is the difficulties faced when fixed and reified categories are imposed on areas and times characterized by constant flux.

With a focus on the British administration, continuities between prewar, wartime and post-war discourses will be highlighted, as well as the extent to which the war challenged both practice and mentality. At times, parallels to National Socialism's methods of 'population management' will be evident; they are mirrored in the DP camp structure,

selection processes, later use of DPs as pools of labour and even the special treatment (reluctantly, in the British case) granted to Jews. There were, of course, significant points of difference, insofar as Allied policy attempted to remedy existing displacement, instead of actively creating it, and that it both sought and enjoyed international legitimacy.

Wider questions of national sovereignty, identification and international legitimacy must similarly be explored as both representing continuity, and break in the post-war period. Post-1945 was a time of experimentation, tension and contradiction. Even as the British categorized DPs into their national units, a changing geopolitical situation triggering a shift from antifascism to anticommunism in Britain resulting in greater acceptance of the DPs as individuals whose futures lay beyond their own national borders. In the context of increasing anti-Soviet sentiment, DPs deported by the Nazis from the East now became refugees from communism; effectively merging the categories of DP and refugee. The broader notion of ‘refugee’ privileged the individual person over the state, defined as a person fleeing from “genuine fear of persecution” at home.<sup>23</sup> At the same time however, historical understandings of “Britishness” and new east-west resettlement schemes hinted generated challenges for the democratic credentials of Western democracies.

### **The (Official) Source Base and its Limitations**

What the more detailed focus of this thesis can outline is the inseparability of practice and ideology; in permanent discussion with one another. George Orwell noted in 1946 that the language used by commentators to describe Displaced Persons was anaesthetized and dehumanising. Euphemisms like “transfer of population” and “rectification of frontiers”, he wrote, consciously disguised the violence of the post-war period and the implications of the

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<sup>23</sup> Jayne Persian, 'Displaced Persons and the Politics of International Categorisation(s)', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 58, no. 4, p.21.

Allied policies whose political underpinnings were masked behind such dead and mechanical terms.<sup>24</sup> This thesis is concerned with exactly these policies and with the politics that influenced them; with simultaneous awareness of the limitations of dealing with sources that reflect dominant British political tendencies.

These official sources, which form the backbone of this thesis, are abundant. The National Archives in the UK contains a large number of policy briefings, cabinet minutes, diplomatic dispatches, and reports from those working in the DP camps. There are hundreds of files held from the Displaced Persons Section (FO 945/359-773). This collection includes information relating to the intergovernmental relief agencies (UNRRA and the IRO) of which the British Government were part, reports of the various volunteer societies based in Britain, emigration, financial aspects of DP administration, different DP groups and much more. The records of the Control Commission for Germany (British Element) are also held in the Public Records Office archives at Kew in the UK. With searchable online databases and succinct content descriptions, these files may be used in specialized studies that approach the otherwise overwhelming body of materials with a particular, clear set of research questions and aims.

These papers not only capture the activities of the various official and voluntary relief efforts but also the interactions between them. This stretches from planning activities in 1944 through to the closure of camps. This particular cache of documents contains numerous insights into the practicalities and politics of relief operations for the post-war displaced in the British Zone.

While official and organizational accounts will enrich our understanding, they are incomplete without considering DP attitudes. While this thesis could not integrate personal testimonies without losing its focus, “top-down” analyses dealing with official sources do not

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<sup>24</sup> George Orwell, ‘Politics and the English Language’, *Horizon*, April 1946.

necessarily have to leave DPs silent. Particularly as DP groups began to organize and elect their own representatives, direct correspondence between DP leaders and the administration are circulated, commented upon and responded to on a number of levels. Such examples in particular highlight the tumultuous relationship the DPs often had with relief personnel, with DPs themselves complaining, say, of sub-optimal conditions in a DP camp in contrast to reports detailing great improvements in conditions.

DPs appear again and again in documents reporting events held at DP camps, recording instances of individual or group criminality, in detailed descriptions of tours of the DP camps in the Zone and so on. Certainly the official histories and reports produced by individual relief workers are rife with everyday examples of different kinds of interactions with individuals in DP camps. Again, the comparative methodology is absolutely key in allowing and exploring differences between the administration of different DP communities; an important means of giving voice to multiple experiences.

As Orwell believed, official commentary can reveal much about administrative attitudes towards DPs. They will provide no less fruitful insight into the interaction between the British authorities and the DPs.

## **Structure and Relevance of the Thesis**

The chronological division of this thesis into three major periods, ‘Anticipation’, ‘Repatriation’ and ‘Resettlement’ is intended to highlight the link between broader socio-political developments in each period to the history of the administration of DPs, as well as to maintain a consideration of the Polish and Jewish DP communities throughout. Chapter 1 will consider the extent to which post-war realities were anticipated and planned for to a markedly insufficient extent. Although UNRRA was established long before the end of the War, many

of the techniques for managing mass displacement that were standardized, and subsequently globalized in the aftermath of conflict were improvised *after* 1945.

As Chapter 2 makes clear, the relationship between the major bodies administering DPs in the British Zone in the ‘Period of Repatriation’ was an evolving one. Concentrating on the administration of Poles and Jews, the chapter explores the key issues fostering or inhibiting cooperation between British occupying Authorities and UNRRA. Both the shifting politics of relief work and the unequal effects this had on different DP groups after 1945 becomes clear.

The situation changes again in the period following 1946, dealt with in Chapter 3, as United Nations talks that preceded the establishment of the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) manifested, and arguably even catalysed, ideological cleavages between East and West. Purely in terms of definition, DPs (especially those that did not wish to go home) epitomized the radically different approaches and world views of each side of the descending Iron Curtain. From the early 1940’s, the British government had argued that the international community was tasked with finding a solution to the problem of displacement. As time wore on, that solution did not necessarily mean forced repatriation or exclusion from aid, but rather they saw assisted emigration as a legitimate alternative.<sup>25</sup> The establishment of the IRO marked the end of an era of Allied humanitarian cooperation with the creation of a fundamentally *Western, liberal* organisation entrusted with their care and management.

It has now become common to observe that the displacement of people has accelerated around the world at a face pace, and that displaced involves incredible numbers of individuals whom are today classified legally as refugees.<sup>26</sup> The origins of the figure of the modern refugee can be traced to the DP camps. Displaced Persons camps made people accessible to a world of intervention, including the research presented in this thesis. Since the

<sup>25</sup> Cohen, p.19.

<sup>26</sup> Liisa H. Malkki, ‘Refugees and Exile: From “Refugee Studies” to the National Order of Things’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 24, 1995, p.495.

immediate aftermath of war, much excellent historical study has dealt with the histories of the displaced who played such a prominent role in post-war European life, and for good reason. Through the slow process of pre-planning, national segregation, screening, organized repatriation and resettlement, the post-war refugee emerged as an object of social-scientific engineering, knowledge and study.

The impulse to manage population underpinned both Allied and international welfare programmes during and after the War. Multiple interests, governmental and non-governmental alike, came together to create the image of the refugee who must be acted upon; whose needs – even at the expense of wishes – must be met through organized relief. Much of the criticisms aimed at the present international refugee regime concern its quasi-military administration and the bureaucratic nature of its relief. As Malkki and Gatrell have argued, among others, the standardisation of relief today can be traced back to the wake of the Second World War. To comprehend both the history of displacement and the administrative interventions it caused, one has to look further into the past, as this thesis aims to do.

## CHAPTER 1: The Period of Anticipation

Conditions after this war will have no parallel since the Thirty Years' War.<sup>27</sup>

We have been called upon twice within the span of a lifetime to devise a peace in which all men can live in freedom from fear and from want. We failed once. We dare not fail again.<sup>28</sup>

The provision of relief in war-torn areas at war's end prompted a number of different considerations in the United Kingdom in the early 1940s. Different visions of future cooperation and the development of relief mechanisms on an international scale were widely discussed, as well as how best to deal with the problem of the millions of European displaced.

The majority of historical accounts of the nexus of efforts accompanying Allied post-conflict planning anchor their narrative in the rise of internationalism in the aftermath of the First World War, its failures in the inter-war period and eventually, its triumph in the new post-war period – marked by the birth of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). Historians have, on the whole, concentrated their efforts on the shift towards an international *American* foreign policy, discussing the United Kingdom's role and particular visions about the post-war period within a framework of broad consensus with American policy-makers; with little exploration of its often competing interests and interpretations of what international relief should mean after the war.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, to what extent the Allies - and British planners in particular - made special provision for the care of Displaced Persons (DPs), anticipated its far-reaching and lasting impact for relief work, or planned different strategies for different DP categories and

<sup>27</sup> Sir Frederick Leith Ross, Chairman of the Inter-Allied Post-War Requirements Bureau, as quoted in Francesca M. Wilson, *In the Margins of Chaos: Recollection of Relief Work in and Between Three Wars* (London: 1944) p.269.

<sup>28</sup> The words of Governor Lehman, accepting his post of Director-General of UNRRA, in Donald S. Howard, 'UNRRA: A New Venture in International Relief and Welfare Services', *Social Service Review*, XVIII, December, 1944, p.11.

<sup>29</sup> Recently, historians Ben Shephard, Daniel Cohen, Jessica Reinisch and Mark Mazower have started to bring the issue of relief and rehabilitation in the immediate aftermath of war and Allied war-time planning forward as a field of research in the making.



nationalities, has gone largely unexplored. What Allied hopes were in the pre-planning period of anticipation, and how far these were realised, remains a subject “that has been poorly served by historians.”<sup>30</sup> After a few general comments about the development of international humanitarian relief before the outbreak of the Second World War, this chapter will examine four key areas: Pre-existing inter-war relief machinery and its limitations, British propaganda planning for post-war Europe, Britain’s role in the coordination of international relief work, culminating in the birth of UNRRA, and finally, military plans for the post-hostilities period. Where Jewish refugees were very much at the centre of debates surrounding Britain’s own war-time propaganda and international relief planning, a Polish (repatriable) refugee was the proto-typical displaced person that practical planning envisaged British forces should be prepared for at war’s end. At each level, discussions of how to deal with displacement will be concentrated upon. In this period of anticipation, the development of a conceptual framework and a bureaucratic language of relief was of primary importance.

### **1.1 A Brief History of Inter-War Relief Machinery**

The history of the international machinery for dealing with refugees in the 1940s finds its origins some twenty years earlier, when the United Nations General Assembly and the Council of the League of Nations recognized, in 1932, that the creation – as a result of the war of 1914-1918 and subsequent conflict marked by the expulsion of ethnic minorities – of very large numbers of refugees without homes and without financial security constituted both an international danger and an international responsibility. At their request, a High Commissioner of the League of Nations for Refugees was appointed, in the hopes that the

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<sup>30</sup> Ben Shephard, “‘Becoming Planning Minded’: The Theory and Practise of Relief 1940-1945’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2008, p.405.

ongoing refugee problem would “liquidate within a fairly short space of time.”<sup>31</sup> The problem however, proved to be more intractable and it became necessary to continue and develop in existence the machinery for dealing with it.

From 1933, the application of Nazi doctrine in Germany led to a sudden exodus from Germany of refugees, of whom as much as 80% were Jewish.<sup>32</sup> The governments of France and the Netherlands, as well as Jewish organizations outside of Germany, urged that problems arising out of the presence of these refugees in foreign countries called for international treatment. The matter was raised in 1933 in the League Assembly, whereupon the position of High Commissioner for Refugees coming from Germany was created and given to an American citizen, Mr. J. G. MacDonald. The League Assembly three years later, in a general resolution, noted the fact that existing arrangements operated on the assumption that they would cease to function at the end of 1938 and general principles needed to be outlined that should govern its subsequent attitude to refugees from then on.<sup>33</sup>

On the 24<sup>th</sup> March, 1938, the United States Government put forward a proposal to just over thirty countries, including the United Kingdom, suggesting co-operation in the establishment of a special Committee, representing all willing Governments, to facilitate emigration of refugees from Germany to Austria. The United Kingdom responded with enthusiasm and expressed its desire to co-operate to the fullest extent possible. The Foreign Office however, was less enthusiastic about facilitating emigration than it was about discouraging the growth of the refugee problem on the continent and in particular, limiting any impact it might have on the United Kingdom.<sup>34</sup> A meeting convened at Evian, with

<sup>31</sup> FO 1012/33 Operational Planning, ‘Appreciation of Displaced Persons Policy and Factors Affecting Berlin Mil. Govt.’, 20<sup>th</sup> November, 1944.

<sup>32</sup> WO 204/10838 Displaced Persons: Resettlement, ‘United Nations General Assembly, Delegation of the United Kingdom, Proposal Concerning Refugees’, 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 1946.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Louise London provides a comprehensive account of Foreign Office’s attitude toward European refugees, particularly Jews, in war-time. Whatever the rhetoric, the priority, she makes clear, “was not to help refugees.” See Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews 1933-1948: British immigration policy, Jewish refugees and the Holocaust* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p.91ff.

thirty-two countries represented, centered its attention around “the most pressing problem, that of German and Austrian refugees.”<sup>35</sup> This Committee became known as the Inter-Governmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR) and was eventually combined with the office of the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.<sup>36</sup> British officials “consistently discouraged proposals for refugee emigration outside of IGCR auspices” and played a leading role in ensuring that the IGCR failed entirely to produce any increased prospects for refugees.<sup>37</sup> When war broke out shortly after, it was the IGCR’s who claimed to be responsible for the persons who “must migrate on account of their political opinions, religious beliefs or racial origin”, and persons who for these same reasons “have already left their countries of origin and who have not yet established themselves elsewhere.”<sup>38</sup>

## 1.2 Rhetorical Wartime Planning and the proto-typical *Jewish* refugee

What people in Europe want to know is who is going to look after them. If they felt the British would do this, the response would be immediate and enthusiastic.<sup>39</sup>

### *British War-time propaganda*

Britain considered the conditions that would prevail at the cessation of conflict, remarkably early into the Second World War. As early as August 1940, before even the

<sup>35</sup> WO 204/10838 Displaced Persons: Resettlement, ‘United Nations General Assembly, Delegation of the United Kingdom, Proposal Concerning Refugees’, 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 1946.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Importantly, Britain herself imposed restrictions in the controversial White Paper of May 1939, which established a limited quota for Jewish immigration to Palestine. When members of the IGCR suggested a commitment to the absorption of a certain amount of European refugees, British representatives rejected this also. Britain’s failure to act to save European Jewry is well documented; see London, pp.94-95.

<sup>38</sup> For a thorough exploration of the establishment, history and failures of the IGCR, see Tommie Sjöberg, *The Powers and the Persecuted: The Refugee Problem and the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR), 1938-1947* (Sweden: Lund University Press, 1991).

<sup>39</sup> FO 898/414 Policy Plans for Postwar Relief to Europe, ‘Special Guidance on Relief for Europe’, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1943.

Russians or Americans came into the war, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom declared:

We can and will arrange in advance for the speedy entry of food into any part of the enslaved area when this part has been wholly cleared of German forces, and has genuinely regained its freedom. We shall do our best to encourage the building up of reserves of food all over the world, so that there will always be held up before the eyes of the peoples of Europe including – I say it deliberately – the German and Austrian peoples, the certainty that the shattering of Nazi power will bring to them all immediate food, freedom and peace.<sup>40</sup>

Statements such as these were integral to Allied propaganda that centered on the desire to eliminate the fear of aggression in Europe, in order to restore reasonable national and international security when hostilities ceased. According to British propaganda policy, two distinct classes of people were targeted in each war-torn country on the continent, the people “at home” and the foreign workers and prisoners of war in Germany and elsewhere, awaiting repatriation. Propaganda targeted at the latter group was complicated by the fact that the British military, in particular, recommended a diametrically opposite course of conduct on the part of displaced nationals during hostilities from what would be required after the cessation of hostilities. For the hostilities phase, carefully timed action which would “cause the maximum embarrassment to the German war machine” was advocated in the hope that it would lead eventually to open resistance and sabotage at “the critical moment.”<sup>41</sup> One of the most obvious pre-D-Day means of creating problems for the Germans for the British was encouraging DPs to find “their own way home”; which was precisely what they hoped to prevent in the post-hostilities phase. For the post hostilities phase, disciplined compliance with repatriation arrangements would be of critical importance.

A communist Russia, it was claimed, had assumed the role of first champions in the struggle for national liberation in Belgium. War-time British propaganda was often less

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<sup>40</sup> CAB 123/225 Establishment and Scope of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), ‘Inter-Allied Committee on Post-war Requirements, Draft Report to Allied Governments’, 1943.

<sup>41</sup> FO 898/414 Policy Plans for Postwar Relief to Europe, ‘Propaganda Policy’, November, 1943.

concerned with targeting national groups of foreign workers so much as trying to offset what it saw as “Russian opposition”, which made a pro-British vigorous and creative post-war policy, exploited by propaganda, even more necessary. In conjunction with their spectacular war effort and own Soviet-inspired propaganda for potentially revolutionary post-war changes, Soviet efforts were seen as constituting a serious danger – unless offset by a more vigorous British lead. The Minister of Economic Warfare in particular, was anxious to deter any “collaboration with the [Communist] enemy”.<sup>42</sup> Britain’s “policy for Europe”, then, needed to carry a definitive message, to provide a convincing picture of the “brave new economic and social world” it represented.<sup>43</sup>

According to this policy, in the minds of ‘Europeans’, there was a distinction between British policy and the British people themselves. British policy, it was noted, was highly distrusted as changeable and unreliable in relation to Europe; “it never quite commits Britain to Europe and therefore tends to moralise Europe.”<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, British people were supposedly seen as less distrustful, for the following reasons; their particular political experience and tradition and their broad tolerance and humanity (marked by an apparent unwillingness to “deprive other countries of their liberties”). The job of the British propaganda machine would therefore be to marry the conception of British policy with the conception of British character on the Continent. Accordingly, it was claimed that “there is not one country in Europe which would not breathe a sigh of relief if it could feel that the British Government, backed by the British people, were determined to put Europe on its feet

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Foreign Office noted that “His Majesty’s Government are from time to time asked to announce their peace aims”. While it claimed that “this was not possible at present” propaganda policy worked on the assumption that something could nevertheless be said to the populations of Europe. See FO 898/414 Policy Plans for Postwar Relief to Europe, ‘British Policy for Europe’, 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 1942.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

again and to provide peace and security.”<sup>45</sup> No country would believe that message however, unless it was convinced that Britain decided to act in its own interests.

In order to gain credibility, Britain actively offered support to a number of voluntary organisations and took a leading role in the creation of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), established November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1943.<sup>46</sup> Various plans were developed to co-ordinate not only Britain’s own state and military interests in Europe, but also the activities of international and domestic organizations established to provide humanitarian assistance. As Jessica Reinisch put it, relief was to be about; “fair leadership in place of isolationism or imperialism.”<sup>47</sup>

Some time before UNRRA took shape, British relief planners had stressed the need to avoid repeating the errors of earlier relief operations after the First World War, which were widely believed to have been both costly and insufficient to cope with needs. At a Fabian Society<sup>48</sup> conference in Oxford, Julian Huxley stressed that relief in the aftermath of the war would be far beyond the means of the volunteer society who played such a prominent role after the Great War. Both relief and reconstruction, planners argued, must be planned and operated internationally through an organisation of states, an international authority, which would pool the resources of states.<sup>49</sup>

An early institutional product of a desire for international co-operation at the end of the war, stressing in particular the responsibility of the United States in international relief structures, was the British-run ‘Inter-Allied Committee on Post-War Requirements’, established by Winston Churchill on the 24<sup>th</sup> September, 1941 at St James’s Palace with

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Shephard, p.411.

<sup>47</sup> Jessica Reinisch, ‘Internationalism in Relief: The Birth (and Death) of UNRRA’, *Past and Present*, 2011, p.270

<sup>48</sup> The Fabian Society was a well-established British socialist organisation. For the history of the Fabian society and its operations in Britain, see Margaret Cole, *The Story of Fabian Socialism* (US: Stanford University Press, 1961).

<sup>49</sup> For the published findings of the Conference, see J. Huxley, *When Hostilities Cease. Papers on Relief and Reconstruction prepared for the Fabian Society* (London: 1943).

Frederick Leith-Ross as its Chairman.<sup>50</sup> The purpose of the Committee was to lay the groundwork for sound schemes for long-term European reconstruction; in cooperation with eight European allies, it was expected to compile reliable estimates of the relief materials occupied territories would require once liberated.<sup>51</sup> It was Leith-Ross who is thought to have first coined the term ‘Displaced Person’, which quickly became the dominant term used in the West to interpret the human effects of the war.<sup>52</sup>

Pressure too, had been mounting from an independent group of relief workers who were equally determined to ensure that relief not become the political weapon it had been in the First World War<sup>53</sup> and that private relief interests be allowed to operate under the general guidance of official agencies, without complete independence.<sup>54</sup> This was achieved on the national level when in August 1942, the Council of British Societies for Relief Abroad (COBSRA) was founded, tasked with advising and coordinating the activities of 40 British organizations, of which 11 would eventually send teams to the Continent.<sup>55</sup>

### *Symbolic measures intending the rescue of persecuted Jews*

Other international measures soon followed. The United Nations issued a declaration on 17<sup>th</sup> December, 1942, condemning Hitler’s announced intention to exterminate the Jewish populations of Europe.<sup>56</sup> The need for better international planning and co-ordination was

<sup>50</sup> CAB 123/225 Establishment and Scope of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), ‘Inter-Allied Committee on Post-war Requirements, Draft Report to Allied Governments’, 1943.

<sup>51</sup> Reinisch, ‘Internationalism in Relief: The Birth (and Death) of UNRRA’, p.262.

<sup>52</sup> Shephard, p.408.

<sup>53</sup> In particular, the delay in admitting foreign relief to Soviet Russia had cost thousands of lives. See M. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (New York: 1985).

<sup>54</sup> The National Planning Association, who published a series of ‘Planning Pamphlets’ in 1942, similarly stressed that “The broader the international cooperation, the less likelihood there is that relief will be used for political purposes.” See National Planning Association, *Relief for Europe: The First Phase of Reconstruction* (Washington DC, 1942) p.38.

<sup>55</sup> Johannes-Dieter Steinert, ‘British Humanitarian Assistance: Wartime Planning and Postwar Realities’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 43, no. 3 (2008) p.423.

<sup>56</sup> WO 204/10838 Displaced Persons: Resettlement, ‘United Nations General Assembly, Delegation of the United

increasingly underlined by reports coming out of Europe,<sup>57</sup> detailing in particular the outrages against Jewish victims at the hands of Germany and its satellites. Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden confirmed that evidence was continuing to reach His Majesty's Government and Allied Governments that the Nazi policy of extermination had not been halted and that the persecution of the Jews was in particular of unexampled horror and intensity. Eden was greatly concerned with stressing His Majesty's Governments "detestation of Germany's crimes" and "their determination that all those guilty of them shall be brought to justice."<sup>58</sup> He publicly stressed that "His Majesty's Government, for their part, are firmly resolved to continue, in co-operation with all Governments and private authorities concerned, to rescue and maintain, so far as lies in their power, all those menaced by the Nazi terror."<sup>59</sup>

Again, a clear distinction between propaganda and practice should be stressed. While Eden may have promised much, any changes in refugee policy were slow and deliberately impotent. The Governments of the United Kingdom and United States agreed "as a preliminary to action", that the situation should first be reviewed by representatives they would designate.<sup>60</sup> At the Bermuda Conference initiated by the British in 1943, delegates examined the refugee problem and emphasis was placed entirely on "rescue work" in conditions of war and providing help to fugitives from Nazi persecution. Once again, the United Kingdom claimed it was prepared to take a leading role in accepting responsibility, "as one of the principle belligerents", for refugees falling within IGCR's expanded mandate – which was explicitly said to now cover *all* refugees caused by war and not limited mainly to German and Austrian refugees.<sup>61</sup> Very quickly at Bermuda however, British and American

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Kingdom, Proposal Concerning Refugees', 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 1946.

<sup>57</sup> A series of reports were published in the UK and US in the early 1940s, detailing in particular the situation the Allies would have to face, as it was anticipated then. See for example, a report by the National Planning Association, *Relief for Europe* (Washington DC: 1942).

<sup>58</sup> FO 660/170 Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, 'Persecution of Jews', April, 1944.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden in response to a question in the House of Parliament.

<sup>60</sup> The gap between official rhetoric and action on the American side is well presented in David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945* (US: The New Press, 2007).

<sup>61</sup> FO 660/170 Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, 'Persecution of Jews', April, 1944.



representatives “lost little time in confirming that their governments would neither initiate nor support projects of rescue.”<sup>62</sup>

As historian Tommie Sjöberg argues, the chief result of the Bermuda Conference was the re-assertion of the ICGR as the main means of satisfying public opinion.<sup>63</sup> By 1943 the problem of refugees had assumed formidable dimensions needing to be approached on bold and large-scale lines. The ICGR imposed no contractual obligations on its members, save for sharing administrative expenses, and commanded neither the sufficient resources nor a sufficiently large authoritative organizational structure to handle a problem of unprecedented magnitude.<sup>64</sup> A new *international* body needed to be established in order to effectively divert away some the pressure on the British and American governments to act. The often contradictory aims of British refugee policy, characterized both by propagandistic promises of help to all victims of Nazism and unwillingness to envisage the flight of persecuted populations from Axis-held areas, were ruled almost exclusively in terms of Britain’s national priorities and interests – even when these were thought to be best served in international forums.

#### *UNRRA’s “sickly childhood”*<sup>65</sup>

By the time that UNRRA was eventually established, it had already become necessary to devise machinery to prevent uncoordinated relief work and unprofitable organisational scrambling. Because relief “offered an opportunity to create the instruments of international

<sup>62</sup> London, p.212. London points out that as well as ruling out plans for large-scale rescue, the British in particular feared the prospect of being faced with the exodus of unwanted Jews, then the Nazi’s captives. That Hitler might release large numbers of Jews was not only actively not fought for, but in fact dreaded.

<sup>63</sup> Sjöberg, p.220.

<sup>64</sup> Experts did not necessarily agree on the size of the refugee problem. Estimates in this period varied greatly, from 8 million DPs to 30 million DPs. See Malcolm J. Proudfoot, ‘The Anglo-American Displaced Persons Program for Germany and Austria’, *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, vol. 6, Issue 1, October, 1946, p.34.

<sup>65</sup> Shephard, p.418.

co-operation”, Roosevelt gave it priority over the existing IGCR and entrusted the task of devising new machinery to the ‘Big Four’; the United States, United Kingdom, China and the USSR.<sup>66</sup> Herbert Lehman, the Governor of New York state and future Director-General of UNRRA was established as the American relief supremo. Lord Halifax, the British Foreign Secretary from 1939-1940 and Ambassador in Washington since 1941, was to be the British representative during 5 months of intense debate, after which an agreement on a new international agency was hammered out among the Four. By June 1943, the first Draft Agreement for the establishment of UNRRA had been written.<sup>67</sup>

Immediately, there was much debate surrounding the functions and scope of UNRRA. The following definition of relief and rehabilitation had been adopted: “Supplies which are required to maintain life or to restore the means of maintaining life and which cannot be provided or distributed through normal governmental or commercial channels.”<sup>68</sup> Significantly, the draft constitution of UNRRA, then being circulated to other United Nations, saw Relief and Rehabilitation “as essentially a question of supply and distribution.”<sup>69</sup>

Some were more aware of the potential political problems UNRRA may have to face. British representatives in Washington, Sir Edward Bridges and Sir Alan Barlow, stressed in a report the important political considerations necessarily thrown up by the provision of relief, and in particular, “by such matters as the return of displaced persons to the countries from which they were removed”.<sup>70</sup> They cautioned that relief should not be envisaged as an issue which would present itself complete upon the cessation of hostilities; but rather contemplate a situation in which relief problems would arise gradually and in variation, as territories were

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<sup>66</sup> Shephard, p.411.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> CAB 123/225 Establishment and Scope of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), ‘Relief and Rehabilitation’, 1943.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. ‘From Washington to Foreign Office’, October 1943.

progressively liberated from the enemy. However, they stressed that there was little UNRRA should do at this point. “Since the situation is a changing one”, they stressed, “it is impractical now to devise a form of organisation which will suit both the needs of today and of two or three years hence.”<sup>71</sup> The right course, it was argued “is to see that the present organisation [UNRRA] suits existing needs, and is in a form which can readily be adapted to meet likely developments.”<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless, political problems were less significant in the minds of those in Washington and London than was discussing how UNRRA was to be paid for. The British, in particular, were anxious to find any formula which would justify in the public eye an American subscription several times the size of British contributions. Eventually, a suitable formula was proposed whereby the amount to be put up by each country would be 1 per cent of its national income for 1 year. This, Ministers in London agreed, “would be simple and might have great popular appeal.”<sup>73</sup>

That financial and bureaucratic considerations overshadowed much of the debate surrounding the creation of UNRRA is evident when considering in particular the degree to which the new organization planned for the possibility of any unrepatriable DP groups. The UNRRA Council defined in some detail the services and supplies it would seek to provide, falling under four main heads: relief supplies, relief services, rehabilitation supplies and services and rehabilitation of public utilities and services.<sup>74</sup> The second of these related directly to the care and maintenance of those “displaced by reason of war”.<sup>75</sup> The repatriation of DPs had from the very beginning been considered one of the most important of UNRRA’s

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. Britain would thus contribute a total of around 80 million pounds, to the approximately 1.4 billion dollar contribution of the United States. Everyone in those countries which had not suffered invasion would in effect be subscribing one cent in the dollar of their income for one year.

<sup>74</sup> Donald S. Howard, ‘UNRRA: A New Venture in International Relief and Welfare Services’, *Social Service Review*, XVIII, December, 1944, p.5.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.6.

functions. Noticeably, the category of DP included many who came under the IGCR's mandate. It was the IGCR that had originally been mandated in 1938 to deal with "persons who are outside of their own country but are unable to return to it and who must therefore be aided in finding new places of resettlement"<sup>76</sup>, i.e. any DPs who did not wish to be repatriated. The issue was a definitional one. Where IGCR was tasked with the care of refugees fleeing persecution, UNRRA was tasked with the repatriation of displaced persons. A 'refugee' was defined by UNRRA "as a person who had left his native country of his own free will to escape persecution or the ravages of war", whereas a 'DP' "was defined as a person who had been removed by official or para-official action – that is deported by Germans."<sup>77</sup> The two categories however, were often treated interchangeably and distinguished by different definitions at different times.<sup>78</sup>

In light of its considerably larger budget, UNRRA was eventually tasked with cooperating with the IGCR in providing assistance to any *non*-repatriable persons, a potential group whose probable size and make-up was not broken down.<sup>79</sup> In fact, it was UNRRA who alone who would eventually represent international relief and administration of DPs in occupied Germany at war's end; with practically all of the activities of the IGCR targeted after 1945 at Allied countries in which UNRRA was not present.<sup>80</sup> UNRRA however, was ill-prepared to deal with non-repatriable groups. Though it had been decided at the beginning of 1944 to establish three parallel, equally important non-supply divisions: Health, Welfare and Displaced Persons, the latter was envisaged solely as a repatriation division during the war.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p.11.

<sup>77</sup> Sjoberg, p.80.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Even Jews were not directly mentioned as possible non-repatriables. While President Roosevelt had decided in January 1944 to create a War Refugee Board (WRB) explicitly to help as many Jews on the Continent escape Nazi persecution, and while the British had long been sensitive to the horrors of the Jewish experience on the Continent, there was remarkably little consideration as to their position vis-a-vis planned repatriation drives.

<sup>80</sup> For an explanation of the limited role the IGGR would play in the post-war period, see Sjoberg, Chapter V, 'The Problem of Non-Repatriables.'

<sup>81</sup> One year later, the three Divisions were grouped together to form the 'Bureau of Services'. Only in the post-hostilities period, as we shall see later, did UNRRA's Welfare Division evolve to have to deal with an unforeseen

Despite the fact that the British were aware both of the enormous numbers of refugees they would encounter on the Continent and the fact that many would not have homes to return to, political planning worked on the assumption that all DPs would want to go home. The British stressed the need for international cooperation, and international relief planning for displacement meant planning for repatriation. Most significantly, where much of the impetus for UNRRA had come from the need to act with respect to refugees – Jewish in particular – political planning after the establishment of UNRRA focused its energies on the DP, whose prototype was the Polish foreign labourer.

### 1.3. Practical Wartime Planning and the proto-typical *Polish* Displaced Person

We must lay a foundation for the future for Europe by producing a feeling of gratefulness and confidence in the bosoms of the displaced persons and their governments. The latter is distasteful in a military appreciation, but I believe it to be true.<sup>82</sup>

#### *Military Planning: An issue of traffic control*

By 1944, pressure was mounting to prepare detailed plans for dealing with refugees and displaced persons in order to eliminate or reduce interference with military operations by preventing or minimising their uncontrolled movement and massing, “dangerous unrest, food riots, disease and epidemics” and to divert the minimum number of military personnel, supplies and facilities necessary for these purposes. Importantly, a smooth transfer of responsibility from military authorities to UNRRA at the earliest practicable date was to be

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operating function that meant caring for a million DPs who not immediately repatriable. See W. Hardy Wickwar, ‘Relief Supplies and Welfare Distribution; UNRRA in Retrospect’, *Social Service Review*, vol. 21, no. 3 (Sep., 1947) p.367.

<sup>82</sup> WO 219/2564 Operation Rankin: Problem of Displaced Persons, ‘Measures for dealing with the situation in the field’, 13<sup>th</sup> December, 1943.

planned.<sup>83</sup> Civilian displaced persons were to be the responsibility of the Displaced Persons Executive (DPX) in the military phase and their movement and concentration was to be controlled to prevent “clogging of military routes and massing in strategic areas” – repatriation would be undertaken only when it did not hinder military operations.

In many respects, the military planning of relief was far more developed than its political counterpart. By the end of 1943, preparatory measures for dealing directly with the refugee situation in the field had been outlined and explained. The plan, known to the Anglo-American armies as ‘SHAEF [Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces] Administrative Memorandum Number 39’<sup>84</sup> defined a Displaced Person, in the short, as “All persons and all classes or groups of persons separated from their home and consequently in need of help.”<sup>85</sup>

Once displaced persons had started a mass movement, it would be necessary to control or divert such movement so that consequent interference with military operations was reduced to an absolute minimum. Any physical means to move DPs were thought to aggravate the problem; rather, relief measures would have to find alternate means of preventing displaced persons from embarrassing the military operation both “during movement and on arrival in devastated areas.” The key to keeping “a relatively even flow” was to be food. Crucially, military planners noted that it would be essential to ensure that refugees move on from camps daily and thus, essential to avoid making camps appear too attractive.<sup>86</sup>

British military forces operated on the assumptions made by relief planners. The Inter-Allied Committee had been of the opinion that the first impulse of nearly all displaced

<sup>83</sup> WO 219/3812 Displaced Persons Branch: Directives and Instruction Outline Plans, ‘Section 1: Estimate of Problem’, April, 1944.

<sup>84</sup> Proudfoot, p.35.

<sup>85</sup> WO 219/2564 Operation Rankin: Problem of Displaced Persons, ‘Classification of Displaced Persons’, December, 1943.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., ‘Measures for dealing with the situation in the field’, 13<sup>th</sup> December, 1943.

persons on the removal of enemy control from the area in which they are situated would be to make for home, even when their homes would not be immediately accessible. The military similarly operated on that assumption, aware of the fact that such movements were likely to begin in the military period and may already be in progress when allied forces enter the country. If the attempted return was unorganised and on a large scale the result would be to embarrass the military and other authorities, to spread disease, and to increase social and economic confusion by shifting the burden of displaced population from their country of location - where some sort of accommodation for them was in existence - to their home countries where there may be no preparation to receive them.

The question was essentially one of traffic control. As with the more rhetorical relief planners, the military were keenly aware of the failures of the last war, when according to the 'Preliminary Report on Medical Problems of Displaced Persons', thousands of refugees returned on foot, on bicycles and by carts, travelling through little-known and unorganized paths. The most pressing concern in the military mind was therefore covering any time lag between the point when DPs would become mobile and the arrival of military forces, at which time it was all the more likely that refugees would start for home.

### *Estimating a Polish majority*

The statistics of displacement were of critical importance. It was estimated that in August, 1943, the total number of displaced persons in Europe or of European origin temporarily located elsewhere was at more than 21,000,000.<sup>87</sup> Of the 21 million, 8 million were displaced within their own country and "with the possible exception of the French, all these people are living in improvised conditions of varying degrees of misery." By far the

<sup>87</sup> "Excluded from this total were: prisoners of war belonging to UK US USSR and Italy as well as armies of occupation. etc". WO 219/2564 Operation Rankin: Problem of Displaced Persons, 'Nature of the Problem of Displaced Persons', December, 1943.

largest single group, consisting of about 8,000,000 persons, was to be found in Germany. Of these some 5,000,000 were workers, mainly adult men but including women and young people, forcibly recruited by the German government from at least 14 different countries, the largest single contingent being from Poland, estimated at some 2,000,000 persons.<sup>88</sup> It was assumed “that displaced persons in all these categories will be anxious to return to their homes as soon as opportunity offers and that the majority, though not all, will have homes which they can go to.”<sup>89</sup> Only the return of deportees from Germany and of German colonists from non-German countries were thought at this stage to potentially present a grave problem; “Their number may approach 1,000,000.”<sup>90</sup>

It was agreed early on that the military’s Advisory Committee on Displaced Populations was not competent to discuss any political aspects of the repatriation of displaced populations. However, based on preliminary reports admitted by the Inland Transport and Medical Advisory Committee, military planners noted that in order to make any progress in the consideration of technical problems and in detailed practical recommendations, it would be necessary to proceed on the assumption that some international authority, charged with the task of repatriation would be in existence; an international authority whose task would be to deal with any political complications. The composition of such an authority, the derivation of its powers and its general relation to other international or national authorities was not yet known, yet it was considered not to affect the strictly technical recommendations which the Committee had been directed to put forward. It was assumed that this body’s duties would

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<sup>88</sup> In fact, this number was an over-estimate. The British were aware of the possibility of this and noted that German figures mixed prisoner of war figures together with forced labourers – as well as the possibility of some Poles having left and then been re-recruited under different names, also resulting in inflated numbers. According to Ulrich Herbert, there were just under 1.2 million Polish workers in Germany at their peak. See Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany Under the Third Reich* (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p.198.

<sup>89</sup> WO 219/2564 Operation Rankin: Problem of Displaced Persons, ‘Measures for dealing with the situation in the field’, 13<sup>th</sup> December, 1943.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.



include securing agreement on a unified system of identification records for displaced populations and negotiating with their countries of origin should difficulties emerge.<sup>91</sup>

Military planners anticipated early on some of the difficulties that would characterize their relationship with UNRRA in the post-war period, particularly when it came to division of labour. There was an awareness of the potential for double-ups in the work of both the military and any international organisation. One report suggested the possibility that a military authority and a civilian relief authority [UNRRA] might deal with the problem of displaced populations concurrently in adjacent areas, one of which is “discharging while the other is receiving” displaced persons. If the same organisation was not to handle displaced persons from the beginning and in all areas, it hoped that the military and the relief and repatriation organisation would soon be adjusted for the purposes of efficient co-operation, “and the former can in due course pass into the latter with the least disturbance in the practical work of repatriation and care of displaced persons.”<sup>92</sup>

Unlike much of the discussion surrounding the birth of UNRRA, military representatives anticipated the likelihood of finding a considerable number of displaced persons who would be either legally stateless, unable to return to the country from which they came and yet unable to remain in the country in which they are located. This long term aspect of the refugee problem, it was thought, lay outside the military mandate and within the recently expanded mandate of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees. Again, reports showed keen awareness of the need to draw distinctions between the respective Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees and the Relief and Rehabilitation Authority, though saw the basis which needed to be laid for co-operation between them as beyond military remit. Nevertheless, measures for dealing with the situation in the field continuously

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> WO 219/2564 Operation Rankin: Problem of Displaced Persons, ‘The Refugee Problem under Conditions of “Rankin C”’, 13<sup>th</sup> December, 1943.

stressed the military's wish to "point out that every step should be taken to avoid the creation of stateless groups for whom no country will accept responsibility."<sup>93</sup>

If military planners were perhaps wary of the planning for any political implications of relief around the possibility of a number of DPs unwilling or unable to be repatriated (again, though to be outside their remit), they were similarly suspicious of the effect that Britain's propaganda would have in the post-hostilities period. The people of Europe, one report concluded "are by now heartily sick of propaganda and pay little attention to it. In order to prevent uncontrolled movement, therefore, something stronger than propaganda is required."<sup>94</sup> Governments themselves would have to relay stand-still orders to their nationals abroad; stressing that there would be no food for anyone who disobeyed these instructions.<sup>95</sup> The degree to which preventive measures would succeed in Germany could not be estimated. The matter hinged mainly on the extent to which any Central Authority retained power and even unpredictable factors such as the season of year at which the armistice takes place may also have an effect on the scale of movement.

## 1.4 Conclusion

The new advances are disclosing the magnitude of the DP task in all its vast physicality, and there are but 'two men and a boy' to deal with it. Unfortunately 'I told you so' recriminations won't get a DP nearer his home, or a meal in his 'tummy'. I am anxious about our position, we remain so 'wide open' at the moment, and I pray that all possible is being done to get our requirements.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 'Measures for dealing with the situation in the field', 13<sup>th</sup> December, 1943.

<sup>94</sup> WO 219/3461 Outline Plan for Refugees and Displaced Persons, 'Outline Plan', June, 1944.

<sup>95</sup> On September 4<sup>th</sup> 1944, General Eisenhower issued an instruction to all allied nationals in enemy territory: Stay where you are and await further instructions. See FO 1012/33 Operational Planning, 'Instructions by General Eisenhower', 4<sup>th</sup> September, 1944.

<sup>96</sup> FO 1012/33 Operational Planning, 'Letter from Lieutenant Colonel Kensington', 29<sup>th</sup> March 1945.

By the time UNRRA was founded, relief – prompted by the experiences and lessons of the First World War - had long been considered an international problem for which an international solution needed to be found. Nevertheless, within the broad recognition of the need for international collaboration stressed by both American and British governments early into the war, a range of interests were represented. Declarations both of past failures and of present responsibilities were strengthened by rhetoric of self-interest, both political and economic. While it was acknowledged that many still perceived a sense of British unreliability when it came to European affairs, it was declared to be undeniably in the United Kingdom's national interests to seek active international involvement towards the relief and reconstruction in the post-conflict period.

Disentangling *British* preparations prior to D-Day involves a consideration of a number of different strands; from its involvement in pre-existing inter-war relief machinery, to its propaganda planning for post-war Europe, to the role taken in the coordination of international relief work, as well as British military plans for the post-hostilities period. What Ben Shephard calls 'rhetorical planning', commenced early into the war and produced the dominant construct of the 'Displaced Person'. Allied deliberations soon resulted in the formation of an entirely new relief animal; the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), which was planned to be the major instrument for relief provision, concerned predominantly with supply and distribution.

Following its formal establishment in November 1943, UNRRA quickly became preoccupied less with planning its operations on the Continent and more with maintaining its own bloated bureaucracy than the future conduct of its operations in liberated territories. Most significantly, the DP humanitarian problems that would emerge in 1945 – including the uncovering of the death camps and the hundreds of thousands of former POWs and concentration inmates who would not prove to be immediately repatriable – was largely

ignored in the political planning for relief and excluded from the concerns of the main international and humanitarian body created during the war. While British politicians stressed at home that “urgent action be taken to forestall the plot of the Nazis to exterminate the Jews and other persecuted minorities in Europe”,<sup>97</sup> remarkably little planning went into considering the position of these groups in the post-war period. In short, the political provision of relief greatly underestimated the enormity of the DP problem it was to encounter in occupied Germany.

Where UNRRA was focused on the theory and finance of relief, the British military were more concretely focused on its practice. Military planners were more aware of the enormity of expected DP numbers waiting in Germany, as well as the possibility of large numbers of these proving to be unrepatriable. It was expected that a number of displaced would eventually end up under longer-term UNRRA care and that some would eventually become the responsibility of the Inter-governmental Committee for Refugees, whose special function it was considered then to be the care of persons persecuted because of their race, creed or political convictions. Despite noting longer-term problems, military planning worked on the same assumption as the political: namely, that all DPs would want to go home – and where this was not the case, international relief bodies would step in.<sup>98</sup>

All these different levels of policy-making, propaganda, political planning, military planning and actual relief provision would have to come together as British forces moved further into Germany in 1945. In many respects, the stage was set in the early 1940s for tension between international and national forces, which would come to the fore after 1945. How far were British hopes for occupied Germany in the post-war period realised? Was UNRRA able to overcome its “sickly childhood”? The relationship between the major bodies administering DPs in the British Zone, the shifting politics of relief work and the different

<sup>97</sup> FO 660/170 Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, ‘Circular Airgram’, January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1944.

<sup>98</sup> They envisaged a smooth hand-over with regard to facilitating repatriation, which as we shall see in the following chapter, overestimating the capabilities of the fledgling UNRRA.

effects this had on different DP groups in the post-war period will be examined in the ‘Period of Repatriation’.

## CHAPTER 2: The Period of Repatriation

The aim of this chapter is to sketch out the evolving relationship between the major bodies administering DPs in the British Zone in the early ‘period of repatriation’; beginning with military mass repatriations from Spring 1945, and ending with the cessation of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration’s (UNRRA’s) DP Operations in 1947. By concentrating on the administration of Poles and Jews, the chapter hopes to focus on the key issues fostering, or inhibiting, co-operation. The main actors in this period were the British military commanders and the UNRRA relief workers in the Zone. As we shall see, their relationship in particular highlights both the politics of relief work and its different effects on the DP groups considered.

### 2.1 Military Mass Repatriation and a Slow Start for UNRRA

No operation [the DP Operation] was so misunderstood within the Administration, by member governments and by the public. In no operation was the early organizational control of the Administration so unsatisfactory.<sup>99</sup>

With the collapse of German resistance in the spring of 1945, the anticipated problem of the post-war European refugee was thrown directly into the forefront of occupying military concern. Controlling a swelling flood of people fleeing the final furies of war in Germany fell to Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF), who established strategic points of refugee collection to “herd” refugees in efforts to stop and control uninhibited movement.<sup>100</sup> Refugees were directed towards assembly centres by military units to be

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<sup>99</sup> George Woodbridge, *UNRRA: The History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration*, vol. II (New York: 1950) p.470.

<sup>100</sup> Mark Wyman, *DPs: Europe’s Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* (New York: 1998) p.40. Of course, the military did receive *some* help. For instance, Friends Ambulance Units had been some of the first to follow in the wake of British combat troops into enemy Germany. Their main task was to help establish DP camps directly behind British lines to stop uncontrolled movements and assist with repatriation, as well as providing medical support.

screened and registered before funneled into camps largely distinguished by national groups, in preparation for repatriation.<sup>101</sup>

Following a visit to the 21 Army Group Area in late April of 1945, D. S. Dawes described the Displaced Persons Scheme run by the British military as “working admirably”.<sup>102</sup> This was largely thanks, Dawes describes, to the establishment of “screening lines” from North to South at various points along the map. At the Western-most screening line, all nationalities received were given a preliminary security check and sanitary examination. “At the next line west, the preliminary separating of nationalities takes place, and at the line of the Rhine all ‘eastbound’ DPs [...] are segregated and remain in camp without crossing, to be sent east when feasible”.<sup>103</sup> DP transportation, he notes, falls to either purely military units or civil affairs units with vehicles obtained by SHAEF.

Much of this early work fell almost entirely to the military machine, although SHAEF had asked for 200 UNRRA teams to act as helpers in the early administering of DPs. So far, as Dawes notes, very few of these teams were in action and “it is obviously difficult for them at present to give much help [...] owing to their language difficulties among themselves, mostly being all different nationalities, and their lack of knowledge and the indifferent quality of their transport.”<sup>104</sup> Only a week after the German surrender, the British Foreign office conceded the “embarrassing position which has arisen owing to inability of UNRRA to provide on time the number of teams requested by SHAEF for displaced persons work in Germany [...] failure is however bound to add to prevalent feeling that UNRRA is not up to the job.”<sup>105</sup>

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See J. D. Steinert, ‘British Humanitarian Assistance: Wartime Planning and Postwar Realities’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, July 2008, vol. 43, no. 3, p.427.

<sup>101</sup> In this process, a ‘Displaced Persons Camp’ quickly became a euphemism for all kinds of buildings.

<sup>102</sup> FO 945/591 SHAEF Outline Plan for DPs and Refugees, ‘Visit to Europe by D.S. Dawes’, 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1945.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

The early months following the sudden collapse of German forces proved to be a painful teething period for the Military and UNRRA. A swarming mass of DPs overwhelmed military government officials who found themselves waiting for promised UNRRA aid. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> May, UNRRA sent Commander Jackson, its Senior Deputy Director General to its European Regional Offices to ensure that UNRRA, “in co-operation with military authorities right down chain of Command, is in a position to fulfill its responsibilities in connection with Displaced Persons as soon as possible, first under military authorities and subsequently in place of those authorities”.<sup>106</sup>

Eventually, the military was able to dilute its own personnel with the incorporation of UNRRA bodies. After the rapid repatriation in the spring and summer of 1945 by British military authorities, the “extraterritorial universe of DP camps”<sup>107</sup> established by the British military was slowly but surely handed over to UNRRA teams. As the period of fighting ceased, former battlefields were flooded by armies of volunteer relief workers. Military personnel, as well as members of a range of charitable and religious organizations<sup>108</sup> were soon joined by growing numbers of UNRRA staff, most of which similarly hailed from English speaking countries.<sup>109</sup> Before long, UNRRA’s work overshadowed that of the voluntary societies.<sup>110</sup> By the end of September 1945, any voluntary agency wanting to enter Germany could only do so with the approval of, and under the specific orders of UNRRA.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., ‘Message 25<sup>th</sup> July’, 1945.

<sup>107</sup> G. Daniel Cohen, ‘Between Relief and Politics: Refugee Humanitarianism in Occupied Germany 1945—1946’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, July 2008, vol. 43 no. 3, p.441.

<sup>108</sup> Who had been moving with military forces, under the COBSRA umbrella, into Germany. COBSRA’s work on behalf of DPs continued until the late 1940s. They were some of the first teams in occupied Germany. Teams from British voluntary organisations were an integral part of the occupation and of the administration and maintenance of DP camps – their relief focused on the DPs themselves, in areas under British control. The number of teams increased immediately after the cessation of armed conflict and reached a peak in mid 1946 with some 600 relief workers. See Steinert, ‘British Humanitarian Assistance’, p.423.

<sup>109</sup> Due to the leading role the US and UK played inside the organization. See Silvia Salvatici, ‘Help the People to Help Themselves’: UNRRA Relief Workers and European Displaced Persons’, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2012, vol. 25, no. 3, p. 2; George Woodbridge, *UNRRA: The History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration*, vol. III (New York: 1950) p.415; William I. Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom* (New York: 2008) p.222, for a breakdown of UNRRA categorisations of staff.

<sup>110</sup> Salvatici, p.3.



Once in Germany, “they were technically under UNRRA supervision and could be assigned anywhere”.<sup>111</sup>

By the end of March 1946, UNRRA had successfully helped to arrange the repatriation of some 7 million displaced from Germany to their countries of origin.<sup>112</sup> After this initial period of mass-movement, around 1.2 million remained without homes. The map of British occupied Germany, peppered with its DP camps, started to take on a more permanent look. In the British Zone, the Control Commission for Germany (British Zone) was established with a Commander in Chief and Deputy Military Governor at its top. Their policy making body was in Berlin and in each region<sup>113</sup> there was a powerful Regional Commissioner.<sup>114</sup>

The overall supervision of DPs was the responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief, but by agreement with UNRRA, the latter took over the responsibility for the internal administration of a large number of assembly centres.<sup>115</sup> In March 1946, UNRRA was responsible for 128 assembly centres (another 18 of which were run by volunteer societies under its co-ordination), to the military government’s 51.<sup>116</sup> DP figures of the same month in the British Zone place the total number of remaining DPs at 427,930 – comprising of 309,200 Poles 69,255 Balts, 14,844 Yugoslavs, 15,427 undetermined and 19,204 “other nationalities”.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> UNRRA even insisted that all volunteers not be assigned to work in DP camps containing any preferred national group. Though, exceptions were made in the case of some Jewish organisations. See Hitchcock, p.245.

<sup>112</sup> George S. Marshall, 'Concern Expressed on Resettlement of DPs; Statement by Secretary of State', *Department of State Bulletin*, July 27, 1947, pp.194–95.

<sup>113</sup> Four in total: Hannover, Westphalia, Schleswig-Holstein and North-Rhine province.

<sup>114</sup> It was at this level that an enormous amount of work was done in the Zone. It was here that food was found to put in DP mouths and where a great deal of hospitalization and allotting of beds was arranged. See FO 1052/361 Jewish Volunteer Societies, 'Letter from General Fanshawe', in which the Chairman of UNRRA describes the situation in the British Zone.

<sup>115</sup> Relationship is defined by an agreement dated 27<sup>th</sup> November 1945. See FO 945/389 Future of DP Camps, 'Outline of responsibilities of Control Commissions and UNRRA for admin and care of DPs', 9<sup>th</sup> May, 1946.

<sup>116</sup> In population terms, this translated as UNRRA in charge of roughly 330,000 DPs, volunteers 20,000 and the military government 50,000. Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 'Figures 27<sup>th</sup> March from Control Office for Germany and Austria'.

Working together, the first and major task of British military authorities and UNRRA teams had been to gather up DPs, feed them, and de-louse them. In the eyes of both the military authorities and of UNRRA, DPs had first to be classified, by nationality and by place of origin and destination. The next logical step meant repatriation. As we shall see, it was never that simple.

## 2.2 The Politics of Being Polish

In the initial period of mass military repatriations, Poles were moved by the thousands through the British Zone.<sup>118</sup> By October 1945, targets were set at 3,000 a day, with the military hoping to raise the number to 5,000 (dependent on whether or not Polish authorities could receive that number) as well as an extraordinary 8,000 a week by sea from mid-November.<sup>119</sup> The day before these ambitious targets were distributed in the British cabinet, the Control Commission for Germany (British Element) reported back to the Foreign Office that to their knowledge, the vast majority of those who are ever likely to go back, “all except confirmed Rightists and Jews”, were now willing to go.<sup>120</sup>

During the winter of 1945 and 1946 however, the number of Poles willing to go back dwindled significantly, disappointing hopes of complete repatriation. As at June 1946, estimates of unrepatriable “hard-core” DPs in the British Zone saw Poles in the overwhelming majority; making up some 200,000 of an approximate total of 327,000.<sup>121</sup> Undoubtedly, both the British military machine and the Polish Provisional government wanted these Polish DPs back in Poland as quickly as possible. However, despite sharing a

<sup>118</sup> There was no need to urge anyone to go; the number desiring to be repatriated actually outran the physical means of repatriation.

<sup>119</sup> Protracted discussion with the Russians had established what appeared to be a satisfactory road by which Polish DPs could be conveyed by lorries from Hamburg to Stettin, and from there into the Soviet Zone. FO 371/47722 Repatriation of Polish DPs, ‘Cabinet Distribution’, October 1945.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., ‘From Control Commission for Germany (British Element) to Foreign Office’, 2 Oct, 1945.

<sup>121</sup> FO 945/389 Future of Displaced Persons Camps in Germany, ‘Estimates of Hard Core’, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1946.

common goal, administrative and, increasingly political realities caused friction on the ground.

*Military frustrations with “London” and “Warsaw” Poles*

It is an unpleasant truth that today the exiles of Europe are the main fugitives from countries ruled by our own War Allies.<sup>122</sup>

From the beginning, “the geopolitical framework of post-war Europe was constructed to tie Poland permanently to Soviet tutelage.”<sup>123</sup> At Yalta, the Kremlin was adamant that the western frontier of imperial Russia be restored – at the so-called “Curzon Line”.<sup>124</sup> Not all Poles, therefore, had a home in Poland to go back to.<sup>125</sup> Poles who had grown up east of the Curzon line – in what had formerly been a part of Poland – were now, according to the Soviets, Soviet citizens.<sup>126</sup>

From the Soviet perspective, those who did not wish to go home were not seen as legitimately unrepatriable: “those who do not share the dream of returning home are not refugees but quislings”.<sup>127</sup> Nationals unwilling to return home were seen as universally guilty both of shunning Soviet leadership *and* - in that unwillingness - war crimes and collaboration.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., ‘Parliamentary Mission to British Zone’.

<sup>123</sup> Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland* (Oxford: 1986) p.32.

<sup>124</sup> The fate of the war-time Polish Government had been painful; having lost all accreditation when Great Britain and America recognized the Soviet-backed TRJN in Warsaw in June, 1945. The Home Army was formally disbanded in 1945, with many former members moved swiftly to labour camps in the USSR, and Poland’s wartime Resistance was quickly put on trial in Moscow in June. See Ibid., pp.97-98, 105.

<sup>125</sup> Hitchcock, p.279. Poland, in the final account, was awarded by the Allies nothing of the historically Polish lands in the East.

<sup>126</sup> Wyman, p.68.

<sup>127</sup> Cohen, *In War’s Wake*, p.23.

<sup>128</sup> Thus, the Eastern Bloc’s insistence that the D.P.s in occupied Germany be treated as full nationals and repatriated immediately was premised on the framework of presumed collective guilt and a desire to punish. See Linda McDowell, *Hard Labour: The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant ‘Volunteer’ Workers* (London: UCL Press, 2005) pp.87-88.

As reports emerged detailing the conditions of the forced-labour camps in the Soviet Union, where repatriates from the West were sent to 'reintegrate' and help meet the demands of post-war reconstruction of a devastated economy, British officials fell under increasing pressure to consider the fates of various groups in their occupied zones, and to recognise the permissibility of freely choosing to remain outside one's country of origin.<sup>129</sup> At the highest levels, the fate of ex-Wehrmacht Poles in the British Zone was of growing concern. Minutes taken from a Cabinet meeting on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, 1945, note that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs was repeatedly asked what measures were being taken to ensure the security of repatriates "in view of the measures threatened in an official announcement, January 1945, issued by the Lublin Committee declaring the necessity for extirpating members of the Polish Home Army<sup>130</sup> and followers of the Polish Government in London."<sup>131</sup>

The DPs themselves were very much aware of the potential for a less than warm welcome at home. Władysław Wolski, the Polish Minister for Repatriation, had pushed successfully for the establishment in the British Zone of Polish liaison officers appointed by the Polish Provisional Government to help encourage return.<sup>132</sup> However, as winter neared its end, the military began reporting Polish liaison officers as a potential *hindrance* to repatriation at a crucial moment when they hoped repatriation was about to recommence.<sup>133</sup> By February 1946, the Political Advisor to the Commander in Chief of the British Zone complained that "the effect of visits by Warsaw Poles to Polish Prisoner of War and

<sup>129</sup> Mark R. Elliott, *Pawns of Yalta: Soviet Refugees and America's Role in their Repatriation* (Illinois: 1982) p. 110; George S. Marshall, 'Concern Expressed on Resettlement of DPs; Statement by Secretary of State', p.195.

<sup>130</sup> The Polish resistance movement during the war in occupied Poland.

<sup>131</sup> FO 371/47722 Position of Polish Prisoners of War and Displaced Persons in Liberated Territories, 'Telegram from the Political Advisor to the Commander-in-Chief in Germany (Berlin) to the Foreign Office', also notes an awareness of the presence of some 24,000 ex-Wehrmacht Poles in the British Zone. "Naturally, the military authorities are anxious to get rid of these Poles but they are at present in the lowest priority for repatriation."

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 'Cabinet Distribution', 3rd October, 1945 notes that liaison officers are always in charge of "their nationals."

<sup>133</sup> The history of Polish liaison officers is complicated. They were first appointed by SHAEF with authority coming from the London Polish government. In September of 1945, Warsaw was given charge of repatriation matters (first with 19 officers, then 41). The British were slowly attempting to unify Polish liaison missions. See FO 945/364 Polish DPs in Germany, 'From Political Adviser to Commander-in-Chief', 8<sup>th</sup> February, 1946.

Displaced Persons camps has occasionally been to increase the resistance of Poles to repatriation.”<sup>134</sup>

Other bodies shared concerns over the fate of Poles repatriated to Poland. As early as April 1945, the Polish Embassy in London issued a memorandum calling for the cessation of recent appeals, broadcasted by the Allied Supreme Commander, General Eisenhower, that Polish DPs should remain on the spot in Germany to assist with repatriation declaring firmly that “it would be inadmissible that the repatriation of Poles to Poland should take place without the explicit consent of each individual concerned.”<sup>135</sup> The British League for European Freedom<sup>136</sup> complained that for many Polish DPs, “return may be extremely dangerous”, raising alarming instances of the suicides of several former female Home Army members in the Zone.<sup>137</sup>

Much of the growing friction surrounding repatriation, between British and Polish authorities (based both in London and in Warsaw) in the Zone, manifested itself around the subject of “propaganda”, and the information reaching and circulating among Polish DPs. Official reports from the Control Commission in October 1945 were littered with complaints of its falling under strong criticism, “not only from Warsaw, but also from supporters of the ‘London Polish’ point of view [...] on the ground that insufficient steps have been taken to provide for the needs of Poles in Germany in the way of balanced news and comment.”<sup>138</sup> The existence of the *Jutro Polski* newspaper,<sup>139</sup> seen as favourable to the present Polish Provisional Government and “broadly speaking endorsed by us [the Commission] as in the

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> FO 371/51211 Repatriation of Polish Displaced Persons, ‘Memorandum from Polish Embassy London’, 26<sup>th</sup> April, 1945.

<sup>136</sup> A fervently anti-communist organization. FO 371/47722 Repatriation of Polish DPs, ‘Letter to Lawson, Secretary of State for War from British League’, 25<sup>th</sup> August, 1945.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., ‘Letter from Control Commission for Germany (British Element) to Foreign Office’, 2 Oct, 1945.

<sup>139</sup> Only official paper allowed in the Zone. Ibid., ‘From Control Commission for Germany (British Element) to Foreign Office’, 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1945.

best interests of Poland” had been useful in appeasing some of the criticisms from Warsaw.<sup>140</sup> However, when it came to actually *convincing* Poles to repatriate, it was noted that “Poles are unpredictable people and really looks as if it would be necessary to provide a different newspaper for every single Pole to satisfy their peculiar idiosyncrasies.”<sup>141</sup>

Of course, Polish DPs were inevitably exposed to more than just the *Jutro Polski*. Interestingly, reports to the Commission from Polish liaison officers themselves, describe how “gossips” spread by Radio Warsaw had markedly changed the attitude of Polish DPs towards both themselves and British authorities (though, noticeably, not enough to reinvigorate repatriation). Such broadcasts apparently claimed that “British authorities have a political interest not to send Poles back to Poland” and that “dark ominous powers try to make the repatriation of Polish DPs from the British Zone as late as possible”.<sup>142</sup>

#### *The Military find an ally in UNRRA*

Even UNRRA with all its broad humanity in its approach to the problem of starving Europe has been noticeably influenced by political considerations when dealing with the issue of refugees.<sup>143</sup>

For UNRRA, as with the military, repatriation had the highest priority. Officially, UNRRA field representatives were not to suggest to any DP any alternative to repatriation, and “all other schemes for working with the displaced persons were judged in terms of their probable effect on repatriation”.<sup>144</sup> Anxious to satisfy both the British and Polish governments, UNRRA adopted a number of different strategies targeting the repatriation of

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., ‘Reply: Propaganda Among the Poles’, 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1945. The language of the documents are continually coloured by uninhibited references to “the Poles”, who were often dismissively characterized as being “rather simple peasants.”

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. Officials of Polish organisations are “of the opinion that this action is inspired, organised and supported on purpose by the Russian authorities through Polish communist centres.”

<sup>143</sup> FO 945/398 Refugee Defence Committee, ‘Report from a visit to the British Zone’, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1946.

<sup>144</sup> Woodbridge, vol. II., pp.506, 514.

Poles. Certainly one of the most infamous of these, dubbed “Operation Carrot” by the British, was its 60 Day Ration Scheme.<sup>145</sup>

The Scheme provided any Pole who decided to return home, during a period of three months from October to December 1946, with enough for 60 days at certain points in Poland.<sup>146</sup> The plan required both the provisions from the British occupying government, and the establishment in Poland of the necessary facilities to provide for the delivery of the provisions to the returning DPs.<sup>147</sup> Distribution of the rations was administered by UNRRA, who were most enthusiastic about the Scheme’s potential to reinvigorate the repatriation effort. UNRRA Head Mr. Lubbeck “was at pains to emphasize that [...] the mere fact that there was a scheme had an encouraging effect on all concerned. It provided a focusing point.”<sup>148</sup>

Although there was a marked increase in repatriation during the Scheme’s life, “negligible” results fell below expectation in the British Zone.<sup>149</sup> Nevertheless, UNRRA was committed to the Scheme’s resumption, and pushed both the Foreign Office and War office for an extension, wanting it back up and running from the 1<sup>st</sup> of March. The idea was “most welcome from the Foreign Office point of view”<sup>150</sup> and favoured by the Polish government (who described themselves as the “direct beneficiaries” of the scheme<sup>151</sup>). Only the Polish Repatriation Mission raised protests - it’s Chief being confident that “he can get 90% of Poles in the British Zone back without resort to this course.”<sup>152</sup> Any uneasiness concerning the Scheme coming from UNRRA or the British government was purely financial. Major Beamish, M.P., for instance, demonized the Scheme in the *Daily Telegraph* solely on the

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p.515.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> FO 371/66701 Repatriation of Polish displaced persons: Sixty-Day Ration Scheme, ‘From UNRRA to Ambassador of Great Britain’, 19 March, 1947.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., ‘60 Day Ration Scheme for DPs’, 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1947.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., ‘Report from political division headquarters of control commission’, 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1947.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., ‘Control Office Letter to C.J Edmonds at the Foreign Office’, April, 1947.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. Even the Polish public was in favour of the Scheme, according to the Embassy in Warsaw.

grounds of its “using the funds of the British taxpayer for the benefit of the Polish Government.”<sup>153</sup>

If UNRRA helped the military to pull the DPs back to Poland by making conditions at home seem more favourable, it proved equally helpful in pushing the DPs by making conditions in DP camps seem *less* favourable. For military commanders, the situation was relatively clear: “The plain fact is, however, that there are many Poles among the Displaced Persons in Germany who are not really compromised in Poland and could perfectly well go back. They are worked on by propaganda by the London Poles, are depressed by stories from Poles now escaping from Poland, and are in a constant state of uncertainty.”<sup>154</sup> They were not wrong, by 1946 complaints of “saturation” in the Zone were rife, with growing concerns about the increasing number of Poles entering Germany generally, including former Polish armed forces who went back and were unsatisfied with the conditions they found in Poland, as well as former DPs who were repatriated and similarly unsatisfied. By March 1946, it had been decided that Poles succeeding in reaching the British Zone and falling into these categories should be eligible to reside in DP camps, as DPs - though in Berlin, incoming Poles would be segregated from repatriating Poles, so as not to “discourage the latter from returning”.<sup>155</sup>

Although new registration of Displaced Persons was cut in July 1946 in the British Zone,<sup>156</sup> the *growth* of Poles in DP camps shifted the discourse around repatriation away from political concerns and increasingly to the purely economic. In June of 1946, the Control Commission for Germany reported that “our policy of encouraging the repatriation of DPs is undoubtedly thwarted to some extent, at any rate in Germany, by the life of comparative comfort and idleness in which the DPs live in the DP centres. They have become

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> FO 945/364 Polish DPs in Germany, ‘Letter to Sir O. Sargent’, 21<sup>st</sup> June, 1946.

<sup>155</sup> FO 945/370 Disposal of Non-Germans Entering British Zone of Germany, ‘Letter 30<sup>th</sup> March’, 1946.

<sup>156</sup> FO 945/731 Jewish DPs, General, ‘Food Concerns: Board of Deputies of British Jews’, Letter 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1946.



institutionalised and are reluctant to make the effort to return to normal life: many are in fact not ‘political dissidents’ but ‘economic dissidents’.”<sup>157</sup>

Perpetual screening made life increasingly unpleasant for Polish DPs. In concrete terms, this involved rigorous interviewing and the filling out “eligibility questionnaires” in order to divorce the “genuine”, authentic DP from the ineligible.<sup>158</sup> Growing UNRRA involvement in screening procedures coincided with this marked shift in emphasis; namely the growing concern surrounding the importance of who should be able to *remain* in the camps – as opposed to allowed in.<sup>159</sup> The question of eligibility was key. Unsurprisingly in the postwar economic climate, the DP category quickly became a status, entitling its holder to claim both special need and support,<sup>160</sup> and was thus fiercely contested.

With tensions mounting with the Soviets, accurate numbers of Poles coming into the Zone were difficult to verify. At a “DEEPUNRRA” Conference held on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1946, Polish representative Major M. Gondowicz suggested that the cause of increases in camp populations was the result of Ukrainians posturing as Poles. Gondowicz urged UNRRA to identify “Poles who are not Poles”; in most cases, Ukrainians claiming to be Polish:

I should like to make all camps of one nationality [...] We all know that many Ukrainians who cannot establish a claim to Polish nationality are in his camps and call themselves Poles... We will assist him, and I am sure General Fanshawe [of UNRRA] will, to divide the accepted Poles from the others as far as accommodation and staff situation permit.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>157</sup> FO 945/389 Future of Displaced Persons Camps in Germany, ‘Letter from Control Commission for Germany’, 18<sup>th</sup> June, 1946.

<sup>158</sup> A discussion of the politics and tradition of sorting “good” from “bad” DPs will be discussed further in the IRO period, in the next chapter.

<sup>159</sup> Wyman, p.57.

<sup>160</sup> Support was often measured in terms of calorific intake. After an inspection of several camps in the British Zone, a report by British representatives Mr Hector McNeil and Sir George Rendel stressed that “it is known that economic conditions in Poland are such that it would be difficult for this calory level to be reached there. It was suggested to us on all sides that the calory level should be reduced to something much nearer the German civilian population”. FO 945/398 Refugee Defence Committee, ‘Records of a visit made by Mr. Hector McNeil and Sir George Rendel on 9/10 July’, 13<sup>th</sup> July, 1946. In fact, calory levels were scaled to German standards. See FO 945/390 Future of Displaced Persons Camps in Germany, ‘Future Policy for the Disposal of Displaced Persons’, 27<sup>th</sup> July, 1946. .

<sup>161</sup> FO 1052/394 ‘Deep Unrra’ Conferences for Facilitating Business of UNRRA, PW and DP Division and Government Representatives, ‘Letter from Kenchington’, 18<sup>th</sup> December, 1946.

Concerns over any “DP idleness” and the costs of maintaining the DP population mounted. UNRRA proved most useful when it came to frightening any such “idle” DPs into states of uncertainty. Alarming reports of UNRRA camp closures in the American Zone in 1946 soon reached the British Zone. Although British authorities gave various arguments as to why they did not want to discuss the closure of camps in their zone, these featured barely any argument concerning DP welfare and rather the more political concern that any “impending closure of the camps in United States zone would play into the hands of the Russian group who would argue that the United States Government had, in effect, accepted the thesis they had been maintaining in connection with Resolution 71 that displaced persons who do not accept repatriation should no longer receive relief.”<sup>162</sup>

Rumours from the American Zone concerning the banning of DP organisations similarly circulated, including plans to discontinue all recreational, educational and other cultural activities in camps caring for one hundred or more Polish Displaced Persons.<sup>163</sup> Though this plan was quietly abandoned, proposals such as these undoubtedly were put forward as part of general UNRRA pressure on Polish DPs to repatriate.

In the British Zone, there were cases of DP organisations being liquidated on the grounds of their being “inimical to repatriation”.<sup>164</sup> The pressure exercised by UNRRA on Polish schools provides yet another telling example. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of September, 1946, UNRRA declared that Polish schools should register themselves with the Polish Government or else face closure. As the DPs themselves complained, UNRRA seemed to have no qualms about forcing DPs to fall under the “control of the representatives of the very government whose authority they disputed.”<sup>165</sup>

<sup>162</sup> UNRRA resolution 71 stipulated that the “Administration will not assist displaced persons who may be detained . . . on charges of having collaborated with the enemy.” See Cohen, *In War's Wake*, p.38.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> FO 1052/269 Administration Policy for Displaced Persons (DPs): Poles, 'Subject: Wolski, Minister for Repatriation', September, 1946.

<sup>165</sup> Petitions were signed by Polish DPs and sent to British Authorities in protest, see FO 945/364 Polish Displaced

As well as the DP Poles, Volunteer societies similarly had complaints regarding UNRRA's attitude towards Polish DPs generally. Reflecting on its proposed liquidation in May 1946, the Polish Red Cross (PRC) reveals that it was UNRRA who declared before the British authorities that its aid was no longer required for Polish DPs. According to the PRC, the Control Commission should find an "a proper and effective solution", given that its activities in the British Zone are considerable and the number of Polish DPs is greatest. The PRC clearly felt UNRRA had little desire to prioritise aid for Polish DPs, and concluded that "one cannot expect respect from UNRRA", citing its own experiences working under the Administration as "proof that efficient and fair co-operation is impossible between a voluntary society and UNRRA".<sup>166</sup> As of May 4<sup>th</sup>, the PRC ceased to enjoy UNRRA's recognition.<sup>167</sup>

*UNRRA under pressure; repatriation vs. DP welfare*

Noticeably, UNRRA policy when it came to Polish DPs and repatriation highlights an apparent contradiction within its DP Operations. On paper, UNRRA claimed to want to foster self-government, the election of DP leaders and to actively encourage DP participation in their own administration and welfare provision; encapsulated in their famous slogan "Let the People Help Themselves". Yet UNRRA care, particularly when it came to Polish DPs, was characterized by a permanent tension. It was clear that DPs were disinclined to choose repatriation if conditions in the DP camps were better than at home. Yet, UNRRA workers in particular knew what difficulty the majority of DPs had already faced, and therefore felt the need to ensure their physical and psychological preparedness to face a difficult life ahead. As

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Persons in Germany, 'Registration of Polish students in the British Zone in Germany', September 23rd, 1946.

<sup>166</sup> FO 1063/99 Polish Red Cross, 'Letter to Colonel Todd from Polish Red Cross delegation in Germany', 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1946.

<sup>167</sup> FO 1032/2314 Employment of Polish Red Cross Society, 'Move of the London Polish Red Cross', 12<sup>th</sup> August, 1946.

a result, some felt UNRRA help aided repatriation, while others believed it helped only to keep DPs away from home.

The issue of crime further complicated the balance between pressures to repatriate and appropriate care. Criticisms concerning the attitudes of both UNRRA and the military towards DP Poles were nourished by a growing association of DP Poles to DP criminality. Bluntly put, Poles were often the least favourably looked upon and were linked to the vast majority of criminal activity rife in DP camps: “The Poles, for a variety of reasons – perhaps because they are in larger numbers and have suffered more from the Germans than most other groups – appear to be the most unruly element among the displaced persons, and are giving our military authorities a great deal of trouble. We understood that a great deal of the crime in the British Zone of Germany is committed by Poles.”<sup>168</sup>

It is clear that in the military mind, complaints both of DP idleness and simultaneously, of energetic and widespread black market activity coexisted without issue. Not only were Poles overrepresented numerically in the Zone, they were also overrepresented in DP crime. Indeed, a great number of Polish DPs were responsible for a plethora of different criminal activities in the camps; ranging from petty theft to murder. Reports from the Polish DP camp at Voerde, for example, stress the existence of a black market as a primary concern, carried on in the camp in public “in an unmolested way.”<sup>169</sup> Here goods were sold at extortionate prices, including products obtained as a result of illegal plundering and theft. According to one report, the number of robberies and sudden attacks against neighbouring German communities had risen dramatically as more Poles were billeted in the camp. It was proved, according to the same report, that “fire-arms are recklessly being used by the Poles”, who are “fit out with modern mechanic arms and thus far superior to the

<sup>168</sup> FO 945/389 Future of Displaced Person Camps in Germany, ‘Records of a visit made by Mr Hector McNeil and Sir George Rendel on 9/10 July’, 13<sup>th</sup> July, 1946.

<sup>169</sup> FO 1013/181 Voerde DP Camp, ‘Extract from the Reports of Police’, 1947.

German police”.<sup>170</sup> Indeed, advanced weaponry in DP hands had been a very real concern from the very beginning and required in December 1945, the temporary one month lift of a ban on weapons, targeted at Polish inhabitants of DP camps, so that illegal weaponry could be handed in to military authorities without criminal repercussions.<sup>171</sup>

DP crime included also “the presence of a greater number of depraved females” and the inevitable spread of venereal disease, which further contributed to growing perceptions of both Polish male and female DPs as disproportionately indulging in immoral and criminal operations. Of course, many DP Poles had lived and survived via black market exchanges in Nazi Germany for years: this was nothing new from their perspective. At the most senior levels in London however, the Polish DP “problem” and especially its criminal dimension was the cause of much anxiety and concern.<sup>172</sup> Severe measures against DP criminals were often taken and the “worst elements in the camps” were frequently confined to camp borders under strict military supervision.<sup>173</sup> In extreme cases - typically involving witnessed murder -, DP Poles were sentenced to death; as were the fates of the four Poles executed on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September in the Polish DP camps at Rendsburg and Celle.<sup>174</sup>

Evidently, as well as the negative perceptions of DPs as idle and criminal, DPs themselves showed degrees of disinterest or resilience to rehabilitation efforts. In the face of growing prejudices against DP Poles and demands from above to enforce pressure on returning “home”, UNRRA workers were frequently torn between two principles: repatriation and care.<sup>175</sup> Debates surrounding whether or not segregation of national groups and

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> FO 1052/266 Administration Policy: Displaced Persons (DPs), all nations; vol I, ‘Special Firearms, Ammunition and Explosives Amnesty to Displaced Persons’, December, 1945.

<sup>172</sup> While Polish DPs were at the forefront of concern, the Polish Repatriation Mission also came under criticism for indulging in various criminal activities, including the smuggling of goods such as drugs, cars and petrol. FO 1063/99 Polish Red Cross, ‘Polish Repatriation Mission: Letter for Lieutenant-General Deputy Military Governor’, 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1946.

<sup>173</sup> FO 945/595 Measures to Enforce Discipline Amongst Displaced Persons in British Zone, ‘Teleprint Message for M. Montgomery’, 27<sup>th</sup> August, 1945.

<sup>174</sup> FO 371/47722 Repatriation of Polish Displaced Persons, ‘Crimes by Polish DPs’, 26<sup>th</sup> September, 1945.

<sup>175</sup> Salvatici, p.10; Woodbridge, vol II, p.514.

enticements such as the 60 Day Ration Scheme really constituted “welfare” abounded. As UNRRA worker<sup>176</sup> George Woodbridge put, it was always easier to agree on policy at a higher level than to put it into action at a lower one. Within UNRRA, “the tensions between these two modes of handling DPs were never resolved.”<sup>177</sup>

## 2.3 The State of Being Jewish

The scene was set for a painful dialogue of the deaf: between a brisk, businesslike military occupation that sought to sort out the DP problem quickly, and a small but resilient, resourceful Jewish remnant that interposed itself between the Allies and any tidy end to the war.<sup>178</sup>

In many ways, Jewish DPs present an anomaly in the Zone, preventing quick generalisations with respect to the period of repatriation.<sup>179</sup> Importantly, as the consideration of the Jewish case highlights, repatriation was not the major drive behind all relief work. While Jewish DPs similarly presented practical and political administrative concerns, these were in many respects – despite concerted efforts to prevent this – unique.

### *A small minority*

A variety of different structures housed DPs in 1945, from former military centres with large, permanent structures, to barracks camps including former concentrations camps and forced labour camp sites, to dwelling-house camps including sectioned housing units in a

<sup>176</sup> And later, UNRRA historian.

<sup>177</sup> Recent scholarship on UNRRA, interestingly, faces much the same problem. While for some, UNRRA was both an organisational and humanitarian disaster, others paint their UNRRA heroes a little too clearly, for instance, according to Hitchcock, though (almost charmingly) ramshackle, UNRRA alone “brings the human touch back to Europe in 1945”, see Hitchcock, p.247.

<sup>178</sup> Hitchcock, p.311.

<sup>179</sup> Of course, these groups are not as distinct as may be convenient. Analyses of encounters between Poles and Jews in DP camps in post-war Germany have yet to be fully explored in scholarship. For a recent attempt at such a project, see Katarzyna Person, ‘I am Jewish DP: A Jew From the Eternal Nowhere’, *Jewish History Quarterly*, February, 2013, pp.312-318.

section of a city.<sup>180</sup> Once a site was designated as DP accommodation, it “quickly took on an ethnic identity.”<sup>181</sup> Strikingly, the segregation of DPs into national units effectively mirrored a map of Europe as the Allies wanted to see it. In the British Zone especially, one group simply did not fit the desired model.

In contrast to the Polish DPs, Jews were not as spread within the Zone, for obvious reasons. Although close to half of all remaining Jews in Germany were in the British Zone, of the approximately 22.5 million persons it contained at the end of 1946, only c.18,000 were Jewish - a tiny percentage of the DP and overall population.<sup>182</sup> Most of the Jewish DPs in the British Zone were housed in Bergen-Belsen, converted from a concentration to DP camp after liberation, and later re-named “Hohne” by the British.<sup>183</sup> The largest majority of Jews in the camp were Polish, although a significant Hungarian population of around 3000 made up a large percentage.<sup>184</sup> Unsurprisingly, given these statistics, “Bergen-Belsen soon became the social, organizational and political centre of the survivors”.<sup>185</sup>

It is clear that neither American nor British military authorities were, in the beginning, prepared to handle the particularities of the issues surrounding the Jewish war-time experience, or what was to be their post-war experience.<sup>186</sup> Until September 1945, Allied armies had given Jews no special rights,<sup>187</sup> and Jews were, as Hitchcock bluntly put it, unceremoniously “lumped by nationality with other DPs.”<sup>188</sup> Belsen, “a Polish camp” did segregate Jews by 1946 for “religious reasons”, but they were still regarded officially as

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<sup>180</sup> Wyman, p.44.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Hagit Lavsky, *New Beginnings* (Wayne State University Press: 2002) p.51.

<sup>183</sup> Two-thirds of the residents of the Belsen DP camp were Jewish, leaving little doubt about its primarily Jewish character, and its position as the centre of Jewish life in the British Zone. While small pockets of Jewish DPs could be found scattered across the British Zone in smaller numbers, it is hard to estimate their numbers. Estimates in late March 1946 name Neustadt and Rheda as the camps with the second largest numbers of Jewish DPs (just over 300 in each) – a major gap from the 10,000 plus in Hohne/Belsen. FO 945/384, ‘Jewish DP numbers as at 22/3’.

<sup>184</sup> Lavsky., p.60.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p.62.

<sup>186</sup> Hitchcock, p. 311.

<sup>187</sup> Save of course for automatic eligibility for UNRRA aid.

<sup>188</sup> Hitchcock, p. 245.

Poles.<sup>189</sup> The official defence of Britain's Jewish policy was a firm refusal to practise racial discrimination in the footsteps of Nazism.<sup>190</sup>

*A problematic "ideology of the remnant"*

The British probably faced more extreme provocation from the Jews in their zones, as they were blocking Zionist ambitions concerning Palestine.<sup>191</sup>

General statements regarding the life of an average "Jewish DP" are problematic, thanks to the many political and internal differences among Jewish DPs. However, the Sh'erit ha-Pletah – the "surviving remnant" - had certain common convictions that justify discussion of the "ideology of the remnant".<sup>192</sup> A major feature distinguishing Jewish DPs from other DPs groups was the conviction that the Sh'erit ha-Petah was to be a "herald of the indivisibility of Jewish destiny."<sup>193</sup> Crucially, the overwhelming majority of Jews in Germany did not entertain a desire or intention to stay.<sup>194</sup> As Pinson wrote in 1947, for the "Jewish DPs, [...] All cultural activity must have only one aim, to make propaganda for Palestine."<sup>195</sup>

In the American Zone, Jewish volunteer bodies, and the Jewish DPs they worked with, effectively formulated military policy when it came to Jews, which both permitted and encouraged Jewish self-organization and representation. This was hardly the case in the British Zone.<sup>196</sup> However, Jewish survivors did manage to develop a framework of Jewish

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<sup>189</sup> FO 945/378 Jewish Matters: General, 'Letter from Major General to Sir Arthur Street', 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1946.

<sup>190</sup> Cohen, *In War's Wake*, p. 15. As we shall see, official rationale was coloured less by a Nazi context and more by the British position in Palestine.

<sup>191</sup> Proudfoot, p.344.

<sup>192</sup> Samuel Gringauz, 'Jewish Destiny as the DP's See It', *Commentary*, Dec 1947, Vol.4, p.502.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Koppel S. Pinson, 'Jewish Life in Liberated Germany: A Study of the Jewish DP's', *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol.9, No.2, April 1947, p.115.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p.114.

<sup>196</sup> FO 945/378 Jewish Matters: General, 'Policy of "Equality of Right Regardless of Race or Religion" makes position of Jews in Germany untenable', 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1945. As one DP noted "We have not the impression that the British Military Government really wants to help us".



self-organisation, with the main purpose of communicating with British authorities. Within only a few days of Belsen's liberation, Josef Rosensaft founded the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in the British Zone, whose delegates were elected by the DP Jews themselves.<sup>197</sup> Almost immediately, the Committee, under Rosensaft, made demands upon British authorities, including improvement in the conditions of the camp and its services, establishment of Jewish-only camps and formal recognition of the Committee as the representative body of the Jewish population in the British zone.<sup>198</sup>

While the Committee's original goals had centered primarily on organising a united front before British authorities<sup>199</sup>, by September 1945, a Zionist spirit had well and truly gathered strength and intensity.<sup>200</sup> September's Committee meeting noted the general feeling of being regarded as "second-rate" human beings in the British Zone and stressed the right of all Jewish DPs to determine their own destiny, in their own way, in their own country – Palestine. The message was clear and reflected in its first, published resolution: "to designate Palestine as a Jewish State." Rosensaft proclaimed: "we will not be driven back into the lands which have become the mass graveyards of our people."<sup>201</sup> With such unequivocal Jewish demands, the prospects for easy Anglo-Jewish cooperation were slight.

This difference in official attitudes meant that the American zone became the preferred Jewish zone and numbers of Jewish migrants began to swell there. But this did not provide much relief for British officials, who were now being pressured by America to "open

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<sup>197</sup> Hitchcock, p.347.

<sup>198</sup> FO 1052/283 Jewish Congress Hohna Camp, 'Report by Major C.C.K. Rickford', September, 1945.

<sup>199</sup> A military report on the "Jewish Congress" at Hohna Camp, 25/27<sup>th</sup> September notes "the purpose of the meeting appears to have been to contact Jewish DPs all over Germany and to endeavour to band them together [...] It became obvious very early on that a claim to return to Palestine was the main objective, and as a corollary the demand for segregation into Jewish Camps in order to train the community for its future life in Palestine." FO 945/723 Jewish Displaced Persons in HOHNE Camp, Germany, 'Notes on Jewish Congress Opening', 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1947.

<sup>200</sup> Hitchcock, p.73.

<sup>201</sup> Ben Flanagan and Donald Bloxham, *Remembering Belsen: Eyewitnesses Record the Liberation* (Great Britain: Vallentine Mitchell, 2005), p.87.

the gates of Palestine to 100,000 Jewish immigrants.<sup>202</sup> Consequently, to deflect American pressure, British foreign secretary Ernest Bevin proposed the commission in November 1945 of the 'Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry in to the Problem of European Jewry and Palestine'; to which the Americans agreed. Unfortunately for Bevin, the announcement of the committee did little to end the "barrage of criticism the government faced."<sup>203</sup>

In an effort to help deflect criticism from both the States and at home, the Control Commission appointed its own 'Jewish Advisor', one Colonel Robert Solomon, who initially expressed great satisfaction with the general administration of Jewish DPs in the British Zone. Solomon did, however, stress two major points of concern: "first, that the classification of Jews by nationalities has completely broken down, and secondly, that Polish Jews will never go back to Poland."<sup>204</sup> According to Solomon, of the approximately 16,000 Jews (Including some 5,000 Germans, whom Solomon believed could be "resettled without difficulty" in their entirety in Germany), 1,000 were "hopeless cases" needing to be confined to sanatoriums for rest of their lives, and a further 1,000 had existing homes to go to. Crucially, the remaining 9,000, increasingly "institutionalized" DP Jews, wanted to go to Palestine. The issuing of certificates for these remaining Jews, Solomon stressed, should not "lead to the immigration of further Jews to the East".<sup>205</sup>

While Solomon may have been useful to the British government, he was far from popular with Jewish communities back in England. The Chairman of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, Professor Selig Brodetsky complained that no sign of any improvement in the condition and prospects for Jewish DPs had come about as a result of Col. Solomon's

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>203</sup> Hitchcock, p.352.

<sup>204</sup> FO 945/384 Jewish Adviser: Colonel Solomon and his Recommendations for Jews, 'Minute Sheet; Association of British Refugees in Great Britain', 6<sup>th</sup> December, 1945. Kochavi also notes that British failed to implement their own declared policy of non-segregation, and attempted to conceal this failure. See Arie J. Kochavi, 'Britain's Image Campaign Against the Zionists', *Journal of Contemporary History*, April, 2001, vol. 36, no. 2, p.297.

<sup>205</sup> FO 945/384, 'Minute Sheet'.

appointment, and suggested Solomon “ought to resign and to make public his reasons for taking this action.” Solomon failed to buy the goodwill of British Jewry, “a factor of some importance”<sup>206</sup> and Solomon’s own reservations about British policy finally forced him to take Brodetsky’s advice. On April 1946, Solomon tried to resign, on the grounds that “he felt that justice was not being done to the Jewish DPs”, particularly with regard to the British refusal to recognise Rosensaft, as well as the slow distribution of immigration certificates.<sup>207</sup>

Solomon’s story highlights the British awareness of the political implications of the Jewish situation in the British Zone, as well as the fact that the members of Rosensaft’s Committee clearly had strong political backing in both England and in America. By April 1946, a military report detailing the unveiling of a memorial by Hohne Jews at Belsen complained that the Jewish Committee in Hohne was becoming a powerful organisation, “and it is considered that unless something is done in the near future to curb their activities, they will be a source of considerable trouble”.<sup>208</sup> Unfortunately for the British, that trouble was a growing problem.

### *Getting bigger: the “infiltrates”*

By the end of 1945, a growing number of military reports began raising concerns over the number of Polish Jews making their way to Berlin by train and road from Poland, some 6,000 in the month of December. According to one such report, these Jews state openly that as a result of “general hostility” in Poland, they wanted to enter the British or American Zones, in the hope that this would give them a claim to settlement in America or Palestine.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. ‘Jewish Advisor’, 13<sup>th</sup> January 1947.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., ‘Letter to Sir Oliver Harvey’, 6<sup>th</sup> May, 1946. Prevailed upon to withdraw resignation, Solomon resigned once and for all two months later.

<sup>208</sup> FO 1052/426 Stateless Persons: Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) in British Zone; vol I, ‘Problem of the unveiling of a memorial by Hohne Jews at Belsen’, 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1946.

Among these refugees were former DPs, who had been repatriated and were returning to Germany. According to military estimates, the total number of “infiltrating” Polish Jews likely to eventually arrive in Germany would not exceed some 40,000, with winter delaying travel till Spring.<sup>209</sup>

Initially, British authorities were not overly concerned. Of course, any illegal movement into the British Zone, at a time when repatriation was slowing heavily, was hardly desirable. They knew by now the cost of DP care and were well aware of the economic commitment involved in accepting a share of the estimated 40,000. Accurate numbers, to the War Office’s frustration, were hard to acquire, and although the exact numbers of infiltrates reaching the British Zone was “not known, approximately 600 Jews have arrived at Hohne Assembly Centre each month.”<sup>210</sup> However, political, rather than economic factors forced action. The decision to prohibit the admission of such infiltrates to DP centres was explained by the War Office as a matter of definition: “As these persons are Polish citizens, they cannot be described as displaced from their homes by reason of war nor as refugees from persecution instigated by Germany or her allies [...] we are therefore refusing them food and accommodation in our sector of Berlin and onward transit into our zone.”<sup>211</sup> Tellingly, American, Russian and French authorities seemed not to share the same definitional concerns, and were all receiving these people and affording them shelter in Berlin.

Infiltrates represented a growing problem. Most were headed for the American Zone,<sup>212</sup> and the British were aware of the likelihood of falling under heavy criticism and negative press in the States if their present “logical policy” continued. However, the British

<sup>209</sup> FO 945/370, Disposal of Non-Germans entering British Zone of Germany, ‘Record to the War Office: Subject is Polish Jews’, December, 1945.

<sup>210</sup> FO 945/590 Joint British-United States Committee to Consider Jewish Problems, ‘Numbers of Jewish DPs’, 1945.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> By October 1946, the numbers of Jews in British Zone remained relatively small, only 10% of a growing Jewish population in the American Zone. The Zone, as noted, did not welcome the arrival of more Jewish DPs. Illegal, unauthorized zonal crossings violated military government law, but the British Zone was not a major route to the American for infiltrates.

military remained “certain this movement is a concerted one, and is connected with the determination of Jews in general to have done with Central Europe” and “aimed at forcing us to admit these people to Palestine”.<sup>213</sup> As the Control Commission (British Element) soon realized, the same Mission that was encouraging the repatriation of Poles to Poland was “unlikely [...] to foster the return of Poles of Jewish origin to Poland”.<sup>214</sup>

### *The “cloak of UNRRA”*

It is particularly unfortunate at the present time to find individual UNRRA officials and Jewish Relief organisation involved in a conspiracy to facilitate this irregular movement. We are fully investigating the extent of these charges.<sup>215</sup>

Not only did British policy antagonise the Jewish community and international Jewish bodies at home and abroad, it proved to be a major point of contention with UNRRA as well. Frustrated by the political effects of more and more Jews (re)entering Germany, military officers increasingly relieved their frustrations by making scapegoats of UNRRA personnel, who soon came under heavy criticism for supposedly *facilitating* the unauthorized flow of Jews into the Zone. A report from August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1946 noted again that a number of Jews from Eastern Europe had again been arriving by “devious” means into the British Zone. These were not Germans, not part of “Operation Swallow”<sup>216</sup> and not DPs (given their voluntary entry). “As many as 2000” of these could have reached Hohne camp.<sup>217</sup> The report claimed to

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<sup>213</sup> FO 945/370, Disposal of Non-Germans entering British Zone of Germany, ‘Letter to Foreign Office’, 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1946.

<sup>214</sup> FO 945/364 Polish Displaced Persons in Germany, ‘Response to Political Advisor’, 10<sup>th</sup> February, 1946.

<sup>215</sup> FO 945/370 Disposal of Non-Germans entering British Zone of Germany, ‘Unauthorized flow of Jews to Hohne camp’, 3 August, 1946.

<sup>216</sup> The organised movement of the German minority from Poland to the British Zone, beginning late February, 1946. For a discussion of ‘Operation Swallow’, see Michael Fleming, *Communism, Nationalism and Ethnicity in Poland, 1944–1950* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p.43ff

<sup>217</sup> To remove these people by force would be taken as anti-Jewish policy, which “would be justified, but cause publicity”. Instead, “We shall, NOT recognise them as displaced persons and we shall take steps to prevent them from being included in the ration strength of the camp.” Orders about infiltrates not receiving rations were put into effect in an attempt to put a brake on the widespread movement of Jews. See FO 1052/426 Stateless

“have evidence that the movement is facilitated by individuals in the UNRRA organisation and Jewish Relief organisations.”<sup>218</sup> General Fanshawe, UNRRA Head in the British Zone, was consequently charged with recording any and all information implicating any UNRRA personnel and to correct the indiscipline of his staff.<sup>219</sup>

Accusations such as these were not unfounded. One confidential report from an UNRRA staff worker noted how strikingly organized the groups in question moved along well-defined routes, often with precise destinations in mind.<sup>220</sup> The impression was one of deliberate, rather than spontaneous movement. For the military, the problem was finding specific evidence confirming UNRRA involvement: “We have no evidence that Jewish Organisations as such officially organise or encourage mass movements although we believe individuals are implicated. The same is probably true of UNRRA officials. The act of helping a Jew can hardly be made a crime but if papers are forged or irregularities sponsored such acts can and will be punished.”<sup>221</sup>

The issue, once again, boiled down to questions of eligibility, which saw frequent clashes over DP status on the ground. As part of the Harrison report’s recommendations,<sup>222</sup> the Americans implemented strict Jew/ non-Jew segregation in their Zone, while Britain stubbornly held on to their principle of non-segregation.<sup>223</sup> This change in the American position naturally had an influence on UNRRA action, whose funding came overwhelmingly from the States. UNRRA regulations were changed to state “that all Jews were automatically

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Persons: Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) in British Zone; vol I, ‘Letter from the Office of the Deputy Military Governor’, 3 August, 1946.

<sup>218</sup> FO 945/370 Disposal of Non-Germans entering British Zone of Germany, ‘Unauthorized flow of Jews to Hohne camp’, 3 August, 1946.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Proudfoot, p.338.

<sup>221</sup> FO 945/494 Control Office for Germany and Austria, ‘Illegal entry of non-Germans’, 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1946.

<sup>222</sup> Recommendations made by Earl G. Harrison, sent by President Truman to investigate the situation of Jewish DPs, estimated at around 100,000, whom he concluded should be helped emigrate to Palestine. See Kochavi, p.294.

<sup>223</sup> Lavsky, p.53.

considered eligible [for support] unless positive proof to the contrary is produced”.<sup>224</sup> The change was strongly resisted by British authorities who were still fearful of a Zionist intent to send DPs illegally to Palestine. Naturally, as effective clients of the Allied governments, UNRRA personnel had to follow official British policy in British occupied territory.

The issue was unaided by erratic screening procedures and an artificial cutoff date for UNRRA aid in the British Zone in June 1946. Only by mid-1946 did eligibility procedures start to look less chaotic and not until the end of the year had “almost all DPs in Germany had gone through military or UNRRA screening.”<sup>225</sup> The military made no bones about disliking DP preference,<sup>226</sup> a fact that did not escape the notice of UNRRA staff, of which a growing number were DPs themselves.

When it came to assisting Jewish infiltration, UNRRA was not the only perceived culprit. The American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC), most active in the American Zone in relief programmes for Jewish DPs, came under fire as well. Frequent complaints suggest that UNRRA’s overshadowing of relief societies’ work often came at an advantage: as military personnel complained, “it is extremely difficult if not impossible to pin down the responsibility for illegal immigration of Jews because UNRRA can always wash its hands of AJDC’s activities when it suits UNRRA.”<sup>227</sup> The military were “most unhappy about the AJDC.” In the British Zone, the AJDC worked in conjunction with the Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad, whose individuals were “suspected of Zionist activities in Hohne camp.”<sup>228</sup> However, there was little UNRRA could do, given that AJDC and other relief workers

<sup>224</sup> Cohen, *In War’s Wake*, p.136.

<sup>225</sup> Cohen, ‘Between Relief and Politics’, p.446.

<sup>226</sup> This of course, intermingled with the popular view of DPs exhibiting only violent and disruptive behaviours. For an recent, interesting look at the German population’s perception of Jewish DPs as criminals, see Michael Berkowitz and Suzanne Brown-Fleming, ‘Perceptions of Jewish Displaced Persons as Criminals in Early Postwar Germany: Lingering Stereotypes and Self-Fulfilling Prophecies’, in Avinoam J. Patt & Michael Berkowitz (eds), *We Are Here: New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Michigan: 2010) pp.167-193.

<sup>227</sup> FO 945/494 Illegal Immigration of Jewish Displaced Persons, ‘Telegram from Rome to Foreign Office’, 14 April, 1947.

<sup>228</sup> FO 945/384 Jewish Adviser: Colonel Solomon and his Recommendations for Jews ‘Recommendations put forward by Colonel Solomon’, April, 1947.

“seldom commit any actual crime which comes to the notice of UNRRA”, despite the military’s insistence that “these allegations are not just anti-Semitic rumours, but are really founded on fact.”<sup>229</sup> The actions of the AJDC were not actionable from a criminal point of view, despite military investigations and attempts to bring its workers under proper supervision and control.

Concerns over the activities of volunteer societies extended beyond any likely clandestine dealings with infiltrates. Whilst the agreements with Jewish Voluntary Societies’<sup>230</sup> activities in Germany were on paper confined to work with DPs only, “it is known that they have extended their work to include German Jews.”<sup>231</sup> The implications of such an extension were naturally concerning for the British, who saw it as being the obvious first stage to permitting a Jewish nationality, comprised of both DP Jews and German Jews together, to come into being. Complaints that “societies operating in a dual role are difficult to control, since they are inclined to ‘play off’ UNRRA against Military Government and vice versa, dependent upon from whom they can get the better conditions”, led to workers being brought under the Military Government to work solely on behalf of German Jews. In order to “implement HMG [His Majesty’s Government] policy, any Jewish Voluntary Society which already operates in the British Zone, should confine its activities to welfare among Jewish DPs.”<sup>232</sup>

<sup>229</sup> See FO 1052/426 Stateless Persons: Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) in British Zone; vol I, ‘Letter from the Office of the Deputy Military Governor’, 3 August, 1946.

<sup>230</sup> The AJDC, The Jewish Committee, The Jewish Agency for Palestine, The Belsen Committee, and The World ORT Union.

<sup>231</sup> This was not the case with UNRRA workers. For a discussion of UNRRA workers’ uncategorical and deliberate disinclination to show much concern for the plight of displaced Germans see Jessica Reinisch, ‘Auntie UNRRA at the Crossroads’, *Past and Present*, 2013, Supplement 8, p.84.

<sup>232</sup> See FO 1052/426 Stateless Persons: Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) in British Zone; vol I ‘Documents relating to the AJDC in HAMBURG’, 25<sup>th</sup> June, 1946; Grossmann notes that much historical analysis is yet to be done concerning the many encounters among Jews and Germans. (Similarly with Allied occupiers and international aid workers, which this thesis hopes to go some way towards doing). Much like the different administrative bodies working with DPs, Jews and Germans in occupied Germany, Grossmann argues, “continually interacted in uneasy, sometimes cordial, and always pragmatic ways.” See Atina Grossmann, ‘Entangled Histories and Lost Memories’, in Avinoam J. Patt & Michael Berkowitz (eds), *We Are Here: New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Michigan: 2010) pp.14-25.



*Left to “to rot in Belsen under the care of UNRRA”*

Once again, though UNRRA - and the Jewish volunteer societies it administered - frequently clashed with military authorities, all faced mounting international criticism. In this sense, the military and UNRRA were allied in a mutual battle against bad press, much of which centered around life in Belsen DP camp for its Jewish inhabitants. A well publicized memorial event in April at the Belsen camp, attended by some 7,000 DP Jews, blamed the British for inaction during war, which had lead to death of six million Jews. An opening speech referenced the “so-called liberation” of Belsen and claimed the British could open the doors of Palestine if they wished, but prefer the Jews be allowed “to rot in Belsen under the care of UNRRA”. As a report on the event notes, “Palestine or nothing was the theme.”<sup>233</sup>

As international attention turned to the vocal Jewish community in Belsen, both the military and UNRRA increasingly found themselves having to respond to various allegations coming from both DPs themselves and a domestic and international press. Two major points of tension dominated: the conditions in Belsen – centered predominantly on the amount of food received by Jewish DPs - and tales of brutality on the part of British soldiers.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> September, 1946, the Manchester Guardian published an article on the issue of ‘Displaced Jews’ Rations’. The article made clear that Mr. Piorelle LaGuardia, the Director General of UNRRA, had responded to public pressure concerned with prevailing conditions in Belsen camp, by promising to take up the question of alleged starvation among displaced Jews. The promise was contained in a telegram received the previous day by Mr. Marcus Shlomovitz, a member of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, who had drawn Mr. LaGuardia’s attention both to the conditions of sanctioned starvation believed to exist in Bergen-Belsen, and to the allegation that UNRRA authorities refused to grant the status of

<sup>233</sup> FO 1052/426 Stateless Persons: Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) in British Zone; vol I, ‘Speech Containing Political Content by Norbert Wolheim’, 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1946.

displaced persons to newly arrived Jewish refugees from Poland, thus making them ineligible for rations.<sup>234</sup> As no new registration of DPs had been allowed since July, 1946 in the Zone, it was predominantly Jewish “infiltrates” who were said to be not receiving any food. UNRRA’s response to these allegations was simply to stress that it was the British military in control of the food supplies; although UNRRA was running the camp, it was “obliged to carry out British policy there, despite the fact that the views of the Administration conflict with it.”<sup>235</sup> The military’s response was clear; as far as the ‘starvation’ conditions at Bergen-Belsen were concerned, all accusations were unfounded as the current normal ration for all DPs, 1,550 calories a day, was being met.

As well as concerns over food, British authorities had to answer to accusations that claimed they were failing to protect Jewish DPs from violence. According to one article, “there are frequent cases of anti-Jewish violence [...] only last week two Jews were severely beaten up in Essen and had to be brought to the hospital”. Such reports accused British personnel of inflicting violence. For their part, the British “were, of course, gravely disturbed by reports in the overseas press that British soldiers had been guilty of ‘gross brutalities’ against Jews in Germany [...]”, but nonetheless claimed that such “stories were either pure fabrication or, when they bore any resemblance to the facts, were a complete distortion of them.”<sup>236</sup>

Crucially, unlike in the case of Polish DPs, there was no government *per se* for either the British or UNRRA to clash with, save for the American and international press. The bodies claiming to represent the two groups were entirely different. Where DP Poles were represented by representatives of Warsaw and London governments as well relief

<sup>234</sup> FO 945/731 Jewish DPs – GENERAL – Germany, ‘Copy of the Manchester Guardian, 6<sup>th</sup> September’; ‘Letter to Control Commission Concerning Food Concerns’, 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1946.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> FO 945/378 Jews and the British Military, ‘P.S. to Permanent Secretary’, 12<sup>th</sup> February, 1946.

associations such as the PRC, Jews were represented by AJDC, American public opinion, British Jewry, Zionists and increasingly, their own DP organisations.

In short, the British gained little by prevaricating, and delaying finding effective solutions to the Jewish “problem”. By 1947 certainly, the British government was under increasing pressure to improve the conditions for Jews, as a distinct collective, in DP camps. From liberation and the promise of new beginnings, the Jews had – in the space of only a few months – evolved into a continual source of international embarrassment for Britain.

Gerard Daniel Cohen suggests that ultimately, it was international humanitarianism that made the crucial contribution to the ‘nationalisation’ of Jews in the postwar period. In the British Zone, it could be argued that it was less the crippled efforts of Jewish Volunteer bodies and UNRRA aid and more so British attitudes that played a major role in that process. If the original British aim was to minimise the Jewish problem, their policies actually had the opposite effect. What started out as a response to harsh living conditions and the perceived hostility of British officials in the camps became full-blown Jewish nationalist fervor. These external factors, beyond the shared experiences of the horrors of the Holocaust, helped shape the Surviving Remnant into a nation. Of course, Jewish, American, and some British international commentators increasingly linked the DP crisis to Palestine through effective lobbying. By 1948, the British had withdrawn from Palestine and UNRRA’s successor, the IRO backed Jewish emigration to Israel; developments with dramatic consequences, to be explored in the next chapter.

## 2.4 Conclusion: “As Oil and Water?”

I should like to point out that the whole army has been faced with the intricate problems of readjusting from combat to mass repatriation and then to the present static phase with its unique welfare problems.<sup>237</sup>

A radical reorganisation of relief in 1947,<sup>238</sup> with an emphasis on American agendas, spelt the finish of UNRRA.<sup>239</sup> The two short years when UNRRA's DP Operations worked with in the British Zone were undoubtedly fraught with many conflicts and tensions with the Military government. Military authorities had faced the unexpected challenge of setting up assembly centres, *by nationality*, until the problem of what to do with the DPs could be solved. Only in November did UNRRA finally manage to take over the formal administration of the majority of DP camps.<sup>240</sup> In the early months of 1945, military criticism of UNRRA centered on its apparent lack of organization and unnecessary *duplication* (rather than the desired *replacement*) of the work of military personnel.<sup>241</sup> From the beginning, “UNRRA suffered from a good deal of reckless amateurism, poor planning, and just plain naiveté”.<sup>242</sup>

As things started to settle down in the Zone following mass repatriation, UNRRA continued to fall afoul of the British army, which often saw its work as meddlesome and detrimental to the full implantation of British occupied policy. The feeling was often mutual. As well as providing basic needs, UNRRA was seeking rehabilitation of individuals in the camps.<sup>243</sup> Though UNRRA teams were administering the majority of DP camps in the Zone, they remained subordinated to British military authorities, a state of affairs that irked both senior and lower-level UNRRA officers who noted that military officers seemed “less interested in caring for displaced peoples than they were in sorting them out and getting them

<sup>237</sup> Proudfoot, quoting Eisenhower, p. 333-334.

<sup>238</sup> To be explored in the following chapter ‘The Period of Resettlement’.

<sup>239</sup> Reinisch, ‘Auntie UNRRA at the crossroads’, p. 82.

<sup>240</sup> Lavsky, p.50.

<sup>241</sup> Weintraub, p.5-6.

<sup>242</sup> Hitchcock, p.216.

<sup>243</sup> Woodbridge, vol II, p.522.

shipped back whence they came.”<sup>244</sup> As Woodbridge put it, for the average UNRRA worker, “the civilian and the soldier were as oil and water, and dependence on the military was resented to the end.”<sup>245</sup>

However, there were instances where military and UNRRA co-ordinated reasonably well. When it came to Polish DPs, both placed a heavy emphasis on encouraging repatriation as a primary objective. The economic disorder of the post-war period, and a growing number of opportunistic migrants<sup>246</sup> from Eastern Europe, made the costly task of ending DP care all the more pressing. The experience for all Displaced Poles in the UNRRA period was defined by the constant and unending pressure to repatriate. In their interior Zone, the British government had full responsibility for displaced persons and, despite growing concerns about the fates awaiting repatriated Poles, was for the most part desperate to encourage Poles to go back to Poland. In this, they found an ally in UNRRA. Although physically repatriating DPs was outside the UNRRA jurisdiction, much of the actual convincing of DPs fell to their representatives. UNRRA workers were clearly expected to implement the UNRRA Council’s mandate on repatriation. Relief and rehabilitation however, remained something of a grey zone. However wary some relief workers undoubtedly were about the measures taken by UNRRA in their dealings with the Poles to encourage repatriation, these measures were part of a general policy that prioritized getting DPs home – often at the expense of the co-existent priority of care.<sup>247</sup> When it came to DP Poles, political circumstances outside the DP camps as well as the perceived idleness, apathy and criminality of Polish DPs were used as justification for increased pressure on repatriation.

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<sup>244</sup> Hitchcock, p.213.

<sup>245</sup> Malcolm J. Proudfoot, *European Refugees: 1939-52, A Study in Forced Population Movement* (London: 1957) p.236.

<sup>246</sup> Migrants thought to be consciously hoping to exploit the economic benefits of the West.

<sup>247</sup> Red Cross teams even went so far as to claim that the acronym UNRRA stood for 'You never really relieved anybody.' See Jessica Reinisch, “‘We Shall Rebuild Anew a Powerful Nation’: UNRRA, Internationalism and National Reconstruction in Poland”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 3, no. 3, July 2008, pp.451-476.

A focus on the Polish DP experience alone fails to capture the fuller complexities of administrative relationships on the ground, and its variation in the Zone. As with Polish DPs, Jewish DPs moved fairly rapidly in the military mind from victims to problems. From the very beginning the British ignored the Jewishness of the Jewish DPs. Unlike for Poles, it was insisted that Jews should not be separated in DP camps. Relief efforts earmarked especially for Jews were severely restricted and the British actively tried to disrupt attempts at Jewish self-organisation as well as refusing to recognise Jewish representational bodies.<sup>248</sup> This was motivated by an acute political awareness of the strength of self-organisation. In the British Zone at least, the Zionist cause was too inconvenient and Jewish self-organisation too threatening, with the British “seriously against the idea that Jewry enjoys a supranational status”.<sup>249</sup>

These restrictions did not just apply to the efforts of the British government. UNRRA, under the influence of its British donors, did not make special provisions for Jews, rather stating that the type of provision would be worked out within each nation. UNRRA was fundamentally international – but, then it has to work with national governments, who were UNRRA’s clients. It was well known that the British government found UNRRA inflated, naïve and incompetent. This was most potently felt where relief work was thought to exacerbate the problem of the existence of outsider populations, like the DPs, who ultimately were thought to threaten the security and viability of nation states in the postwar era.

When it came to the Polish DPs, the solution was largely agreed upon: constant pressure to repatriate permeated all activities on all fronts. In the case of the Jews, who refused to be treated purely as citizens of the countries they had fled, Palestine was the problematic destination of choice. Repatriation policies for both Polish and Jewish DPs assumed every citizen had a national home country to go back to nation states in the postwar

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<sup>248</sup> Lavsky, p.75.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., p.349.

era. Jewish DPs themselves agreed with the Allies; stability comes by being in a state of your own. The only problem for the British was the state they were offering. For the Jewish DPs, DP camps were the only 'countries' on offer. Where these DPs were, and who they were, remained incompatible with dominant views of British state security, economic development, and broader social/cultural/political cohesion. Ultimately, the political and national dimensions of the post-war administration of DPs in Germany, in particular the British Zone of occupation, emphasize both the strength and inadequacy of war-time political blueprints as they continued to be applied in the postwar period.

Unlike originally planned, UNRRA ended up playing a subordinate role in Germany. From the beginning, UNRRA had been conceived of as temporary and by July 1947, all its European missions had been terminated.<sup>250</sup> “Our impression”, military authorities claimed at the end of UNRRA’s term, “was that the case for maintaining UNRRA in Germany, rather than handing the camps back to our own military authorities is still unproven.” UNRRA, they complained, had a disturbing tendency “to... apply ad hoc and sometimes conflicting solutions to problems as they arose.” The winds of Cold War, with its bipolar vision, would change the story however, in the ‘Period of Resettlement.’

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<sup>250</sup> Reinsich, ‘Auntie Unrra at the Crossroads’, p.71.

### CHAPTER 3: The Period of Resettlement

Declining rates of repatriation and the increasing numbers of DPs refusing to return to their countries of origin provided the impetus for a new international solution to the problem of unrepatriables. United Nations talks preceding the establishment of a new International Refugee Organisation (IRO) highlighted, indeed catalysed, ideological cleavages between East and West. Increasingly heated discussions between the Soviet Bloc and the three occupying Powers in Western Germany, concerning how to define DPs and who among them should receive international aid, became the focus of repeated sparring in plenary sessions of the UN General Assembly.<sup>251</sup> Purely in terms of definition, unrepatriable DPs who did not wish to go home symbolised the radically different approaches, and world views, of either sides of a descending iron curtain.

Not all was uniform on the Western side of the curtain however. In the British Zone, the new IRO was to play a subordinate role, as British authorities sought to establish tighter control over the 'DP problem'. Following a brief discussion of the debate surrounding the creation of the International Refugee Organisation (IRO), this chapter will examine a policy shift that saw assisted emigration as a possible solution to an ongoing 'DP problem'. As relief efforts turned to resettlement abroad, Polish and Jewish DP communities presented different challenges to the success of highly selective recruitment schemes in the Zone.

While Louise Holborn, the IRO's official historian, characterized resettlement schemes as representative of an international community animated by a "self-conscious intent to preserve human dignity and realize individual potentialities",<sup>252</sup> the DP experience, once again, would put the Allied rhetoric of human rights to the test. While the unknown

<sup>251</sup> Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) p.19.

<sup>252</sup> Louise Holborn, 'International Organizations for Migration of European Nationals and Refugees', *International Journal*, vol. 20, no. 3, Summer, 1965, p.332f.



destination of foreign DPs led to growing unease in the Zone, the British did not ultimately want to shoulder the financial burden of resettlement and feared the destabilising effects that the immigration of different DP communities to both Britain and Palestine.

### 3.1 Debating the new IRO

IRO has had a stormy passage.<sup>253</sup>

In February, 1946, the United Nations Assembly agreed to set up the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) to deal with DPs and refugees and approved a constitution on the 17<sup>th</sup> December 1946, with the proviso that fifteen nations joined it and voted 75% of the money required to finance it.<sup>254</sup> The DPs negotiations at the United Nations, which had lasted an entire year, “showcased for the first time the blossoming rhetoric of the Cold War”<sup>255</sup> and set the stage for the first round of ideological battle between a communist East and a democratic West.

#### *The ‘genuine’ refugee*

A significant part the early dispute concerning the mandate of an IRO, was the question of who should be entitled to its aid, particularly the different Eastern and Western attitudes concerning wartime guilt and emphasis on retribution. The Soviet side had long been simple; there was no such thing as an unrepatriable DP. The Eastern Bloc's insistence that the DPs in occupied Germany be treated as full nationals and repatriated immediately was premised on a framework of presumed collective guilt and a desire to punish; as Soviets

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<sup>253</sup> FO 371/66673 Disposal of Displaced Persons: Welfare and Resettlement Measures, ‘Current Affairs Bulletin: Edited by Mr. A. W. H. Wilkinson of the Refugee Department’, 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1947.

<sup>254</sup> Cohen, p.19.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., p.24.

sought to settle the political score with those who had forcibly or voluntarily served under Nazi command.<sup>256</sup> An anti-repatriation stance was – often correctly – interpreted as deliberate agitation against Soviet leadership in the DPs camps.<sup>257</sup> Delegates from within the Soviet Union urged that these war criminals not receive further humanitarian aid. As a representative of Yugoslavia pointed out, no government should have to contribute “to the cost of maintaining its political enemies... or emigrants who have in fact committed crimes against its people.”<sup>258</sup>

Despite Soviet argument, the Constitution of the IRO eventually adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations ruled out the compulsory repatriation of DPs under its care.<sup>259</sup> Declared as unacceptable on that basis, the Soviet Union promptly withdrew from the new organisation altogether.<sup>260</sup> The establishment of the IRO thus marked the end of an era of Allied humanitarian cooperation with the creation of a fundamentally *Western*, liberal organisation entrusted with their care and management.<sup>261</sup> As George S. Marshall wrote in 1947, East/West debate over the fate of the DPs boiled down to the adoption of different principles. The principles upheld by the Americans, he noted, were not just their own, but had “been adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations.”<sup>262</sup>

Although rejected by the Soviet Union, the Constitution of the IRO did not contradict all Soviet argument. It recognised that individuals unwilling to go home may not universally be guilty of criminal wartime activity or voluntary collaboration.<sup>263</sup> However, the

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., p.26.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., p.24.

<sup>259</sup> United Nations, *Constitution of the International Refugee Organization*, 15 December 1946, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 18, p. 3, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b37810.html> [accessed 28 April 2014].

<sup>260</sup> Alexander Dallin, *The Soviet Union at the United Nations: An Inquiry Into Soviet Motives and Objectives* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1962), p.66.

<sup>261</sup> Western is often taken to simply mean 'American'. As we shall see, British attitudes towards the IRO were different to that of the Americans.

<sup>262</sup> George S. Marshall, 'Concern Expressed on Resettlement of DPs; Statement by Secretary of State', p.195.

<sup>263</sup> United Nations, *Constitution of the International Refugee Organization*, 15 December 1946, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 18, p. 3, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b37810.html> [accessed 6

organisation was acutely aware of the presence of 'unworthy' individuals in the DP camps inherited from UNRRA. Planned IRO screening of unrepatriable DPs in search of certifiably 'genuine' recipients of aid was symbolic of a wider disorder of politics of retribution across Europe, as it was imported into the DP camps.<sup>264</sup> The aftermath of the Second World War had seen "a general sorting out of good and bad, victim and victimizer, hero and villain" across Europe, and the DPs inherited by the IRO were similarly categorised.<sup>265</sup>

Although IRO screening was tasked with weeding out *individual* guilt, DPs nonetheless continued to be categorised and dealt with according to ethnic group. The use of simplistic binaries was evident in the Soviet readiness to collectively indict. The West, and the IRO that reflected its attitudes, was by no means above similar blanket criminalization. Under its Constitution, no German nationals could receive help from the IRO.<sup>266</sup> Just as belligerent states targeted politically 'unreliable' ethnic groups during the Second World War, so too did the IRO in 1946.<sup>267</sup> Only unwilling DPs who could present "valid objections", including proof of persecution, or fear based on reasonable grounds of persecution, could be classified as a DP.<sup>268</sup> The interest in collective war guilt never went away; the IRO was designed just to pursue a more moderate, bureaucratic approach in finding it. This institutionalisation mirrored a broader shift. As Judt argues, by 1947 it was "tacitly

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April 2014].

<sup>264</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005) p.33.

<sup>265</sup> Cohen, p.36.

<sup>266</sup> United Nations, *Constitution of the International Refugee Organization*, 15 December 1946, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 18, p.3, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b37810.html> [accessed 6 April 2014].

<sup>267</sup> Peter Gatrell, 'Trajectories of Population Displacement in the Aftermaths of the Two World Wars', in Jessica Reinisch & Elizabeth White, *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-War Europe, 1944-49*, (England: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), p.5.

<sup>268</sup> The drafters of the IRO constitution did initially distinguish between 'refugee' and 'displaced person', the former defined as forcibly uprooted civilians by consequence of war (now living outside their own national boundary and awaiting repatriation) and the latter being the narrower group outside the protection of their country of nationality (the "victims of Nazi or fascist regimes"). The possibility of presenting "valid objections" however, made the difference unclear and ultimately closer to the more modern concept of political refugee. For a brief discussion of this, see Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order*, p.33.

understood that newly re-constituted institutions of government must take upon themselves the task of punishing the guilty.”<sup>269</sup>

However, while the more explicitly political aspects of the formation of the new IRO as an early Cold War battleground are indeed significant, they should not be overstated. Historians like Daniel Cohen, who have recently stressed this aspect of the formation of the IRO, tend to focus predominantly on the role played by the United States, to the detriment of considerations of important Zonal differences. In fact, while British representatives approved the constitution of the IRO, its formation had been largely unwelcomed. In the British mind, there had been two alternatives to replace UNRRA; the IRO and the British-run Control Commission for Germany in the British Zone (CCG). While the position of an IRO was debated at the United Nations, the CCG and the Control Office had already taken the view that the IRO should *not* undertake the care of DPs in the British Zone of Germany for “political and administrative reasons”.<sup>270</sup>

They proposed instead that the CCG act on behalf of the IRO and be subject only to some degree of supervision by the later; however the expenses incurred, of which the payment of staff would be one, would be deducted from the subscription to the IRO. This proposal had the assent of the Chancellor of the Duchy, the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer and it was hoped that the proposed arrangement would not be more expensive than that of having the IRO to do the job in the Zone.<sup>271</sup> Certainly, senior

<sup>269</sup> Judt, p.44. As a number of scholars have pointed out, reality of the binaries of 'good' and 'bad', in the DPs camps, as elsewhere, proved to be less than simply applicable- bureaucratically uncovered or not. Poles fought against German, Soviet and Ukrainian depending on time and place. Clearly, pre-war factors, as well as local dynamics varied the extent and type of collaboration in the East. The broad mix of motives that had compelled men to fight made the categories of resistance and collaboration protean and unclear. It is also worth noting that as well as planned to target ethnic Germans, collaborators and Eastern veterans of the Wehrmacht, IRO screening of the DP population was motivated by pragmatism. Officials were to be tasked not only with weeding out the guilty, but also those purely interested in the economic benefits of the West; the so-called 'economic' DPs. The limited resources of a battered European economy could not afford the long-term maintenance of so many homeless. See Stathis N. Kalyvas, 'Collaboration in Comparative Perspective', *European Review of History*, Vol. 15, No. 2, April 2008, p.110; Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake*, p.44.

<sup>270</sup> FO 936 258 Cessation of UNRRA, 'Present Position of Staff', 19<sup>th</sup> December, 1946.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

UNRRA staff were most alarmed by the British attitude. As one officer in the British Zone complained: “we have lost the fight here and while IRO, in the American and French Zones, is going to take over from UNRRA and do what UNRRA did that is to run camps and distribute the amenities, here in the British Zone IRO is to be allowed only in sufferance and then only in an advisory capacity.” He concluded, “We feel very depressed at having to hand over all our camps which are now running so smoothly and our people to the tender mercies of CCG. Personally it worries me a lot when I think of them [DPs] left all on their own.”<sup>272</sup>

Once the IRO was formed, it became necessary to outline a working agreement between the Control Commission and the IRO defining the functions in regard to DPs and refugees which were contemplated would fall to either party. The main principles of the eventual agreement were, firstly, that the Control Commission recognised that the care and maintenance of DPs is one of the responsibilities of the IRO in accordance with its constitution. However, the CCG would undertake the carrying out of the executive work of administering the DP camps and Assembly Centres, under the supervision of the IRO who in turn, would be subject to the overriding sovereignty of the of the Commander-in-Chief in the Zone. The French negotiated an agreement on similar lines; only the Americans were prepared to allow the IRO to actually run the camps in their Zone.

More than anything else, this unwillingness on the part of the British to allow the IRO the same privileges as its predecessor - largely ignored in recent scholarship on the IRO - is evidence of the uneasy relationship that had existed with UNRRA, discussed in the previous chapter. As with the debates that had surrounded the creation of UNRRA in the early 1940s, the British Government’s planning at its cessation was equally motivated by the prioritization of its national interests. A desire to learn from the mistakes of the past, predominantly financial and practical concerns, as well as Britain’s changing international position,

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<sup>272</sup> FO 938/117 Handover to IRO, ‘Letter to Major Tufton Beamish’, 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1947.

ultimately meant attempting to shift control over the DP camps in the Zone away from the new international relief agency and back onto its own Authorities in the Zone.

*On the ground in the Zone: Planning to run a tighter ship*

It is recognised that the relationship between the Occupation Authority and the IRO must rest upon mutual confidence and full cooperation.<sup>273</sup>

Of the many complaints the British had directed at UNRRA, none preoccupied the Control Commission (British Element) more in 1947 than the *financial* administration of DP camps. The transition from the temporary arrangements of 1946 to a more adequate system of control under CCG was of necessity a slow and difficult process. The introduction into the DP organization of UNRRA, “with its large ideas on expenditure and unwillingness to accept Military Government financial control” had been an additional complication. The Displaced Persons Division did not have the right to investigate or audit UNRRA’s expenditure and the agreement between the Commander-in-Chief and UNRRA was widely thought to have been unsatisfactory as regards financial control. The new agreement with IRO, therefore, would first and foremost have to embody the lessons “which have been learned from their [UNRRA’s] past errors.”

An enquiry into the financial administration of DP camps in July of 1947 found that from the very beginning, the military had not been equipped to handle the vast quantities of procurement entailed in housing and feeding DPs. The financial organisation and administration at Headquarters (HQ) CCG, Regional HQ and in the field had been almost non-existent; “it can be stated that at all material times an effective financial organisation did

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<sup>273</sup> FO 371/66664 Disposal of Displaced Persons: Welfare and Resettlement Measures, ‘Report by the Executive Secretary on Draft Agreements with Governments and/or Authorities in Control of Occupied Areas’, 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1947.

not exist.”<sup>274</sup> The military never issued any accounting instructions until early 1947 – and it was taken for granted that UNRRA would have issued instructions of the camps under their management, which was found to not have been the case. Any new agreement with the IRO, it was stressed, would have to be so worded that full responsibility for the issue of instructions and directives would be placed indisputably on CCG. According to the enquiry, over-grading of DPs for ration purposes, where light work was graded as heavy work, was rife. Under the new agreement with IRO, rations were to be the responsibility of CCG and CCG Detachments would be responsible for checking rations strengths and the quality and quantity of the rations issued.<sup>275</sup> In contrast to UNRRA, the IRO was to be fully accountable for its transactions.

The British were particularly, more so than either the French or Americans, concerned with the financial operation of the IRO and immediately ran into serious difficulty over the financial section of the Agreement. British representatives, with the support of the Treasury, had hoped to secure the recovery from IRO of the whole foreign exchange cost of care and maintenance of DPs in the British Zone. They interpreted “the whole foreign exchange cost” to mean that part of their foreign exchange expenditure on the British Zone which would not have been incurred if the DPs had not been there. This included not only the cost of foreign exchange supplies specifically imported for DPs but the cost of indigenous German supplies made available for DPs and requiring specific replacement by way of foreign exchange imports. This view was rigorously opposed by the American and French delegates who, while “appreciating the logic” of the British position, opposed it on the practical ground that it would mean too heavy a charge on the IRO budget.

<sup>274</sup> FO 944 865 Financial Administration of Displaced Persons Camps, ‘Enquiry into financial administration’, 18<sup>th</sup> July, 1947.

<sup>275</sup> Even load carrying vehicles, of which UNRRA had over 700 in service, were to be operated under CCG and issues of ‘P.O.L’ (Petrol, oil and lubricants) “brought under normal control.” UNRRA was regularly accused of supplying camps without question as to the reasonableness of demand, resulting in an “enormous amount of wastage and even the possibility of DPs taking stores with them.” Ibid.

While British representatives failed to attain the financial agreements they may have liked, they urged that full consultation be maintained at all appropriate levels with regard to every phase of the IRO's work. Such consultation contemplated constant discussion on overall policy between the IRO Zone Director and the Commanding General of the Zone, or his representative. Occupying authorities, it was decided, would be responsible for procuring and transporting to assembly centres the supplies which are imported from abroad and "to the maximum extent possible the cost of IRO operations in occupied countries is to be a charge upon those countries."<sup>276</sup> The British determination both to maximise their own control over the administration of Displaced Persons and minimise all financial costs after UNRRA's cessation would characterize the DP experience after the cessation of UNRRA. Policy shift was in part due to the fact that two years after the War, ensuring that Britain's own domestic situation was prioritized became of increasing importance.

### *A different Britain*

The Second World War had left a British Labour government facing both a weakening international position, and an already weakened national economy. The domestic perception of Britain as a world power in 1945 "was not a *folie de grandeur* but a statement of the obvious"<sup>277</sup>: Britain was manifestly a world power, possessing world-wide interests, military bases, and substantial forces.<sup>278</sup> By 1947-49, that perception had shifted dramatically, and weaknesses that looked provisional two years ago were then judged as permanent. As well as a declining competitive position in the capitalist world economy,

<sup>276</sup> FO 371/66673 Disposal of Displaced Persons: Welfare and Resettlement Measures, 'Financial Issues with the IRO', 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1947.

<sup>277</sup> Josef Becker & Franz Knipping (eds.), *Power in Europe?: Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany in a Postwar World, 1945-1950* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), p.20.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.



intense measures of social reform were needed to deal with the economic and financial crises at the end of the War.<sup>279</sup>

Reform involved reconstruction, and reconstruction meant rebuilding the infrastructure of industrial production, increasing exports and a strong labour force.<sup>280</sup> Needless to say, industries most affected by labour shortages were those critical to reconstruction and export efforts.<sup>281</sup> Labour's post-war inheritance, then, was imperial realignment, economic crisis and labour shortage. In this context, the government came gradually to potential solutions in migration and nationality. With the activities of the British government in the camps, we see both a concerned shift from repatriation to resettlement, the exploitation of cheap (especially Polish) labour under the auspices of relief. The economic disorder of the post-war period, and a growing number of opportunistic migrants from the East in Europe, made the costly task of *resettlement* all the more pressing.

### 3.2 Poles Apart

As at the 15<sup>th</sup> September 1947, there were some 230,400 DPs in the British Zone, of which nearly 100,000 were Poles.<sup>282</sup> With repatriation increasingly ruled out by 1947,<sup>283</sup> Polish DPs were either to be absorbed into the German economy or else considered for emigration. With regard to absorption, most Poles, it was regularly reported “felt hatred for the Germans”, who had deported them from their homes in the first place.<sup>284</sup> While in

<sup>279</sup> Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (USA: Cornell University Press, 1997), Introduction.

<sup>280</sup> Robert Miles, ‘Nationality, Citizenship, and Migration to Britain, 1945-1951’, *Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 4, Winter, 1989.

<sup>281</sup> Paul, p.5.

<sup>282</sup> FO 938 117 Handover to IRO, ‘DPs in the British Zone of Germany’, 15<sup>th</sup> September. 1947.

<sup>283</sup> By early 1946, “the collaborative atmosphere [between East and West] was evaporating”. In 1947, that evaporation acquired specificity, particularly in January of 1947, when a “manifestly rigged Polish election gave Communists 80.1 percent of the vote.” See Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) p.300.

<sup>284</sup> While DPs, in the same manner as they themselves were distinguished by occupying forces, distinguished

February, 1947, all able-bodied DPs in the British Zone of Germany, except Jews, were required to work either in camps, for the Allied Army or for the Germans; Polish DPs resented working for their former enemies and found living on their present rations “extremely hard”.<sup>285</sup> Both the British and DPs themselves preferred the second solution, emigration.

According to Sir Robert Emerson, the head of the Inter-Governmental Committee, the present manpower shortage in Western Countries by 1947 had revolutionised the outlook for all DPs. South America represented one of the largest potential fields, though it demanded only immigrants of a special kind – agricultural workers, technicians and industrial specialists, preferably of Spanish or Italian origin – and would not accept these in large numbers. The Dominions were another major option, in particular Australia, whose Government in the post-war period had woken up to the fact that it urgently needed an increase of population; its present population of 7 million far below estimates of its capacity for a population of up to 60 million. While the Australians were prepared to up emigration to 70,000 a year, they gave priority to British subjects and were hampered by a shipping shortage that made transportation difficult.<sup>286</sup>

Thus, emphasis on resettlement of DPs out of Germany shifted largely to the countries of Western Europe, in particular to France and Belgium. However, once again, preferences disfavoured Polish DP populations. While “the French are said to be looking for 50,000

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between “good” Germans and “bad”, there was considerable friction between them. Most DPs had been kept in semi-idleness for a year and half after VE Day and were better fed than local German populations. Polish DPs in particular were accused of having carried on a vigorous Black Market with the contents of the Red Cross parcels and the clothing given to them in the camps, and looting and other crimes were often attributed to them, though these were exaggerated. All this alienated still further the native population, which was already impregnated with the Nazi doctrine that Slavs were an inferior race. See FO 371/66673 Disposal of Displaced Persons: Welfare and Resettlement Measures, ‘Current Affairs Bulletin on the Displaced Persons’, 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1947; Atina Grossmann, ‘Entangled Histories and Lost Memories’, in Avinoam J. Patt & Michael Berkowitz (eds), *We Are Here: New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Michigan: 2010).

<sup>285</sup> Ibid. Once again, the British proved the most hard-line when it came to alleviating economic burdens in the Zone. In the American and French Zones of Germany many DPs found work, but there was no equivalent universal ruling on their employment.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

workers in the DP camps”, they paradoxically relied predominantly on the populations of their ex-enemies; Italian and German workers.<sup>287</sup> Belgium hoped only to recruit 20,000 Baltic men between the ages of 21-40, for work in their mines.<sup>288</sup> On the other hand, Great Britain itself promised to be a major destination in deciding to absorb up to 100,000 DPs in industry by the end of 1947, at the rate of 2,000 a week. As well as Britain’s mines, cotton industry, agriculture and building trades being desperately short of manpower<sup>289</sup>, there was strong argument in favour of admitting ‘suitable’ DPs to full citizenship, in light of declining population figures, with “experts estimating a serious decline in our population by 1970, because of our large old-age groups.”<sup>290</sup>

*“We act quickly, get the best of the pick, and a very good best it is.”<sup>291</sup>*

The authorities of the different Zones shared the view that from a moral standpoint Balts topped the ladder, ahead of the Yugoslavs, Ukrainians and finally, Poles.<sup>292</sup>

The first to be looked at by the British were Polish veterans, whose contributions to the Allied victory fostered a feeling of moral obligation towards their care in Whitehall.<sup>293</sup> To this end, the government introduced the Polish Resettlement Act, whereby 20,000-125,000 former members of the Polish armed forces and their dependents were resettled in Britain and expected to remain there permanently. By April 1949 however, only 27,217 of these had

<sup>287</sup> One reason for French preference of Italians and German workers is said to be that in case of trouble they could repatriate them at short notice.

<sup>288</sup> FO 1052/160 Resettlement Schemes, ‘Country Requirements’, as at 6<sup>th</sup> January, 1948.

<sup>289</sup> By the end of 1948, it was also to lose all its German POWs, 163,000 of whom had been working in agriculture. According to estimates, 657,000 more workers are needed to bring the labour force back to the strength of 1939.

<sup>290</sup> Such arguments tended to trump the more international and humanitarian point made by some, which stressed that Britain ought “to play her part in helping to solve the problem of homeless people”. See FO 371/66673, ‘Current Affairs Bulletin on the Displaced Persons’, 10th June, 1947.

<sup>291</sup> Miles, footnote 55.

<sup>292</sup> Cohen, p.108.

<sup>293</sup> Paul, p.68.

entered the “essential industries”.<sup>294</sup> As well as Polish veterans (not Polish DPs), preference was given to the limited recruitment of 1,000 “Baltic” women drawn from Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia in 1946 under the ‘Balt Cygnet’ recruitment scheme helped supplement a dying British domestic service labour pool. The ‘Balt Cygnets’ programme, was targeted at young single women originally from the Baltic states, on the grounds - as British officials put it - that they were “scrupulously clean in their persons and habits” and full of “the spirit and stuff of which we can make Britons”. Under this scheme, unattached young women from DP camps were assigned to jobs in hospitals or domestic service. By August 1947, in order to increase the supply of women EVWs for Industry, the field of recruitment was extended to single unattached women of the following nationalities – Poles, Yugo-Slavs, Hungarians, Romanians and Bulgarians.<sup>295</sup> Thus while “more suitable Balts have been found than others”, all nationalities were technically free to volunteer.

Following the success of these schemes, recruitment out of the DP camps was expanded. Under the European Volunteer Workers (EVW) scheme, the British government sent officials from the Ministry of Labour to the DP camps to recruit workers in order to meet the need for labour in key occupations in industry.<sup>296</sup> The biggest worker recruitment scheme, *Westward Ho!* brought in over 78,500 workers and their dependents, including DPs from Baltic countries, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and from Poland. Most importantly, desirable prospective migrants were those most physically capable; inevitably, the young and fit.<sup>297</sup>

Operation *Westward Ho!* made a good start in 1948, and there was initially no lack of volunteers. To begin with, women were most desirable and directed in to the textile

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<sup>294</sup> Paul, p.68.

<sup>295</sup> FO 945/502 Recruitment of Displaced Person Labour for UK in British Zones of Germany and Austria, ‘Women EVWs for Industry’, 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1947.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> For a detailed account of the numbers and breakdown of DPs recruited under *Westward Ho!*, as well as some of the problems of assimilation they faced after arrival in the UK, see Elizabeth Stadulis, ‘The Resettlement of Displaced Persons in the United Kingdom’, *Population Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3, March 1952, pp.207-237.

industries. Men were mostly recruited for farm work, an area in which Polish Ukrainians proved particularly desirable. The British government confined its recruitment drive to its own Zones in Germany and Austria; which had obvious advantages given that the care and feeding of all DPs in these areas was in any case their responsibility. Moreover, the Ruhr was the main industrial area of Germany, and it was believed that “the most useful types of labour are to be found there”, having been imported by the Germans to work in factories.<sup>298</sup>

*The stuff (some) migrants are made of*

Where the emphasis after 1945 had been placed on categorizing DPs according to nationality, resettlement schemes made age and gender more significant than they had ever been before, as policy shifted to re-organise camps “in order to separate the various categories of DPs”. In the first place, ‘resettlement camps’ were established, in conjunction with IRO, to facilitate resettlement at Wentorf (Land Schleswig Holstein), Diepholz, Fallingbostal and Buchholz (Land Niedersachsen) and Lintorf (Land North-Rhine/Westphalia). While relations with IRO were “strained to start with”, the operation of resettlement camps improved as IRO staff came to realise, as one report from Wentorf details, that “the Centre is commanded and administered” by the Displaced Persons Division. British long-term policy was to ensure that all camps were organised “from the employment point of view and to effect the maximum economy in administration and expenditure.”<sup>299</sup> Availability for resettlement was thus considered from two aspects i) the “employable individual” ii) the “dependant”.<sup>300</sup>

<sup>298</sup> FO 371/66673 Disposal of Displaced Persons: Welfare and Resettlement Measures, ‘Current Affairs Bulletin on Displaced Persons’, 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1947.

<sup>299</sup> FO 1052/160 Resettlement of Displaced Persons (DPs): general; vol I, ‘Numbers in IRO Resettlement Camps’, 25<sup>th</sup> October, 1947.

<sup>300</sup> Statistics at the time suggested, rightly or wrongly, that of the entire DP population there only remained 50,000 DPs who were probably fully capable of being classified under i), though it could be assumed that a further total

Nevertheless, however much “dependants” were thought to be eligible for resettlement, the various resettlement and employment schemes that operated were largely applicable only to a limited number of carefully selected younger and able-bodied displaced persons. As one report succinctly put it, the job at DP regional resettlement and processing centres was to “sell DPs”, a job made considerably easier when dealing with individuals of sufficient vitality, as opposed to the aged, underage or sick.<sup>301</sup> *Westward Ho* was undoubtedly one of the most selective schemes, with the percentage of rejections at interviews at over forty percent, assuring that “there should be few misfits among those who pass all the tests.”<sup>302</sup>

While discrimination based on age, gender and physical capability came to characterize the resettlement schemes in the Zone, nationality did continue to play a role. In September of 1948, mass resettlement schemes under organised programmes conducted by Governments and IRO accounted for the migration of 2048 DPs, of which Canada accepted the most, 832, followed by the UK with 388, including 326 under *Westward Ho*. Once again, ‘Balts’ were preferenced over any other nationality at 426, followed by Ukrainians at 315 and finally Poles, at only 116. DP recruitment, then, was perceived through a demographic lens that saw Poles as some of the least suitable candidates, both in terms of productive and “ethnic value.”<sup>303</sup>

Very quickly, the selectivity of the resettlement process drew heavy criticism. With the IRO officially empowered to promote resettlement abroad in August, 1948, it claimed to represent “the largest mass transportation system in the world”.<sup>304</sup> Unsurprisingly, a number

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of 100,000 would be available for resettlement under ii).

<sup>301</sup> FO 1006/520 Resettlement Policy: vol II, ‘Expenses and Entertainment Facilities’, 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1948.

<sup>302</sup> FO 945/502 Recruitment of Displaced Person Labour for UK in British Zones of Germany and Austria, ‘From Vienna to Foreign Office (German Section)’, 9<sup>th</sup> August, 1947.

<sup>303</sup> Cohen, p.108. For the most comprehensive analysis of Britain’s attitudes towards different migration policies and the informal notion of which populations had the greatest potential to become “truly British”, see Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (USA: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>304</sup> Arthur Rucker, ‘The Work of the International Refugee Organisation’, *International Affairs*, vol. 25, January 1949, pp.66-73.

of commentators concerned with the fate of DPs noted the apparent paradox of having established an international organisation proclaiming to protect DPs in assuring their protection from threat, while simultaneously promoting schemes that were designed explicitly for the exploitation of foreign interest. Under *Westward Ho* for instance, EVWs could not leave their jobs without the permission of the Ministry of Labour and as ‘aliens’ they had to register with the police whenever they changed jobs or address. It was obvious that these programmes were justified mainly on economic grounds; with any wish ‘save’ Baltic, Polish or Ukrainian DPs from Soviet communism a secondary consideration. As the General Advisory Council for Baltic Welfare complained,<sup>305</sup> “genuine refugees and displaced persons have suffered for the very same principles for which the Western Democracies have fought and made so many sacrifices.” Consequently, bona fide refugees and displaced persons deserved better treatment and from the humanitarian point of view had “the right to demand the same privileges ascribed to every individual living under the auspices and protection of free democratic Governments.”<sup>306</sup>

While the IRO took the brunt of criticism on an international level, the British were once again more concerned with unwanted propaganda in the Zone. This time, instead of having to deal with anti-repatriation propaganda circulating in DP camps, the British now had to deal with anti-resettlement propaganda. On the 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1948, an article printed in *Ślowo Polskie* titled ‘Let’s Forget the Nightmare’, reprinted a letter from Polish DP Wiktor Szegiel, whose vivid account of his own volunteer experience in the Belgian mines was presented as a “striking warning to candidates who wish to emigrate”. According to Szegiel, Poles en route to Belgium received little food and no water, and shivered all night during their journey. “The

<sup>305</sup> General Advisory Councils were set up in the Zone to represent the interests of different DP groups and acted as a link “between us [British authorities] and the ordinary DP”. See FO 1052/32 Polish Displaced Persons (DPs): policy, ‘From Deputy Chief Information Services Division to Director of DP Branch’, 10<sup>th</sup> February, 1949.

<sup>306</sup> FO 1052/160 Resettlement of Displaced Persons (DPs): general; vol I, ‘Letter to Zone Resettlement Officer from General Advisory Council, Baltic Welfare Educational and Employment Organisation’, 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1947.

view of the camp and of the huts, to which we came, had such an effect on us that we did not want to get off the cars. Finally, realising that we are at the mercy of our ‘guardians’, we had to put up with our fate.”<sup>307</sup> Assigned to cold, damp quarters, Sziegel had no words “to describe the shameless extortion to which we were subject [...] the worker is exploited to the limit.”<sup>308</sup>

In response to the article, the DP Division noted that if the facts of the article were true, all IRO support should be withdrawn from the Belgian Mines Scheme or proper investigation should be made of the conditions of service in Belgium.<sup>309</sup> Behind the scenes, such articles prompted less a discussion around the experiences of Polish DP migrants, and more a discussion on censorship, with British authorities pushing London for the right of post-censorship of all Polish papers, so as to avoid unfavourable publicity of resettlement in future. In fact, the whole policy for newspapers and literature in the British Zone, as one British official complained, was not properly understood. Whereas in the American Zone, anti-Communist literature was encouraged, this literature percolated into the British Zone where “everything is done to encourage Communistic literature and to suppress democratic papers amongst the DPs. The contradiction of policy just does not make sense.”<sup>310</sup> In fact, many of the Polish DPs themselves would have favoured heavier British censorship, “free from Eastern political points of view.”<sup>311</sup> A number of petitions from various Polish DP camps across the Zone urged British Authorities to edit Polish newspapers arguing that *Ślowo Polskie* was an organ of propaganda of the Government in Warsaw and thus not an independent paper. It presented, they complained, an inimical course against emigration –

<sup>307</sup> FO 1052/110 Licensing of Newspapers and Periodicals, ‘Let’s Forget the Nightmare’, appeared 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1948 in *Ślowo Polskie*.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., ‘Response from Brigadier Todd’, 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1948.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., ‘Policy for Newspapers and Literature in the British Zone’, 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1948.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.



which did not meet the demands of the camp inmates who wanted more information about emigration and vocational training that could be useful for them.

In fact, confusion surrounding British propaganda policy was a consequence of its own changeable and paradoxical DP policy. While resettlement had been stressed as a remedy to the DP problem in the Zone, the British government's own selectivity quickly hampered any chance of resettlement being a long-term solution. By the end of 1948, *Westward Ho!*, having accepted some 37,000 from the British Zone, reduced its rate of acceptance of DPs as 'suitable' candidates dwindled. As for other resettlement schemes, it was complained that "their physical standards exclude most of the residue."<sup>312</sup> By the end of the year it was estimated that there would remain a total of over 100,000 in camps, the majority, as ever, being Polish with even lesser chance of resettlement abroad. With economic realities back in Britain forcing action, resettlement hopes proving disappointing, and continual pressure to "do everything in our power to get rid of this disturbing problem in the British Zone", focus turned once again to encouraging as many Poles as possible to return to communist Poland, which was now to be presented in the most favourable light possible.<sup>313</sup>

*Poland is best after all: revising the repatriation scheme*

By early 1949, the encouragement of repatriation to Poland had once again become the most important mission of both the British Government and the IRO when it came to Polish DPs. While resettlement schemes had reduced the number of Poles in the British Zone to just fewer than 80,000, there was no longer a "great deal of hope in our being able to

<sup>312</sup> FO 1052/577 International Refugee Organisation: DP Programme in British Zone, 'Age and Gender Break-downs', 20<sup>th</sup> April, 1948.

<sup>313</sup> FO 1052/32 Polish Displaced Persons (DPs): Policy, 'Subject Polish Repatriation, from DP Division to IRO Lemgo', July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1948.

resettle a great number in countries overseas or in Europe”.<sup>314</sup> The rate of repatriation at that time was approximately some 500 Poles per month; thought to be far too slow. Ways in which the “terrifying legend of conditions in Poland built up by the London Poles” could be counter-balanced were given priority and in the same way the British had worked with UNRRA to entice Poles to repatriate, the IRO would now be put to similar use.

In February, an IRO Delegation, accompanied by an official of the DP Division, visited Poland with a view to studying conditions there and discussing with the Polish Authorities the possibility of increasing the rate of repatriation. A very favourable report on the subject was distributed shortly after. The report universally stressed the lack of harassment the repatriation officers encountered, as well as the astonishing decadence of “a country where luxury should rather be considered a capitalistic idea”, complete with sugary descriptions of “excellent cakes and beautiful women”.<sup>315</sup> However much the different individual accounts varied, all stressed one point about others: “There is a very great misunderstanding between Poles in Poland and Polish DPs abroad. Poles in Poland think that DPs have a better life than they really have, and DPs are of the opinion that in Poland, it is much worse than it is.”<sup>316</sup>

With regard to repatriation policy, final conclusions stressed that more than 90% of Polish DPs lived under better social conditions than in pre-war times. Work in Poland was apparently offered to anyone willing to take it; with the country’s industrial output higher than in the pre-war period, its agriculture not only encouraged but strongly supported by the Government and finally, its assurance regarding social welfare available to all working classes. It was reported that religious life was not hampered, nor freedom of movement within the country and that freedom of expression was broadly tolerated – provided that freedom is not exploited actively against the present government. 90% of the Polish DPs, it

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., ‘Subject Polish Repatriation, from DP Division to IRO Lemgo’, 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1949.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., ‘Visit of Repatriation Officers to Poland from the British Zone’. 8<sup>th</sup> February, 1949.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

was firmly declared, had “no real objections of refusing to go home. The common sense of the majority of genuine Polish DPS should be to tell them to go home.”<sup>317</sup>

It was decided almost immediately that, in conjunction with IRO, immediate and active measures should be taken to speed up the rate of repatriation by all means necessary. The bulk of Polish DPs had been reluctant to return home not for any political reasons, it was affirmed, but because they were misinformed about actual conditions in Poland.<sup>318</sup> Earlier pleas from Polish DPs for independent publications in the Zone were promptly ignored, as all publications including informative and positive reports on conditions in Poland were promoted in the camps. Any encouragement concerning expansion in literature was targeted towards the IRO, which was given leave to issue pamphlets and bulletins, as well as screen films encouraging repatriation.<sup>319</sup>

The IRO and the DP Division worked together to make a joint representation in the Zone to Polish Authorities in Warsaw on a number of points encouraging repatriation. Nevertheless, once again, new repatriation drives proved disappointing, for much the same reasons as they had before. Eventually, the CCG produced a paper, approved by the Deputy Zone Director of the IRO, on ‘The Final Stage of the DP Problem in the British Zone’. Reflecting on progress made thus far, the report stressed (now familiarly) that “few of the residue will accept repatriation”.<sup>320</sup> The report noted that the IRO hoped that financial contributions would allow them to continue in being for a further two years, at which time they and British Authorities hoped to have resolved the DP problem. With disappointing

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., ‘Reply to Major General Polish Military Mission to Logan Gray’, 31<sup>st</sup> January, 1949. Major General J. Prawin, Chief of the Polish Military Mission complained that misinformation as the fault of the DP papers, in which “there are tolerated slanders and abuses of the Polish Government and even of the President of Poland, what more, as legitimate Polish Government is presented a body composed of ex-Polish citizens with residence in London.” This factor in particular, he stressed, had greatest influence on “the DP population which after 5 years’ stay in the Camps is mostly without initiative and power to take a decision and thus becomes an easy prey of an organised propaganda.”

<sup>319</sup> Cohen, p.110.

<sup>320</sup> FO 1052/577 International Refugee Organisation: DP Programme in British Zone, ‘Report Control Commission for Germany’, 20th April, 1948.

repatriation figures, deadlines set and progress with resettlement abroad still slow and looking to remain so, attention turned finally to absorption.

### *Turning to absorption*

These three years have done little to appease the hostility of the Germans towards their victims. On the contrary, this hostility has become even stronger and in so far as the Germans are concerned the means of showing it are even more numerous.<sup>321</sup>

Hitherto, both UNRRA and IRO had regarded repatriation and then resettlement abroad as the principal, almost the only, means of ‘disposing’ of DPs from Germany. They had not been inclined to regard resettlement in Germany as an acceptable solution.<sup>322</sup> By mid-1948 however, IRO policy shifted towards agreement with the British that DPs in Germany should be directed to work to the greatest extent possible, and should be called upon to contribute to their own maintenance.<sup>323</sup> Such was the anxiety around the need to rid themselves of the DP problem once and for all that the IRO even considered authorizing British Authorities to remove DPs who refused reasonable offers of work from care and maintenance in camps. Much to the approval of the Foreign Office, IRO Eligibility Officers were instructed to act as counsellors to advise and help DPs find work, leave camps and become self-supporting in the German economy: “It cannot be sound to envisage an indefinite drift under present conditions.”<sup>324</sup>

Policy recommendations were to focus all final energies on ensuring the continued support of the IRO for a policy aimed at removing from care and maintenance into work in

<sup>321</sup> FO 1052/32 Polish Displaced Persons (DPs): Policy, ‘Jurisdiction over Polish DPs’, May, 1949.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Again, this was largely due to numbers. Where proper enforcement of direction to work and payment of maintenance contributions was thought to induce some further repatriation during the coming months, it was thought unlikely that any more than 20,000, at the highest, would repatriate out of the Zone that year.

<sup>324</sup> FO 1052/577 International Refugee Organisation: DP Programme in British Zone, ‘Policy Recommendations’, 20<sup>th</sup> April, 1948.

Germany as many possible ‘residual’ DPs and directing IRO efforts in the Zone increasingly towards resettlement in Germany as the most practicable solution in the near future for the majority of the DPs. In yet another turn-around, the IRO would now be given as much responsibility in the Zone for dealing with DPs as possible, as the DP Division aimed now at “reducing its liabilities and establishment” as quickly as possible.<sup>325</sup> Regional Commissioners were instructed to afford every support to the task of removing DPs and their families into workers’ settlements or “institution” camps, as deemed appropriate and the final message from British authorities to DP was to be made clear: “The DPs to face the fact that most of them have to seek their living in Germany and must now cease any reluctance to work with, or under, Germans.”<sup>326</sup>

As with repatriation and resettlement, yet another policy shift towards absorption came with its own set of difficulties. Firstly, in poor contrast to the small numbers of emigrants leaving the British occupied Zone was the large numbers of German refugees coming in. A report to the Military Governors of the Western Zones on the 26<sup>th</sup> March 1949, stressed continually that “western Germany is heavily overpopulated”, with even rapid new building failing to keep pace with the influx. One aspect of this housing problem which was of a “particularly urgent and critical nature is the presence in the US and British Zones of approximately 400,000 refugees quartered in temporary, mass-type housing installations which must be regarded as absolutely unsuitable for human habitation.”<sup>327</sup> Crucially, another major aspect of the problem was the great numbers of these refugees who had been unable to find employment. Available figures for the US Zone suggest that there, unemployment was proportionally twice as high among the refugees as among the ‘native’ population.

In short, the British were concurrently dealing with the assimilation of large numbers of German refugees. It was feared that a continuation of the situation in Western Germany

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., ‘Organisation of PW and DP Division’, 20<sup>th</sup> April, 1948.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

would result in an overall reduction in living standards of the population in general (and of the refugee population in particular) and increasing hostility to the refugees on the part of the native population whose standard of living was threatened by the presence of this minority.<sup>328</sup> While largely ignored in scholarship focussing primarily on the DP experience, the presence of thousands of problematic German refugees in the Zone highlight both the difficulties surrounding employment, as well hinting at cultural and political factors similarly of utmost importance.

German refugees were not the only complication connected to the elaboration of a new occupation statute for Germany. As the Relief Society for Poles (which supervised the legal aid for Polish DPs in the British Zone) pointed out, absorption plans placed the Displaced Persons under German jurisdiction in all matters falling under the penal law, which was argued to be “incompatible with the principles of international law and equity” and “clearly detrimental to the interests of the Polish Displaced Persons and refugees residing in Germany.”<sup>329</sup> Certainly, present Polish-German relations were not such as could be considered formal between the two belligerent powers nearly four years after the cessation of hostilities. In the absence of a Peace Treaty between the two countries, the Society argued that there were no grounds in international law for extending the jurisdiction of German courts to the DP nationals (and not, of course, to nationals of countries which are occupying Germany) of an Allied country now residing on German territory.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Interestingly, the long term problem of German refugees was also considered to be one of such magnitude that any means of solution were worth examination, including large-scale emigration and resettlement abroad. However, it was apparent that opportunities for large-scale emigration were not available to the German population at present, who were often ineligible by virtue of being German. The situation, it was noted, thus risked the emergence of a permanently discontented population (the refugees) which could become “a political threat to German society as whole”, insofar as the hostile environment “in which the refugees find themselves will accentuate their desire to return to their homes giving rise to irredentist or expansionist tendencies.” See Ibid., ‘Report to the Military Governors by the tripartite working party on German refugees’, 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1949; Philip Ther, *The Dark Side of Nation States: Ethnic Cleansing in Modern Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014).

<sup>329</sup> FO 1052/32 Polish Displaced Persons (DPs): Policy, ‘Jurisdiction over Polish DPs’, May, 1949.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

Apart from considerations of a legal nature, the reasons for discounting absorption in 1945 had not gone away. Without reflecting on the moral qualities of German judges, it was submitted by the Relief Society that the latter would also necessarily be under the influence of “social and political factors which are responsible for the German hostility towards the DPs in general and particularly towards those of Polish origin.”<sup>331</sup> Over four years after the cessation of hostilities however, British authorities no longer saw other alternatives.

The creation of a German state authority in 1949 facilitated shifting responsibility for the DPs onto the new German Federal Government. A hard-core hard core, if you like, was transferred from the IRO in mid-July, 1950 – a final illustration of one of major themes running throughout this chapter: that humanitarian considerations “certainly do not always have the highest priority when governments deal with the refugee issue.”<sup>332</sup>

### 3.3 A “Grand” Jewish National

In the late 1940s the British state placed Jewish survivors in the displaced persons’ camps at the bottom of its desirability lists at a time when it was actively recruiting labour from this very source on a massive scale.<sup>333</sup>

Importantly, while emerging Western and Eastern Blocs clashing increasingly over the subject of non-Jewish displaced persons in Germany, they largely agreed on the status of Jewish Displaced Persons. Historian Daniel Cohen has argued that there was a clear correlation between Soviet-bloc position towards Jewish DPs, which saw them as “extraneous to ethnicized Soviet and Polish politics yet compassionately presented as a

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Tommie Sjöberg, *The Powers and the Persecuted: The Refugee Problem and the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees* (ICGR), 1938-1947 (Sweden: Lund University Press, 1991) p.223.

<sup>333</sup> Tony Kushner, ‘Remembering to Forget: Racism and Anti-Racism in Postwar Britain’, in Bryan Cheyette & Laura Marcus (eds) *Modernity, Culture and ‘the Jew’* (Cambridge: 1998) p.233.

collectivity deserving of national rights elsewhere”,<sup>334</sup> and the situation of Jews in the USSR and Poland at war’s end. Both the USSR and Poland ranked Jews as an exceptional category entitled to international emigration assistance in what Cohen describes as acquiescence to “society’s violently expressed desire to render the country [Poland] *judenrein*.”<sup>335</sup> As we shall see, the Eastern bloc’s attitude was in many respects mirrored in the West, when it came to potential Jewish DP eligibility for the same resettlement schemes that categorized the IRO’s operations.

Unsurprisingly, the situation of Jewish DPs in the IRO period proved once again to be anomalous. The gravity of the situation of Jewish DPs continued well after the cessation of UNRRA’s operation in the Zone. Events since the war had proved that almost all Jewish DPs were in fact non-repatriables, as almost all had valid objections to returning to the countries which had become the cemeteries of their parents, brothers, sisters and children. For the same reasons, Jewish Displaced Persons could not be absorbed by the country of their present temporary residence, Germany. British authorities had long fought against the recognition of DP Jewish “infiltrates” as genuine DPs, in case of “embarrassment in regard to non-Jewish refugees who enter the Zone.”<sup>336</sup> This policy had already brought them into conflict with UNRRA, who had been prepared to give assistance to “infiltrates” on the grounds that they were persecuted by the Germans. Although Belsen and other camps had been administered by UNRRA, the British had been able to prevent this assistance by controlling supplies to all Displaced Persons in their Zone. It was anticipated that the same difficulties would no doubt arise at a later stage with the International Refugee Organisation under whose constitution the “infiltrates” would be eligible for assistance.

As much as absorption was problematic in the Jewish case, so too was the resettlement of Jewish Displaced Persons in Palestine, the country which the majority

<sup>334</sup> Cohen, p.138.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., p.140.

<sup>336</sup> FO 945/723 Jewish DPs in Hohn Camp, ‘The Jews in the British Zone of Germany’, 10<sup>th</sup> April, 1947.



considered to be their homeland. What follows will offer an examination of the resettlement opportunities DPs were faced with in the IRO period as well as reflections on how the Jewish DP experience, when considered alongside that of the Polish, is able to highlight different aspects of the politics of relief work as it played out in the British Zone.

### *Operation Grand National*

With regard to the future, the Jewish DP's are interested only in emigration. Their hopes are centered on Palestine.<sup>337</sup>

Towards the end of 1946, the British drafted their own resettlement programme for the movement of Jewish DPs to Palestine: the rather ironically named 'Grand National'. As at the 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1947, 1,500 certificates for emigration to Palestine were available each month for Jews in Europe. Of these, 275 would be allotted to those who had relatives in Palestine and whose applications were registered with Palestine Commissioner of immigration. While there were comparatively few Jews in the British Zone so registered, they would eventually receive certification in their turn under this quota. Furthermore, another 375 certificates would be made specifically available each month for Jewish DPs in British Zone of Germany, beginning from the 15<sup>th</sup> January.<sup>338</sup>

Under 'Grand National', priority was given to those who had already been receiving DP care on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 45, with first priority given to concentration camp survivors. A selection board, made up of representatives from the British DP department, the Jewish Agency (JA) and the Jewish Relief Unit would approve candidates for emigration.<sup>339</sup> *German*

<sup>337</sup> FO 945/723 Jewish DPs in Hohn Camp, 'The Jews in the British Zone of Germany', 10<sup>th</sup> April, 1947.

<sup>338</sup> FO 945/467 Migration to Palestine of Jews (Grand National Immigration Scheme), 'Foreign Office Memorandum', 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1947. An additional total of 360 certificates would be made available for Jewish DPs in British Zone to cover period the period from the 15 November of 1946 to 15 January.

<sup>339</sup> Hagit Lavsky, *New Beginnings* (Wayne State University Press: 2002) p.205.

Jews were not to be included in the programme.<sup>340</sup> In stark contrast to the selection criteria Polish DPs were faced with, within each group priority was also given to skilled workmen in building and agricultural trades but *also* to children under 12, followed by persons permanently incapacitated and persons over 60 years of age<sup>341</sup> – precisely the groups deemed ineligible or undesirable in the Polish context. Strict prohibitions were in place preventing the inclusion of any potential soldiers in immigration quotas; to the frustrations of the leaders of the Jewish community in Palestine (the Yishuv).<sup>342</sup>

*Other resettlement opportunities; or lack thereof*

Due to the limitations of emigration to Palestine, Jewish DP emigrations to other countries did exist parallel to ‘Grand National’. However, any efforts to resettle Jewish DPs *outside* Palestine brought little success due to the following factors. Firstly, a bill which would allow for the admission to the US of a substantial number of DPs, including Jewish DPs, from Germany and Austria, was still before the American Senate Judiciary Committee in May 1948<sup>343</sup> and progress with regard to emigration to the US, the World Jewish Congress complained, had so far “been very little and procrastinated if any.”<sup>344</sup> Secondly, many of the immigration authorities of other countries offering DP absorption applied a policy of discrimination against Jews, although this lacked any foundation in the laws of those

<sup>340</sup> British policy separating the interests of German and DP Jews continued well after the cessation of UNRRA. Official reasoning behind this continued to be the hope that German Jews would “take up their rightful place in the community [Germany] again.” See FO 1052/428 Jewish DPs Vol III, ‘Letter on the subject of Wolheim as Representative of German Jews’, 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1948.

<sup>341</sup> Thought these persons had to provide evidence of having a relative who could support them in Palestine.

<sup>342</sup> In fact, as historian Idith Zertal has convincingly argued, prior to declaration of the State of Israel, immigration authorities in Palestine tried to limit immigration to persons able to work or fight made disparaging judgements on the overall physical condition of the “diasporic” Jewish DPs emigrating from German camps. A number of complaints were made in Jerusalem regarding the “poor profile” of DP arrivals. Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel* (Berkeley: 1998) p.216; Lavsky, p.208.

<sup>343</sup> Eventually, the ‘DP Act’ was passed by the US Congress, “with very great reluctance” and afforded DPs the chance to immigrate to America. See Cohen, p.110.

<sup>344</sup> FO 371/72068 Representation of Jewish Displaced Persons in Germany, ‘World Jewish Congress Memorandum submitted to the Preparatory Commission for the International Refugee Organisation’, May, 1948.

states.<sup>345</sup> Jews were explicitly excluded from Britain's *Westward Ho!*, for example.<sup>346</sup> In others cases, where there was no open discrimination against Jews, regulations were adopted in the selection of an immigrant in such a way that Jewish persons were being excluded de facto, as United Nations investigators in Germany reported: "the various missions invariably reject all Jewish candidates."<sup>347</sup>

The fact that Jewish DPs were consistently excluded from labour recruitment schemes was based, in the British case, on poorly concealed and contradictory formulations. Although the British consistently argued against discrimination on national grounds, which would have continued in the Nazi tradition, its Ministry of Labour was content "for the time being [...] to concentrate on certain nationalities."<sup>348</sup> The work of the 'new school' in British Jewish Studies has shifted focus onto the intolerance operating with the liberal British tradition.<sup>349</sup> Kushner discusses at length the history and continuity of institutional anti-Semitism in Britain as being characterized by the idea that "it was something about the nature of the minority that created the racism of which they were the victims, and that therefore nothing could be done to counter hostility within Britain other than to keep out the cause of the 'problem'."<sup>350</sup> Certainly, the reasoning behind the exclusion of Jewish DPs from European Volunteer

<sup>345</sup> Opposition to Jewish immigration was most overt in non-European countries. For instance, in August 1946, the Australian High Commissioner informed the IRO and British officials that Australian immigration authorities would "be grateful if issues of visas enabling travel by Jews from Germany and Austria could be suspended forthwith." No 'dumping' of Europeans, the Australian News Bulletin declared, "without regard to race or religion" would be tolerated. See FO 945/474 Resettlement in Australia, 'Letter from High Commissioner', 'Extract from Australian News Bulletin', August, 1946.

<sup>346</sup> Johannes-Dieter Stewart, 'British Post-War Migration Policy and Displaced Persons in Europe', in Jessica Reinisch & Elizabeth White, *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-War Europe, 1944-49* (England, Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).

<sup>347</sup> Cohen, p.115, quote taken from Jane Carey, *The Role of Uprooted People in European Recovery* (Washington: 1948) p.59. Although the IRO aimed to resettle Jews by the same methods as non-Jewish DPs, only 23,628 Jewish refugees were resettled in the first ten months of IROs operations, of the 151,672 total under their care; and very few of this number were resettled under mass resettlement schemes. This is due to a number of causes, apart from anti-Semitic prejudice. Chief among those causes were the comparatively small percentage of industrial and agricultural worker among Jewish refugees, the known presence of a minority of "Communists and Zionist extremists", as well the "experience of Palestine which makes other countries fearful of the outcome of any large-scale Jewish immigration." FO 371/72068 Representation of Jewish Displaced Persons in Germany, 'Jewish Refugees', 27<sup>th</sup> July, 1948.

<sup>348</sup> Anthony Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England* (Oxford: 2010) p.340.

<sup>349</sup> Tony Kushner, 'Remembering to Forget: Racism and Anti-Racism in Postwar Britain', in Bryan Cheyette & Laura Marcus (eds) *Modernity, Culture and 'the Jew'* (Cambridge: 1998) p.226.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

Workers Schemes, which was justified on the grounds of needing to avoid a “wave of anti-Semitic feeling in this country”<sup>351</sup>, operated on the fundamentally anti-Semitic proposition that the presence of Jews causes anti-Semitism. The British state’s persistence in asserting its external immigration controls was based on the premise that although Nazi-style racism was beyond the pale, racism is the fault of the minorities themselves.<sup>352</sup> The post-war years thus saw a continuation of the self-interested approach Britain had adopted towards persecuted Jews since 1933.<sup>353</sup>

With the launch of recruitment abroad designed not to benefit Jews, frustrations continued to grow in the Zone. Although most of the occupying military personnel had displayed in the past an understanding of the plights of the Jewish DPs, they grew increasingly weary of the problem because of its apparent insolubility. This was felt in Belsen, where the day-to-day running of the camp was in many ways exceptional in the Zone.

*Belsen’s frustrated administration*

There are times when this camp is a weariness of the flesh to all concerned.<sup>354</sup>

Throughout almost the entire period that the Displaced Persons Division had been controlling the Belsen camp, the Jewish situation had been extremely delicate - including a long period when the British government’s ban on immigration to Palestine had in fact meant that it was holding large numbers of people against their will. The camp was taken over by the DP Division from UNRRA in July 1947. On the takeover, it was found that the entire camp administration was under the control of the Central Jewish Committee and the Division was thus faced with the task of assuming “this control ourselves without causing major

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<sup>351</sup> Julius, p.340.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid. p.237.

<sup>353</sup> Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948: British immigration policy, Jewish refugees and the Holocaust* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p.271.

<sup>354</sup> FO 1052/247 Hohne Belsen, ‘Letter to Logan Gray’, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1949.

political trouble which would, of course, have justified nothing less than an administrative revolution.”<sup>355</sup>

The key figure of the situation throughout was Josef Rosensaft, the Chairman of the Central Committee and also the official DP Camp Leader, whose dual function deemed “unfortunate” by British Authorities who were consequently “unable to separate the political from the administrative side”, with any attempt made to curb his administrative activities having the potential to be regarded as an attack on the prerogative of the Central Committee. Rosensaft was, for a DP, certainly in a quite a unique position, particularly in respect to his direct access to the British Foreign Office. He insisted also on handling all supplies himself, for instance and it was noted early on that all supplies were “run his way and not ours [British]; they are run by him and not us.”<sup>356</sup> While Division leaders complained that Rosensaft was known to exploit his position, it was agreed that “it would have been quite unjustified to have lost his good will for the sake of administrative advantage, particularly since the repercussions would not have been confined to Germany.”<sup>357</sup>

Exceptionally, it was agreed that Belsen camp would continue to run “his [Rosensaft’s] way until it ceases to exist or until he is deposed, whichever is the sooner.”<sup>358</sup> The best the British could do would be to keep the control they had – which, in some directions was quite considerable, i.e. control of registrations, indents, bulk issues, employment and so on – and hope that the ‘Jewish problem’ would cease to exist in the near future. Where other DP camps were being reorganised to better facilitate resettlement and tighter British control at the cessation of UNRRA, it was deemed “a complete waste of time,

<sup>355</sup> FO 1052/247 Hohne Belsen, ‘Memorandum from K. W. Matthews, Deputy Chief Displaced Persons Division’, October, 1949.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., ‘Response to Audit Report from A.C. Clarke, Commander’, 7<sup>th</sup> July 1949.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid. ‘Memorandum from K. W. Matthews, Deputy Chief Displaced Persons Division’, October, 1949.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

at this late stage in the operation, to attempt to reorganise the complex machinery which activates Hohne camp.”<sup>359</sup>

As well as frustrated at the privileged position of Rosensaft, the Division was similarly irritated by the attitude of the new IRO when it came to the Jewish DPs. The Organisation, it was noted, had “always been most reluctant to associate themselves with any measures that might be construed as anti-Jewish”, and only reluctantly made a final check of the camp’s population, eventually agreeing that apart from those whom they have accepted as coming within their Mandate, no facilities should be given to other inmates of the Camp. Had they been able to adopt this measure earlier, the Deputy Chief of the Displaced Persons Division complained, “our hands would have been greatly strengthened.” The Camp’s population still included large numbers of “infiltrates” to whom British forces would give no supplies and who were maintained entirely by the AJDC, complicating the administrative situation greatly. As Matthews noted, “While it would, of course, have been unthinkable to attempt to clear the situation by force, no lesser would have been of any service.”<sup>360</sup>

Of course, the British had not always been above the use of force when it came to Jewish DPs. The well-known *Exodus* affair of July 1947, involving the capture of a ship containing some 4,500 illegal immigrants off the coast of Palestine, had seen violent clashes between those on board and British marines who had boarded the vessel. The decision to return the ship to the British Zone had not only been met with mass demonstrations by DP populations but scandal, both at home in Britain and in the wider international community.<sup>361</sup> The *Exodus* affair undoubtedly catalysed some of the most fierce opposition in Britain to the dominant political tendencies of the time. With attention already on the Jews of

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> Lavsky, p.193ff.

the British Zone, occupation authorities grew increasingly anxious to relieve themselves of the Jewish DPs under their responsibility.<sup>362</sup>

*Operation Journey's End; both "A Beacon of Hope" <sup>363</sup> and the birth of a new refugee problem*

The position at our end is the that Military Governor is very anxious to see the last of these Jewish Displaced Persons whom, as you know, have caused us a considerable amount of trouble in the past.<sup>364</sup>

With the termination of 'Grand National' in May, 1948 – following the end of the British mandate in Palestine with the establishment of the State of Israel – there remained some 7,000-8,000 Jewish DPs in camps in the British Zone, including returned *Exodus* Jews.<sup>365</sup> The British government did not recognise the new state and barred immigration there out of its Zone until November, 1948; while official movement of Jewish Displaced Persons of non-military age from the US Zone of Germany had been continuous and approved by the US Authorities in Germany.<sup>366</sup> As Logan Gray, the Director of the DP Division in the British Zone, stressed, "the situation in the US Zone has always been entirely different to that in our own Zone."<sup>367</sup>

The position of the IRO on Jewish emigration out of Germany was particularly contentious. While pressure groups such as the World Jewish Congress requested that IRO emphasize in one of its resolutions that, as a result of its experience and findings, the

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<sup>362</sup> The Exodus affair, as well as (the cost of) detention camps in Cyprus, would influence Britain's withdrawal from Palestine in May, 1948. See Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> FO 371/72068 Representation of Jewish Displaced Persons in Germany, 'Daily News Bulletin', 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1948.

<sup>364</sup> FO 1032/2566 Operation Journey's End, 'Letter from Logan Gray to C. J. Edmonds of the Refugee Department', 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1948.

<sup>365</sup> Lavsky, p.210.

<sup>366</sup> Avinoam Patt has an interesting discussion of the elected bodies in Jewish DP camps asking Jewish DPs to effectively, in their state of statelessness, act as citizens of an as-yet non-existent Jewish state. This is a side issue, see Patt, p.162, in Reinisch, *Disentanglement of Populations*.

<sup>367</sup> FO 1032/2566 Operation Journey's End, 'Letter from Logan Gray to C. J. Edmonds of the Refugee Department', 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1948.

resettlement of the immense majority of Jewish refugees and DPs can only be solved by their immigration to Palestine and, consequently, to recommend that “urgent measures be adopted for permitting such immigration to the widest possible extent and at the earliest possible moment”, others pushed for the IRO to remain entirely disassociated. Although the creation of the State of Israel provided a permanent place of resettlement for Jewish DPs by adopting liberal, indiscriminate admission guidelines,<sup>368</sup> it also triggered a new Palestinian refugee problem. Although the IRO had significantly supported the emigration of Jewish DPs to Israel, as a consequence of the hostilities between Arab and Israeli armies, the IRO suspended its assistance to Jewish immigration in May of 1948 until early 1949, leaving the Jewish Agency for Palestine and the AJDC to continue its own assistance during the war of 1948.<sup>369</sup>

In the British Zone, the responsibility for the organisation of the movement of Jewish DPs to Palestine had always been “put fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the various Jewish Agencies operating in the British Zone”, except for the issue of Exit Permits and the procurement of any necessary rail movement within the British Zone of Germany. The British welcomed the lifting of the ban on the emigration of Jews of military age to Palestine; noting that many of these DPs would make their way out of the British Zone anyway, and their own anxiousness that full advantage be taken to “speed these people on their way.”<sup>370</sup> By February 1949, the British Government permitted all Jewish DPs, including men of military age to leave the British Zone without restrictions.<sup>371</sup> Though, under ‘Technical Instruction No. 33’, with British Authorities concerned with Arab public opinion, “no publicity will be given to this decision, and no public announcement will be made.”<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Israel would eventually accept an overall of 132,000 Jewish DPs, the vast majority out which were in the American Zone, under IRO care.

<sup>369</sup> Cohen, p.117.

<sup>370</sup> FO 1032/2566 Operation Journey’s End, ‘Letter from Logan Gray to C. J. Edmonds of the Refugee Department’, 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1948.

<sup>371</sup> On 18<sup>th</sup> February, the US Military Governor was in receipt of a cable from the Department of the Army which set forth the same instructions regarding Jewish DPs of military age in the American Zone of occupation.

<sup>372</sup> FO 1052/82 Operation Journey’s End, ‘Letter to Mr. Logan Gray from Louis C. Kely, Chief Displaced Persons Branch’, 7<sup>th</sup> March, 1949.



### 3.4 Epilogue and Conclusion: From ‘Repatriables’ to ‘Employables’

By early 1950, the position with regard to the continuance of IRO operations in Western Germany had been clarified and a decision had been taken by the IRO General Council to continue operations in Western Germany on a modified scale until 31<sup>st</sup> March 1951. IROs activities during this extended period would be almost exclusively devoted to the work of resettlement, and all those Displaced Persons who are not in the process of resettlement by the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1950 would become the responsibility, both administratively and financially, of the German Federal Government. The Allied High Commission communicated officially to the Federal Government the results of this decision in a letter dated 9 February 1950. It was considered that a figure of between 50,000 and 60,000 – the majority of which were Polish DPs - would be handed over, to be divided into two categories, ‘institutional’ cases (requiring hospitalization or institutionalised care) and ‘non-institutional’ cases.<sup>373</sup>

While resettlement schemes had reduced the numbers of DPs in the DP camps of the British Zone, they had failed to deliver new opportunities to the tens of thousands still in camps in 1950. Although Britain itself had pledged to accept an extraordinary 100,000 foreign workers from DP camps in Germany, careful attention was paid to the biological implications of immigration from the Continent. As well as favouring single, able-bodied young migrants, there was a racialization of migration flows out of DP camps under resettlement schemes as the selection of post-war immigrants was guided by the

<sup>373</sup> Since then, at the Session of the IRO General Council in Geneva which was held between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1950, discussion took place on the interpretation which should be placed on the words “in the process of resettlement” and some delegations were in favour of including all the Displaced Persons “with limited opportunities for resettlement” as being “in the process of resettlement”. The UK Delegation was not in favour of this proposal, and after discussion, it was finally agreed that in the British Zone of Western Germany at least, the original plan of handing over all “hard core” DPs to the Federal Government on or before 30<sup>th</sup> June 1950 would be carried out. See FO 1052/162 Liaison Officers, ‘Letter to Land Commissioners’, 11<sup>th</sup> April, 1950.

consciousness that recruiting for domestic labour markets in the short term was tantamount to recruiting for domestic population in the long term. Where Baltic peoples were seen as having long-term demographic potential, Poles often found themselves at the end of preferred nationality lists. Such resettlement policies, of which the British example is particularly telling, resulted in certain facts which were contrary to the principles of the IRO Constitution, and certainly did not coincide with the principles of liberty, freedom and equality laid down in various statements of the prominent leaders of the Western Democracies.

Immigration, then, was a useful tool in the post-war reconstruction process in Britain and elsewhere. However as the example of Polish resettlement highlights so well, it was complicated by official ideas of “Britishness” and a subsequent clash between theoretical, internationally propounded equality, and the practical inequalities of discrimination in DP camps in the British Zone. While a more humanitarian approach to unrepatriable DPs was argued for on an international stage, a highly selective, prejudicial recruitment drive coloured Britain’s own immigration. Resettlement drives had been predominantly motivated by declining repatriation rates and the insustainability of funding significant amounts of aid for the care of DPs in the British Zone while struggling with a ravished post-war economy at home. As well as emphasizing the gap between official international rhetoric and the realities of migration out of the DP camps, the selectivity of Britain’s resettlement schemes hindered also the possibilities that DP labour presented as a solution to the economic problems of camp administration. Occupying authorities were forced to continue to search for alternative means to lower costs, including a re-vamped repatriation drive and ultimately, absorption into the German economy.

Jews in the British Zone also continued to be the objects of a certain set of attitudes (increasingly challenged by growing Jewish self-organisation and international pressures) concerning migration. While the ‘cream’ of DPs were being selected for labour back in

Britain, official explanations of de-segregation of Jews in the British Zone had been based on an apparent unwillingness to racially discriminate. However, the discriminatory techniques the British and other governments used, including geographical quotas and occupational priorities, favoured heavily migrants considered to be future “British stock” – a category that seldom included Jewish DPs. Jews were refused distinction when it came to repatriation, but were made distinct when it came to preventing resettlement.

Displaced persons had always had symbolic value as proof of the Allies’ just cause; the oppressed under fascist regimes, for whom liberation would bring relief. However, the DPs were an inconvenient legacy, complicating the idea of victors’ justice, and political retribution. Their very existence was contested by competing Western and Eastern ideological frameworks that clashed over how to define the displaced and desperate. Disputes over political retribution and humanitarian obligations helped to hasten the onset of a Cold War that was to last another 40 years. The problem lay in how to define the worthy and unworthy, innocent and guilty, especially when boundaries were blurred by the increase in Cold War tension. After such a traumatic upheaval, legitimacy was essential but elusive. A Western emphasis on universal human rights was an understandable reaction to apparent Nazi inhumanity but led to claims of ‘Americanization’ by a Soviet state that did not want their opposition sheltered.

Even in this culture of rights and reactions to the horrors of WWII, the plight of DPs symbolised the difficulty of escaping the war’s legacy of nationalism and ideas of ‘national purity’. Such large numbers of homeless and unrepatriable people led to short and long-term security concerns. In such a profoundly uncertain age, the unknown destination of these foreigners led to unease across Europe. Moreover, no state wanted to shoulder the financial burden of extensive resettlement but all of them feared the potential destabilising effect of such an immigration influx on their national character and security. Ultimately DPs became

the symbols of post-war disorder. But as the geo-political centre of a lot of these tensions, they also were helping to shape and create issues as a group who represented the challenge of reconstruction.

## CONCLUSION

Rhetorical planning commenced remarkably early into the war and produced the dominant construct of the ‘Displaced Person’ and already in 1943, a new United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). ‘Relief and Rehabilitation’ of DPs meant coordinated international relief, vital for the effective alleviation of human suffering and transition to sustainable peace. Though international, UNRRA ultimately worked through national governments whose attitudes competed over the way in which UNRRA should operate. British policy towards international agencies during the war – foreshadowing its post-war policy – was ruled almost exclusively in terms of Britain’s national priorities and interests. While British politicians continued to stress that help be given to Jewish refugees persecuted across Europe (while simultaneously working to prevent the possibility of large-scale Jewish immigration from the Continent), more concrete planning did not focus its attention on considering the position of Jews in the post-war period. Rather, war-time planning following UNRRA’s establishment concentrated overwhelmingly on the millions of foreign labourers Allied governments were expected to encounter – of which the majority were envisaged to be repatriable Poles.

The British military foresaw chaos when its advancing army freed thousands of uprooted people in Germany. It was believed that when Germany was occupied, “millions of wild, half-starved slaves suddenly freed from coolie gangs and concentration camps would swarm over the countryside, pillaging and massacring their oppressors”<sup>374</sup>. DPs struggling to get home under their own steam, it was thought, would spread epidemic and most significantly, might impede military operations by blocking highways. The Allied cure for this was to make DPs stay in their camps and pilot them into newly organised Assembly

<sup>374</sup> FO 371/66673 Disposal of Displaced Persons: Welfare and Resettlement Measures, ‘Current Affairs Bulletin: Edited by Mr. A. W. H. Wilkinson of the Refugee Department’, 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1947.

Centres, where they would receive food, shelter and medical attention, be sorted into national groups, screened by liaison officers and in due course, repatriated. Largely because of this war-time military planning, the repatriation of thousands of DPs *was* to a large extent facilitated, or as one commentator crudely put it, “the army shepherded the slaves into camps with exemplary speed; they were more docile than expected.”<sup>375</sup>

However, not all DPs proved so willing. The two short years when UNRRA’s DP Operations worked with in the British Zone were fraught with tension, as military officers and UNRRA workers clashed over what ‘rehabilitation’ meant on the ground. They largely agreed, however, that rehabilitation ultimately meant a return to the national fold.

While for Polish DPs, this translated into constant pressure to repatriate to Poland, Jewish DPs presented a more problematic administrative challenge. That Jewish DPs be recognised as Jewish, a status on par with that of the national categories adhered to by other DP groups, proved too threatening in the British Zone; a continual point of tension with an UNRRA administration that increasingly recognised Jewish self-organisation in the American Zone. For Jewish DPs, DP camps were the only ‘countries’ on offer; highlighting both the power and limitations of pre-war and war-time political blueprints as they were imposed on the post-war period. Antagonisms between the providers of relief, then, were most pronounced when it came to policy that dealt with groups seen as presenting the biggest challenge to the security and viability of nation states in the post-war era.

The IRO was established because it was believed that there was an international responsibility to deal with DPs and was tasked with finding a *permanent* solution to the problem. Unrepatriable DPs were symbolic of growing East/West antagonism and the difficulties of the politics of international justice and retribution. DPs came to highlight

<sup>375</sup> FO 371/66673 Disposal of Displaced Persons: Welfare and Resettlement Measures, ‘Current Affairs Bulletin on Displaced Persons’, 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1947. Some commentators were far less complimentary; Leonard O. Mosley, a visitor to the British Zone in April 1945, commented that there was “no order among over 100,000 slaves who were tasting their first real freedom for years.” See Leonard O. Mosley, *Report from Germany* (London: 1945) p.80.

primarily the economic disorder of the immediate post-war period, and widespread ideas about, once again, the best way to reconstruct and secure the nation-state. British treatment of DPs, as both problematic stateless outliers, and potential pools of labour resources, raised important human rights debates about the operations of IRO, complicating the 'Western' ideals it was thought to embrace.

As Cold War tensions mounted, anti-communist credentials went on the rise and firm anti-repatriation positions were increasingly re-understood. If genuine fears of persecution could be proven, DPs would automatically be eligible for IRO protection and care.<sup>376</sup> The presence of unrepatriable DPs – and Jewish DPs in particular, who continued to languish in camps in Germany years after 'liberation' - catalysed the rise of human rights debates and discussion, and became a major cause for international humanitarian concern and management.<sup>377</sup> Again however, the reality of the post-war world was one in which the DPs could not be treated as simply citizens of the world. It was still felt that the best way to protect their human rights was to reintegrate them onto the international stage through citizenship. If it was not to be their country of origin, it would have to be integration into a foreign country.

While DPs may have been symbolic of the beginnings of *interest* in human rights, the DPs *experience* "immediately put to test the language of human rights hammered out by Western Powers in the 1940s".<sup>378</sup> While restoring the DPs population to the national collective was essential to a broader campaign to democratize and denazify post-war Europe, it was widely seen also the best remedy against DP apathy and idleness.<sup>379</sup> Despite

<sup>376</sup> Kim Salomon, *Refugees in the Cold War: Towards a New International Refugee Regime in the Early Postwar Era* (Sweden: Lund University Press, 1991) p.243.

<sup>377</sup> Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order*, pp.80-85.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, p.82.

<sup>379</sup> Edward Bakis, 'The So-Called DP-Apathy in Germany's DP Camps', *Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science*, Vol. 55, No. 1, Mar., 1952, p. 62.

participating in growing human rights rhetoric, the British were mostly pre-occupied with cutting costs and putting the DPs to work.

While the IRO presented DPs as symbols of anti-communism and of democracy, their biggest selling point was their labour.<sup>380</sup> Even before the IRO was established, the chief of the Soviet delegation predicted that the capitalist West would exploit the DPs population as a source of cheap labour.<sup>381</sup> He was not wrong. Available exclusively to the West, unrepatriable Eastern nationals, by 1947, were becoming an essential pool of useful migrants; or as Silvia Salvatici bluntly puts it, part of a project to turn “slaves of the Nazi regime” into “labourers suitable for democracies”.<sup>382</sup> Despite the American human rights rhetoric, and America being “in a better position to receive a substantial number of these people than any other nation”, active measures were left to other, European, countries.<sup>383</sup>

DP camps became battlegrounds for labour recruitment. By 1947, Belgium, France, Norway and particularly England were taking substantial numbers of DPs.<sup>384</sup> Humanitarian concerns were noticeably of little concern to the British resettlement programme, *Westward Ho!*, which recruited DPs in order to provide the British economy with much-needed manpower.<sup>385</sup> DP idleness was viewed as problematic, yet DPs were presented by the IRO, and sought after by the British as incredibly industrious.<sup>386</sup> *Westward Ho!* recruited some 80,000 DPs in total; most of whom were young, able-bodied men.<sup>387</sup> Resettlement programmes may have been emptying the camps, but DPs were, in general, not met with

<sup>380</sup> Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order*, pp.109-12.

<sup>381</sup> Kim Salomon, *Refugees in the Cold War: Towards a New International Refugee Regime in the Early Postwar Era*, p.189.

<sup>382</sup> Silvia Salvatici, 'From Displaced Persons to Labourers: Allied Employment Policies in Post-War West Germany', in Jessica Reinisch & Elizabeth White, *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-War Europe, 1944-49* (England: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011) p.27.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> George S. Marshall, 'Concern Expressed on Resettlement of DPs; Statement by Secretary of State', p.196.

<sup>385</sup> Jacques Vernant, *The Refugee in the Post-War World* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1953) p.343; Christoph Thonfeld, 'Former Forced Labourers as Immigrants in Great Britain after 1945', in Alexander von Plate, Almut Leh & Christoph Thonfeld (ed.), *Hitler's Slaves: Life Stories of Forced Labourers in Nazi-Occupied Europe* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010) p.325.

<sup>386</sup> Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order*, p.109.

<sup>387</sup> John Allan Tannahill, *European Volunteer Workers in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958) p.30.



open arms. Brutally put, “no-one wanted older people, orphans or single women with children”.<sup>388</sup>

Whilst some DPs were actively encouraged to move to Britain, helping to overcome its crippling labour shortage, this openness was not universal. Differing attitudes towards different DPs was influenced by age, gender and physical capability - but also ethnic/racial stereotypes. Though DPs from Baltic countries were officially preferenced, the same support was not offered to nationals from other countries and Polish DPs, who continued to represent the majority of the ‘DP Problem’ in Germany, often found themselves near the bottom of lists of desirable migrants. A racialized understanding of DP (and global) populations, as well as of “Britishness”, can be further compared with the self-proclaimed *de*-racialized treatment of Jewish DPs in the British Zone.

Not only were “rigid post-war schemes for selective emigration [...] an inadequate response to the scale of the human tragedy of Belsen”, their selectivity proved counter-productive to their original purpose of providing a permanent solution to the DP problem. The most vulnerable of the DP population highlight the evident tension between DPs helping to spark human rights debate, but ultimately being treated almost as slaves at a slave market.<sup>389</sup> Although the IRO urged countries to consider humanitarian gestures, a poor physical condition, or lack of skilled labour, brought with it a high chance of rejection; the elderly, sick and infirm were the ‘residue’ of the DP camps of 1951.<sup>390</sup>

An exploration of the relationship between a British administration and the international relief agencies charged with the care of different DP communities in the post-war period brings into focus Britain’s willingness to act on the basis of humanitarian concern. Despite actively helping to create the international institutions whose mandate was to care for

<sup>388</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*, p.31.

<sup>389</sup> Paul Weindling, “‘Belsinitis’: Liberating Belsen, Its Hospitals, UNRRA, and Selection for Re-emigration, 1945-1948’, *Science in Context*, vol. 19, Issue 3, September, 2006, p.417.

<sup>390</sup> Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order*, p.109-12.

the persecuted populations of Europe, the Government was free to acknowledge persecution while simultaneously maintaining the right to exclude DPs. While Britain did much to help displaced persons, the generous face of international relief was often a mask for national self-interested aspects that ultimately favoured neither Polish nor Jewish DPs – particularly where these minorities lacked a nation-state to defend their own interests.

Still today, the British government continues to push for international responses to humanitarian crises, though often remains reluctant to honour obligations under international law. The scope for acting on any humanitarian impulse remains, to this day, limited. In different ways, different DP communities already evidenced the paralyzing force of nationalist/ideological concepts of human society, coupled with economic demands, leading to the inability to accept/place certain groups in the postwar period. But it was that disorder, noted by contemporaries, that should simultaneously become the impetus for a continued search for peace, security, justice and human rights.

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