

## Introduction

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I

In a 1943 book devoted to issues of post-war planning, Leonard Woolf began by noting that 'The ruins which the Nazis leave behind them will not be merely those of the scorched earth and of its burnt and bombed cities; if they were, the problem of reconstruction would be a comparatively simple one; the real problem will be the ruin and wreckage of human life, of civilization itself, of millions of individuals all over Europe weakened by under-nourishment and disease and threatened by starvation and disease. These people are the real ruins and wreckage of our civilization which the Nazis and war have wrecked and ruined.' The author of the book's final chapter, on displaced persons, began his contribution by claiming: 'The biggest human problem with which we shall be faced in re-ordering the world after the end of the war will probably be that of re-establishing the peoples who have been displaced from their homes and localities for one reason or another. The magnitude of the problem is such as to cause the heart to sink and beside it the re-organization of the world's economic life may well seem a simple matter. ... There have been vast migratory movements before in the world's history but never one which has taken place under such conditions.'<sup>1</sup>

The documents collected here reveal that the scale of the problem of Displaced Persons (DPs) was indeed enough to make the hearts of the Allies sink. This was so not just because of the enormous figures involved, but because of the seemingly intractable political problems. Jessica Reinisch notes in her essay below that of the 5,800,000 DPs in Germany at the end of the war, 2,326,000 had been returned to their countries of origin within months. And there were millions more, who could not be classed as DPs, including Soviet nationals. By 1953 some five and a half million of the latter, according to the terms of the Yalta agreement, were forcibly repatriated. But there remained tens of thousands for whom such an option was not just undesirable, but fiercely resisted, which is hardly surprising when one considers, as Tony Judt reminds us, that one in five Soviet returnees were either shot or deported to the Gulag.<sup>2</sup> These were the so-called 'non-repatriable refugees'. They included many Poles who refused to return to a Poland that was being taken over by communists. And many Jews found that they were unwelcome in their pre-war homes in Eastern Europe; although not technically DPs, some 220,000 Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe 'infiltrated' their way into the DP camps, swelling their numbers substantially in the first two years after the war.<sup>3</sup> Coupled with a widespread desire among Jewish DPs to emigrate to Palestine, a desire that was resisted by the British mandate authorities, this all meant that what were originally conceived of as places of temporary shelter, turned out to be long-term homes for the war's displaced. It is one of the great ironies of the Holocaust that many of its surviving victims spent the next years of their lives in camps in the lands of the perpetrators; in some cases in the immediate aftermath of the War they even shared

the camps with imprisoned Nazi perpetrators and, in the case of German-Jewish DPs, were regarded as 'enemy DPs' and subjected to the Allies non-fraternization policy (see Arieh Kochavi's and Rainer Schulze's essays).

Many of the documents collected here reveal the ambivalence of the Allies' policies towards DPs. Whilst many thousands of Eastern Europeans obtained entry visas to the United Kingdom or the United States, including among them 'collaborators and former members of Waffen-SS and other German detachments'<sup>4</sup>, Jews were for the most part left languishing behind, once again unwanted, in a sad echo of the pre-war reluctance to accept Jewish refugees from the Third Reich. The Allies engaged on the one hand in massive efforts to house, feed and clothe DPs, no mean feat at the end of the War when resources were extremely scarce and when Europe was in such a desperate state that it was unable to feed itself (as a German joke had it, 'Better enjoy the war – the peace will be terrible'). At its height, in September 1945, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) was caring for or arranging the repatriation of 6,795,000 liberated United Nations civilians (i.e., not including citizens of former Axis countries), and the importance of this extraordinary effort cannot be overestimated.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the Allies displayed, at least at the start, little understanding of what DPs had gone through, with the result that they were sometimes treated callously; American war hero General George S. Patton famously earned himself his dismissal when he referred to the Jews in DP camps as 'lower than animals'.<sup>6</sup> Only in August 1945 did an American report clarify that housing Jews together with their former persecutors was 'a distinctly unrealistic approach to the problem. Refusal to recognise the Jews as such has the effect ... of closing one's eyes to their former and barbaric persecution', leading President Truman to announce that Jews would be given separate facilities.<sup>7</sup> Further policies, especially on the part of the British, certainly had the effect of thwarting the aspirations of DPs to move on either to the US or to Palestine. It is no surprise then, that as time passed, relations between the DPs and the Allies, especially in the British zone, became strained.

The founding of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA, 1943) and its replacements the International Refugee Organisation (IRO, 1947) and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR, 1951) meant that DPs were cared for at the expense of the US, Canada and Britain; it also institutionalized their care, thus prolonging it. After the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 Jewish DPs were free to go there; the continued existence of a minority of the Jewish DP population in Germany after 1948 gave the lie to the Zionist claim, dominant in the DP camps and, most significantly, among those who made their voices heard most loudly in negotiations with the Allies, that all the Jews wanted to go to Palestine (see Michael Brenner's essay). Only by the mid-1950s, when it became too embarrassing in the context of the Cold War – when the Soviet Union was no longer an ally of the West but its new enemy – to be reminded of Germany's role in World War II,

did the last DP camps, still housing 177,000 people, close, the last being at Föhrenwald in Bavaria in 1957.

Those who were still in DP camps a year or two after the end of the War could, then, be regarded as 'the real ruins and wreckage of our civilization.' But the DP camps flourished. They had the highest birth rate anywhere in Europe as Jews remarried and sought to rebuild their communities. They had schools, synagogues, and other communal institutions (see Juliane Wetzel's and Angelika Königseder's essays) working in Yiddish and Hebrew as well as the languages of Europe. It is hardly surprising to find, for example, that on the site of one former concentration camp a social experiment known as Kibbutz Buchenwald began, preparing its members for life in the future Jewish state.<sup>8</sup> DPs may have been pawns in the superpowers' games, but their own vibrant lives have also been rediscovered by historians. The self-designated 'she'erit hapletah' (saving remnant or Jewish survivors of the Holocaust) keenly felt their role as seeds of a future Jewish presence in Europe, Palestine or further afield.

## II

In the last few years scholarly attention has shifted from World War II itself to its aftermath. In part this is a natural consequence of the passage of time, as the 1940s and 1950s seem like history – as opposed to current affairs – to those who write about them. But there is more to the trend than mere chronology. The end of the Cold War has meant not only increased access to previously inaccessible files in Eastern Europe and beyond, but the start of a reassessment of the post-war period as such. First of all, 1945 no longer seems such a massive break as it once did. The idea of a zero hour (*Stunde null*) in 1945 does not seem convincing when one considers the consequences of the War as of a piece with the War itself. We have long known that World War II was the most catastrophic war in history in terms of loss of life: over forty million deaths, including about half that number civilians. But Mark Mazower reminds us that 'A total of close to ninety million people were either killed or displaced in Europe between the years 1938 and 1948.'<sup>9</sup> Thus, one cannot begin to understand the post-war years if one detaches them from the years of war and Nazi occupation. The extraordinary movements of peoples, unprecedented in history, that followed the end of the War (one should recall more than twelve million Germans forced out of their homes in Central and Eastern Europe as well as the DPs, refugees, and others forcibly moved in what are euphemistically called 'population transfers'), are part of the history of the twentieth century in Europe, not an isolated episode.

Furthermore, the end of the Cold War also meant the end of the guiding ideologies of the post-war period, that is to say, the end of the 'post-war consensus' both in Western and Eastern Europe. In Eastern Europe, from as early as 1944 with the advance of the Red Army but definitively by 1948 with the communist takeover of the countries behind Churchill's 'iron curtain' that had been drawn from

Stettin (Szczecin) on the Baltic to Trieste on the Adriatic, 'anti-fascism' was the official line. This meant that 'enemies of the people', that is, landowners and factory-owners as well as proven collaborators, were executed or deported as reconstruction was used as an opportunity for the new communist rulers to reshape society. And in Western Europe, new welfare states combined with a socially conservative Christian Democracy to place a new emphasis on consumerism and – after an initial wave of surprisingly mild purges – a sweeping under the carpet of the true extent of collaboration and indigenous fascism before 1945. Now that those leitmotifs have passed into history, historians have begun to investigate what was not discussed in the years of the reconstruction, and have unearthed some uncomfortable truths about Europe's 'civil war', for example, concerning the fact that there were large numbers of supporters of Nazi racial policy throughout Europe, and, less surprisingly, that even in the apparently stable democracies of Western Europe there were many who believed that the future lay with the dynamic one-party systems being forged across the continent.<sup>10</sup>

An important aspect of this reassessment of the post-war years focuses on the immediate aftermath of the years, in order to present a nuanced and detailed picture of the population movements underway at that time. The files here represent a remarkable collection that will allow students and scholars to address many of the themes mentioned so far, from the social life of the DP camps to the machinations of the great powers from the World War II to the Cold War concerning the control of populations. As a resource the collection is unparalleled, permitting research on, for example, the policies of the great powers acting together and individually with respect to single countries; the development of international regulation of, and law regarding, DPs, refugees, and minorities; the history of the dispersal and absorption of the displaced across the world, from Northern Rhodesia to the Philippines; the development of the United Nations; occupation policy in occupied Germany, Austria and Italy; the link between Zionism among the survivors and British policy in Palestine; illegal immigration to Palestine and the British response to it; restitution claims made by Israel against West Germany and the run-up to the Luxembourg Treaty of 1952; and, of course, the development of the DP camps themselves, whether with respect to Allied health policy or the transmission of communist ideology within the camps. There is an enormous amount of material here for original research at all levels and in all varieties of history: diplomatic, military, political, economic, social, cultural, intellectual, as well as scope for using the material for investigating issues as wide-ranging as disease, religion, language, children, the black market or post-war trials. The historiography of the immediate post-war years, though it has grown enormously since 1989, is still in its infancy. This collection puts in the hands of scholars a resource that can only enhance future research.

Citation:

D. Stone, 'Introduction', *Post-war Europe: Refugees, Exile and Resettlement, 1945-1950*, Thomson Learning EMEA Ltd, Reading 2007

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Leonard Woolf, 'Introduction' and Kenneth G. Brooks, 'The Re-establishment of Displaced Peoples', in *When Hostilities Cease: Papers on Relief and Reconstruction Prepared for the Fabian Society* (London, 1943), pp. 11, 99.

<sup>2</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London, 2005), p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Vernant, *The Refugee in the Post-War World* (London, 1953), pp. 62-63.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London, 1998), p. 218.

<sup>5</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Abraham Peck, 'Liberated But Not Free: Jewish Displaced Persons in Germany after 1945' in *November 1938: From 'Kristallnacht' to Genocide*, ed. Walter H. Pehle (Oxford, 1991), p. 228.

<sup>7</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, p. 32.

<sup>8</sup> See Judith Tydor Baumel, 'Kibbutz Buchenwald and Kibbutz Hafetz Hayyim: Two Experiments in the Rehabilitation of Jewish Survivors in Germany', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 9, 2 (1995), pp. 231-249; idem., *Kibbutz Buchenwald: Survivors and Pioneers* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1997); Zeev W. Mankowitz, *Life Between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany* (Cambridge, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Mazower, *Dark Continent*, p. 222.

<sup>10</sup> See especially István Deák, Jan T. Gross and Tony Judt, eds., *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and its Aftermath* (Princeton, 2000).